

College Guild
PO Box 6448 Brunswick, Maine 04011

Art of the Masters

Unit 4 of 6

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973)

Pablo Picasso, the founder of Cubism, was born in the Andalusia region of Spain. It is said that his first word was "piz", short for "lápiz", the Spanish word for pencil. As a youth, under his father's tutelage, he painted in a traditional manner. The family moved to Barcelona when he was a boy. Here, the fantastic art of the great Spanish architect Gaudi surrounded him. The cultural background of Barcelona would always be a part of Picasso.

1. Do you believe your life has been affected by where you spent your youth? Write a paragraph describing where you lived and how you were influenced. (If you're uncomfortable talking about your youth, feel free to make up a fictional character who was influenced by their childhood surroundings!)

At sixteen, Picasso went to Madrid's Royal Academy of San Fernando. He attended only a few classes. After returning to Barcelona for a short time, he set off for London at the age of nineteen. He stopped in Paris along the way and never made it to London. Even as a youth he was fascinated by the life of the city: café scenes, street entertainers, and the poor street people. The Impressionists Van Gogh and Gauguin intrigued him. His search for art ended in Paris, which became his home. Later in his life, he made several trips back to Spain. While there, he attended bullfights, which he loved. Themes of the bulls and bullfights appear in many of his works.

In Paris, Picasso not only painted, but also drew and worked on sculpture. He had many painter friends, as well as Gertrude Stein and the French poet Apollinaire. Apollinaire coined the word "Surrealism" in the mid-1920s. Surrealist works have elements of surprise, expressing real thoughts outside of reason and aesthetics.

In the early years in Paris, Picasso was lonely and poor. This was expressed in the art of his Blue Period, where the subject and the mood were done in a blue color scheme. It is said that he used blue because it was considered the most romantic and spiritual color. Literary references at times have associated it with decadence. One of his Blue Period works was *Poor Family at the Seashore* (Appendix 1).

2. Why would an artist paint a picture using only shades of blue?

3. How was Picasso able to portray the people in the painting as poor? Can you think of anything he could add to show their lack of wealth?

After Picasso's Blue Period, he had a change of mood and became interested in painting acrobats and their families. This was called his Rose and Circus Period. *Acrobate et jeune Arlequin* (Appendix 2) is a painting from this period. His financial situation had improved and he became more confident. From that point on, success after success followed.

4. Notice how the landscape in this painting isn't as detailed as other paintings we have seen. Do you think the painting would be better with a detailed background? Why or why not?

Picasso, with another artist, Georges Braque, invented Cubism in the early 1900s. They called it "the materialization of the new space". It first appeared in Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (Appendix 3). At first it was known only to his friends and was hidden until 1937, when it appeared publically. It became the demarcation between the old and the new in the world of painting. It was ugly and difficult. The faces were distorted and resembled African carvings from the French Congo, which Picasso admired. Altogether, it was a rejection of conventional painting.

5. We said in Unit one that art can be thought of as "culminating in the creation of an object of beauty". If the faces in *Demoiselles d'Avignon* aren't traditionally beautiful, is this piece of art still considered beautiful? Explain your answer.

6. What is your definition of beauty?

Picasso became a French communist and was given the Stalin Peace Prize by the Soviets. This was partly because of one of his most famous works, *Guernica* (Appendix 4). This painting depicted the aftermath of the bombing of that Basque town by the Germans in 1935 during the Spanish Civil War. It was a brutal slaughter of defenseless refugees and civilians. Picasso was outraged by this atrocious act. The painting is important both artistically and socially. It screams out violence, horror, and fear - in black and white - and it brings about a great feeling of compassion in the viewer.

7. How do you think the geometric patterns in Picasso's painting add to the scene/mood?

8. Try coming up with another title for this piece of art!

In his old age, Picasso lived in Mougins in the south of France with his second wife, Jacqueline. He died there at the age of ninety-two. He is still regarded as a controversial artist, but there is no doubt that he was a master of his art.

9. How would you sum up Picasso's contribution to the world of art?

Jackson Pollock (1912-1956)

Jackson Pollock, an abstract painter, was born in Wyoming. His family was impoverished and lived like nomads, constantly moving from place to place.

10. What effect do you think this had on the young man?

When Pollock was seventeen, he moved to New York. That was in 1929, the year of the stock market crash. He began developing his painting during the Depression years, and his style was affected by the struggle of those years. He was strongly impressed by Orozco's (Unit 3) expression of realism and emotion. He believed that all suffering and despair was caused by an evil world. Guided by violent emotion, despair, and heavy drinking, he was driven toward catastrophe.

11. Looking at Pollock's work in the Appendix, where do you notice this anguish in his paintings?

The early works of Jackson Pollock bore a similarity to the Surrealists and Cubists. He was influenced by Picasso's *Guernica*. Later on, when he was reading much of Jung and his idea of the subconscious mind, Pollock began automatic drawing, which is an expression of the subconscious mind. The hand moves randomly across the paper with no rational or aesthetic outcome; this is shown in *Number 1A* (Appendix 5). Reactions to the outer world are manifested, revealing one's inner emotions. Picasso did automatic drawing in his later etchings.

12. Lately, there has been a lot of controversy over the merit of abstract art. Do you think *Number 1A* requires as much talent and hard work as the other paintings we've seen? Why or why not?

13. Try an automatic drawing of your own!

In 1943, Peggy Guggenheim put Pollock under contract. That was the same year that European Surrealists arrived in New York. They would meet at her gallery, Pollock with them, and paint together.

14. Do you think working together was advantageous? Try to think of the negatives and positives this would have for an artist's work.

Pollock's work continued to be an aggressive, tormented outpouring of his psyche. Form wasn't recognizable. Lines would writhe around, entangle themselves, and untie themselves - sort of the choreography of a whirling dervish! In 1946, he began laying canvas on the floor. He would then dip a thick brush into diluted paint and let it trickle down (shown in Appendix 6). Someone once described it as "drawing in the air above a canvas with a paint-loaded stick - or, dribbling". The canvas became just a field of action. Abstract Expressionism is the term for this type of painting.

15. Can you come up with a creative method of painting like this one? Think outside the box!

Looking at Pollock's work, a person can see whatever he or she wishes to see. In *Autumn Rhythm* and *Mural* (Appendix 7), you can see the physicality and energy that are typical of Abstract Expressionist works.

16. Can you find any concrete images in *Mural* (ex. faces, something from nature, etc..)?

Jackson Pollock died in a car crash at the age of forty-four.

17. Pick one of Pollock's works and tell a story about a character experiencing the same emotion that the painting conveys.

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes

Appendices
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(Appendix 1) *Poor Family at the Seashore*
 c.1901-04



(Appendix 2) *Acrobate et jeune Arlequin*
 c.1905



(Appendix 3) *Demoiselles d'Avignon* c.1907



(Appendix 4) *Guernica* c.1937 (~11.5 feet x 24.5 feet)



(Appendix 5) *Number 1A* c.1948 (~6 feet x 8.5 feet)



(Appendix 6)



(Appendix 7) *Mural* c.1943 (~8 feet x 20 feet)

