

# Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

## COLLABORATIVE ABSTRACTION

Grades: K-12

**SUMMARY:** Georgia O'Keeffe is known for her abstract flowers, landscapes, architecture and the sky. She would find the most interesting lines and colors in the world around her and simplify nature down to a series of organic shapes and forms. In this fun and fast-paced lesson, students will consider the concept and process of abstraction, collaboratively creating a line drawing that will become an abstract painting. *This lesson is meant to be flexible. Please adapt for the level of your students and your individual curriculum.*

### GUIDING QUESTIONS:

*What is abstraction?*

### MATERIALS:

- Watercolor paper
- Watercolor paints
- Paint brushes
- Cups of water

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Students will...

- Closely observe, analyze and interpret one of Georgia O'Keeffe's abstract paintings
- Define the word abstraction and how it relates to visual art
- Work together to make collaborative abstract line drawings
- Individually interpret their collaborative line drawings and create a successful final composition
- Present their final compositions to the class
- Accept peer feedback

### INSTRUCTION:

#### **Engage:** (5 min)

Ask students to sketch the shapes they see in *Pelvis Series, Red and Yellow* by Georgia O'Keeffe (attached or found at <https://www.okeeffemuseum.org/education/teacher-resources/>) and write a short paragraph on what they see in the painting and what they think might be happening in the painting. Compare notes as a class and share the title of the painting. *Did everyone have the same interpretation of the painting? How did your ideas change after you learned the title of the painting?*

Miss O'Keeffe created this painting after looking at the sky through a pelvis bone that she found in the desert. Try making a circle with your fingers and looking at the sky or the ceiling through the circle. The bone that she was looking through was only about two inches wide. Talk about the scale of the painting compared to the size of the bone. *How does this change what you think about the painting?*

#### **Build Knowledge:** (10 min)

Talk about the artist who created *Pelvis Series, Red and Yellow*. *How many students are already familiar with Georgia O'Keeffe? How many have visited the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe? Why is O'Keeffe famous?*



*Pelvis Series, Red with Yellow, 1945*

Georgia O'Keeffe

Oil on canvas

36 1/8 x 48 1/8 (91.8 x 122.2)

Extended loan, private collection (1997.03.04L)

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Georgia O’Keeffe was born on a farm near Sun Prairie, Wisconsin in 1887. As a child she and her sisters received art lessons at home, and by the time she graduated from high school in 1905, she knew she wanted to be an artist. O’Keeffe studied art in many different places including Chicago, Virginia and New York City. Her artwork was first exhibited in 1916 by Alfred Stieglitz, a highly influential gallerist in New York City. By the mid-1920’s O’Keeffe was recognized as one of America’s most important and successful artists, known for her paintings of New York skyscrapers as well as flowers. Beginning in the summer of 1929 and for the next two decades she spent part of most years living and working in New Mexico, a pattern she rarely altered until she made it her permanent home in 1949. At the end of her career she began to lose her eyesight and painted her last unassisted oil painting, *The Beyond*, in 1972. However O’Keeffe’s desire to create did not diminish with her eyesight. She continued to create paintings with the help of her studio assistants, returning to her favorite visual motifs from her memory and vivid imagination. She worked in watercolor and pencil until 1982 and produced objects in clay from the mid-1970s until two years before her death at the age of 98.

How would you define abstraction? Write a definition as a class.

Abstraction is a word used to describe many kinds of art, usually artwork that makes no reference to the world around, but instead might express an emotion or sensation through the use of color and form. Artists who work abstractly simplify, generalize, distort and rearrange what they see or perceive in the natural world. Objects and places are distilled and refined to their most basic shapes and colors. O’Keeffe was one of the first American artists to make abstract art. She wanted to share an experience with the viewer that was important to her, helping them see and feel something of what she felt and saw.

### Apply: (35 min)

1. Hand out paper to everyone in the class and ask students to put their name on the back of this paper. Describe the “rules of the game”:

Rules: Each player gets 5 seconds to make a mark on the paper. As soon as the 5 seconds are up, you must pass the paper to the player on your right. **This player must begin where the first player left off** and add their own mark/line to the page. Continue this process with 5 to 10 players. When the paper makes it’s way to the last player, this player must close the mark making/line loop and return the paper to it’s owner.

2. The abstraction game can get exciting and loud! When you’re finished take some time to share the line drawings that were created as part of the game. Each one will be very different.
3. Now it’s time to add color and transform this line drawing into a finished abstract painting. Decide on a theme for this series. It could be flowers, animals, landscapes, cityscapes, the sky, or a theme of your choosing.
4. Once the theme is chosen each student should begin to find the shapes that will define their composition. Determine an area of emphasis and how the eye will move around the paper. Color and line can help. Now it’s time to paint!
5. You may repeat this process with different themes.

### Reflect: (10 min.)

Share your abstract compositions with the class. Try to let the audience react to the paintings before the presenter shares their intentions. The reaction and the intention do not need to be the same, abstract art can mean very different things to different people.

### **ASSESS:**

Assess your students on the completion of the following tasks:

- Followed directions and cooperated with peers during the game
- Identified an area of emphasis in their drawing
- Used color, shapes and lines to guide the viewer’s eye around the composition
- Presented their final composition to their peers and accepted feedback

