

*Magnetic Fields:*  
*Expanding American Abstraction, 1960s to Today*  
Educator's Guide

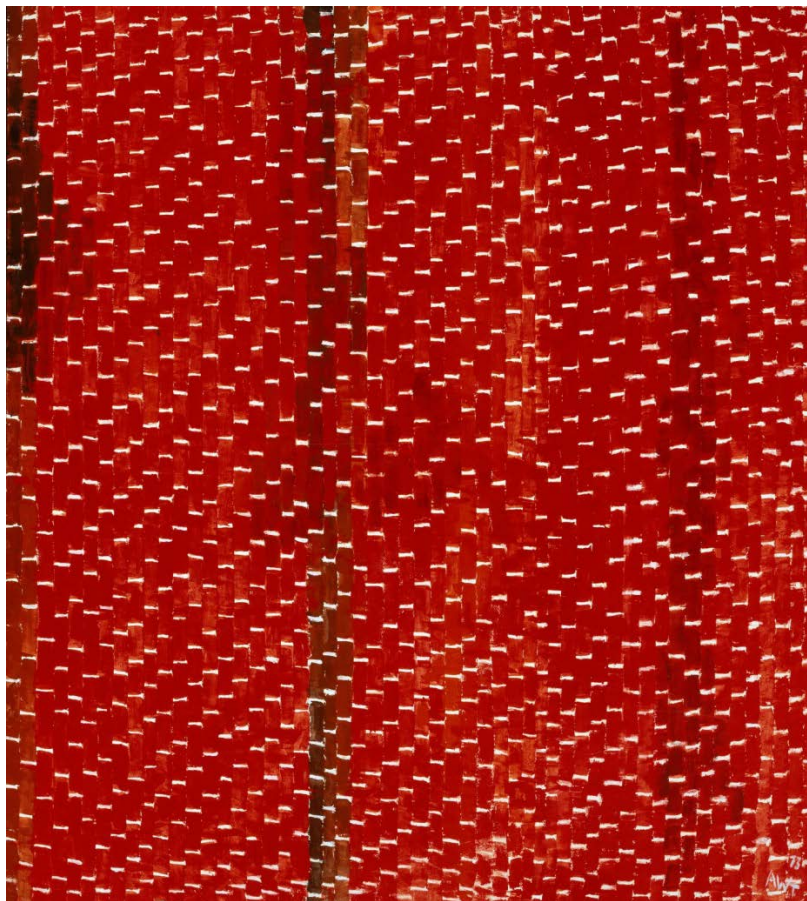


Image credit: Alma Woodsey Thomas, *Orion*, 1973; Acrylic on canvas, 59 3/4 x 54 in.; Courtesy of the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; © Alma Woodsey Thomas; Photo by Lee Stalsworth

Dear Educators,

We are delighted to present this educator's guide, which was created in conjunction with the special exhibition *Magnetic Fields: Expanding American Abstraction, 1960s to Today*, on view at National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) from October 13, 2017, through January 21, 2018.

**About the exhibition:**

Featuring work by twenty-one artists born between 1891 and 1981, *Magnetic Fields* places abstract works by multiple generations of black women artists in context with one another—and within the larger history of abstract art—for the first time. Evocative prints, unconventional sculptures, and monumental paintings reveal the artists' role as under-recognized leaders in abstraction.

Artists in *Magnetic Fields* dispel the notion that figurative art is the only means for visualizing personal experience. The titles of their works and their construction methods evoke intense associations. Mary Lovelace O'Neal's use of allusive titles, such as *Racism is Like Rain, Either it's Raining or it's Gathering Somewhere* (1993), informs the reading of her monumentally-scaled painting while Maren Hassinger similarly uses socio-politically inflected titles and materials—specifically New York Times newspapers—in her textural floor sculpture *Wrenching News* (2008).

Many featured artists have ties to the Washington, D.C., area, particularly the Department of Art at Howard University. Alumni of this department include Alma Woodsey Thomas, Mildred Thompson, Mary Lovelace O'Neal, and Sylvia Snowden. Other artists presented in *Magnetic Fields* include Candida Alvarez, Betty Blayton, Chakaia Booker, Lilian Thomas Burwell, Nanette Carter, Barbara Chase-Riboud, Deborah Dancy, Abigail DeVille, Maren Hassinger, Jennie C. Jones, Evangeline "EJ" Montgomery, Howardena Pindell, Mavis Pusey, Shinique Smith, Gilda Snowden, Kianja Strobert, and Brenna Youngblood.

