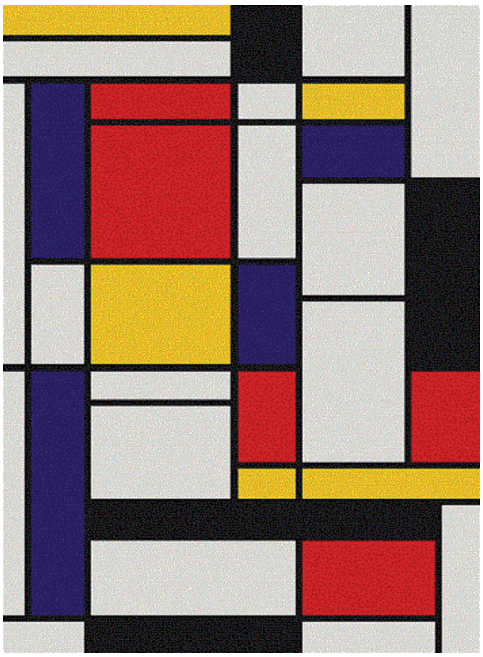
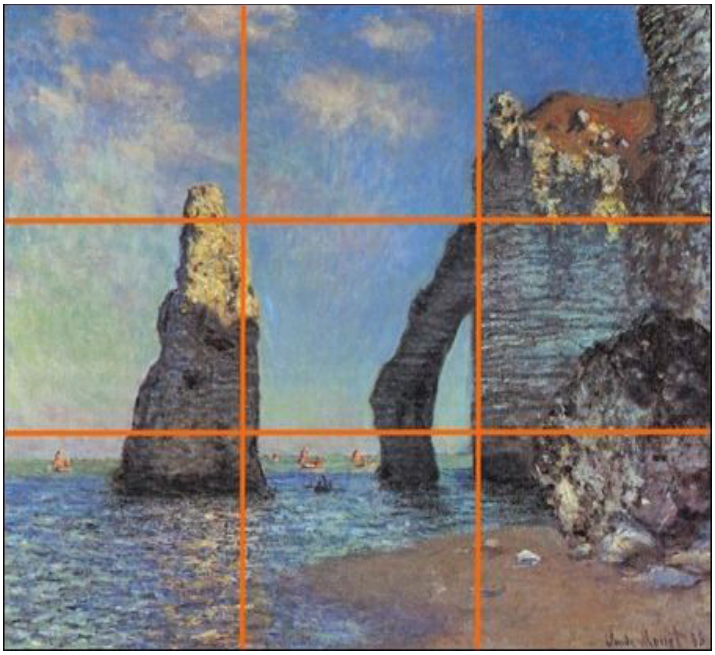




Composition and Design

A short course for ages 12-18

Text written by Ellen J. McHenry

I'd like to emphasize how important it is to **carefully read each lesson page**. In my own classes, I supplement these lessons with slide shows giving more examples. I spent the first 30 to 45 mintues of the class discussing the ideas of the lesson before we started the projects. I regret that this course doesn't have a way to share the slide shows that I used. If I ever think of a way to share them, I will include that information on this page in the future. However, the key ideas are given in these short texts, so the course is still usable "as is" without the extra slides and videos.

I did start a playlist for this class on my YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/thebasement-workshop. You can check that for supplemental videos, or you can search on your own.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE I USED:

I highly recommend getting a copy of **Molly Bang's book, Picture This**. It is extremely well done and presents composition principles in a narrative format, using simple shapes to illustrate a classic story. It is geared for adult or high school audience but younger may benefit, also.

I used this book in lesson 6, so if you want a hard copy by then, you can order on Amazon before starting the course. (If you happen to have Amazon Kindle, you can get a free digital copy!)

TIPS:

1) You may print out as many pages as you'd like to. There is no restriction of copying and printing.
2) Try to find someone with a laser color printer to print the colored activity pages. My home laser printed can print color for only about 3 cents per page.
3) If you don't have access to color printing, print in B&W and use the activities anyway.
4) Have the students read the pages before they come to class, if possible.
5) Search for supplemental videos on youtube or other internet video source. There are always new things coming online. Preview first, of course!

TIME MANAGEMENT:

Each lesson takes about 2 hours to complete. This is a rough estimate, and you can set time limits on how much time is spent on each activity.

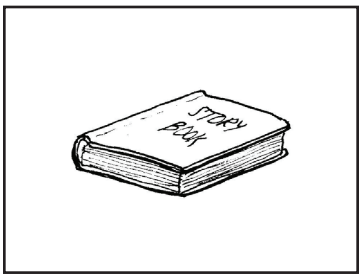
I did the course with my group in 9 weeks, doubling up on a few lessons. For example, lessons 2 and 3 might be combined. Also, I would sometimes do the end of one lesson and the beginning of the next during the same session.

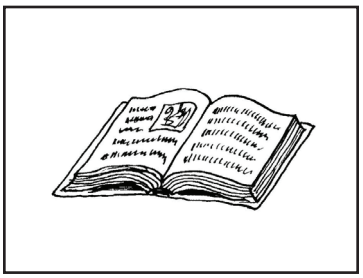
To make the course longer: You can supplement with all kinds of extra videos and projects.
To make it shorter: You can ask the students to do a few of the activities at home.

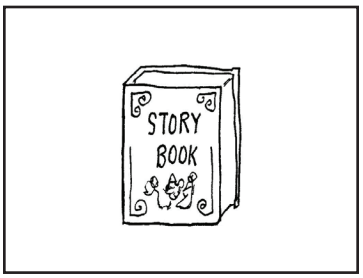
COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

1: Introduction: "A Thing on a Page"

If I told you to draw a picture of a book, what would your finished drawing look like? Would it look similar to one of these drawings?





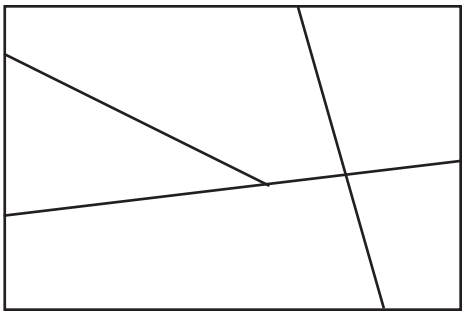


These drawings are examples of what I call "A Thing on a Page." It's a page with a thing on it. Now this isn't necessarily bad. Sometimes you want to (or need to) draw a thing on a page. To illustrate my books I draw little pictures on a page so I can scan them into my computer and then place them into my document near the text they will illustrate. There is a time and a place for things on pages.

Things on pages can be very nicely drawn. Even famous Renaissance artists drew things on pages in their sketchbooks. (Their things were very nicely drawn, to say the least!) However, many people never move beyond drawing things on pages. The Renaissance artists drew things on pages when they were making little practice sketches for objects they wanted to include in large paintings, but when it came to the paintings themselves, these artists practiced something called COMPOSITION.

Composition is when you look at your canvas or paper not as a blank place on which to draw an object, but as an active space that you will design. Every part of the space is just as important as every other part. The edges and corners can't be ignored like when you are just drawing things on pages. It's more like thinking of the canvas or paper as a cake (or maybe a sandwich or a pizza) that you will cut up into pieces. What shape will those pieces be? What size? How many of them? Would you cut a rectangular cake the same way you would cut a circular pizza? The way you are thinking about the cake and the pizza right now is similar to how artists think about "composing" their paintings or drawings. They look at the canvas or paper like an object that they will divide into sections. They must decide how to divide the space before they start painting or drawing a single object.

In this course, you will look at many famous paintings to see how those artists composed their works of art. You will form opinions about what types of compositions you prefer. There may be some artists whose style you don't really like but whose compositions you think are brilliant. Or artists whose style is amazingly good but whose compositions are just average. You will be able to learn from these artists what makes a good composition— one that will hold the attention of your viewers. You'll also learn some general "rules of thumb" that artists and designers over the centuries have discovered by experimentation. You can "stand on their shoulders," so to speak, and use what they learned to create compositions and designs that look professional. As an added bonus, you'll be able to walk into an art museum and not only have something intelligent to say about the pictures hanging on the walls, but also be able to genuinely appreciate the compositions that those artists worked so hard to design for your viewing pleasure.



Artists think about "dividing up space."

EXERCISE 1A: Compositions with lines and dots

You will need:
- pencil
- uler
- black pen (I recommend Sharpie No-Bleed fine point)
- 8 pieces of uncooked spaghetti (can substitute with thin black paper strips)
- hole puncher
- piece of black paper
- glue stick (or white glue)
- copy of each of the following 5 pages for each student (You can staple them together or leave them as individual sheets of paper, whichever is best for your situation. If you are working with a large group, stapling might be best so that everyone's pages don't get mixed up.)

Preparation:

Use the hole puncher to make a few dozen black dots.

What to do:

The goal of this exercise is to learn about composition beginning with the simplest design possible: one dot or one line. As soon as you place one dot on a piece of paper, you've created a composition. As soon as you place one line across a paper you've made an important decision about structure of your drawing or painting. These five pages give you a guided series of design challenges that will start very simple and become more complicated as you go. It doesn't matter that the dots and lines don't represent anything. You aren't trying to create a picture of anything. in fact, you are specifically NOT trying to create pictures. You are only breaking up the space into interesting shapes and patterns. Where will you place your first dot? In the center? Near the edge? In a corner? Where will your line go? Will it be parallel to an edge? Will it cut off a tiny corner? Will it form triangles? When you place your second line, what happens to the effect created by the first line? It's more complex than it first appears.

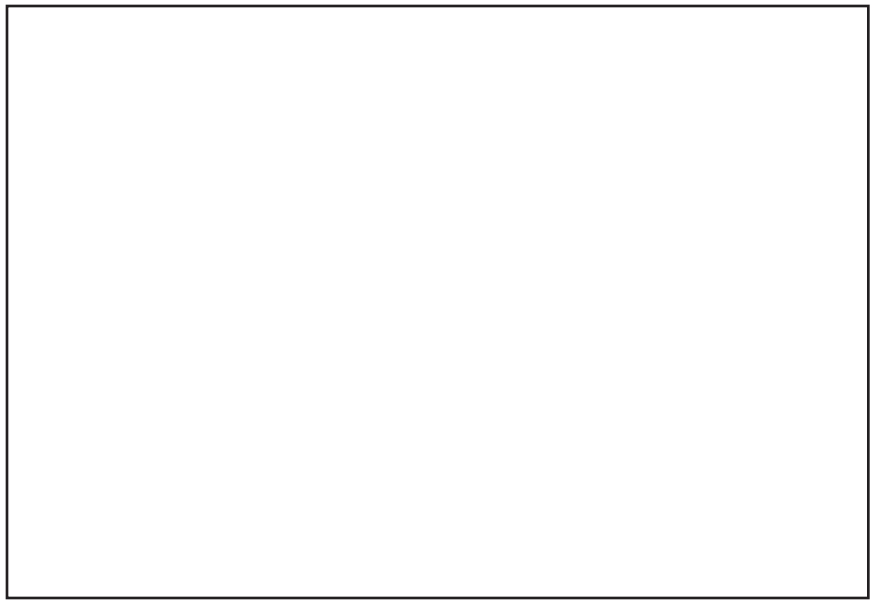
The purpose of the spaghetti noodles and the black paper dots is to give you the ability to lay down a line and then analyze whether you like it there or not. You can move the noodles and dots around until you find a composition that you like. Then you can remove the noodles and dots and replace them with black ink lines and dots. The glue stick is in case you want to just glue the dots in place instead of drawing dots.

NOTE: The lines must go all the way across the paper. No half-lines.

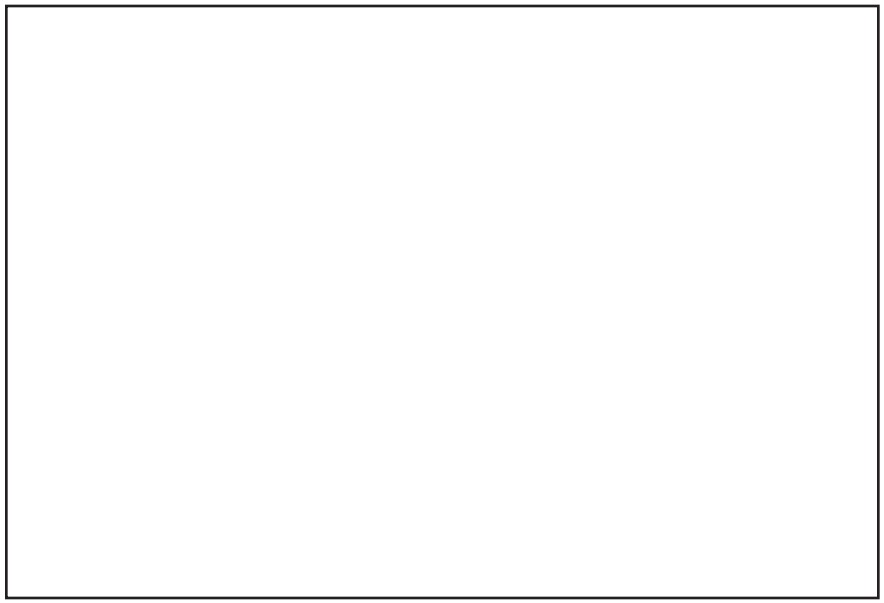
There isn't any "right" answer to these exercises. Each student will make choices according to what they think looks best. However, some compositions will be more aesthetically pleasing than others. In other words, if you turned them into paintings, some paintings would sell better than others (assuming the colors and detail work was the same on all of them).

IF YOU ARE USING THIS WITH A CLASS: Students work at different paces. The students don't have to fill in every single box. If they do most of them, that is good enough. When your fastest students are done, everyone can be done even if they have some empty boxes. If you don't get to the circles or lozenges at all, that's okay. Do what you have time for.

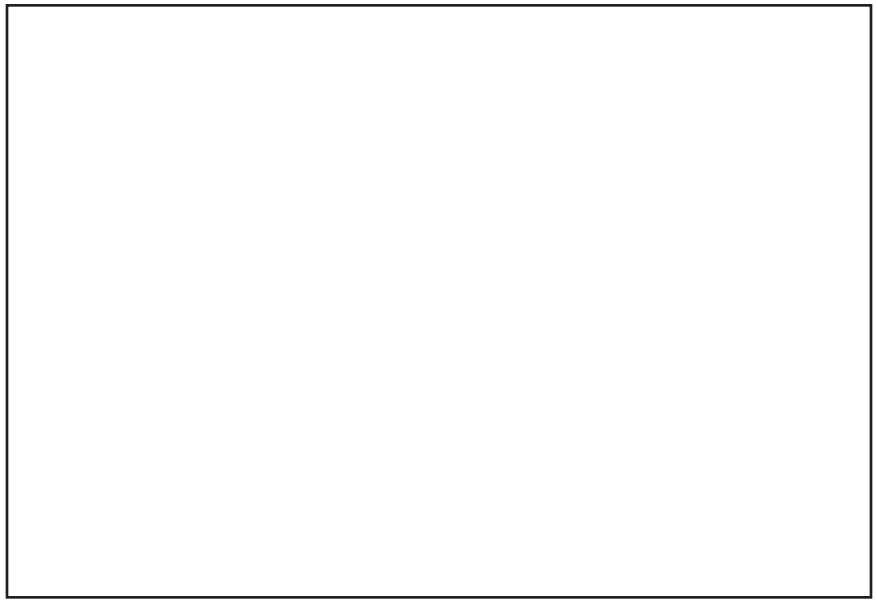
1 Draw the indicated number of lines across each rectangle. The lines will divide the rectangle into smaller pieces.



