



**eva**

**ELEMENTARY VISUAL ARTS**

Park City Education Foundation • Kimball Art Center

LESSON

**6**

**Helen Frankenthaler**

Color Field Paintings

Verbal Directions

## LESSON OVERVIEW

Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011) was an experimental abstract expressionist painter, who described her paintings as being improvisations based on real or imaginary ideas of nature. Students will work with watercolors and movement to create color fields while enriching their understanding of the properties of color in painting.

### INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

- Learn about Helen Frankenthaler.
- Learn about abstraction and the properties of color.
- Learn about action painting and the painting process.
- Create a painting inspired by Helen Frankenthaler's abstract paintings.

### SUPPLIES

- Images of Frankenthaler's artwork.
- Samples of Color Field Paintings.
- Butcher paper/Tarps/Trays.
- Scrap paper for Experiments.
- White Wax Crayons.
- Watercolor Paper.
- Paper Towel/Sponges .
- Liquid watercolors.
- Cups or Palettes
- Pipettes or Straws.

### HELEN FRANKENTHALER



Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011) has long been recognized as one of the great American artists of the twentieth century. She was well known among the second generation of postwar American abstract painters and is widely credited for playing a pivotal role in the transition from Abstract Expressionism to Color Field painting. Through her invention of the soak-stain technique, she expanded the possibilities of abstract painting, while at times referencing figuration and landscape in unique ways. She produced a body of work whose impact on contemporary art has been profound and continues to grow.



## LESSON PLAN

1. Introduce students to the work and life of Helen Frankenthaler. Discuss the context of her paintings : abstract expressionism and that she found inspiration in nature. Review warm and cool colors, the meaning of hue and shades tones and tints. Talk about improvisation.

- What do you see in her shapes and colors? Do you think these shapes are random?
- What do you think about abstract art?
- How do these colors make you feel?
- How is her process different from other paintings you have seen? Is it still a painting if the artist does not use a brush? Is it still a painting if it does not look like or represent something?
- What colors do you like the most in nature?

2. Practice first with color principles. Pass out paper, liquid watercolors, pipettes and water cups. Instruct students to pick a color, to drop it on the paper and then lighten it by adding water. Instruct students to drop another color onto their paper to change the hue of that first color. Finally add a third color to the paper without mixing it with the other two colors. Ask students to discuss what they have learned.

3. Look at images of Park City landscapes and discuss their colors. Ask students what colors they see. (optional) Use an additional piece of scrap paper to try to match the colors in nature.

4. Discuss wax crayons. Show students that they resist the watercolor and can be used to block out areas in the painting. Pass out wax cranyons and the final piece of paper, have students sketch out lines that are inspired by the shapes in nature. Remind student to keep it abstract, not directly painting a tree, for example, but maybe how a tree feels. Encourage students to be loose and talk about movements that represent nature.

5. Once they have their lines drawn, students can chose 4-5 colors for their landscape and drop these colors onto the paper. Encourage students to be intentional about the placement of each color by slowing down. If student mix to many colors their painting will become muddy. student can experiment with lifting their paper and moving the water around using gravity. Colors can be layered without mixing once the color underneath is dry.

6. Discuss choices in color and the color field painting process.





## KEY IDEAS THAT CONNECT TO VISUAL ARTS CORE CURRICULUM: Based on Utah State Visual Arts Core Curriculum Requirements (2nd Grade)

### Standard 2.V.R.2:

Identify the mood suggested by a work of art and describe relevant subject matter and characteristics of form.

### Standard 2.V.R.3:

Use learned art vocabulary to express preferences about artwork.

### Standard 2.V.CR.5:

Discuss and reflect with peers about choices made in creating artwork.



## STUDIO HABITS OF THE MIND

Stretch & Explore: Learning to reach beyond one's capacities, to explore playfully without a preconceived plan, and to embrace the opportunity to learn from mistakes.

## ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Click on links to learn more.

- <http://www.frankenthalerfoundation.org/helen/biography>
- [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/abex/hd\\_abex.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/abex/hd_abex.htm)
- <https://www.theartstory.org/movement-color-field-painting.htm>
- <https://www.crayola.com/lesson-plans/flowing-with-frankenthaler-lesson-plan/>
- [https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/moma\\_learning/docs/MAI7\\_1.pdf](https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/moma_learning/docs/MAI7_1.pdf)

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