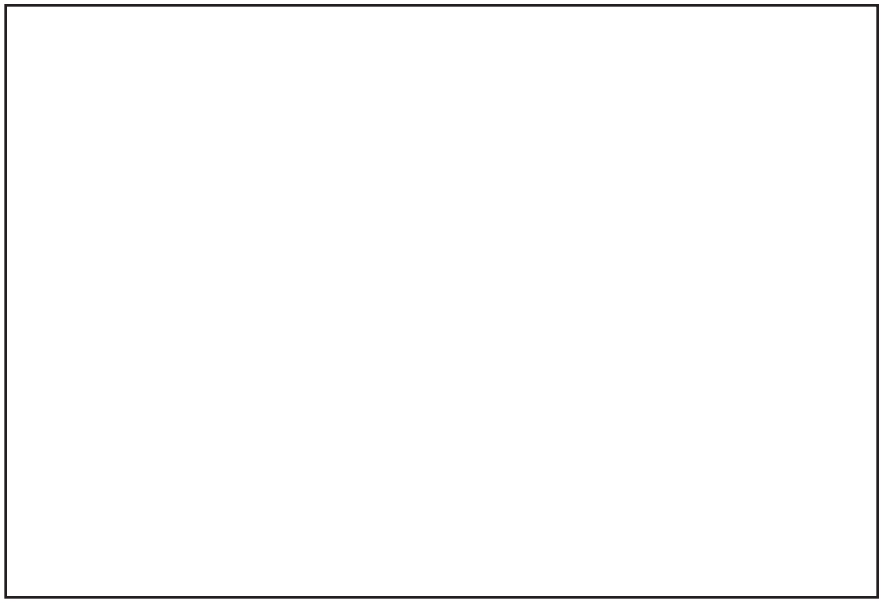
1 line



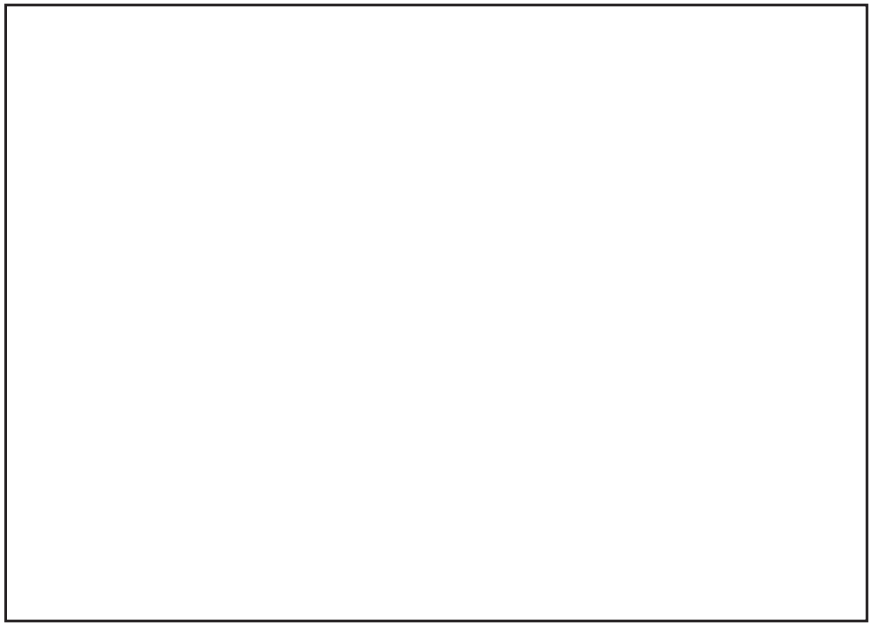
2 lines



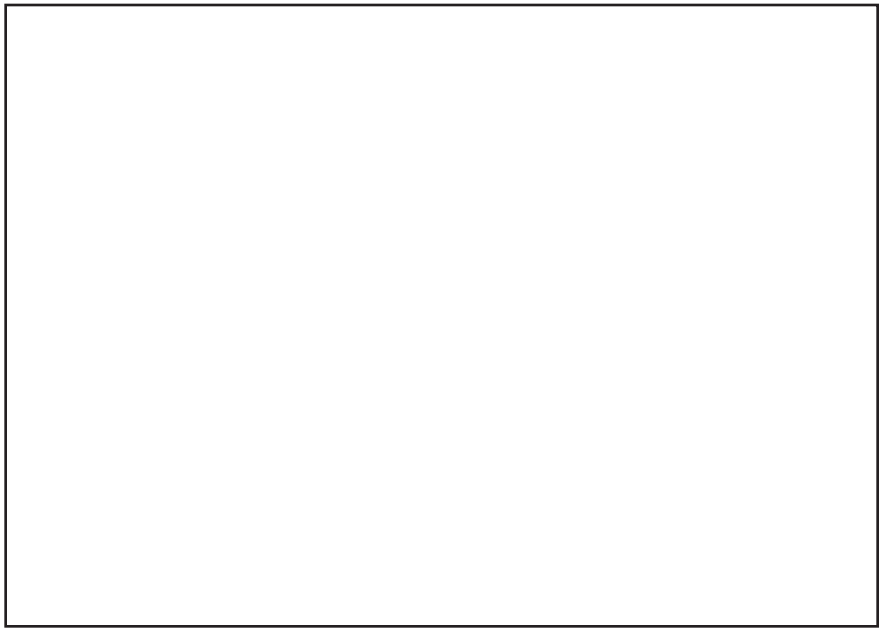
3 lines



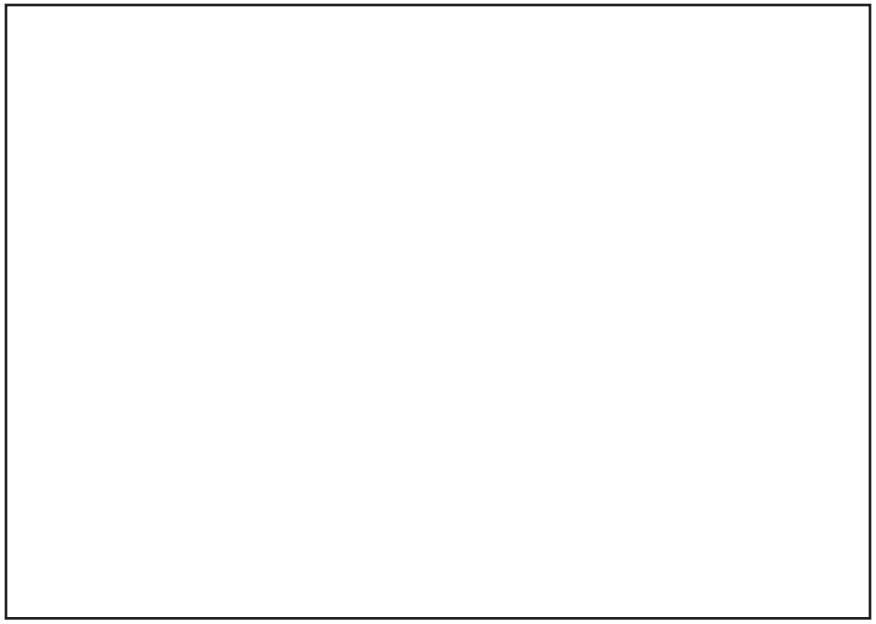
4 lines



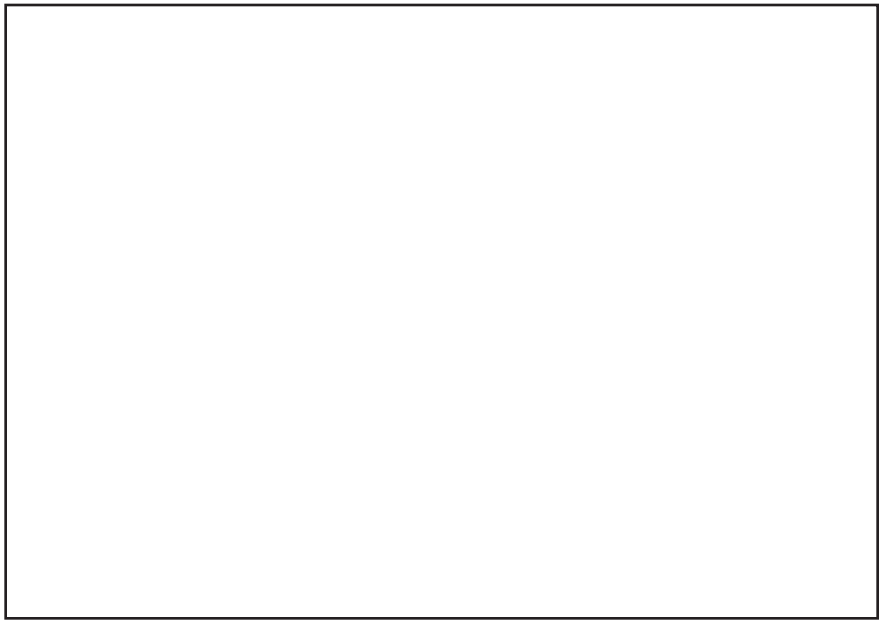
5 lines



6 lines

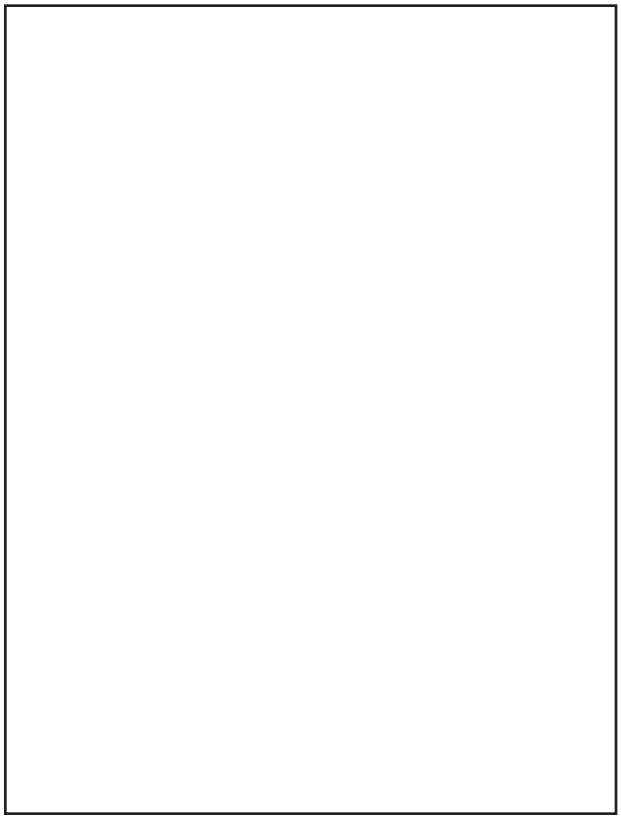


7 lines

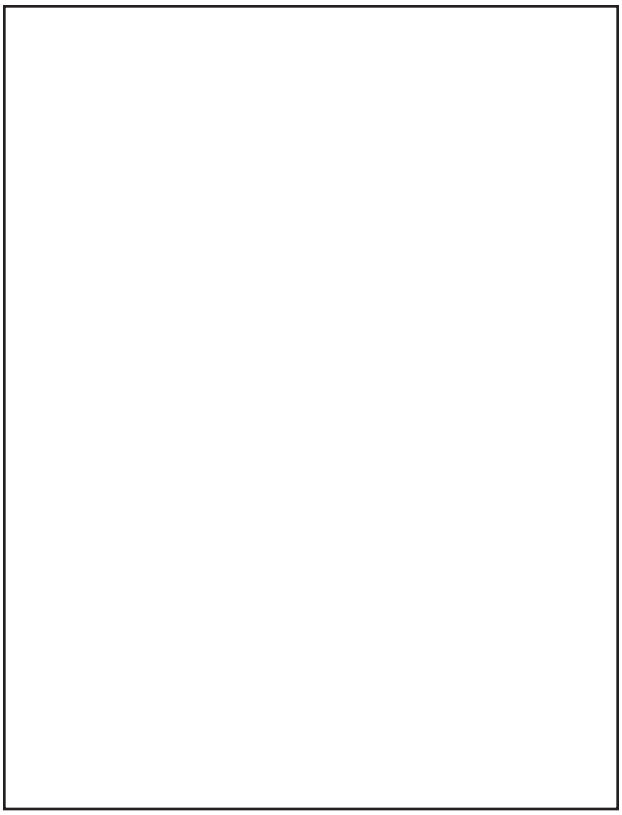


8 lines

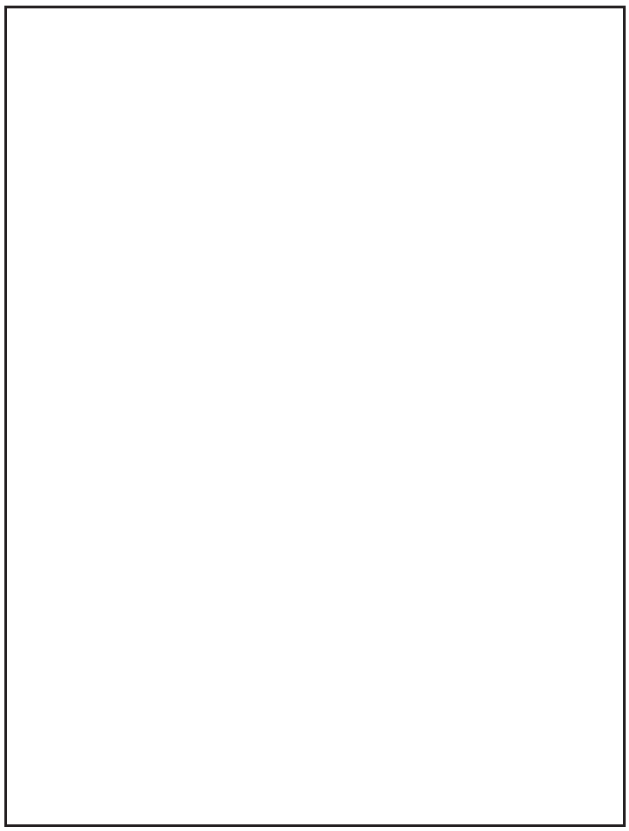
2 Now try the same thing, but with vertical rectangles. Does the process of placing the lines feel different from the horizontal format? What do the compositions make you think of?



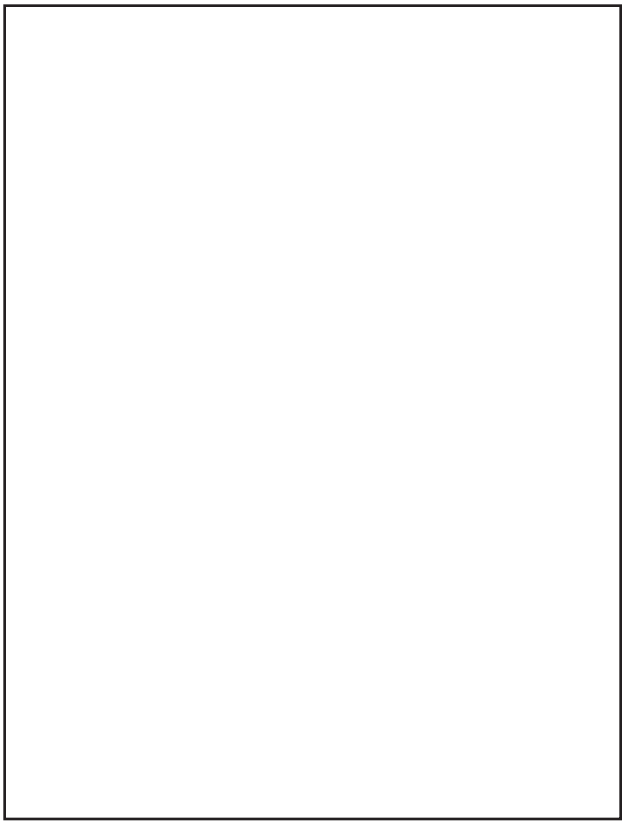
1 line



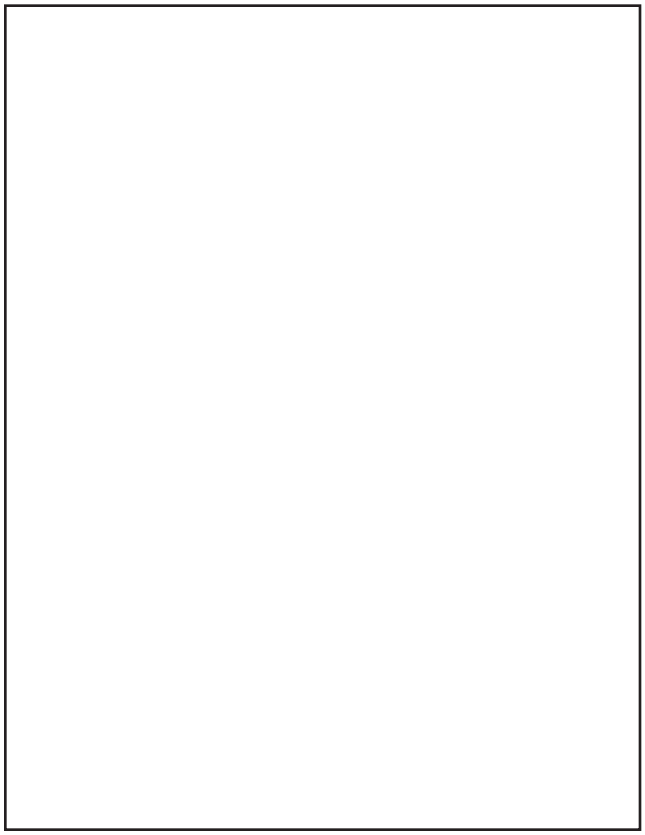
2 lines



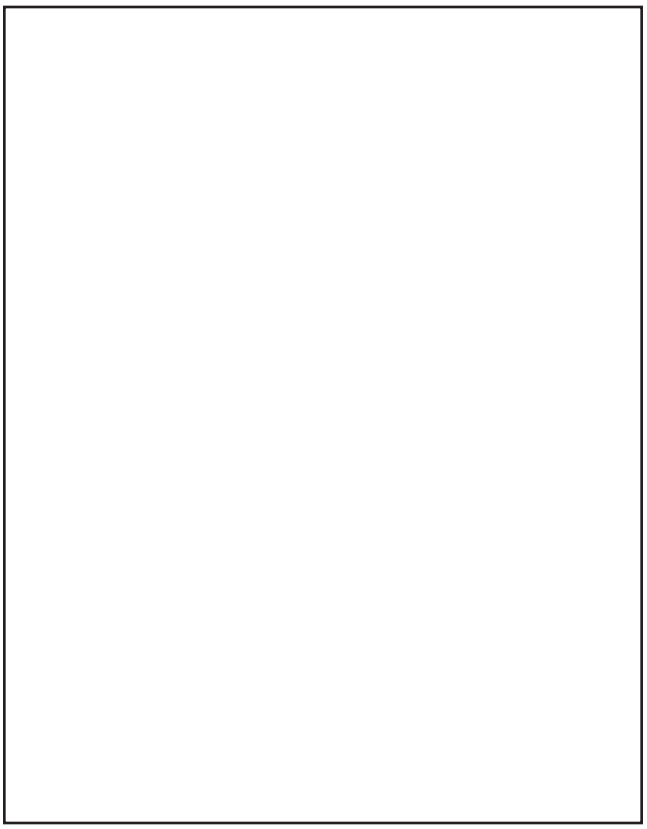
3 lines



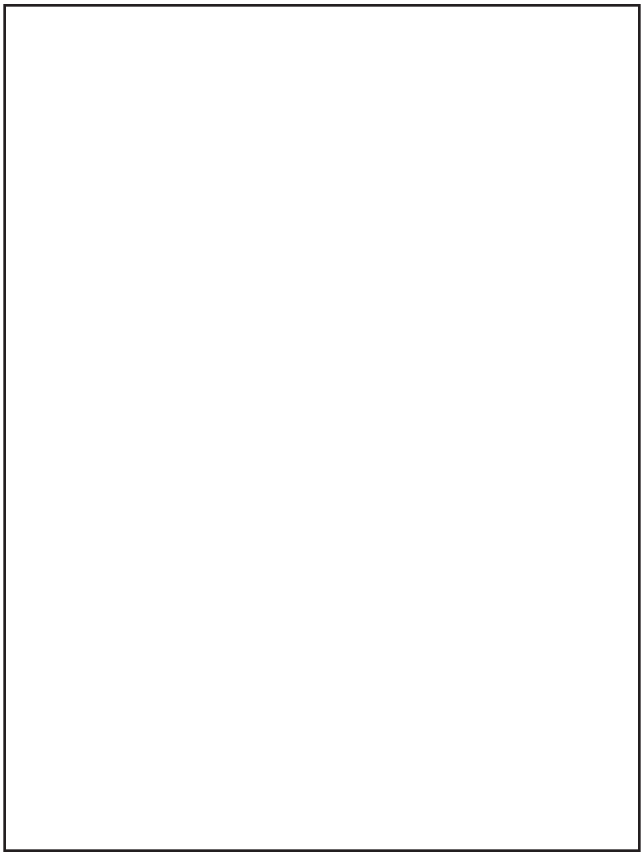
4 lines



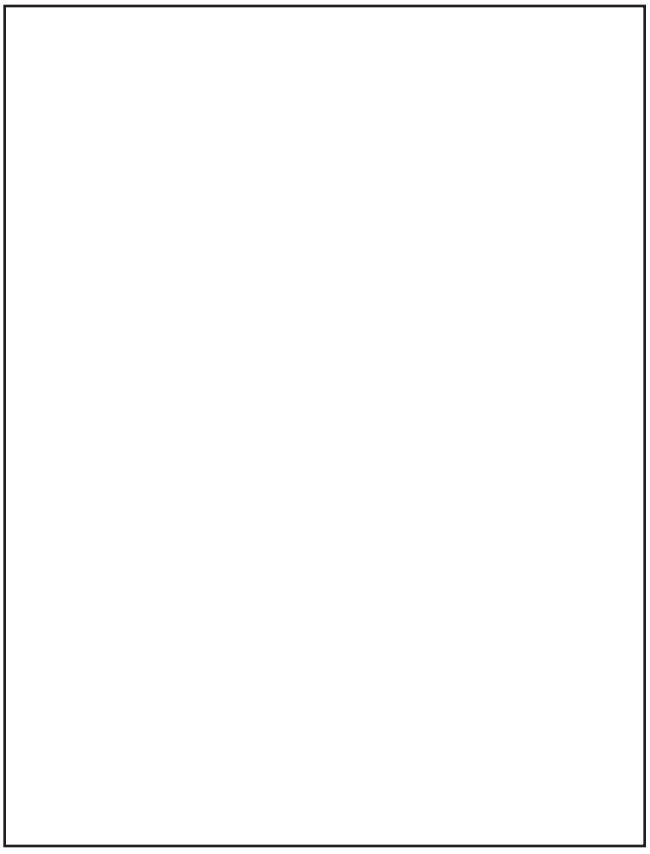
5 lines



6 lines



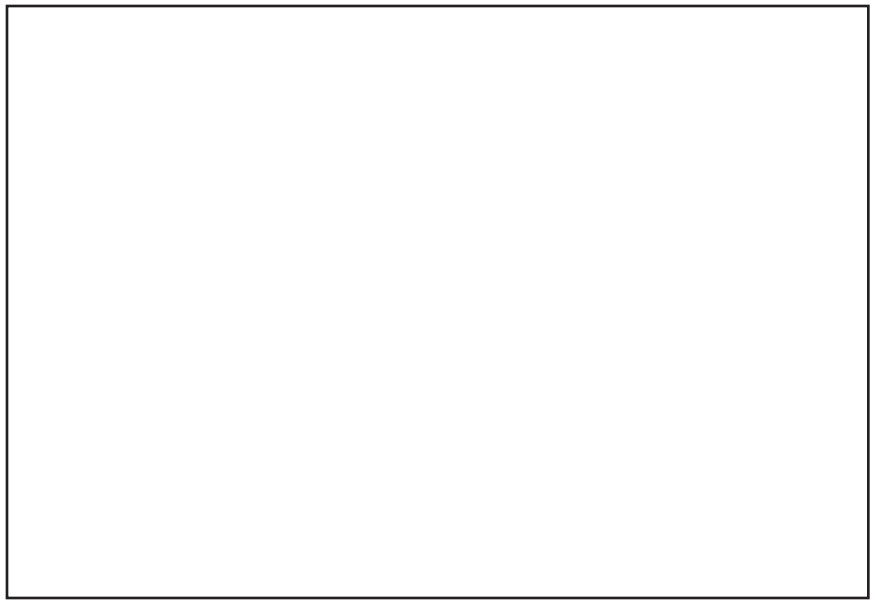
7 lines



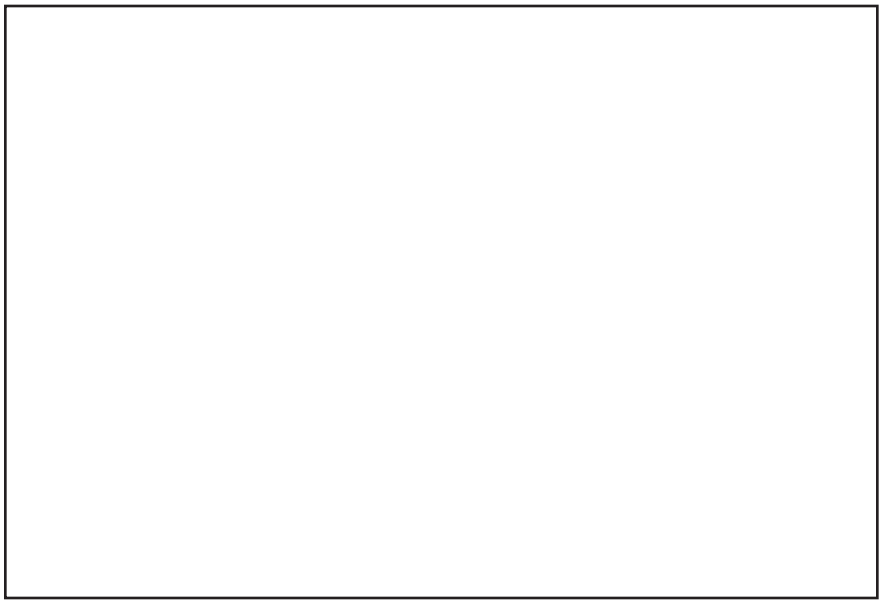
8 lines

Reverse side of page 2

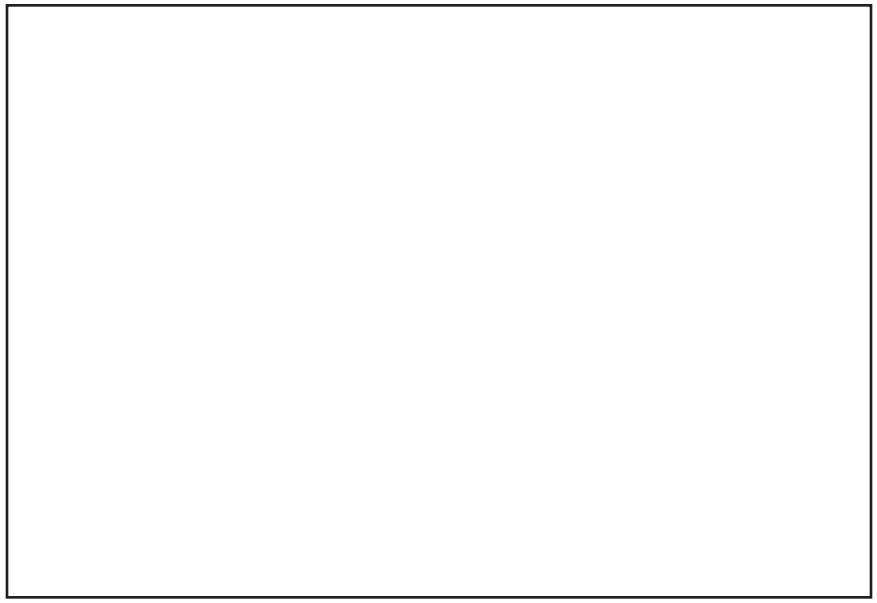
3 Place the indicated number of dots in each rectangle. Place them wherever you want to, but try several options before gluing them down.



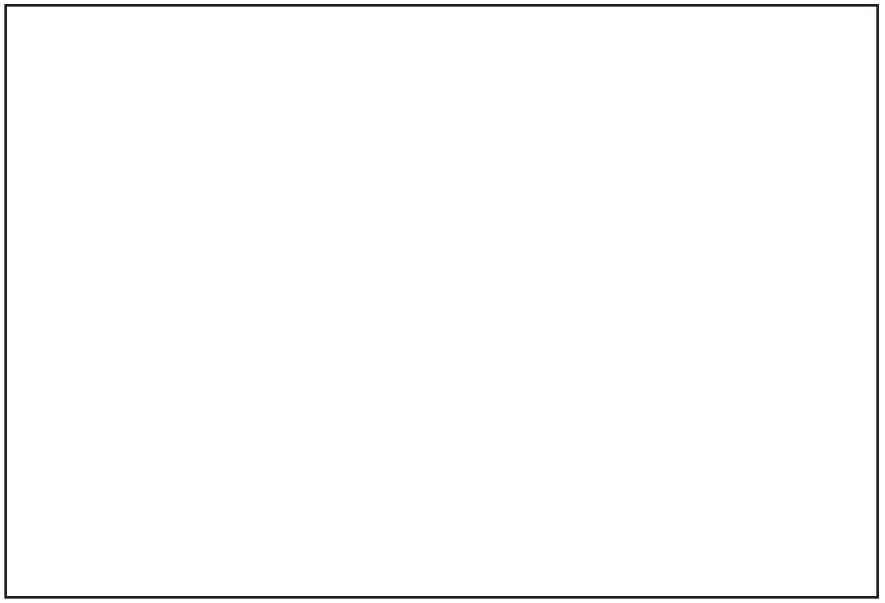
1 dot



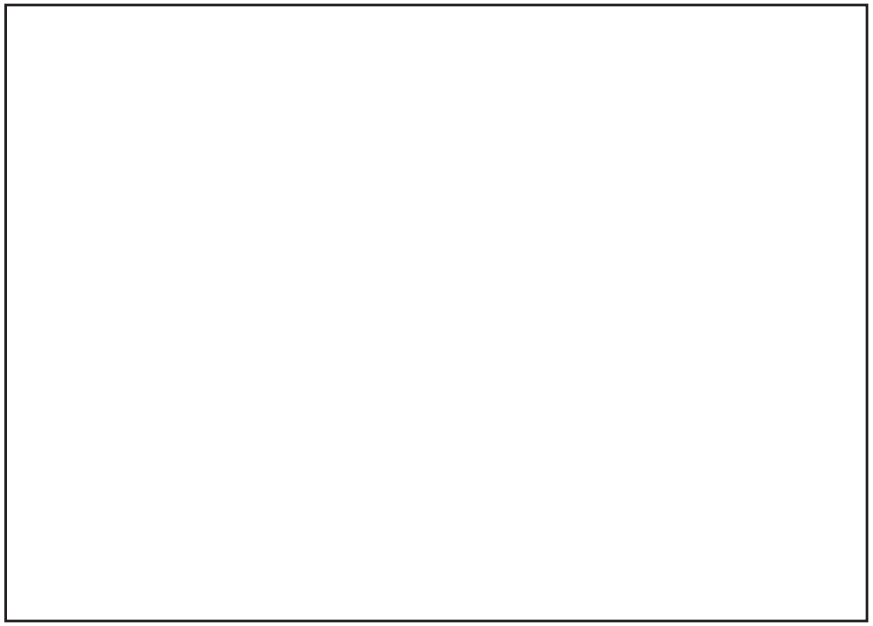
2 dots



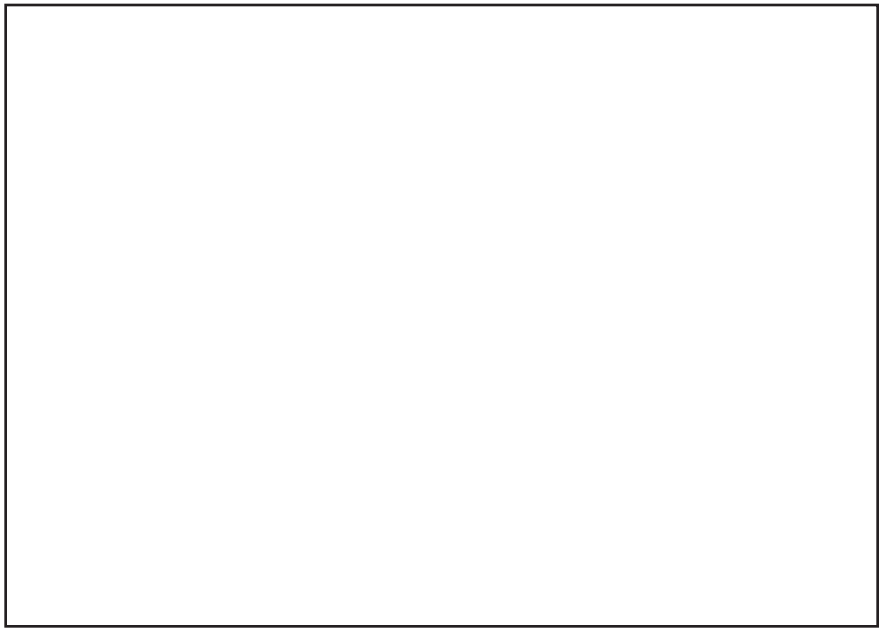
3 dots



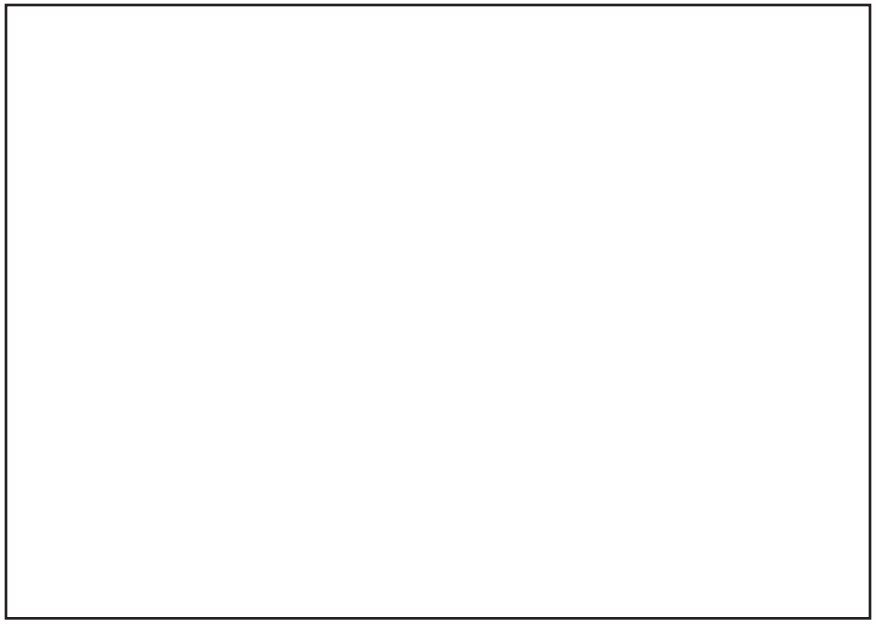
4 dots



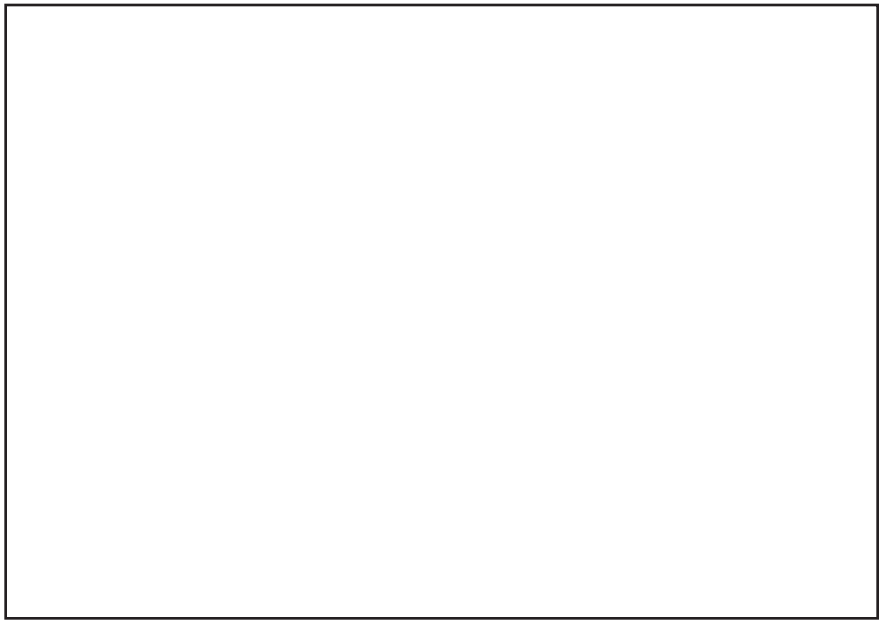
5 dots



6 dots

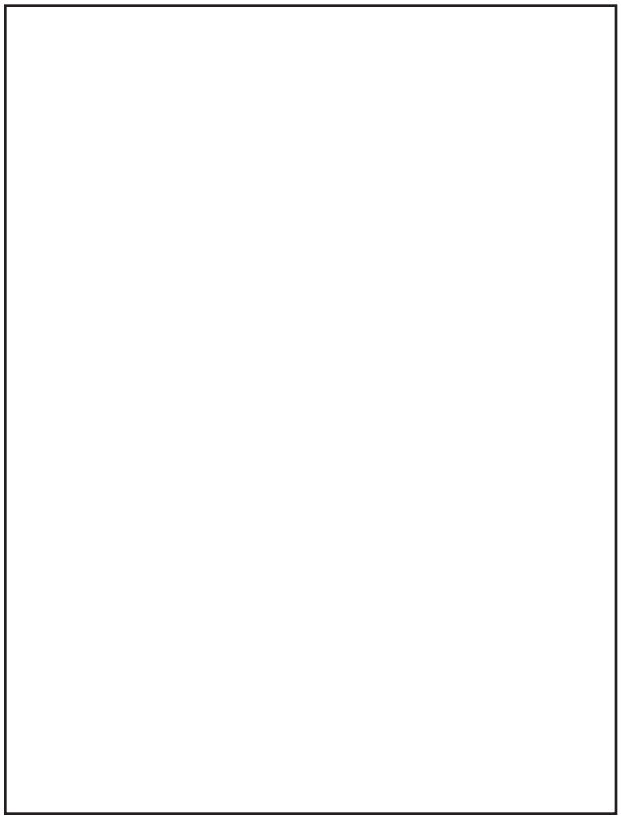


7 dots

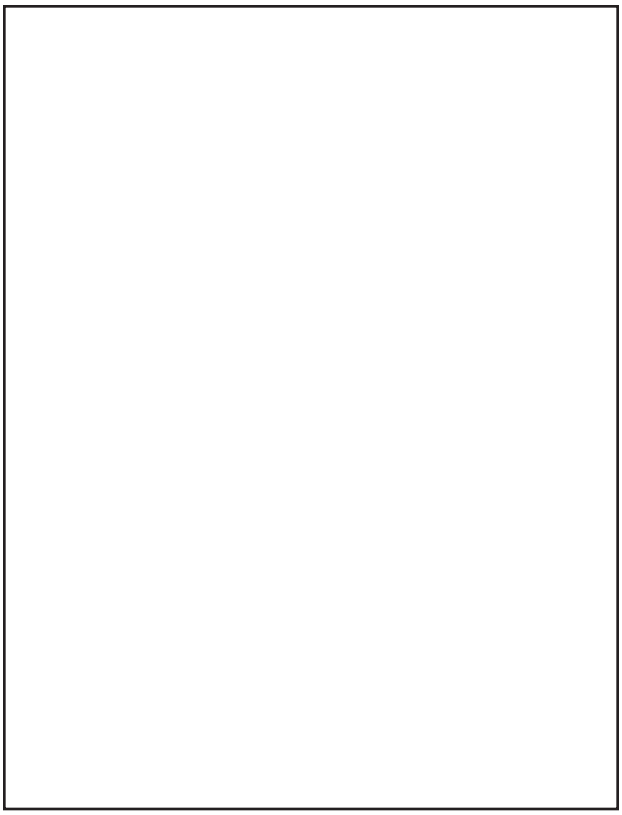


8 dots

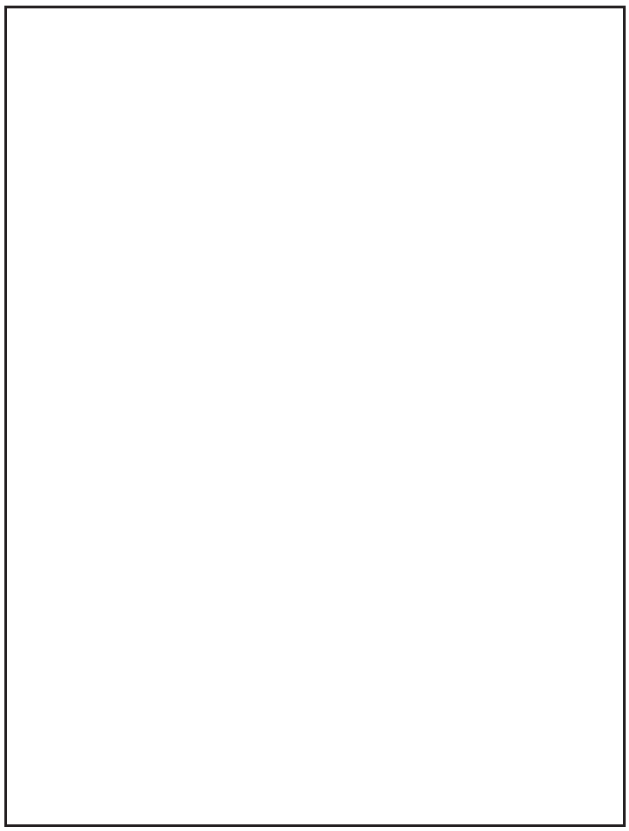
4 Repeat the process of placing dots, but with a vertical format this time.



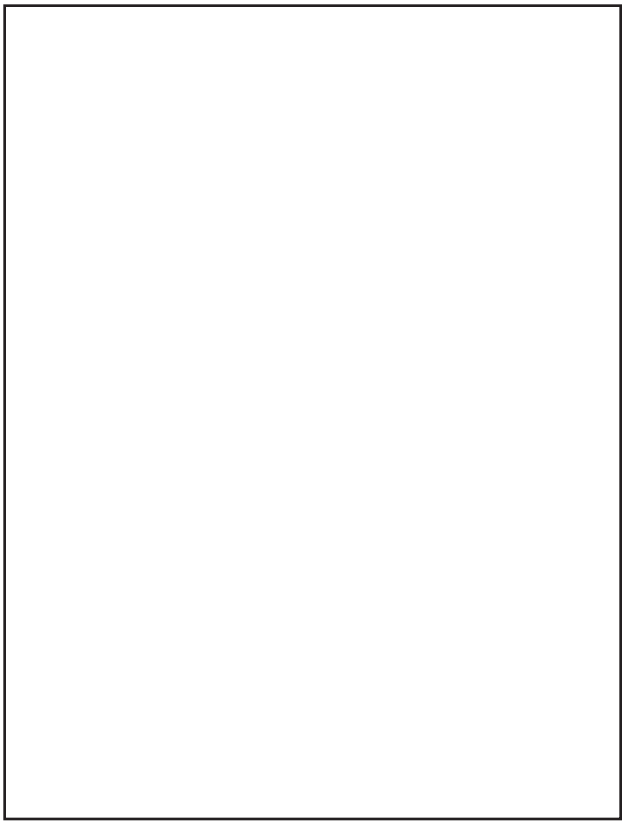
1 dot



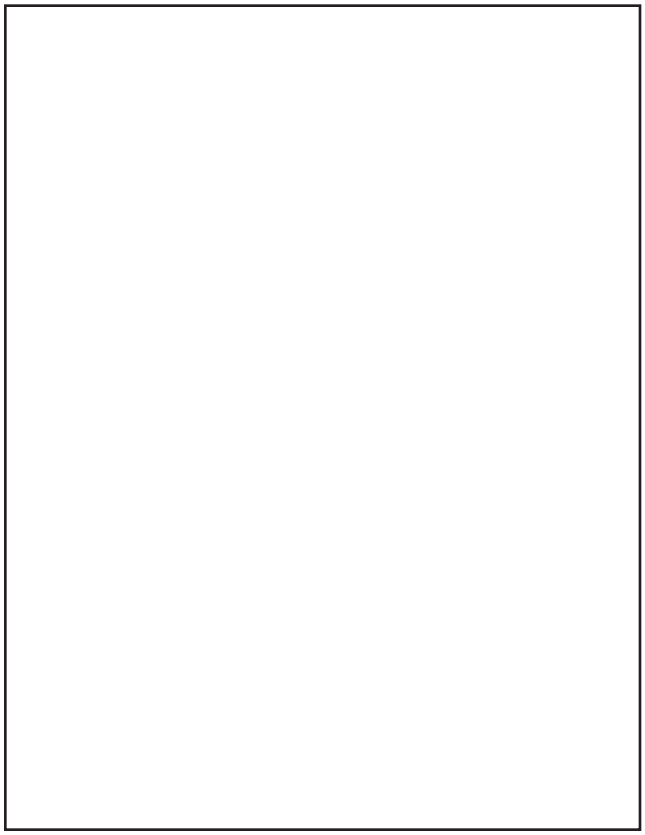
2 dots



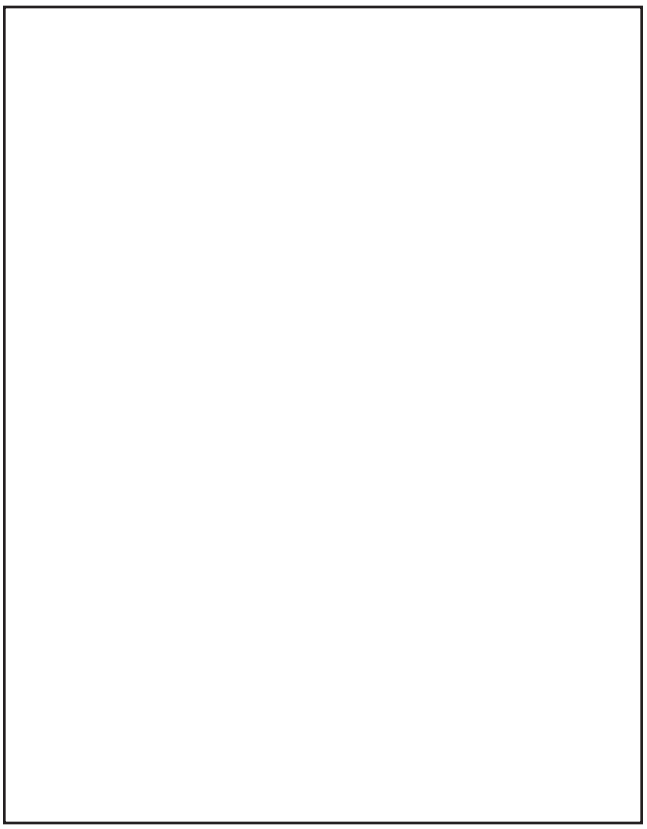
3 dots



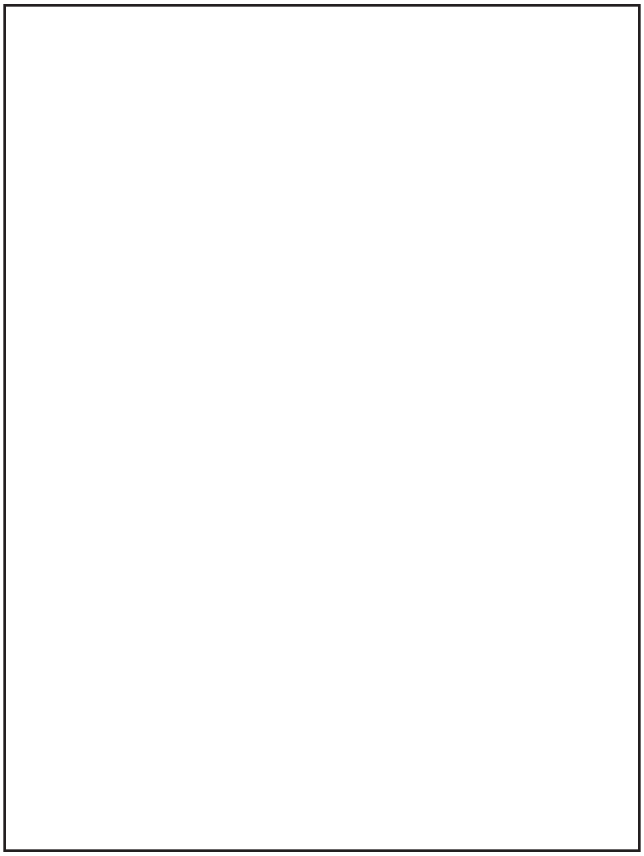
4 dots



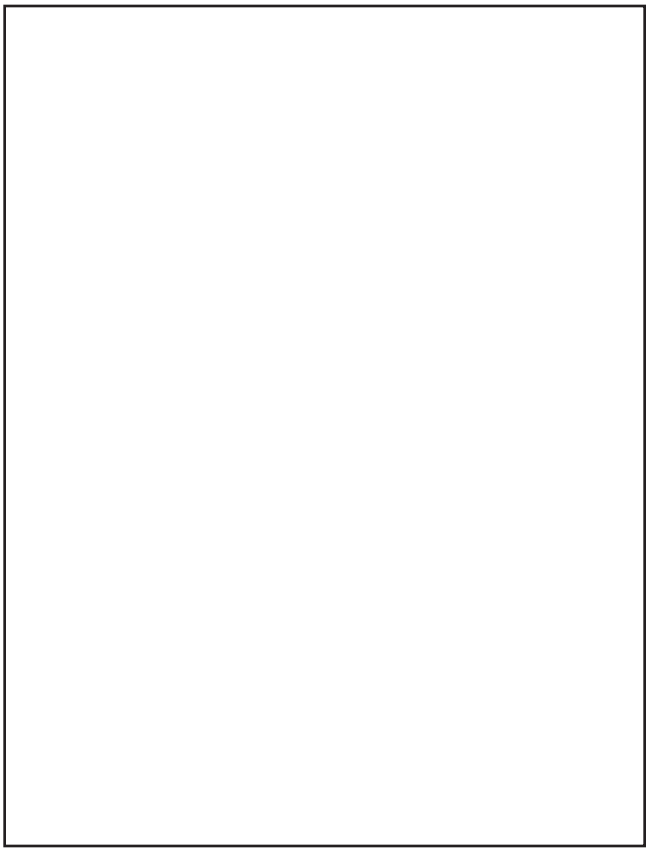
5 dots



6 dots



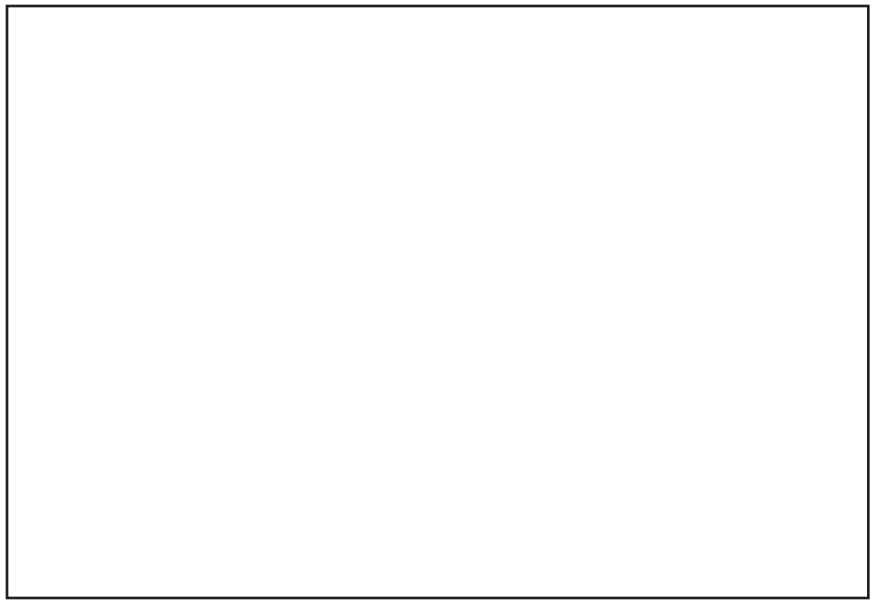
7 dots



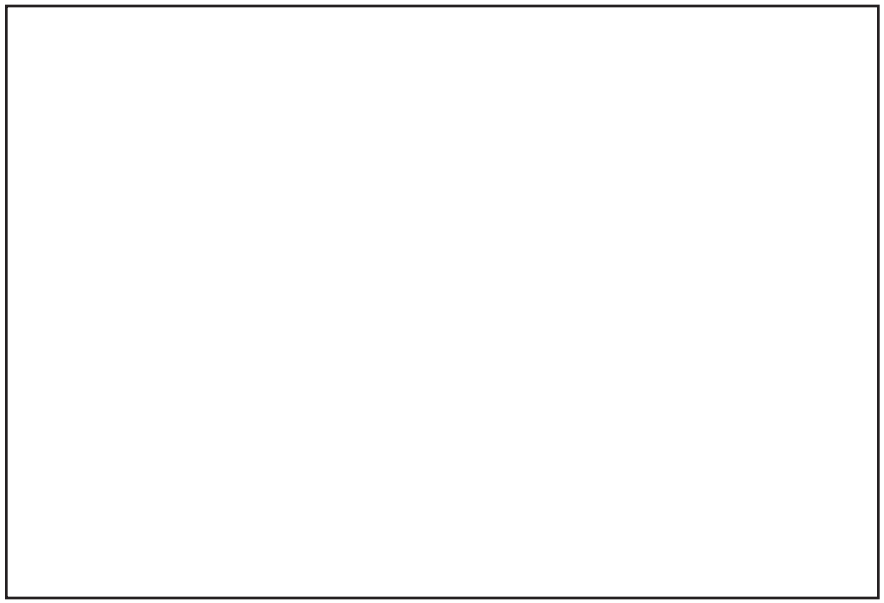
8 dots

Reverse side of page 4

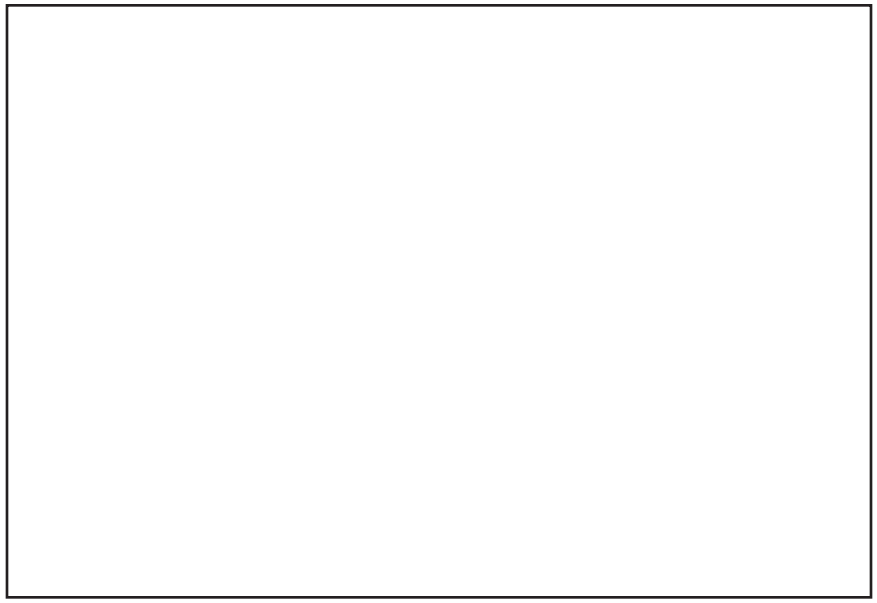
5 Place the indicated number of lines in each rectangle. Place them wherever you want to, but try several options before you glue them down.



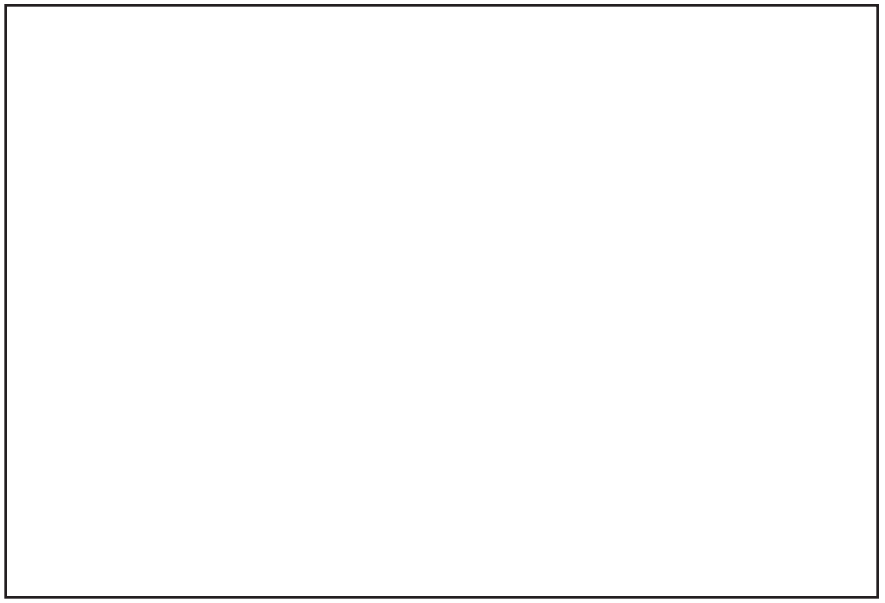
1 dot and 1 line



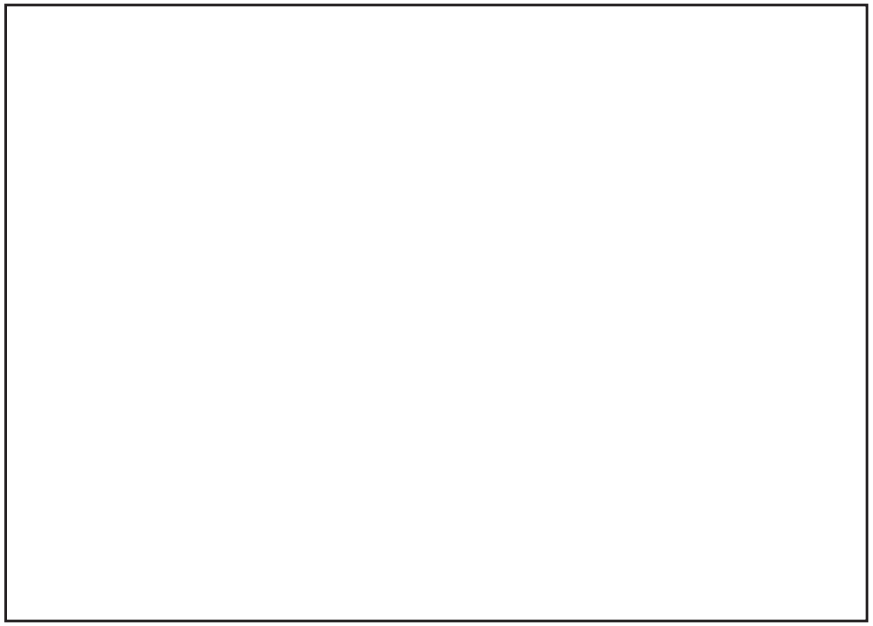
1 dot and 2 lines



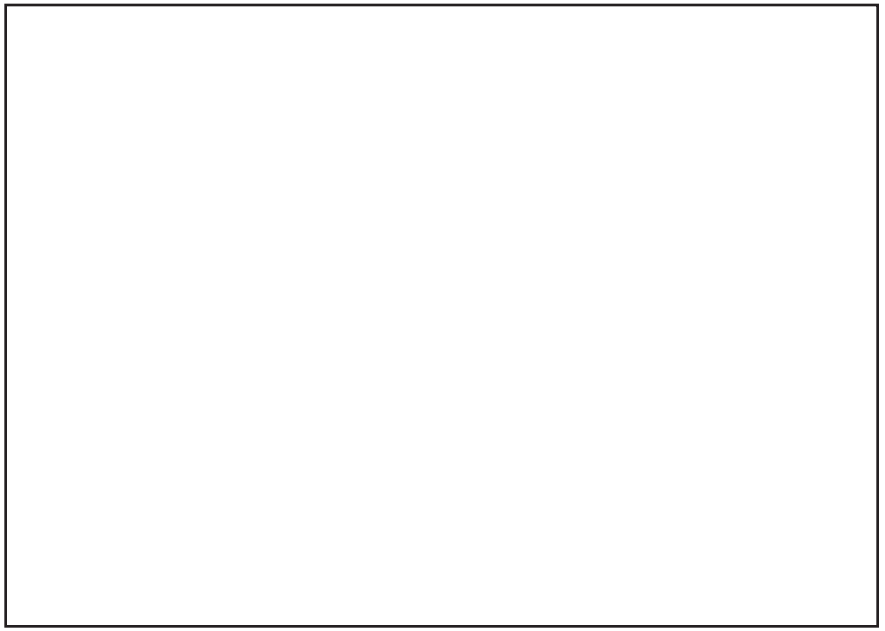
2 dots and 2 lines



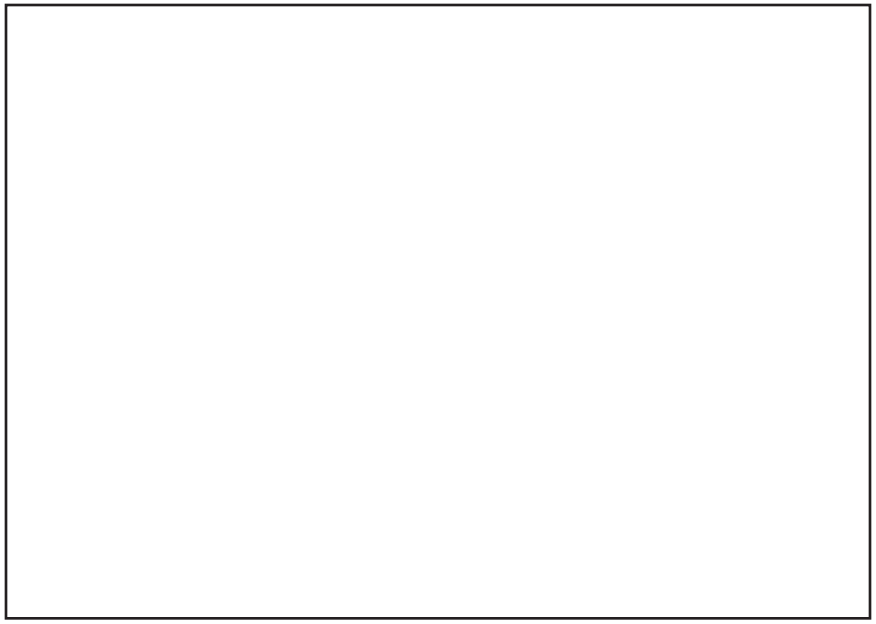
2 dots and 3 lines



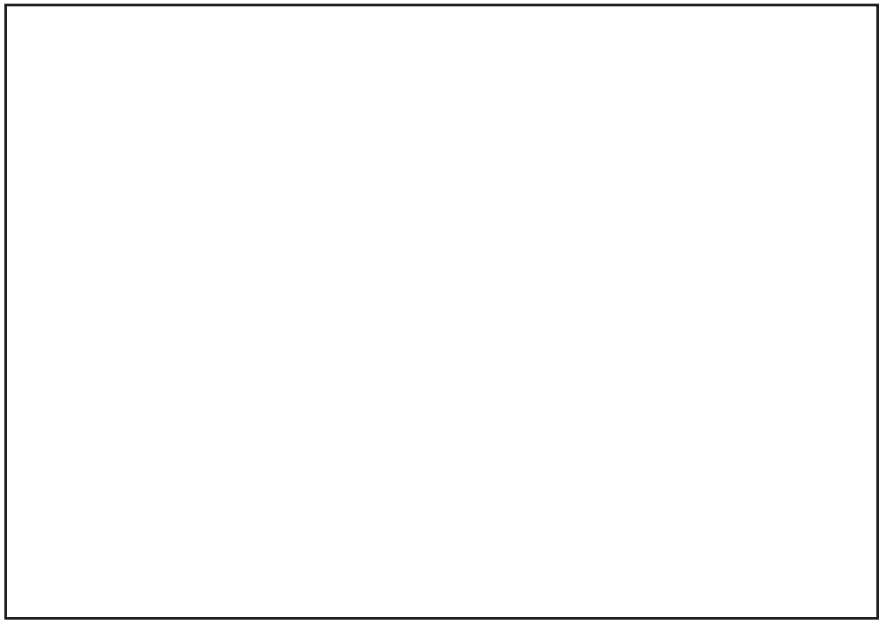
3 dots and 3 lines



3 dots and 4 lines

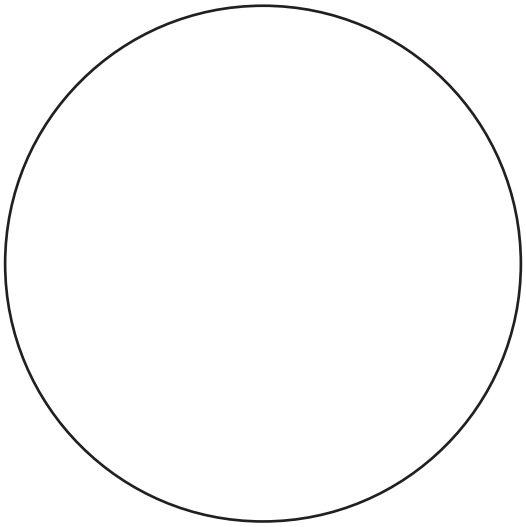


4 dots and 3 lines

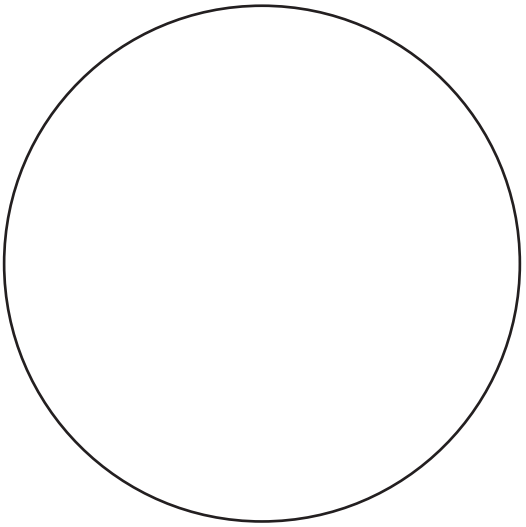


5 dots and 5 lines

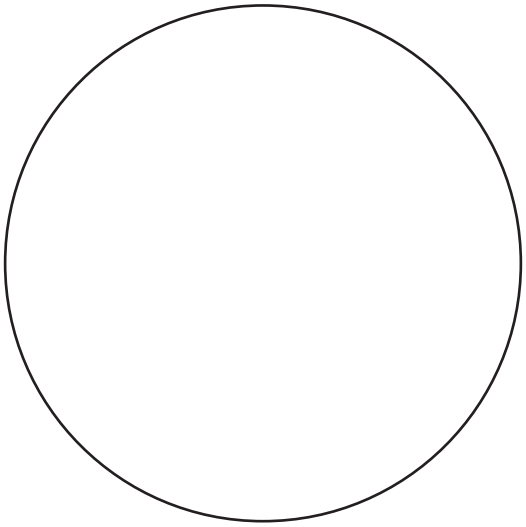
6 Now for something completely different-- a circle! Try creating compositions inside a circular format.



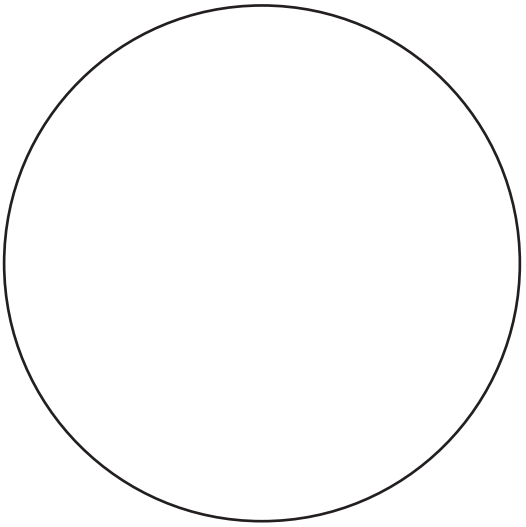
one dot



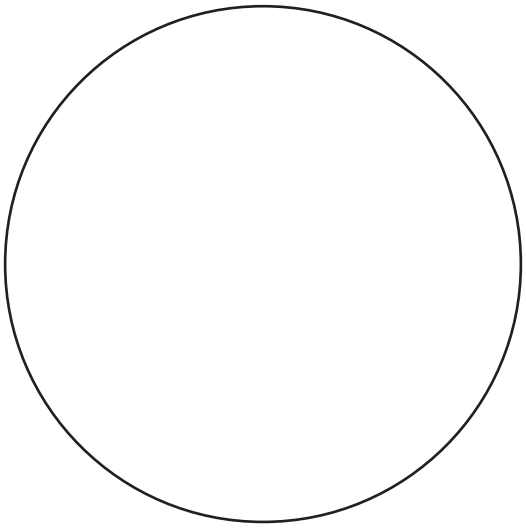
one line



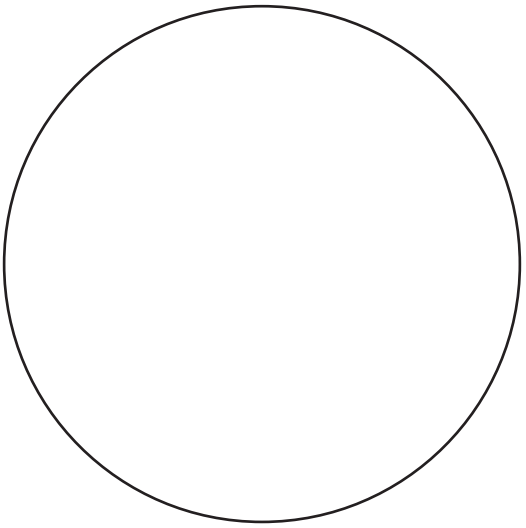
three dots



three lines

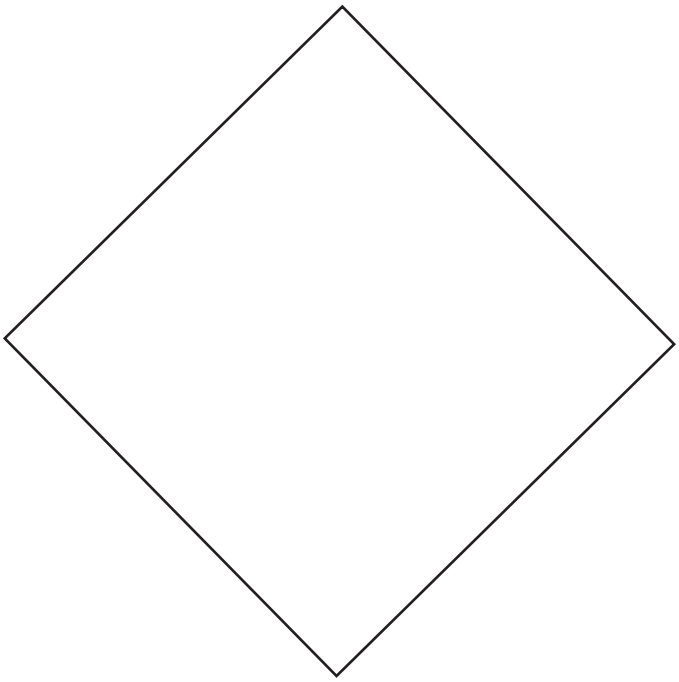


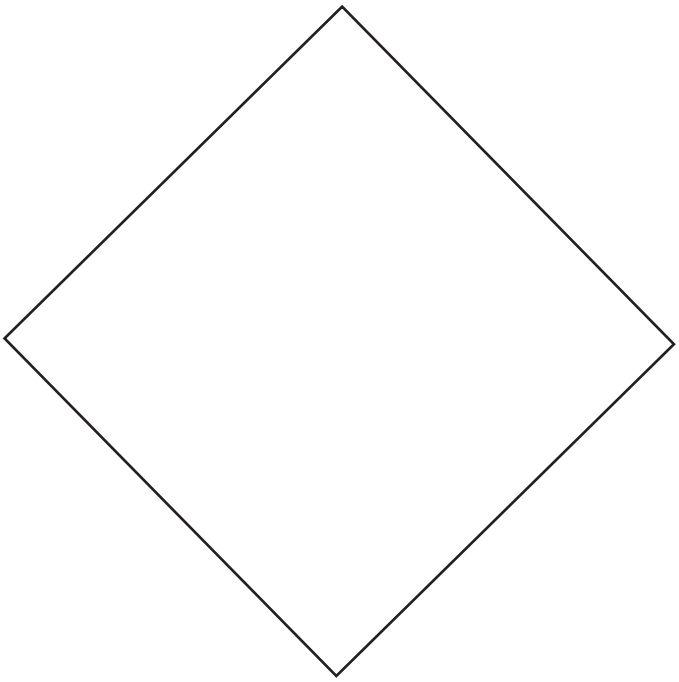
two dots and two lines

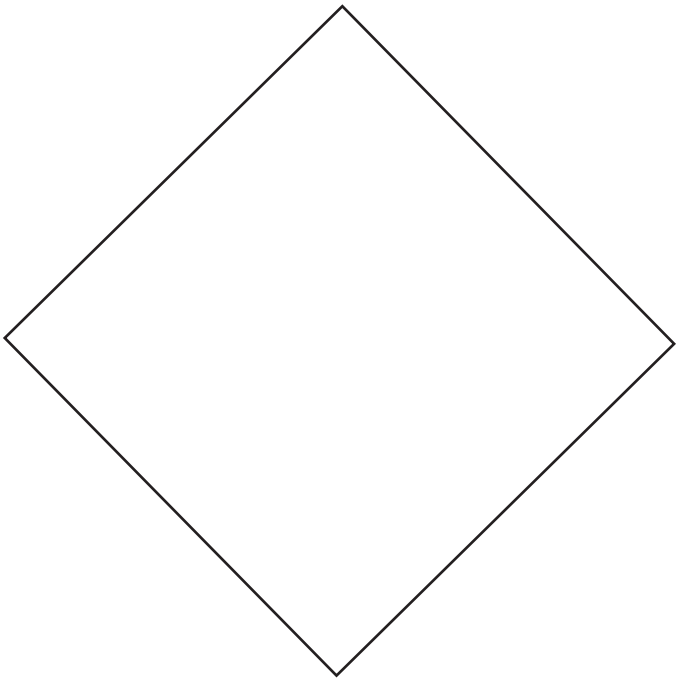


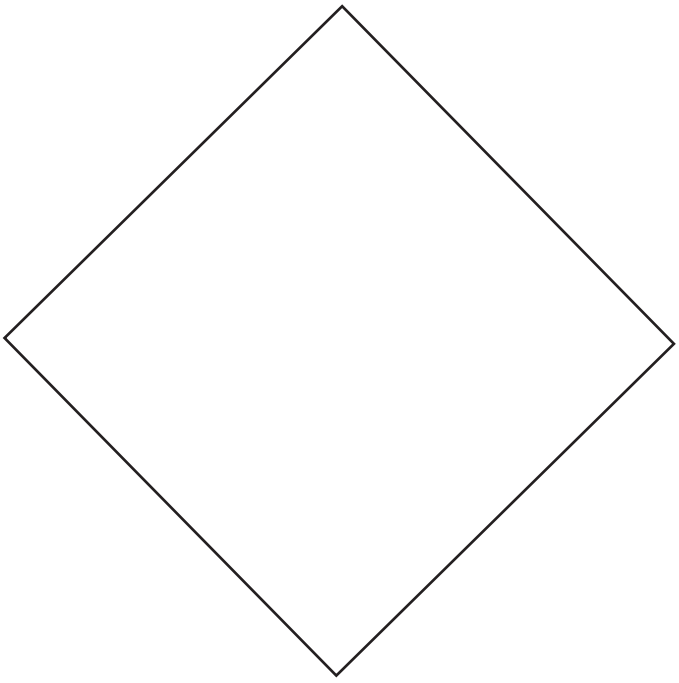
three dots and one line

If you have time, you can try some simple dot and line compositions in these diamond shapes.









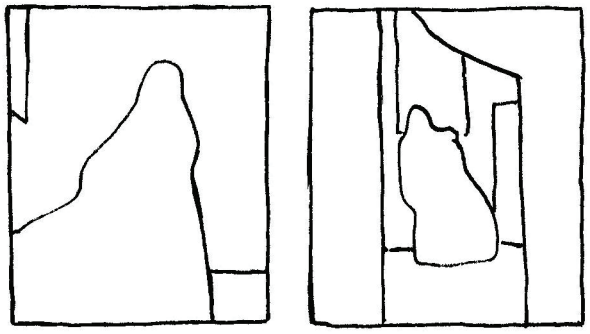
2: Paintings Have Skeletons

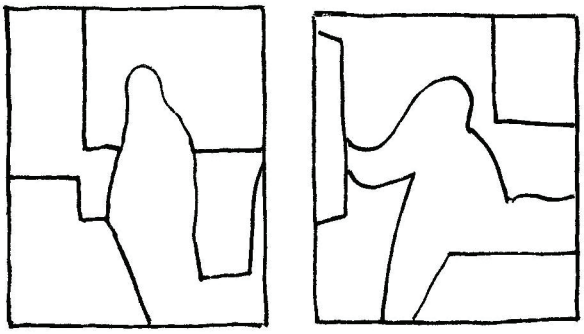
No, you didn't misread that title and it isn't a misprint! In this section we will see how the composition of a work of art can be thought of as its "skeleton."

An animal's skeleton defines how it will look. In your mind, compare a human skeleton to a turtle skeleton. The human skeleton stands upright and has a skull, two arms and two legs. The turtle skeleton is round and flat with a small skull and some feet and a tail coming out from under the shell. Now imagine putting human skin on the turtle skeleton and turtle skin on the human skeleton. Would you still be able to identify the skeletons correctly? What a stupid question—of course you would. It would be hard to disguise the turtle so that it no longer resembled a turtle. And no matter what color skin or hair you put on the human skeleton, it would still look human (compared to a pig or a fish or a mouse). The skeleton is what defines the basic shape and structure of an animal. Everything else is on, or in, or around the skeleton. You could also think of composition as the structural framework of a building. You need to weld the steel beams together (or nail the boards) before you can add insulation and siding, lay bricks, or paint the walls.

Composition defines a work of art like a skeleton defines an animal. It gives it a basic structure on which to build. The other elements of a work of art, such as perspective, shading, texture or color, are just details you add after the basic composition has been determined. No matter what details you add, the basic structure of the work of art will not change.

Here's a very simple demonstration of how basic composition is. On the left are four paintings by Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer, who lived in the 1600s. On the right are simple line drawings that show the compositions of the paintings. Can you match the paintings with their "skeletons"?





That was easy, wasn't it? Should it be that easy? In the line drawings you can't see people or floor tiles or windows or pitchers. They are just rectangles with a few lines drawn inside them. Yet you easily identified which ones represent which paintings. That is because composition is so absolutely fundamental. It's still there even after you wipe out all the details. If you can learn how to make good compositions, you can be sure that your drawings and paintings will be real works of art, not just pages with things on them.

EXERCISE 2A: Find the skeletons of Andrew Wyeth paintings

You will need:
- pencils
- tracing paper

Preparation:

Trim the tracing paper if it is larger than a piece of paper. Place the tracing paper on top of the Wyeth page and tape in place.

TIP: You might want to cut the tracing paper just a tad larger than the area that the paintings cover. Secure the tracing paper at the top with tape, so that it becomes a lift-able flap. Leave the tracing paper on top of the paintings permanently. You can lift the flap to get a better look at the paintings at any time.

What to do:

Follow directions at the top of the page. Try to find the basic compositions of these paintings. I chose Wyeth because his compositions are so easy to see.

EXERCISE 2B: Find the skeletons in Monet paintings

You will need:
- pencils
- tracing paper

Preparation:

Trim the tracing paper if it is larger than a piece of paper. Place the tracing paper on top of the Wyeth page and tape in place.

What to do:

Monet is another artist who made excellent compositions, although they are slightly harder to see than those of Wyeth. Remember, use as few lines as possible. Don't you dare start to draw trees or flowers!

TIP: Same tip as listed above. Consider cutting the tracing paper to be a nicely fitting permanent flap.

EXERCISE 3B: Group matching activity

You will need:
- pencils
- tracing paper
- a few larger images to work from

Preparation:

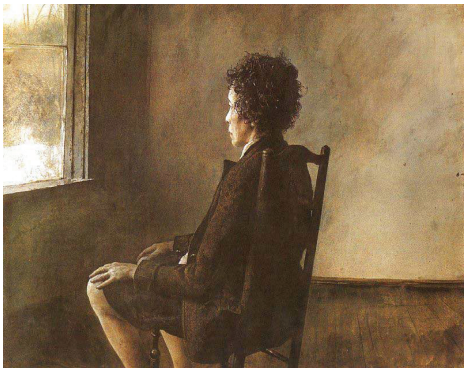
Have the larger images separate from each other. They need to be images that have obvious skeletons, if possible, but they don't have to be overly obvious. Just about any image will work, though.

What to do:

Tack the larger images to a board or on the wall so all students can see them. Give each student a blank piece of paper and have them secretly choose one of the images. They should draw its skeleton on their blank paper. (TIP: Look carefully at how square or oblong the image is and make the skeleton drawing with the same proportions.) Then post the skeleton drawings on the wall and see if the students can match each skeleton to the correct image. It shouldn't be too hard.

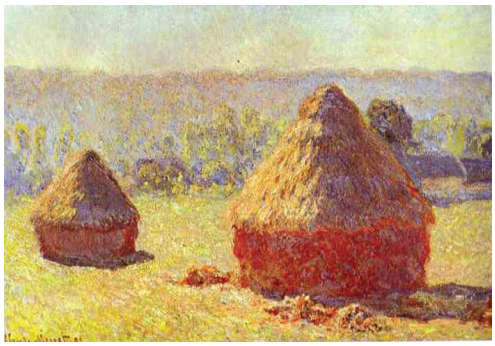
Andrew Wyeth -- A famous artist from Pennsylvania

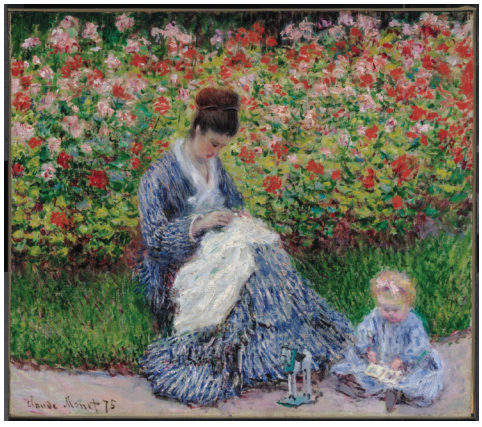
Three generations of Wyeths (grandfather, “N.C.,” father, Andrew, and son, Jamie) all became well-known artists in their lifetime. The family lived just outside of Philadelphia in a town called Chadds Ford. N.C. was a well-known illustrator of classic books such as *Treasure Island*. Andrew painted scenes from ordinary life in Pennsylvania, but always found a way to make the ordinary look strikingly artistic. Andrew’s compositions were strong and bold. Put a piece of tracing paper over this page and draw the basic skeleton of each painting. Use only a few lines. See if you can limit yourself to less than five lines plus an oval, square or circle here and there. Avoid the temptation to draw details.

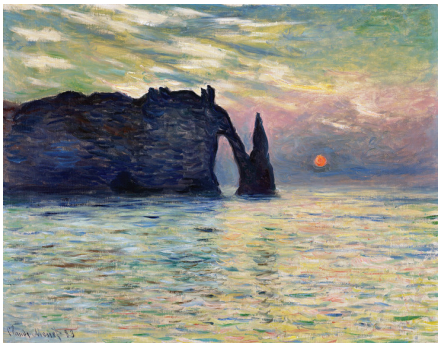


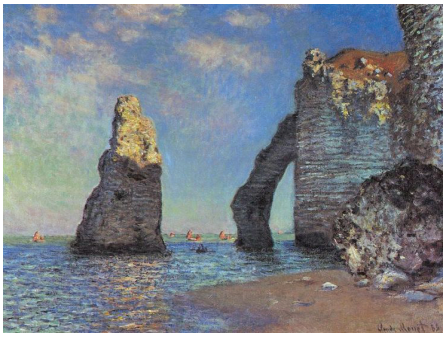
Monet's "Skeletons"

Find the basic "skeletons" of these paintings by Claude Monet. No details! Place a piece of tracing paper over the paintings and use as **few** **lines** as possible to sketch the basic compositions. (Just 15-30 seconds per image.)









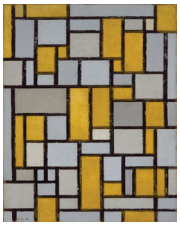
3: Piet Mondrian: An artist who reduced nature to a "skeleton"

Piet ("Pete") Mondrian was born in the Netherlands in the late 1800s. He grew up during the time that many artists were painting in the Impressionistic style. This was the era of Monet, Renoir and Degas. Piet's father was a technical artist and a teacher, so he encouraged Piet to draw and paint. Since Piet lived in the Netherlands, he painted things like windmills and cows. He also liked to draw and paint trees, and it was a series of tree paintings that led him into the style that would make him world famous.

Piet decided to go off to Paris to meet the leading artists of his day. It was in Paris, in 1911, that he first saw the works of Pablo Picasso and other artists who were painting in the Cubist style. He had been searching for a way to change his paintings and make them more about art and less about the objects he was painting. He immediately adopted the Cubist style and began to experiment with how to make trees more "abstract."

painting by Picasso

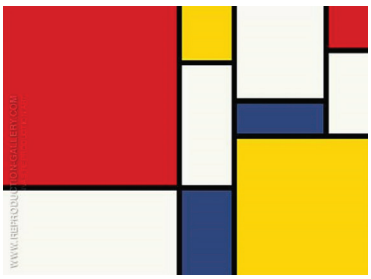
With every painting, his trees looked less like trees. He reasoned that a diagonal line was sort of like a horizontal line and vertical line mixed together. He would separate them. All diagonal lines became either horizontal or vertical lines. Then he began to think about color. Purple was red and blue mixed together. Green was blue and yellow mixed together. The only colors that you could not mix were red, blue and yellow. Every other color was a mixture of the primary colors (plus maybe black or white). He could simplify his art by reducing the colors down to just the primary colors.

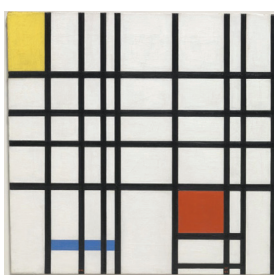


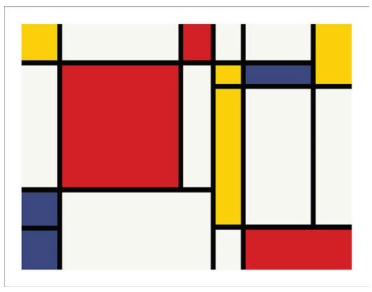
Piet's career was interrupted twice, by world wars. During the first world war, he was stuck in the Netherlands, unable to get back to Paris. He wasn't interested in politics and just wanted to keep painting. Many artists were deeply troubled by the atrocities of war and became bitter or depressed after the war was over. They felt that both humanity and deity had let them down and they struggled to find answers. Some artists during this time came to the conclusion that life really had no ultimate meaning; it was nonsense. These ideas crept into their art and led them to reject many principles that artists had always taken for granted, such as the necessity of making paintings beautiful and meaningful.

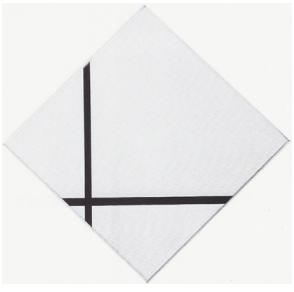
After the war, Piet returned to Paris and began painting in a style that would become his trademark. He used only vertical and horizontal lines and primary colors. He felt that his paintings were still inspired by the natural world, but that he had reduced nature to its most basic elements. These paintings were certainly nothing more than "skeletons." Since this had never been done before, Piet became famous.

When Hitler came to power in the 1930s, many people left Europe. Piet came to New York and rented an apartment in Manhattan. He lived there till his death in 1944.









EXERCISE 3A: Some videos about Mondrian

Go to the "Comp and Design" playlist at: youtube.com/thebasementworkshop. There should be several videos about Mondrian. All the videos that I post have been previewed and are okay for young people to watch. I try to choose videos that are the best of the best, having maximum content in minimum time, with a lively and entertaining method of presentation.

Or, just go to an Internet video service and search for videos about Mondrion, previewing ahead.

Also, try using an image search (like Google images) for "Mondrian merchandise." It is amazing what you can find with Mondrian patterns: clothes, cars, umbrellas, furniture, etc.

EXERCISE 3B: Make your own Mondrian masterpiece

You will need:

- red, blue, yellow, white and black paper
- scissors
- glue stick

Preparation:

Cut very thin strips of black paper. A paper cutter works well, if you have one. Make the strips no thicker than about 1/4 inch (1/2 cm). Cut some variously sized squares of red, blue and yellow. Try to make sure they are very square. Some small, medium and large of each color is best. Smallest would be an inch on a side (2 cm) and largest might be 4 to 5 inches (10 cm) on a side. And plenty in between.

What to do:

Use a piece of white paper as your base. Place strips of black paper across, sort of like you did with the spaghetti noodles in the first lesson. Move them around until you get something you like.

As you work, add in some colored squares. You don't have to use any certain number or size. Make sure the black lines stay very straight-- either horizontal or vertical.

When you get a composition that you like, stick all pieces down with glue stick.

4: Formal and informal compositions

The compositions of Andrew Wyeth are almost always "informal." This doesn't mean that everyone in the pictures is dressed down, or that the scenes are of ordinary life. An informal composition is one that has the focal point quite a bit off center. A formal composition, then, is one that has the focal point at, or near, the center. In the world of classical art (the kind that hangs in museums) the trend is to show a slight preference for informal compositions. Artists that are very good at informal composition can make pictures that have us holding our breath, feeling like something in the painting is about to move or fall. Dramatic compositions catch our eye and hold our attention. Andrew Wyeth's painting of the girl on the hillside is a good example of an informal composition.

Formal compositions are evenly balanced and tend to be symmetric (the same on both sides). Sometimes that's exactly what the artist wants to do. There is a time and place for formal composition.

The artist can intentionally put the focal point on or near the center and make the background symmetric. Below are four works of art by Paul Gustave Doré, an artist of the 1800s. He was a art prodigy, meaning he could draw like an adult when he was only six or seven years old. He began his career as a professional artist at age 15. Doré did many oil paintings, but he also did thousands of black and white prints like these:

"Don Quixote"

"Paradise Canto"

"Orlando Furioso"

"Tower of Babel"

Doré is best known for his illustrations of classic tales such as Don Quixote and Dante's Inferno, and for stories from the Bible and from Greek and Roman mythology. He could also draw cartoons and would make caricatures of famous people. Almost all of Dore's works of art show formal composition. Look at these examples and determine where the center of focus is. Where is your eye drawn as you look at the picture? Close to the center in every one, right? Don Quixote's spear just about cuts the page in half, left and right. In "Paradise Canto" you can't help but look at the center of that circle. In "Orlando Furioso" you have a triangle shape in the middle, pointing to the top. In the "Tower of Babel" the tower is placed in the center, with a prominent figure drawing your attention even more to the middle.

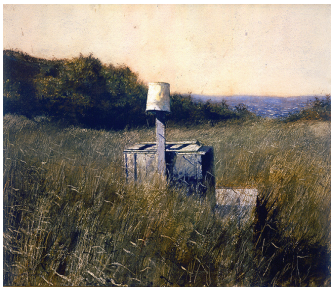
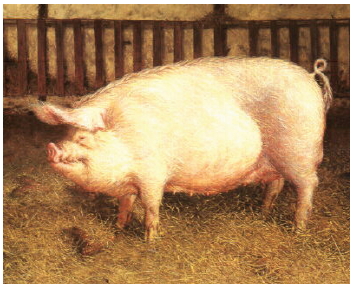
Doré was a brilliant artist. If he wanted to put his focal points at the center and stay away from the edges, who are we to quibble with his preference? Informal versus formal isn't like good verses bad. There's nothing morally wrong with putting your focal point off center, or in the center. However, the natural tendency for most people is to put things in the center. So in this course we're going to thoroughly explore the options of NOT putting the focal point at the center. We can always come back to the center after we're done exploring.

Here are two paintings by Andrew Wyeth's son, Jamie, who was also a professional artist. In these paintings we see the same subjects: a man dressed in a red costume, a lighthouse building, a dark hillside, and sweeping clouds. Which composition is more formal?

EXERCISE 4A: Formal or informal?

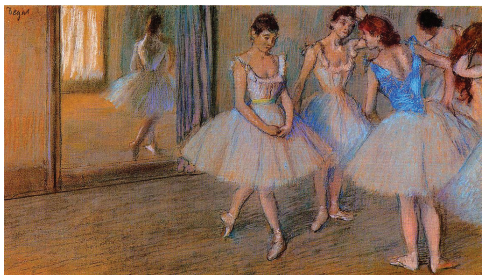
Write F or INF below each painting, indicating whether you think the composition is formal or informal. If you are part of a class, discuss your answers with other class members. Is there a consensus? Are there any paintings that were scored both ways? Have each person explain their answers.

Jamie Wyeth (born 1946), son of Andrew Wyeth (and grandson of N.C. Wyeth):

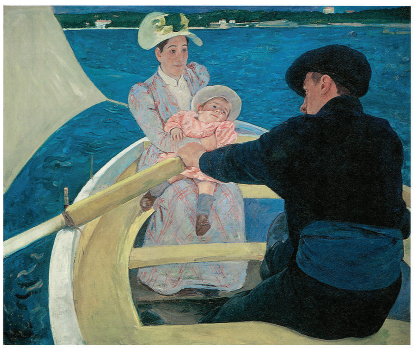

Edgar Degas (1834-1917), an French Impressionist:



Mary Cassatt (1884-1926) an American Impressionist:



Franz Kline (1910-1962), American Abstract Expressionist:




EXERCISE 4B: Try painting like Franz Kline

First, see if you can access some short videos on Franz Kline, possibly using YouTube. You can use the playlist at youtube.com/TheBasementWorkshop (Art Class playlist) if you want to see the ones that I chose to use in my class (Sept. 2018).

Then, get yourself some jazz music to work by, if at all possible. You need to be in a loose, creative mood for this activity.

Kline's paintings are basically nothing but skeletons. He wanted to stay away from representation of any identifiable objects. Look at a range of his paintings. Do any of them look like anything? People? Buildings? Landscapes? Kline hopes that the answer is "no." His goal was to have his paintings be pure skeletons with no hint of them looking like any actual things.

In this activity, the students will try to do the same thing. They should not make their lines look meaningless. No trees, no people, no buildings. Just lines and blobs. This is an advanced version of the very first activity we did in lesson one, with our lines and dots.

Materials needed:

- white card stock or pieces of poster board cut into small rectangles about the size of a sheet of paper
- black acrylic paint
- large brushes (at least as wide as your thumb is wide)
- whatever else you need to paint, such as water dishes, newspaper on the table, etc.
- some additional Kline paintings, if you can find some

What to do:

The students will produce several of their own paintings, imitating Kline's style. The best way to do this is to restrict the time they can spend on them.

If you are working in a group, you might consider doing a "ready, set, go" format, allowing them only a few minutes per painting. (Play the jazz music while they are painting, then with the music stops, they must put down their brushes?) You could start with 3 minutes, then do 2 minutes, then 1 minute, then only 30 seconds. They will be laughing by the last painting, but it will force them to work loose and be creative. (However, time restriction is not necessary for the activity.)

Fun follow ups:

In my class, we did a critique when all the paintings were dry. (Use a hair dryer to speed up dry time.) I had them put their paintings on the wall with no names on them, then the all voted for their favorite Kline composition.

In a second round of critique, I put some real Klines up alongside their paintings (worked a bit to make sure the real ones blended in, such as printing them onto the same card stock paper and going over them lightly with some real black paint). They had to vote on which were the real Klines. Since my group had about 20 students, they each chose just one of their paintings to put up and we still had several dozen on the wall. If a student's painting got chosen as a real Klline they got a round of applause!

5: If paintings have skeletons, then do they have muscles?

Yes, sort of. In animals, the muscles attach to the skeleton, follow its shape, and make the whole body bigger and bulkier. In a drawing or painting, the equivalent to muscles might be the overall patterns of light and dark that follow the compositional skeleton, but fill it out and make it look like "areas" not just lines.

The best way to see a drawing or painting's muscles is to squint. Squinting is an extremely helpful tool when analyzing art. First, squinting tones down the color a bit, letting you see what we call "value." Value is the relative darkness or lightness of something, regardless of its color (hue). You can't say that blue is always darker than red. You can have a very light blue and a very dark red. Some shades of blue and red look almost identical if you make black and white photocopies of them. There are a few famous Monet paintings where you can hardly see the painting at all if you take away the color. You can't always take pictures or make copies of art, but you can always squint.

Second, squinting minimizing tiny details. If you are trying to concentrate on the muscles, you don't want to be distracted by the equivalent of snaps, buttons, jewelry, lace, etc. Those tiny details are just the skin that is pasted on top of the muscles. You want to focus on the muscles, and squinting helps.

Some works of art have more obvious "muscles" than others. Squint while you look at this painting. Squint enough that the clump of trees on the left becomes basically one dark blob, and the clump of trees in the distance on the right becomes a light gray blob. The light gray tree blob might even extend down into the bottom right corner. This often happens--several objects or areas will combine when you squint. The only thing you are looking for is large areas of light and dark grays, so it doesn't matter if these areas are made of one thing or several things combined. That dark tree branch extended across the picture almost blends into those trees when you squint. The harder you squint the more they blend in.

This is a photograph by Ansel Adams, an artist who specialized in black and white photographs of landscapes. Because it is already black and white, it is easy to see these areas we are talking about. The camera did your work for you!

Here is another Ansel Adams photograph. Can squinting turn it into just two or three shapes?

Squinting will reveal that this painting is basically a gray rectangle with two black circles.

Can you reduce this painting to just four light or dark shapes?

This painting is nothing but a light rectangle on top of a darker one.

TIPS FOR LESSON 5 EXERCISES

For the following exercises, you will be printing out the pages for the students. Each student will need a copy that they can draw on. Some of my students found that white pencils worked well (Berols are the best brand for this.) Some preferred a thin point black Sharpie marker, or a Sharpie no-bleed marker. A few tried yellow or red pencils. You can try whatever you have on hand. A white or silver gen pens might work, also.

You will also need a small paper frame, which can be made from any type of paper or card stock. The dimensions of the window should be 1" by 1.5" (2.5 cm by 4 cm). The outer dimension is not so critical, but make sure the frame is large enough that your attention is drawn to what appears inside the frame, not the rest of the image around it.

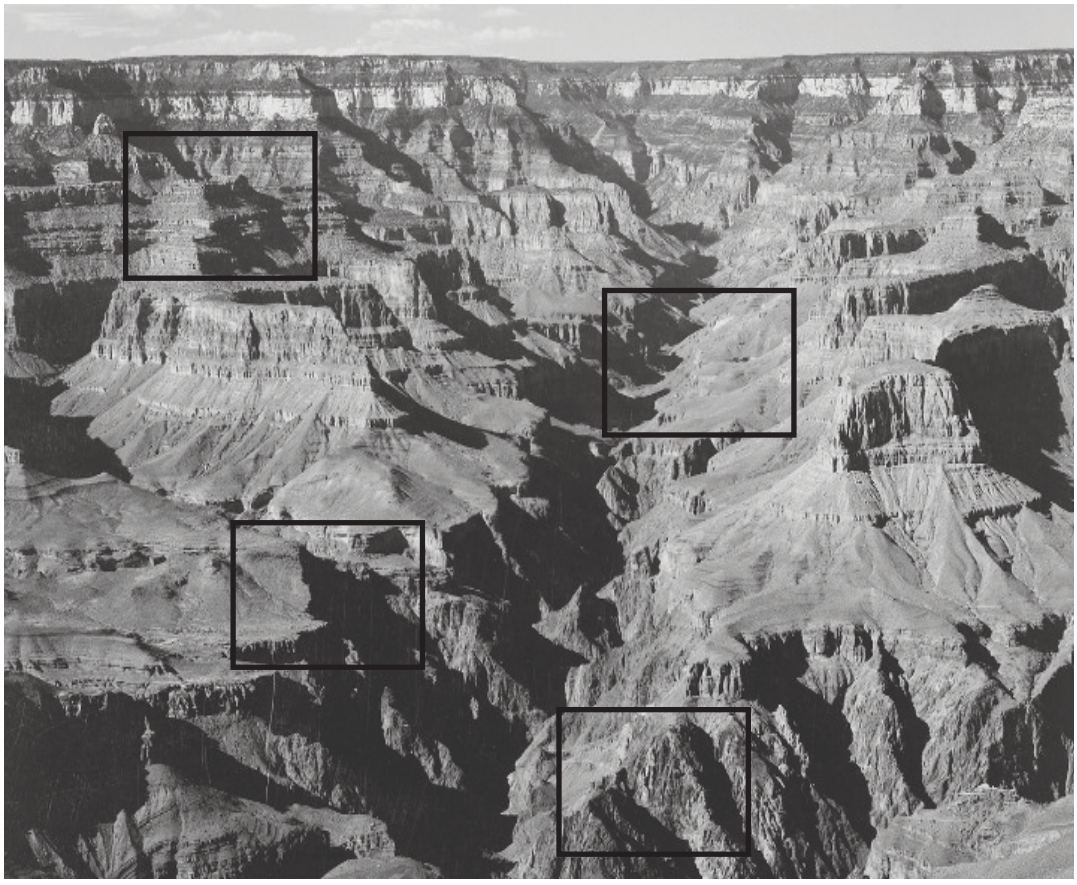
SUGGESTIONS FOR SUPPLEMENTAL IMAGES:

1) You might want to do an image search on the Internet and find some of the US stamp sets that I mention in exercise 5B. Print a few out and pass them around for the students to see. It is amazing how well the mini-compositions all fit together to make one, final, composition. They really thought this through ahead of time!

2) Find and print some additional Ansel Adams photographs. He is the acknowledged master of black and white photography.

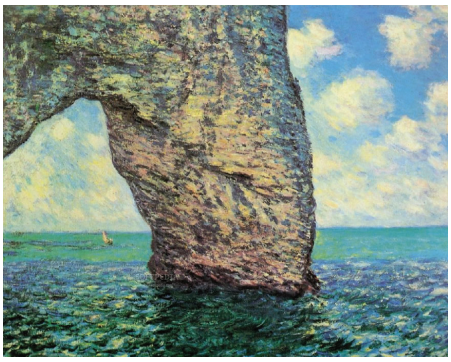
SAMPLE OF FINDING MINI COMPOSITIONS:

Pretend like you are trying to find Kline paintings, or maybe Monet skeletons.
The point is only to find combinations of shapes that make an interesting way to divide up that space.
There aren't any right or wrong answers.



EXERCISE 5A: Adding “muscle” to your skeletons

Just as muscles surround and cover the bones, compositions have basic patterns of light and dark that add to the basic shape and overall “look”of the artwork. In this exercsise, after you sketch the skeleton in the box on the right, shade each space you have created with an appropriate shade of gray that approximates the value (lightness or darkness) of that space in the original painting. (These are all Monet.)



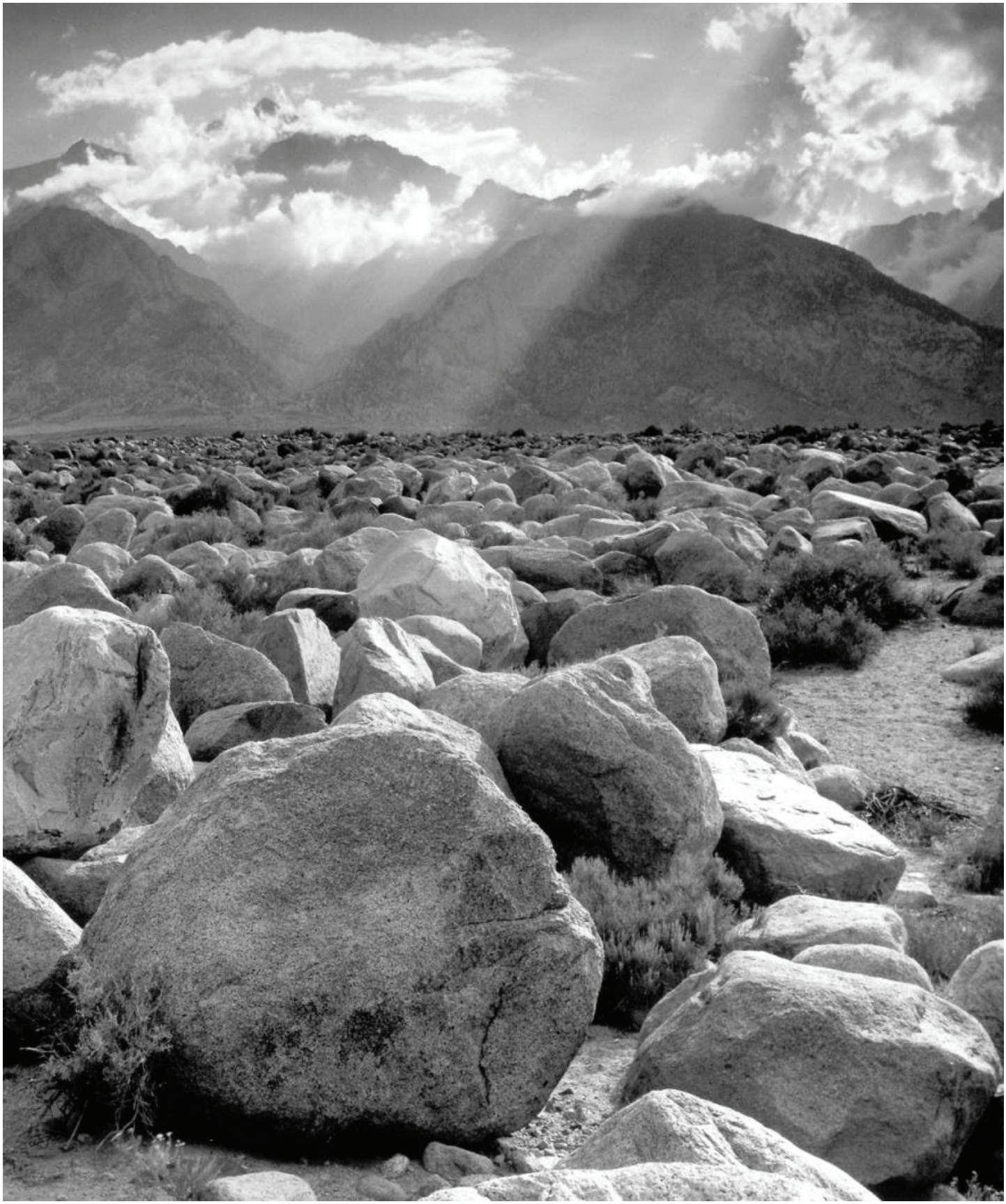
EXERCISE 5B: Finding compostions within a composition

The US Post Office sells sheets of stamps that feature dramatic landscapes of various places around the United States. The artists who design these sheets have a tricky job. They must design a good composition for the entire page while also creating about ten other smaller compositions within the large one. The overall composition has to be excellent, as well as each of the smaller ones. It's like the ten stamps are hidden on the page. But when you peel them off, they look find by themselves.

In this exercise, you will take a famous photograph and find ten small compositions within that large composition. This picture of the Grand Canyon was taken by a photographer named Ansel Adams who lived from 1902 to 1984. Your task is to find ten smaller compositions within this picture. Make a paper frame that has an opening 1" by 1.5" (2.5 cm by 4 cm). Put the paper frame on top of this picture and move it around until you find a composition you like inside. Then trace around this composition with a pen or pencil. The compositions you choose can't overlap each other. (Think of them as stamps that will be peeled off the main picture.)

EXERCISE 5C: Another Ansel Adams photo to try

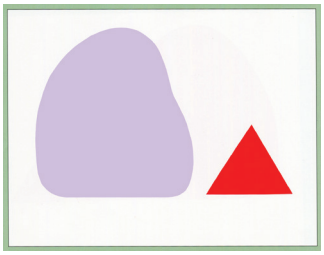
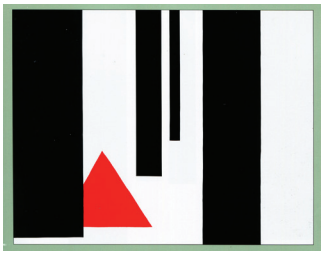
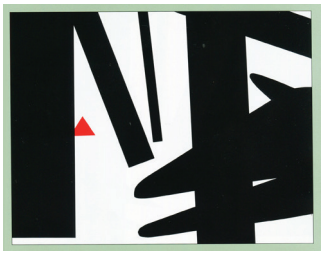
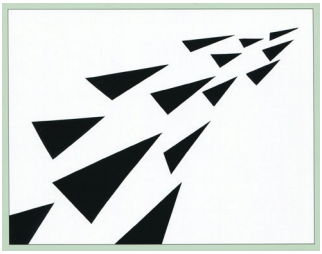
Use your paper frame (from 5B) to find at least 10 “mini-compositions.” (Your composition might not look like rocks--they might look more like abstract pictures of white, gray and black patches.)



6: “Instinctual” principles of design

Everyone is an artist to some degree. Before we go on to talk about more principles of design and make you think it is something you have to learn, let’s review the things you already know. There are very basic things—so basic, in fact, that you take them for granted and probably never stop to think about them.

At this point, I highly recommend a book called Picture This: How Pictures Work by Molly Bang. The author traces her own learning journey, how she became aware of these basic principle of design. In her book she uses cut paper shapes to tell a well-known folk tale, “Little Red Riding Hood,” and shows how just circles, triangles, rectangles, lines and four basic colors, can convey all the emotions found in this story. Here are a few of the pictures from her book:

The first picture shows Little Red Riding Hood and her mother. The artist first tried a large triangle for the mother, but then opted for a softer shape and was more comforting. She is also lilac, suggesteing that she is less daring than her bright red daughter.

Look at the two central pictures. Which forest looks more dangerous? Can you see the tree trunk that is leaning, looking like it might fall on Little Red Riding Hood? The wolf’s silhouette looks threatening, but the auther makes it even more threatening by adding teeth and eyes. She experiments with the shape and color of the eye. What color do you think she finally chose? Also, you can see that white teeth will not show up on the white background, so she had to change the background color. What color would be best-- red or lilac?

The last picture is nothing but triangle. However, they are arranged in such a way that they suggest motion. Artists can vary the size and direction of objects to put motion into their still pictures.

If you happen to have Kindle and Amazon Prime, you can get the Kindle edition for free. Regular price for the Kindle edition is about $10. You can also get used copies of the book for less than $10. It is really worth purchasing and reading this book.

If you are not able to gain access to this book, just do the following exercises anyway.

SOME INSTINCTUAL PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

(things you already know, but don't know that you know)

1) Things that are horizontal give us a sense of stability and calm.

Name five things that are horizontal and give a sense of stability (but you can't use the word "floor" or "ground").

_____ _____ _____ _____ _____

2) Things that are vertical give us a sense of energy or excitement.

We are surrounded by plants growing upward, buildings being built higher, birds and airplanes taking off and rockets being launched. Name three things you can see right now that are vertical and tell how they might be associated with energy.

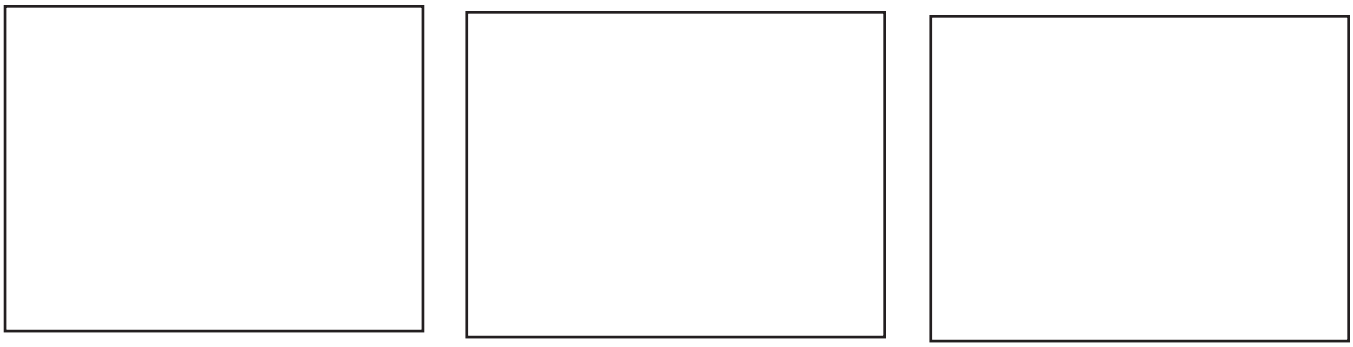
_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

3) *Diagonal things imply movement or tension.*

This is because we observe that when something vertical falls, it will is diagonal while falling. And when something is placed on a diagonal surface, it rolls off. Diagonal beams in bridges and buildings are always in tension (think of trusses on bridges or flying buttresses on cathedrals). Draw some diagonal lines in the picture frames below. Which one gives the most dramatic sense of movement? Why?



UP HIGH

4) Things that are _____ are usually happy, fun, triumphant, spiritual or inspiring

Think of five "up high" things that illustrate each of these. (Height only has to be relative to other things.)

happy _____ fun: _____ triumphant: _____

spiritual: _____ inspiring: _____

5) →→→THE CENTER OF SOMETHING IS THE BEST PART-- IT'S WHERE ALL THE ACTION IS ←←←

Give three examples of centers you like:

_____, _____, _____

6) EDGES AND CORNERS MAKE US FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE.

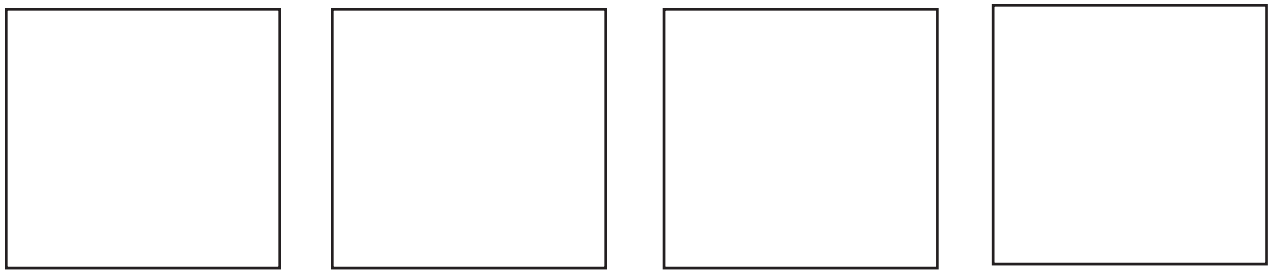
Can you think of four verbal expressions (phrases or sayings) that use the words "edge" or "corner" (or variations thereof) to express some kind of negative thought?

_____ _____

_____ _____

7) THINGS THAT LOOK SIMILAR ARE PROBABLY RELATED IN SOME WAY.

Make a few very simple sketches of some things you might find in nature that look very similar because they belong together in some way.



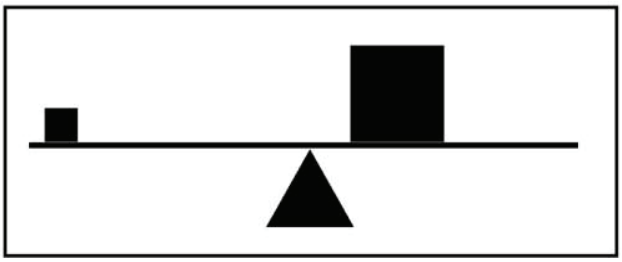
8) POINTED THINGS ARE SCARY.

Time yourself on this one. Give yourself 30 seconds and see how many pointy things you can think of that are dangerous or scary:

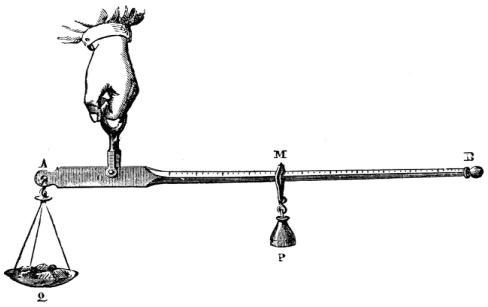
9) Contrast catches our attention.

Imagine yourself walking down a crowded or busy street in a big city. You see two things next to each other that are so different it makes you turn your head to look at them. What are they?

7: Balance



Have you ever done simple balancing experiments with a fulcrum, a cross beam, and various weights? The fulcrum sometimes looks like a triangle shape that you put in the middle, under the cross beam. The fulcrum can be in the middle or more to one side or the other. You put a heavy load or a light load on each side and see how they balance, or perhaps don't balance. In this picture you can see one of the basic principles that you are supposed to learn while experimenting. A heavy weight can be balanced with a light weight if you place the heavy weight near the center and the light weight far out to one edge, away from the fulcrum.



Over two thousand years ago, ancient craftsmen already knew about this principle of physics, and they used it to create what has now become known as the steelyard balance. This picture shows a steelyard balance from the 1800s. It was a simple, but very effective scale that could be used to weigh even fairly heavy objects. The hand is holding the fulcrum, so most of the bar is off to the right. The object was placed in the pan on the left. The tiny weight on the right was called the counterbalance and gave the reading of how much your object weighed. The counterweight could be small because it was far away from the fulcrum and therefore had more "power" so to speak. The further away an object is from the fulcrum, the more force it can apply. So a very small object can be balanced with a very heavy object if the heavy object is put close to the fulcrum and the light object is put far away.

So what does this physics stuff have to do with art? Oddly enough, similar balancing principle are at work in compositions. Large objects can be balanced with tiny ones, or even with empty space. The most famous example of "steelyard balance" in art is this painting by American artist Thomas Gainsborough. You will see this painting in most books about composition and design—it's a classic example. Here we see two figures way off to the left and a bunch of empty space off to the right. The tree acts like a fulcrum and the two figures are the heavy object being balanced with the wide open space in the landscape.

Pieter Bruegel's "Hunters in the Snow" (1565) is another example often shown. The subject of the picture is the group of figures on the left. Again, we have a tree acting as a fulcrum and wide open space balancing with the figures. Figures (people) in paintings draw our attention very strongly and it takes an awful lot of open space to balance them!

Every object in a painting has a certain amount of "draw" that attracts our attention. Big things draw our attention a lot, but a very tiny object can have as much draw as a large object if it is put in the middle of a lot of empty space. The middle painting below is one of Monet's sunset paintings. The triangular rock is a very handy fulcrum, and the tiny red sun is used to balance the entire mass of black cliff. Can you feel your eye being drawn to the sun?

When the fulcrum is in the middle, we have a formal composition, like the compositions of Gustave Doré. Here is an old-fashioned balance on top of a Doré. No steelyards here!

EXERCISE 7A: "Balancing act"

There isn't any "right or wrong" when it comes to putting a sense of balance into a work of art. The artist will have his or her own feeling about what looks best. The viewer simple observes what the artist did and will have their own opinions about whether they like it or not. Sometimes the artist will intentionally add an element that puts the work of art slightly off balance just to make it more interesting.

In this illustration by N. C. Wyeth, the tiny white birds in the lower left draw our eye off to that side. There isn't anything on the right to balance them. But since they are small, we still feel an overall sense of symmetric balance.

In this illustration by Doré, we have a triangular composition similar to Wyeth's but every element on the left has something to balance it out on the right, such as the shadow of the horseson the left, and the tree on the right.

In this Andrew Wyeth painting, the dark have nothing to balance with except the blankness of the rest of the painting. The legs are just too dark and our eye stays up there in the upper left corner. But this is what the artist intended.

In the rectangles below, draw one line in the first box, two lines in the second box, three in the third and four in the fourth. (This is like what we did in the very first exercise.) Then use a black marker or crayon (or black paper if want to cut and paste) to color some of the sections black. You must decide which sections to color so that the overall composition looks balanced. After you have done this, analyze your results. You will then be allowed to add one small black dot to each composition, if you think it will improve the design.

EXERCISE 7B: Improve on some masterpieces

Think you can do better than Monet or Rembrandt? Go ahead and give it a try! (The page that does not have the titles printed on it is for you to cut up.) For each painting, do the following:

1) Figure out where the focal point is. This is the place your eye is drawn to the most. You have to leave this in the composition! (Sometimes the focal point can be several objects together, which your eye sees as unit.)
2) Use scissors to crop (trim) the painting, cutting off portions that you think could be eliminated while still maintaining a good composition. You can trim more than once if you want to. (You might also want to fold it first, before cutting, so you can experiment with your ideas before actually cutting.) Glue your cropped version in the empty space to the right of the original.
3) How successful were you? Was it easy to improve on the original composition? Don't be shy. If you think the cropped composition is better, go ahead and say so. If you are working in a group, look at what each person did to the paintings. You might even want to take a vote on which is better, the original composition or one of the cropped versions.

"Sunset in Venice" by Claude Monet, 1908

"Picking Flowers in a Field" Mary Cassatt 1875

“Field wtih Cypresses” by Vincenet Van Gogh, 1889

“Winter 1946” by Andrew Wyeth

“Two Men Contemplating the Moon” by C. D. Friedrich, 1825

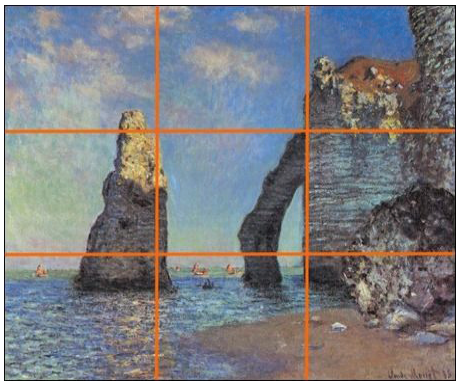
This page is for you to print and cut up.

8: Rule of Thirds

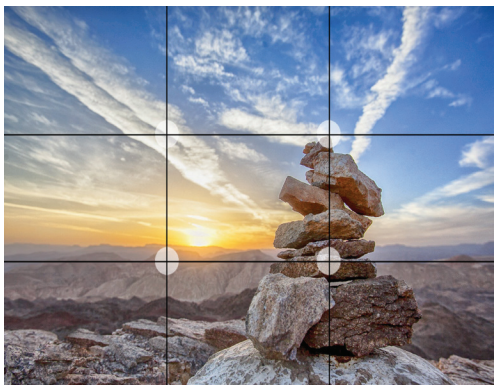
People who spend a lot of time looking at art have noticed something interesting. Viewers tend to like artwork that uses a design principle called the "Rule of Thirds." This principle works for sculpture as well as paintings, but it will be easier if we talk about paintings.

If we put imaginary lines across a painting, dividing it into thirds both horizontally and vertically, many of the lines of the "skeleton" and many of the visual focal points will occur either along these lines or at places where these lines intersect. This landscape painting has the horizon line exactly one third of the way down the picture. The house on the right is at one of the places where the lines intersect. The white shore line at the bottom is right where a grid line touches the edge. Notice that not everything in the painting lines up with a grid line. Artists don't follow this rule slavishly. Rarely does every element in a picture line up with the grid.

If we put the grid of thirds on top of this Monet painting, we can see that two vertical edges line up pretty well with the grid. The top of the arch stops right at a grid line, also. The horizon line is at least close to a grid line.



Photographers probably use the rule of thirds more than any other kind of artist. Some digital cameras even come with a grid option where you can see this grid as you take a picture. How many features of this photo line up with the grid?



The lighthouse is exactly at one of the grid lines. Not much else lines up with the grid, but since the lighthouse dominates, that's the important feature.

Here are three works of art for you to try. Use a pencil and ruler to draw "third lines" on top of each.

Mary Cassatt

Edgar Degas

Camille Pissaro

EXERCISE 8A: Rule of thirds skyline

Materials needed:
- pencils
- a copy of the pattern page for each student (printed in color)
- black permanent markers, fine and medium (or, you could use cut black paper and glue sticks)
- scrap paper to put underneath your page so the marker doesn't bleed onto table top
- optional: copy of the silhouettes idea page (black and white)
- optional: white paint marker or "white out" (very optional; I only list this because one of my students requested it)

What to do:

Each student receives a copy of the Rule of Thirds Skyline paper. (It is important to print it in color.) The students will design a black silhouette skyline to draw on top of the evening sky, using permanent black markers (or cut black paper if you want to avoid permanent markers).

You can require that they work entirely from imagination, or you can give them a copy of the city skyline silhouette page. Make sure they understand that this page is only for getting ideas of building shapes-- they are not allowed to copy any of these skylines!

First, they need to understand the goal: create a skyline that uses the rule of thirds principle. This doesn't mean that everything in the picture has to fall on one of those lines. It simply means that at least some kind of focal point needs to close to a line, or at an intersection of the lines.

Second, they need to do at least two "thumbnail" sketches before starting on their final drawing. Thumbnails let you try out your ideas to see how they look before committing to one idea. Make the thumbnails in pencil so you can erase as you draw, and move buildings around. This is where you make all your mistakes, hopefully.

The trickiest part of this drawing will be that you can't really erase on the colored background. Make sure they are aware of this before they start. If they do a preliminary sketch, they need to make the lines very, very light. (Cut paper avoids this issue.) Also, tell them that this is artwork, not an architectural drawing, so if their buildings are not perfect, it is okay. Chances are that their drawing will look nice no matter what they do.

Some of my students added their own creative touches, like a rocket or a meteor. One of my students had just participated in a musical show of Mary Poppins, so she put a tiny umbrella character in the sky right at focal point. Very cute. Another student asked for white out and wanted to put a few stars just coming out. Again, it looked nice and did not detract from the black silhouettes.

Follow up idea: You can stretch this assignment and make it longer if you have them do their own watercolor sky ahead of time. You can still use marker over watercolor. Another option would be to use strips of colored paper glued to the background. I've seen sunset skies done with torn stripes of colored paper glued in order from bottom to top: red, orange, yellow, light blue, darker blue. The end result looked nice with black paper silhouettes glued on.

EXERCISE 8B: Design a flag for a space colony

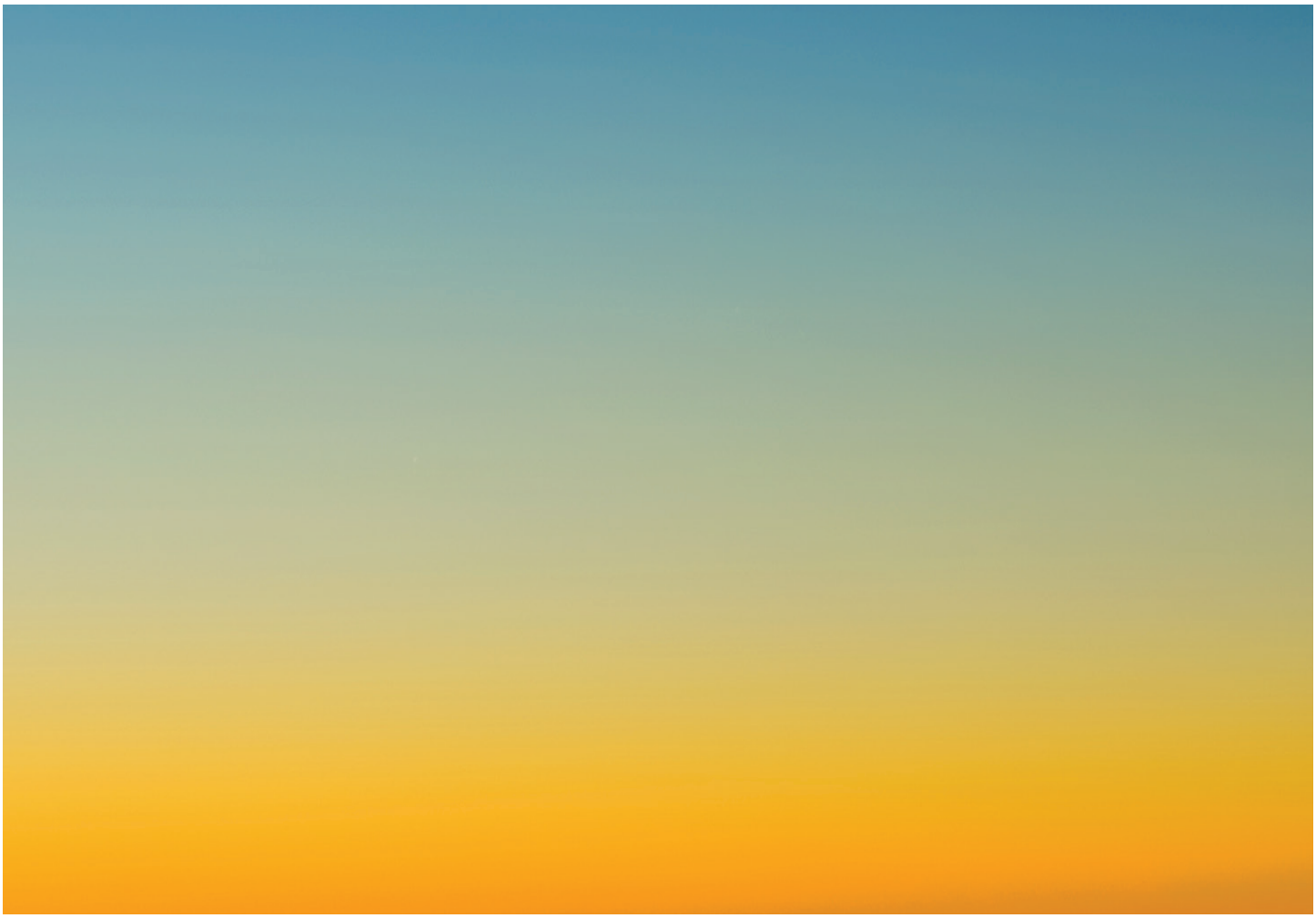
Materials needed:
- the pattern page printed for each student
- various art supplies, whatever you want to use: cut paper, markers, colored pencil

What to do:

Flags are a very basic graphic design project, and a good way to practice the rule of thirds. How many flags of the world have three bands of color? (quite a few) Tell the students to design a flag for an imaginary space colony. The colony can be on the moon or Mars or anywhere in the galaxy. They can include simple objects (in silhouette would be best) as will as stripes, circles, triangles, or squares.

RULE of THIRDS SKYLINE

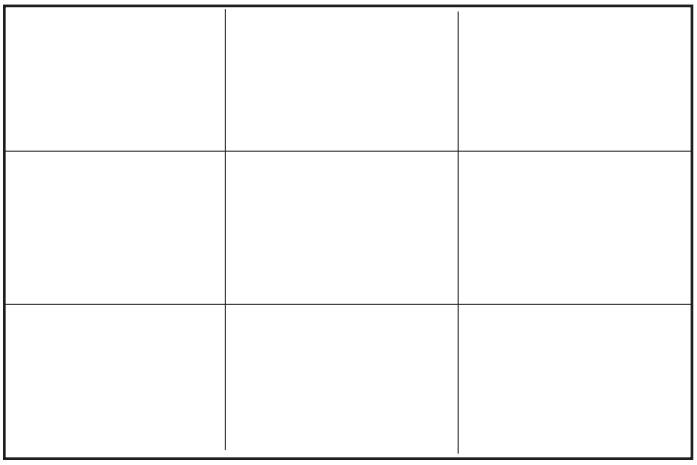
Do two thumbnail compositions before you start your final work of art:

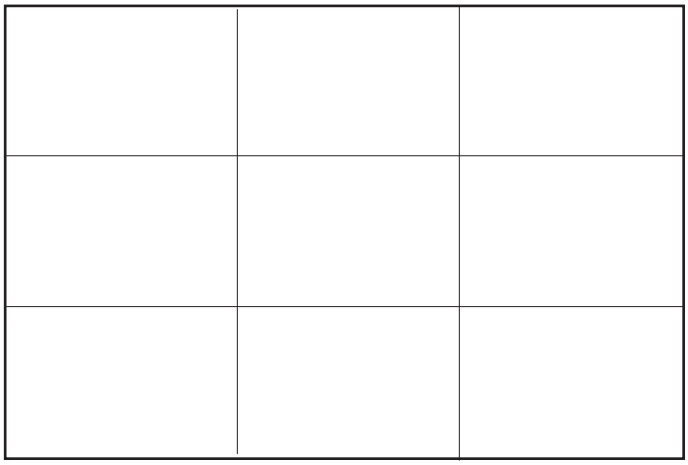


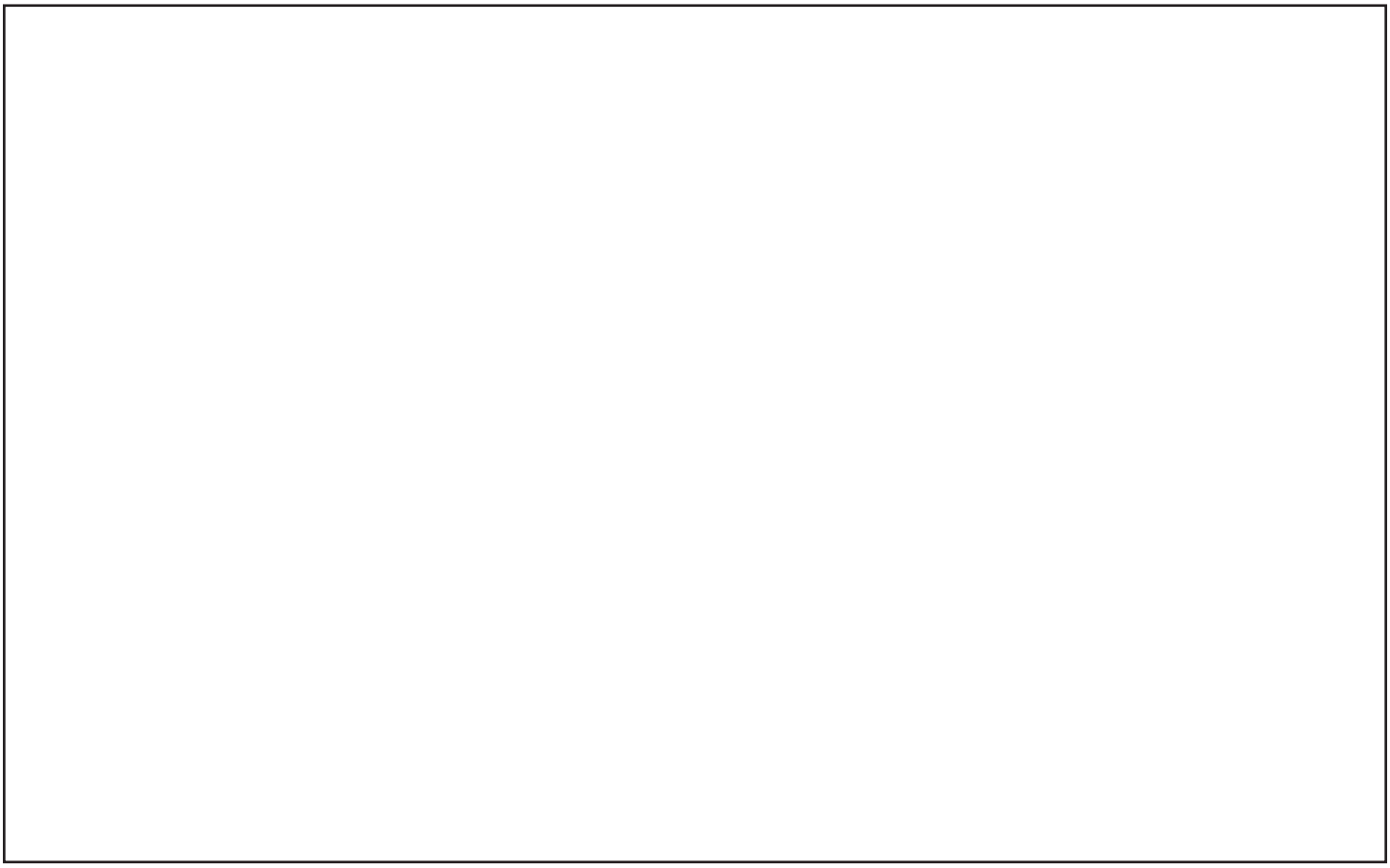
DESIGN A FLAG FOR A SPACE COLONY

Design a flag for an established colony on one of these extra-terrestrial locations: Venus, Mars, or the moon. Use appropriate colors, shapes and symbols for such a colony. You can invent a history for the colony and use design elements take from that invented history. (How far in the future is this? What types of people built it? For what purpose? What is the colony known for-- farming, minerals, nuclear power research, genetics, astronomy, war)? How many countries cooperated to build it? What to the buildings look like? Do they have new forms of energy? Do they have sports? Use your imagination!)

Do two thumbnail sketches before starting your final design, and don't forget to incorporate the "rule of thirds."





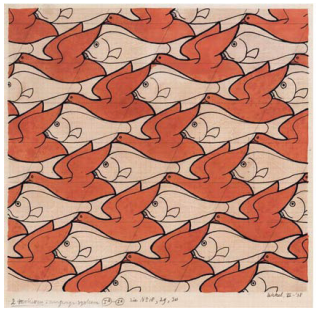


9: Repetition (Rhythm)

Repetition is a concept we are familiar with. It crops up constantly in our every day lives. Life goes in cycles. Traffic signals go red, green, yellow, red, green, yellow all day long. The pedals of a bicycle go around and around. Radio stations repeat news headlines at the top of every hour. The music we listen to has a steady, repetitive beat. The same commercials come up over and over again while we are watching a program.

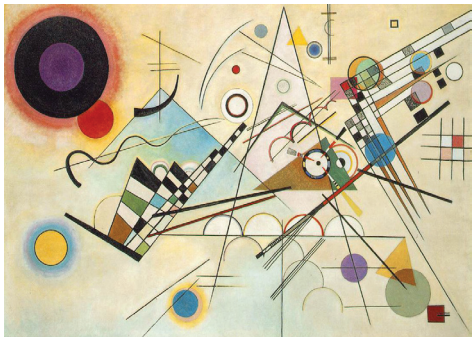
In a work of art, repetition can't work over a period of time like the examples just given. A painting is the same from hour to hour. So the repetition is entirely visual, meaning the same shapes or colors or themes are used multiple times in the art. The most straightforward example of repetition in visual art is the work of Andy Warhol. Andy was a "pop artist" meaning his art wasn't meant to compete with Monet or Wyeth. He wasn't really interested in painting or drawing. It was more like he was out to shock people and push the limits of the definition of "art." If he pasted the image of a common object, like a soup can, onto a canvas, would that still be art? Could it hang in a museum? He decided to use many images of the soup can, stacked in rows without any consideration of composition of balance. What you see is what you get. Rows of soup cans. Andy was able to sell his art because he knew a lot of famous people and belonged to a "hip" inner circle of artists, actors, writers, political figures. Everyone figured that since Andy was a "hip" person and was excepted by this elite group, then his art must be worth something. Do you agree?

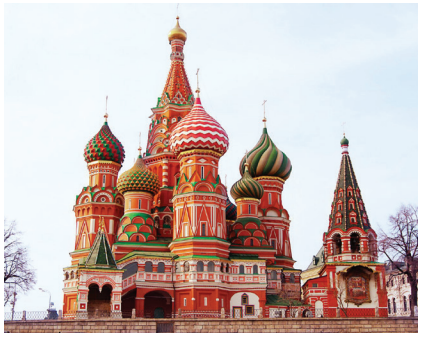
Warhol's work is what I call redundant repetition. Redundant means repetitive in a boring, tiresome way. Nothing interesting about it. Boring, boring, boring. (You can tell I'm not an Andy Warhol fan.)



Another artist who used very obvious repetition was M. C. Escher. Escher lived in the Netherlands during the 1900s. Escher became the master of a particular type of repeating pattern called a tessellation. Tessellating shapes fit together in clever ways so that our brains are intrigued by the interlocking patterns. Mathematicians love Escher's tessellations. The tessellations shown here are some of the more basic patterns Escher did. He also found creative ways to use tessellations to make more complex works of art.

Artists should try to use repetition in a subtle way, such that the repetition isn't painfully obvious (redundant). The repetition should make the artwork more interesting to look at, not more boring. Shapes and colors and patterns, and even themes and ideas, can be repeated in ways that are pleasing and interesting. The first piece on the left is by Wassily Kandinksy, from the early 1900s. He uses the same shapes over and over again (circles, lines, triangles) but in a way that makes us want to look at the painting for a while and explore its features. Architects almost always use repetition in their designs. This photo shows St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow. The architect used a handful of colors and shapes over and over again to make a design that keeps our attention for a very long time. We just can't stop looking at this amazing building! Last in line is a landscape by Grand Wood, from the early 1900s, sometimes called "America's Painter." His landscapes show a masterful use of repetition to create visual rhythm.





EXERCISE 9A: Repetition without redundancy

Let's experiment with making some compositions from only one shape. This means you will automatically be using the principle of repetition because you must use that shape over and over again. However, you may think of variations such as size, color, texture, value (light or dark) or whether it is solid or just an outline. They should be 2D works of art (don't turn the circles into spheres, for example), and you must have some shapes going off the edge. No things on pages. Try to keep your compositions balanced, too, and think about your arrangement of darks and lights.

LINES:

CIRCLES:

SQUARES:

TRIANGLES:

EXERCISE 9B: Identify examples of design principles

Graphic artists know design principles VERY well. In fact, they probably use them more than any other type of artist. A classic example of graphic design is in advertising posters. Give each student a copy of the following worksheet showing a dozen movie posters. Put a check mark in the boxes next to the design principles you see in the poster. Most of them will have a few, but not all the principles. I gave my students a while to work on their own, then went around the room asking them to share their answers out loud. Here are a few of my own thoughts on some of the poster, just to give an idea of what they might say. This is somewhat subjective, as each person's brain sees things slightly differently, but on some of them there are some fairly definitive answers. The main point is that they are observing and thinking. Group discussion is great.

CAKE BOSS:

Balance: Yes. The large white area of his shirt is a balance to the red spatula and the red word. Also, the panel is fairly evenly divided diagonally between white and blue.
Repetition: Not a whole lot in this one. I'd leave the box unchecked.
Contrast: Yes, the red words and his black hair just pop out at you.
Rule of thirds: Although this is not the best example here, the word BOSS is close to a third line. His hand is close to an intersection. His right eye, which is a focal point, is close to being on a third line.
Symmetry: Not really, except maybe a diagonal line between white and blue areas.
Focal point off center: Yes. His face is the strongest focal point, followed by the word BOSS.

MEGAMIND:

Balance: This poster is one of the best examples on the page. We've got those two heads that are very similar in size and shape and features, but have different colors and expressions. Our eyes go back and forth looking from one to the other. See yourself doing that? Back and forth, back and forth.
Repetition: Hmmm, not really. We have two heads, which barely qualifies as repeating.
Contrast: Absolutely, as we said the different colors of the faces and the different expressions. Also the black background sets them off very sharply.
Rule of thirds: Not so much here. It's more like the poster is divided in half both vertical and horizontal.
Symmetry: Yes, if you folded the page in half you'd get a head on each side.
Focal point off center: Yes, but interestingly enough, you have two equally strong focal points. You have two equally strong focal points in the two faces. Your eye stays away from the center.

TOY STORY 3:

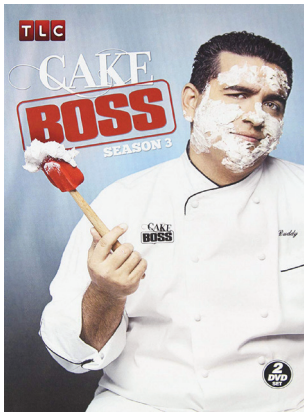
Balance: Not so much. With that strong central focal point, there isn't much to balance.
Repetition: Yes, all those heads, and they are so different that it is not boring at all.
Contrast: The simplicity of the 3 is contrasted with the complexity of the background.
Rule of thirds: The 3 lies inside the area formed by the third lines.
Symmetry: Yes, both vertical and horizontal. If you fold the paper up and right or left and right you get similar images. Symmetry in art does not have to be perfect. The fact that the 3 is not mathematically symmetric doesn't matter.
Focal point off center: Nope.

TRON:

Balance: This could go either way. You could say that the tiny white line balances off the large blue/black of the rest of the poster (steelyard principle where one small thing balances against a large empty area). Balance is not the same thing as symmetry, so we'll discuss that last.
Repetition: No, not really.
Contrast: Yes, that white line just pops out at you.
Rule of thirds: Not a lot, but you might say that the black figure is about at the lower third line.
Symmetry: Yes, obviously. It is divided down the middle.
Focal point off center: Not really. Can you feel your eye gravitating to the lower part of the white line? That is at least close to the center.

What principles did these designers use?

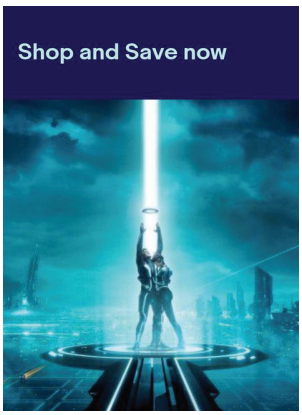
Analyze these compositions and put a check next to the principles that you see being demonstrated.



- ❑ Balance without boredom
- ❑ Repetition w/o redundancy
- ❑ Contrast
- ❑ Rule of thirds
- ❑ Symmetry
- ❑ Focal point off center

- ❑ Balance without boredom
- ❑ Repetition w/o redundancy
- ❑ Contrast
- ❑ Rule of thirds
- ❑ Symmetry
- ❑ Focal point off center

- ❑ Balance without boredom
- ❑ Repetition w/o redundancy
- ❑ Contrast
- ❑ Rule of thirds
- ❑ Symmetry
- ❑ Focal point off center



- ❑ Balance without boredom
- ❑ Repetition w/o redundancy
- ❑ Contrast
- ❑ Rule of thirds
- ❑ Symmetry
- ❑ Focal point off center

- ❑ Balance without boredom
- ❑ Repetition w/o redundancy
- ❑ Contrast
- ❑ Rule of thirds
- ❑ Symmetry
- ❑ Focal point off center

- ❑ Balance without boredom
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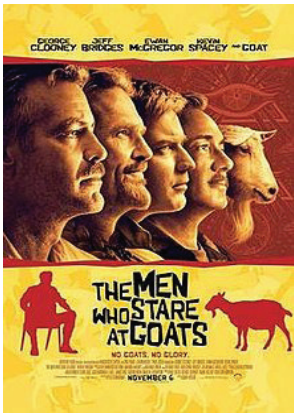
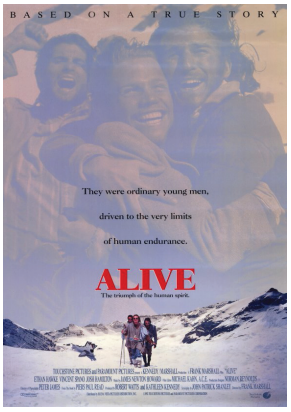
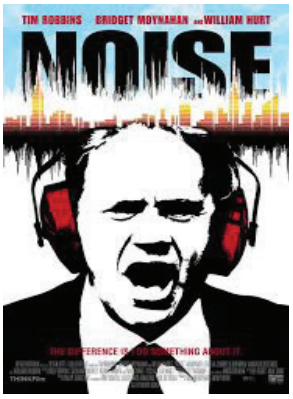
- ❑ Contrast
- ❑ Rule of thirds
- ❑ Symmetry
- ❑ Focal point off center



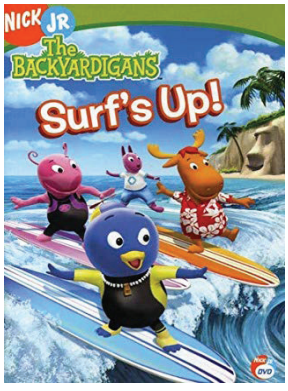
- ❑ Balance without boredom
- ❑ Repetition w/o redundancy
- ❑ Contrast
- ❑ Rule of thirds
- ❑ Symmetry
- ❑ Focal point off center



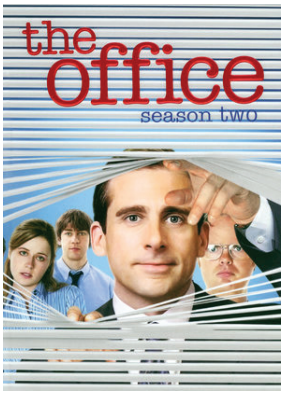
- ❑ Balance without boredom
- ❑ Repetition w/o redundancy
- ❑ Contrast
- ❑ Rule of thirds
- ❑ Symmetry
- ❑ Focal point off center



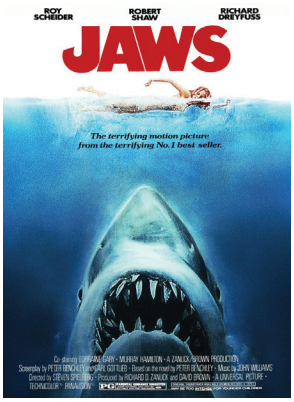
- ❑ Balance without boredom
- ❑ Repetition w/o redundancy
- ❑ Contrast
- ❑ Rule of thirds
- ❑ Symmetry
- ❑ Focal point off center



- ❑ Balance without boredom
- ❑ Repetition w/o redundancy
- ❑ Contrast
- ❑ Rule of thirds
- ❑ Symmetry
- ❑ Focal point off center



- ❑ Balance without boredom
- ❑ Repetition w/o redundancy
- ❑ Contrast
- ❑ Rule of thirds
- ❑ Symmetry
- ❑ Focal point off center



- ❑ Balance without boredom
- ❑ Repetition w/o redundancy
- ❑ Contrast
- ❑ Rule of thirds
- ❑ Symmetry
- ❑ Focal point off center

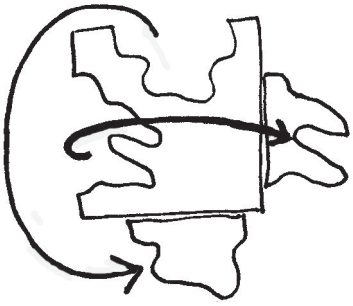
EXERCISE 9C: Make a tessellating pattern (like Escher)

Tessellations are certainly repeating. Whether they are repetition without boredom depends on what you do with them. M. C. Escher often made his patterns merge into something else. Or he made the tiles so detailed that they were interesting to look at.

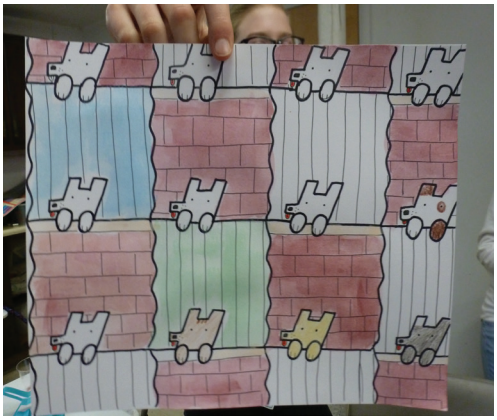
If you choose to do this activity, I suggest starting by getting a few Escher books or else typing his name into an Internet search engine. There might even be a few short biographies of him on youtube.

It is actually much better to see someone demonstrate how to make a tessellation than to read a lengthy written description. I recommend typing "How to make a tessellation" into YouTube or your favorite video search engine.

The basic idea is that your take a paper rectangle (use card stock or poster board) and draw a shape on two sides. Then your very carefully cut out the shape and tape it onto the other side. Be exact. Then this becomes your tile pattern. You can trace it again and again, making a series of interlocking shapes. I had my students make a shape at random, then look at it and imagine it into being something. Then they painted their tiles accordingly. We used watercolors and Berol prismacolor pencils, but you can use any art media you'd like.



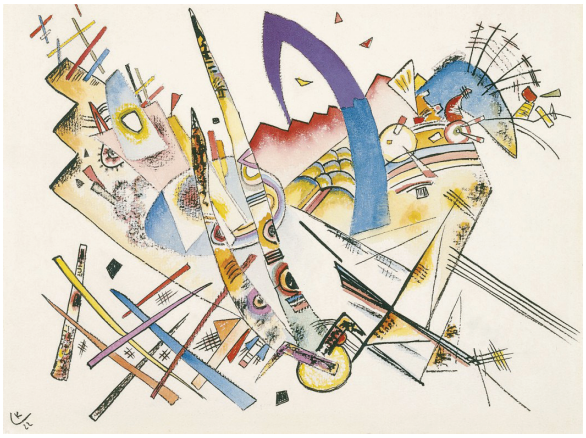
Here are a few student samples from a class I did for ages 10-14.



10: Motion

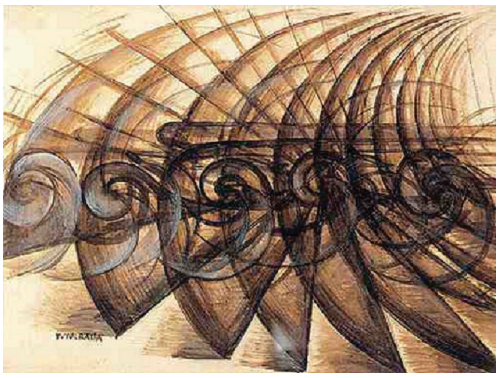
We don't tend to think of paintings or drawings as having any motion. Some sculptures, such as mobiles, might be in motion, but paintings tend to hang on a wall and not move. The motion that happens in a painting or a drawing is inside your head, in the visual center of your brain, not in the painting itself. However, artists have ways of guiding and controlling how your eyes and brain interact with their art. They can plan their work of art so that you will perceive motion in some way.

There are two types of motion in a painting or drawing. The first is what I call "subject" motion. This kind of motion is related to what is happening in the picture. Perhaps someone is running or walking, or a boat is being tossed on stormy seas, or a soldier is throwing a spear. The subject—what the painting is about, or what the figures are doing in the painting—involves movement. The other type of motion is what I call "compositional motion." This type of motion doesn't even need a subject to do anything. A completely abstract piece of art made of nothing but lines and circles can have compositional motion. The arrangement of the shapes on the canvas leads you eye in such a way that you perceive movement. The artist may use many techniques to achieve compositional motion. Van Gogh's famous Starry Night painting is a picture of things that don't move, or at least don't move very much: trees, buildings, hills, stars and the moon. (The moon does move across the sky, but so slowly that we don't generally think of motion when we think of the moon.)Van Gogh has filled his painting with compositional motion by using the texture of the paint. He used a choppy, swirly application of paint that makes us feel that the paint itself is in motion. Real starry night are not this active!

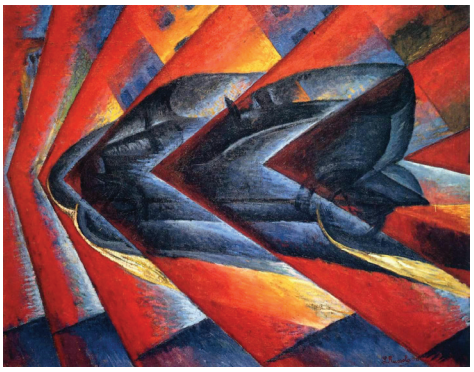


Kandinsky, who we looked at in the last lesson, also was able to put a lot of motion into his paintings. He used only basic shapes such as circles, squares, triangles and lines, but could arrange them in such a way that the viewer sees motion.

Right about the time that Mondrian and Picasso were painting, in the very early 1900s, a small group of Italian artists began an artistic movement called "Futurism." These artists were attracted to the progress that science and technology was making, especially in the area of transportation, with the invention of cars and airplanes. No one had ever seen anything go faster than a horse. Now cars were beginning to whiz by on the road. These Italian artists were overcome with enthusiasm for machines and industry. Many of their paintings have titles that begin with the word "dynamism," meaning "movement." One of the futurists (Russolo) was also a musician. Like a proper futurist, he wanted to throw out every trend of the past and create something new. He wrote a book called "The Art of Noise" that cataloged sounds. He also made sculptures that made terrible noises. People didn't like his noise art and he never became famous outside of Italy.



Giacomo Balla "Speed of a Bicycle" 1913



Luigi Russolo "Dynamism of a Car" 1912

The use of swirly lines and repeated shapes will almost always provide motion when used in a composition. Perhaps the all-time master of swirly lines was Peter Paul Rubens, a Flemish artists who lived during the late 1500s and early 1600s, the same time period as Galileo. "Flemish" means that he lived in Flanders, which is now part of the country of Belgium. (When Rubens was alive the countries of central Europe weren't countries, but were part of The Holy Roman Empire.) Rubens lived in the city of Antwerp. His first major work, "The Raising of the Cross," made him famous overnight. It was a huge panel (11 ft/ 3.5m) tall for the front of a cathedral. The compositional motion in this painting is masterful. Rubens positions all the people so that everyone is leaning or pushing in the same direction, straining to lift the cross. The figure of Christ pulls our eye upward, making us feel as though we are helping with the lifting. Not only did Rubens place each figure carefully, he also painted the figures with rippling muscles that swirl with motion in the same way that the Van Gogh painting does.

Rubens combined subject motion with compositional motion. Many of his paintings show scenes where people are moving, sometimes violently, such as in this scene of a lion hunt. The lion is attacking, hunters are thrusting spears, and people are falling. This is as close as you get to a snapshot in this pre-photography era. Rubens may have had people pose for him so he could draw body parts accurately, but he had to add his imagination to make the bodies look like they were in motion.

On top of the subject motion of the hunt, Rubens added plenty of compositional motion so that our eye roams all over the picture, taking in detail after detail. He uses swirls and curves of arms. legs, and fabric to create movement.

Let's compare two paintings of the exact same subject: St. George and the dragon. The subject is identical in both paintings, so we are really only comparing compositional motion, not subject motion. St. George is killing a dragon to save a fair maiden. The panting on the left is by Edward Burne-Jones (1866). The one on the right is by Rubens. Look at the Jones painting. Notice how your eye travels around the painting. How much time to do you spend looking at various places? Now look at the Rubens. How fast does your eye travel, compared to the Jones painting?

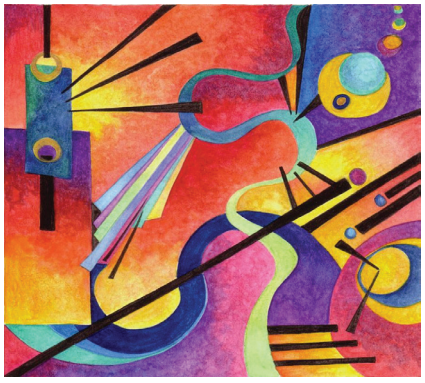
EXERCISE 10A: Make your own “Kandinsky” painting

Wassily Kandinsky was a bit unusual in that he had a condition called synesthesia. He saw colors and patterns when he heard music playing. He would try to paint what he saw. Kandinsky’s favorite composer was Arnold Schoenberg. You can type his name into youtube or a search engine and listen to some of his music. It is nothing like the jazz that inspired Mondrian. Schoenberg’s music is “avant garde” meaning that he was trying to break the traditional rules of what concert music should be like. If you like to combine music and art, you could find and play some Schoenberg while the students are making their Kandinsky art. (For example, a site like this: https://www.interlude.hk/front/music-art-schoenberg-kandinsky/)

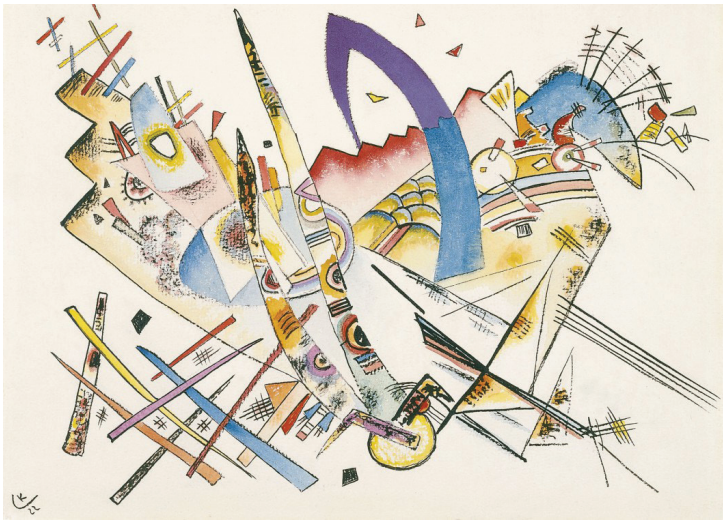
Notice how Kandinsky uses the same basic shapes over and over again, but somehow he manages to vary the size and the placement so that he achieves a sense of movement and action. The paintings are full of motion. The use of curved lines is a key, as well as lines placed so that they are closer together at one and farther at the other, a classic way of suggestion outward motion. Zigzags and cones also help.

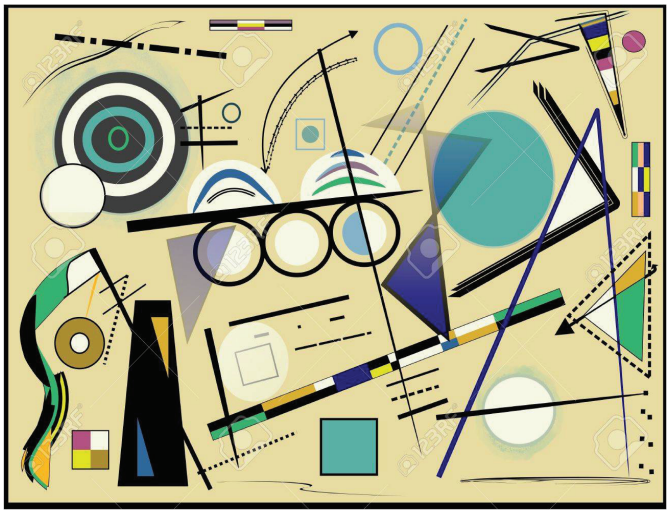
Provide the students with your choice of art supplies and have them try to create a picture in the style of Kandinsky. Two students samples are given. Make sure your students don’t copy a real Kandinsky, but make their own original design.

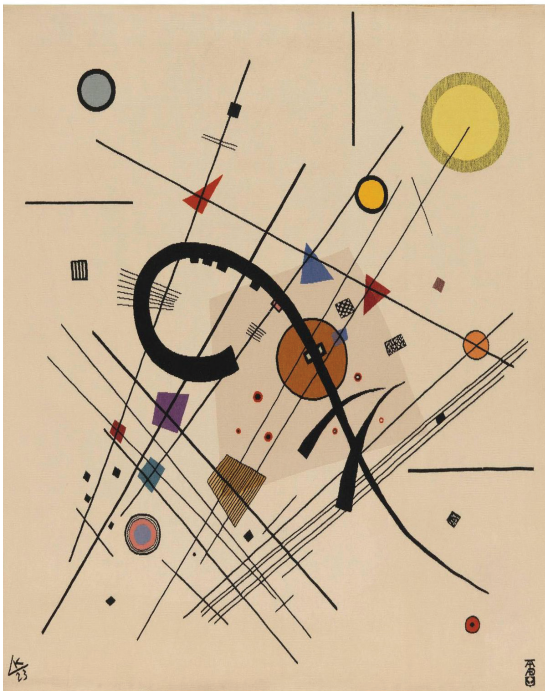
Student artwork inspired by Kandinsky:

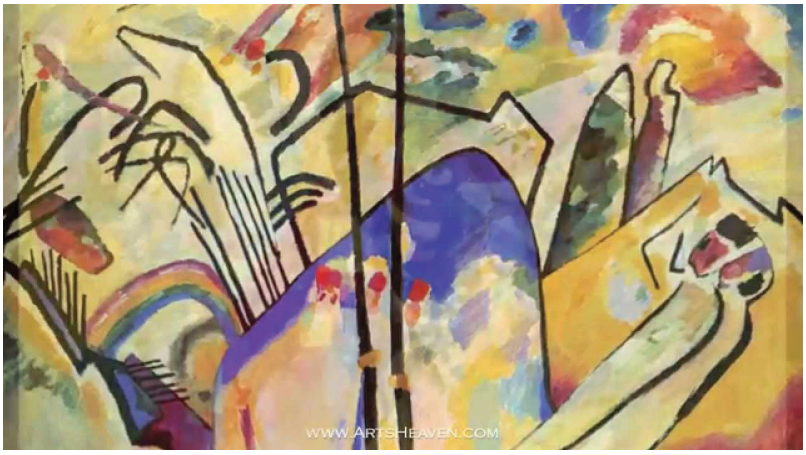


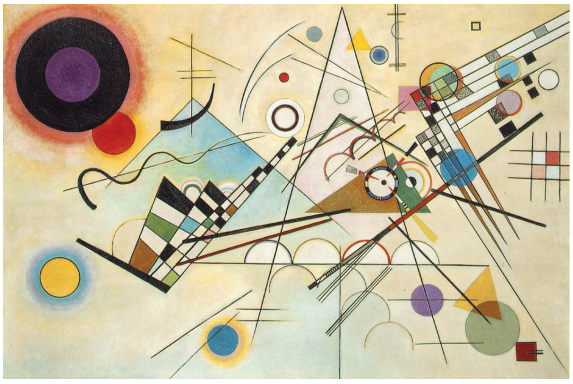
Paintings by Wassily Kandinsky











11: Paintings have skin

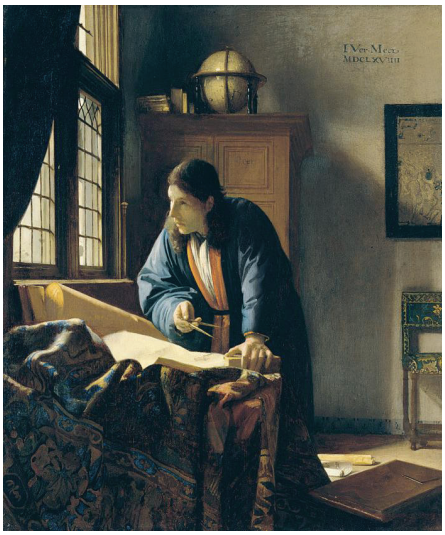
Our second lesson showed us that paintings and drawings have skeletons. We talked about muscles, too. So what about skin? Every living body is covered with skin of some sort. Do paintings have skin?

The skin of a painting is made of its surface features such as texture and patterns. Color might be part of the skin if it is part of an intricate pattern, but more often color should be considered as part of the muscles, because the colors will have a light/dark value, the same as shades of gray. (Remember, you can see this better if you squint—colors and areas of light and dark will simplify and become easier to see.) However, if the colors are an essential part of a texture or pattern, they can also function as skin.

Textures and patterns are often the primary thing that young students focus on when they make a piece of art. It takes a mature artist to be patient and think about all the other aspects first, then consider textures and patterns last. A great work of art will have all of these. It will have a good composition, well thought out areas of dark and light, and then beautiful patterns and textures on the surface. The Dutch painters of the 17th century (the "Age of Rembrandt") are great examples of how to do all of these well.

Pieter Claesz was one of a group of Dutch painters who specialized in still life. Basically these paintings were a way for the artist to show off. They intentionally chose objects that were very different in texture, to show that they could paint absolutely anything. In this still life by Pieter Claesz, we see shiny metal, soft linen fabric, fabric with crisp folds, crusty bread, fuzzy peaches, leaves, flower petals, water in a glass, a roasted chicken, a patterned tablecloth, and several kinds of feathers, including peacock feathers that are notoriously difficult to paint. The painting is a feast for the eyes. However, Claesz had to create an overall plan for his painting before he began painting these textures.

Another Dutch artist who is known for good composition is Johannes Vermeer. Vermeer's paintings show textures and patterns placed on top of very solid compositions. Vermeer's works show each stage done well: skeleton, muscle, skin. You can evaluate each stage separately, though they all work together to make the whole a masterpiece. You can find the skeleton of this painting very easily. If you squint, you can the patterns of dark and light. On the surface, Vermeer has painted the lady's silk dress to look so real that we want to reach out and touch the fabric. There is also glass, wood, and tile in the painting, as well as other paintings in the background.

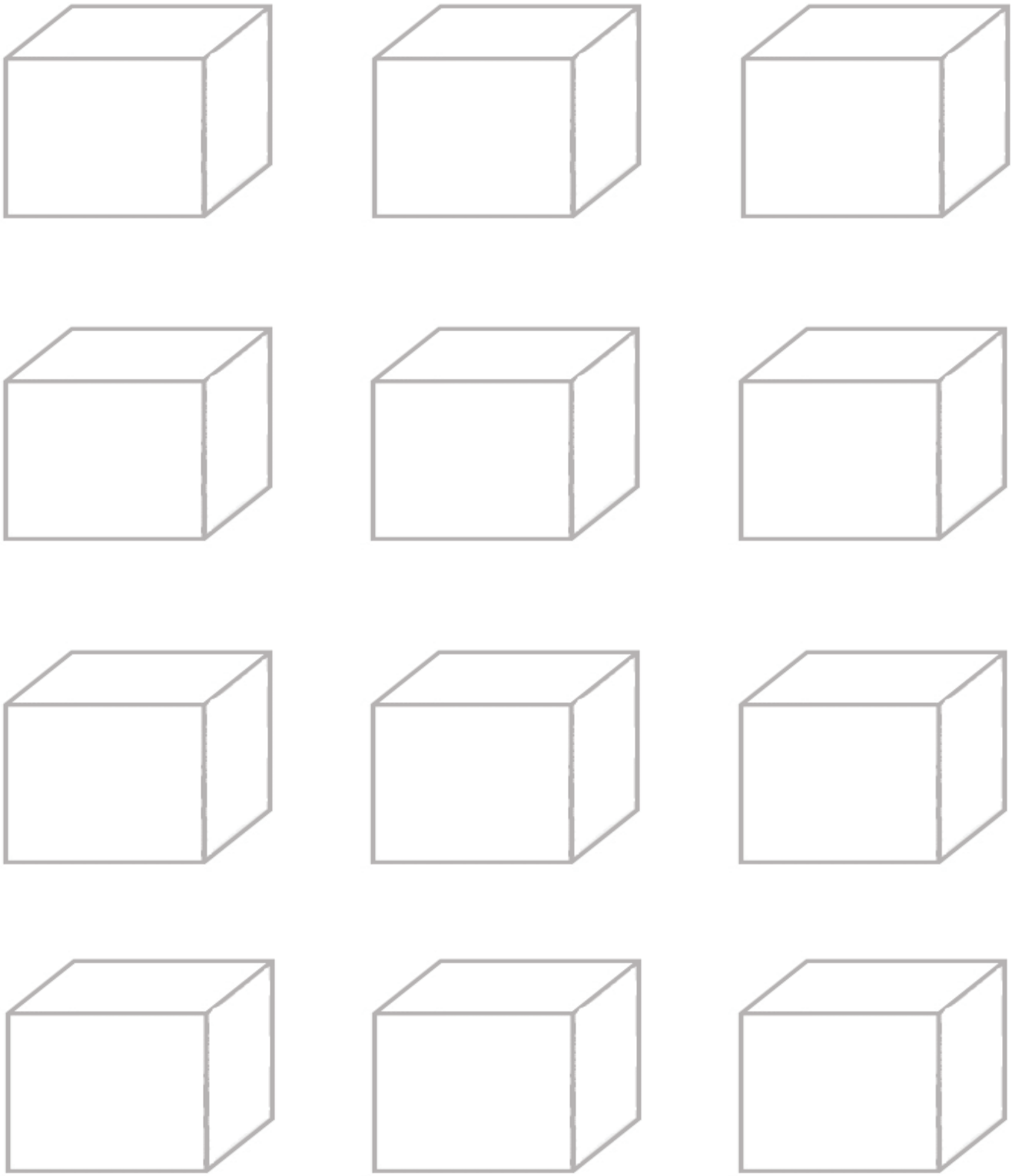


One of Vermeer's most famous works is "The Geographer." This is likely portrait of Antony Van Leeuwenhoek, the great pioneer of microscopy. The composition is excellently balanced. In the foreground (front) we see a wrinkled Oriental carpet on the table that is full of patterns. (These carpets were so expensive that Dutch people put them on tables, not floors!) We also have the textures of glass, wood, paper, fabric, and a smooth, shiny globe.

Patterns and textures delight the eye of the viewer, but the artist must be careul to put them on top of a solid foundation of good composition.

EXERCISE 11A: Texture with pen and ink (or pencil)

I recommend finding some video demonstrations and watching how the artist uses the pen/pencil to make something look fuzzy, shiny, furry, rocky, woody, etc. Several instructional videos recommend drawing a series of cubes that look like they are made of different substances. If choose to do this, here are some starting guidelines to help you.



EXERCISE 11B: Play the Design Game (ideally, a group game)

This exercise can be done by a single student, but it is more fun to do with at least one other person. The reason you need multiple people is because you will be critiquing each other's drawings. Opinions are subjective, yes, but often a group consensus can be reached. It is easier for us to analyze a piece of art other than our own. It's just the way our brains work. This activity requires honest opinions, but opinions that are simply academic and not in any way personal. Expect some harsh criticisms, but tell the students that this is part of the activity-- to find out what graphic artists go through both in college classes and in the real world. Graphic design students learn to not take criticism personally. It's only about designs.

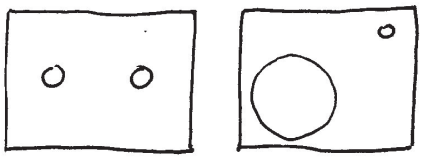
If you have a larger group, arrange them into smaller groups with 2 to 4 in each group.

Goal of the game: To not "lose the game"! (Kids and teens love stuff like this.)

Your composition "loses" if it looks like anything. The role that the other team members play is to look at a composition and see if something obvious immediately jumps out at them. Sample responses might be: "It's a face." "It's a sunset." "It's a person." "It's a road." "It's a hand."

Now, certainly this could get out of hand, and kids could start making stuff up. They could say that a single dot on a page could be a pea or a ball or an orange. This is where the other group members come in. Everyone has to agree with the diagnosis. Hopefully there will be a balance of opinions. If an analysis is legit, usually all the other group members will say that they also see that object. The ultimate ruling will be by the adult(s) in charge. Whenever there is a dispute, the adult(s) will have the final say.

Besides not trying to look like anything real, the composition must also satisfy the requirements listed. This should be clearly stated at the beginning of each section. An example is shown here on the right. Both boxes show balance, but one is less boring that the other.



NOTE: My original version of this activity had each level retaining the restrictions of the previous levels. For example, in level 2 you also had to maintain balance without boredom. If you are working with older students, especially students who are likely to go into graphic design, you can add this additional requirement.

EXERCISE 11C: Do a group critique (as a follow up to the Design Game)

Critiques, or "crits," are a routine part of college level art classes. The teacher asks each student to post one or more of their projects on a wall or large bulletin board. After everyone's work is on the wall, the teacher can do the critique in a number of ways. The teacher himself/herself can make comments about each piece, or the teacher might require each student to make comments about their own piece, or (more typically) the teacher may ask the students to comment on each other's work. The teacher can control the nature of the comments, making sure they are "on target" and not about anything personal pertaining to the artist themselves. I suggest the following format:

1) Have each student choose what they feel is their best composition from Level 1.
2) Tell the students to do a "final" version of that composition on a larger sheet of paper. You may want to provide blank papers that are the same proportion as those little squares. (If the final papers are too oblong or too square, they will have difficulty making the large version look the same as the small one.)
3) Tell the students NOT to put their name on the front, but to write it in small letters in pencil on the back.
4) Post those final pictures on the wall. Put a number next to each composition.
5) Have the students vote for which composition they think is the best at balance without boredom. You can decide whether to promote discussion at this point, or not.
6) Announce the top three winners. Give them a round of applause.

Do this again for level 2 and level 3.

THE DESIGN GAME

Object of the game: To make a composition that doesn't "lose the game"
Rules of the game: The composition loses the game if it: 1) does not show the concept for each level, or 2) if it contains anything "representational" (something that can be identified as an object that has a name).

While you are working, ask someone to scrutinize each of your thumbnails to see if any of them can be disqualified.

LEVEL ONE: BALANCE WITHOUT BOREDOM

ROUND 1: Only rectangles (of any shape or size)

(Remember, the composition loses if it does not show balance, if it is boring, if it has anything other than rectangles, or if it has anything representational.)

ROUND 2: Only circles or arcs (an arc is part of a circle)
(Remember, the composition loses if it does not show balance, it it is boring, if it has anything other than circles or arcs, or it is has anything representational.)

ROUND 3: Rectangles, circles and arcs (Each composition must have at least one of each.)

LEVEL TWO: REPETITION WITHOUT REDUNDANCY

ROUND 1: Only rectangles and straight lines (of any shape or size)

Remember, the composition loses if it is boring or redundant, if it has anything other than rectangles or straight lines, or if it has anything representational.

ROUND 2: Only circles or arcs

Remember, the composition loses if it is boring, has anything other than circles or arcs, or if it has anything representational.

LEVEL THREE: MOTION

In this level, you must get ***motion*** into your compositions. You may use a combination of rectangles, lines, circles or arcs, **but <u>NO</u> <u>TRIANGLES!</u>** Use your shapes to construct compositions that lead the viewer's eye across or around the page, or even in a circle. Be wary of shapes that might seem dynamic (like a circle) but are really static. (And, as always, nothing representational!)

12: Negative space in a composition

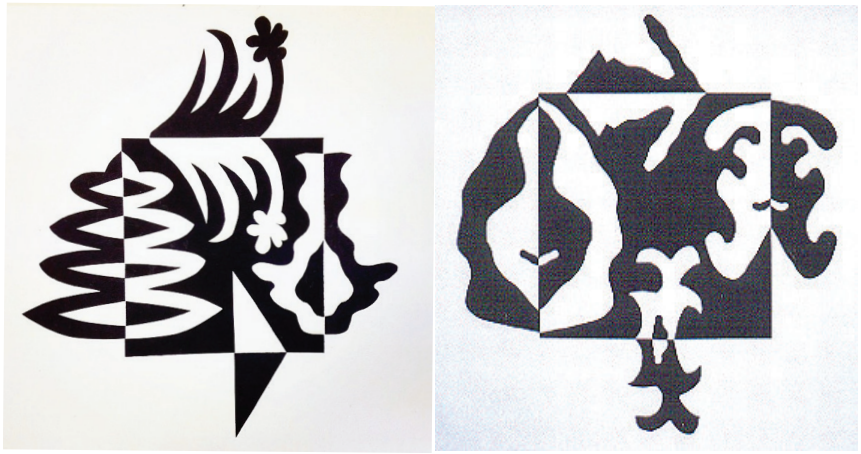
Negative spaces are the places where the background can be seen around and behind the objects that we're drawing. If we are drawing a chair, for example, we tend to think of the chair as the really important object, and the places where the floor or wall is seen between the rungs is just empty space, and almost irrelevant to the drawing. However, on your page, where you are composing your picture, those spaces are just as important as the chair. A composition is an arrangement of shapes, and whether a certain shape happens to be part of an object or part of the background isn't important. It's the shape itself that's important, and the way it fits with the other shapes on the page.

An image that is often used to teach about negative space is some variation on this image to the right. At first it appears to be the silhouette of a fancy vase. But then if you stare at it a while you realize that you can also see two faces. Once you see the faces, it's hard not to see them. You can switch back and forth between seeing the vase and the faces. If the vase is the object of the painting, then the faces are the negative spaces. If the vase had a different shape and did not make faces, we would not be so aware of the white spaces. Because our brains are tuned to find faces everywhere they can, we become keenly aware of these white shapes. But in a drawing or painting, those white shapes are still important even if they don't make faces.

In this drawing, we can identify the silhouette of an office chair, but the chair is white, gives us the impression that it is not really there, or is the empty space, while the background shape are the dark, "positive" shapes. By using this reversal of the usual coloring scheme, the artist has emphasized the negative shapes.

Look at the tiny triangle in the upper right corner. It's an important part of the composition. Now look at the triangular shape in the bottom right. It is much larger and isn't a perfect triangle. But try to see it as a meaningful shape in its own right. Then look at the other black shapes and try to fool your brain that those are what the drawing is about. It just so happens that when you put those shapes together in the right way, the blank spaces between them happen to remind you of a chair. (Yes, these are the kinds of mind games that artists play.)

In this chair drawing we see an extension of this positive/negative space idea. The chair is negative space (white) inside the square, but is positive space (black) outside the square.

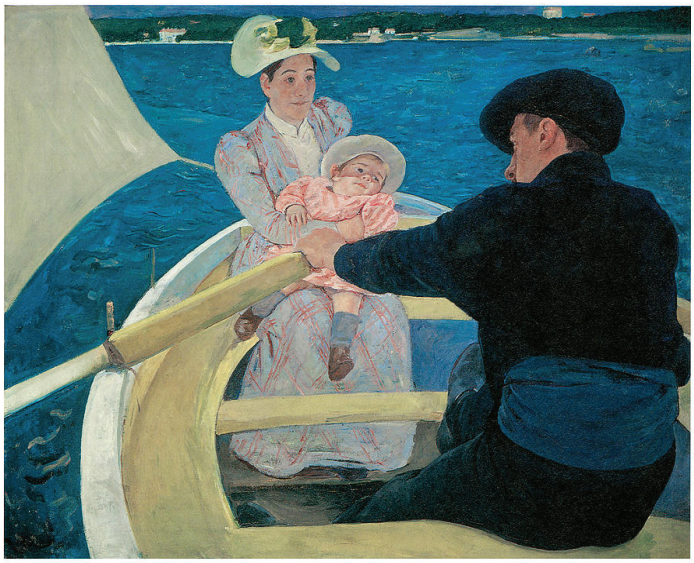


These two drawings are examples of a Japanese art form called Notan. To make a Notan design, you start with a black paper square, then cut out a shape on each side. Those cut-out shapes are then flipped and placed so that they look like mirror images of the original shapes. The result is a very interesting abstract shape.

EXERCISE 12A: Reveal negative space in these paintings

You will need a piece of tracing paper and a black marker (ideally, both a fine point and medium point marker)

Put the tracing paper on top of this page and tape it so that the tracing paper is like a flap you can lift from the top. Trace around the edges of each painting. Now take your black marker and fill in all the negative shapes on each painting. Negative spaces are often the "background." So in the first painting you will color in the water, and the tiny horizon strip. The positive images in this painting are the boat, the sail, the oar and the people. In the second painting, the negative spaces are the yellow areas. In the gull painting, the birds are the positive shapes. What you will end up with are four compositions made of black shapes. The black shapes will look like positive areas because they are black. So you get a reversal of positive/negative. This lets you really see the shape of those negative spaces. These paintings were chosen because they have interesting negative spaces.



Mary Cassatt

Jamie Wyeth

Jamie Wyeth

Johannes Vermeer

EXERCISE 12B: Make a Notan design

It's easy and fun to make a Notan design. You can work white on black or black on white. Either is okay. These instructions will be for black paper glued to a white background sheet.

You will need:
- a piece of white paper (can use the following template page that says NOTAN at the bottom)
- a piece of black paper (1/4 sheet is enough)
- scissors
- glue stick

What to do:

1) If your white paper is a standard 8.5 by 11 inches, cut a black paper square that is about 4 inches on a side. This might seem small, but the shapes you will cut will take up quite a bit of space on the outside. You can also make the black paper into a rectangle. It does not have to be perfectly square.
2) Cut a shape into each side of the square, going fairly deep into the square. As you cut, bear in mind that what you are cutting is not scrap that will be thrown away. Cut the shape as one whole piece, and carefully save it.
3) When you have the four pieces cut, one out of each side, place each shape next to the hole it was cut from, but in reverse, as a mirror image.
4) Use the glue stick to carefully paste the cut out shapes in place.

EXERCISE 12C: Draw some negative space

One way to become more aware of negative space is to do a few drawings of nothing but negative spaces. You don't draw any objects, you just draw the empty spaces around them. The hardest part of this exercise will be finding something to draw. (Or rather, NOT to draw!) Chairs are often used for this type of assignment because they have lots of rungs and legs that create interesting negative spaces. Plants are also good choices if you draw only a small portion of them, perhaps even just a few leaves. You could also arrange some silverware or utensils on a table.

You will need:
- paper and pencil (You might want to use the following template page, that says NEGATIVE SPACE.)
- a piece of thin carboard, or card stock paper (use regular paper if that is all you have)
- scissors
- a still life object that is good for negative space, such as a chair or a plant

How to prepare:

Make a small frame out of the cardboard or cardstock. It should be about the size of your hand, and the window in the middle should be only a few inches wide. The most important thing is to make the window in your frame the same proportion as the paper you will be drawing on. For example, if you are drawing on a square sheet of paper, make the frame window square. If your drawing paper is twice as long as it is high, your frame window all needs to be twice as long as it is high. (NOTE: A square template has been provided on the next page if you want to use it. That means making the little frame will be very easy since it will be square.)

What to do:

1) Look at your still life object(s) through the window of your little frame. Hold the frame just far enough away from your eyes that you can find a nice, fairly simple composition. This is very similar to what you did in lesson 5.
2) Once you have a nice composition, look for negative spaces. Ignore the object(s) as your draw and try to look only at those negative spaces. If you draw all those negative shapes reasonably well, the spaces between them will form the shape of the object(s) you are drawing.

N O T A N

The Japanese art of balancing postive and negative spaces (usually black and white)

NEGATIVE SPACE

1) Use your frame to find a good composition.

2) Look at the spaces between your object(s) and draw just that empty space. This won't be easy because we are used to looking at things, not the spaces around them. Carefully observe the shapes that include the edges of the frame. For example, what shape grows out of each corner?

3) It sometimes helps to close one eye and see the image inside the frame as flat, not three dimensional.

4) Optional: When you are done drawing the lines, you might want to make the piece look more finished. You might want to put a different pattern into each negative space. Or, if you have an interesting background behind your object(s), you could draw that background, making sure to leave those positive spaces blank, of course.