**About this guide:**

This guide contains **lesson plans** written with elementary through high school students in mind by veteran teachers Terry V. Thomas (Seaton Elementary School, Washington, D.C., Public Schools) and Faylinda Kodis (H-B Woodlawn Secondary Program, Arlington Public Schools [VA]).

These lessons are designed to encourage the thoughtful observation, creation, and written reflection of abstract art, as well as to introduce students to a handful of the many creative women featured in *Magnetic Fields*. Both lessons are anchored by works in NMWA's collection, giving this resource life and usefulness beyond the scope of the temporary exhibition.

This guide also contains **gallery games** that can be adapted for classroom use. These creative

challenges encourage students to think deeply about visual abstraction, develop opinions about what they see, and respond personally using various modes of communication.

We hope this resource proves to be a valuable instructional tool in part or in toto and that you find myriad ways to adapt it to teach about the creative accomplishments of woman abstract artists.

Sincerely,

Adrienne L. Gayoso  
Senior Educator

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# Elementary School Lesson Plan

## Abstracting the Natural World

**Author:** Terry V. Thomas, visual art teacher, Seaton Elementary School, Washington, D.C., Public Schools, in collaboration with Adrienne L. Gayoso, senior educator, [National Museum of Women in the Arts](#)

**Grade Level(s):** 3rd grade

### Essential Questions:

- How do artists get ideas for their artworks?
- How does art reflect and elicit emotions?
- How does collaboration extend the creative process?
- How is art used to inspire writing?

### National Visual Arts Standards:

- Creating
  - Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
    - VA:Cr1.1.3a: Elaborate on an imaginative idea.
  - Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
    - VA:Cr2.1.3a: Create personally satisfying artwork using a variety of artistic processes and materials.
- Responding
  - Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
    - VA:Re.7.1.3a: Speculate about processes an artist uses to create a work of art.
    - VA:Re.7.2.3a: Determine messages communicated by an image.
- Connecting
  - Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
    - VA:Cn.10.1.3a: Develop a work of art based on observations of surroundings.

### Lesson Overview

Students will explore abstraction through the lens of Washington, D.C., artist and teacher Alma Woodsey Thomas (1891–1978), who rendered motifs of nature in an abstract style. Thomas’s work is based on nature, but instead of portraying a realistic view of what she saw, the artist expressed her feelings about it with color, shape, pattern, and line.

Students will meet three additional women abstract artists who also have been inspired by the natural world. They are featured alongside Thomas in the special exhibition [\*Magnetic Fields: Expanding American Abstraction, 1960s to Today\*](#) (October 13, 2017–January 21, 2018), at the National Museum of Women in the Arts.

Thomas was inspired by nature near and far—through the immediate view of her garden from her kitchen window as well as via pictures of the depths of Outer Space from NASA’s Apollo Program (1963–1972).

Her painting *Iris, Tulips, Jonquils, and Crocuses* (1969), in the collection of the National Museum of Women in the Arts, interprets the view from her window, but the subject matter—flowers in her garden—is not realistic or recognizable. Similarly, artists across generations, like Lilian Thomas Burwell (b. 1927), Evangeline “EJ” Montgomery (b. 1933), and Deborah Dancy (b. 1949), create work inspired by, but not an exact mirror of, the world around them.

First, students will compare works by Thomas, Burwell, Montgomery, and Dancy to identify the types of marks these abstract artists made in their works. Students will practice their own mark-making, taking into account their feelings and reflecting on how emotions inform their shape and line creation color selection.

Then, students will immerse themselves in Thomas’s process of color selection and mark-making and will work collaboratively to design and create seasonal abstract collages.

Finally, students will integrate art and writing by using the haiku, a traditional Japanese poetry form, to describe their collages and to reflect on the ways in which other abstract artists depict the natural world.

**Length of Lesson:** Three or four 45-minute periods

#### **For the Teacher**

- Alma Woodsey Thomas, *Iris, Tulips, Jonquils, and Crocuses* (1969)
  - Artist biography: <https://nmwa.org/explore/artist-profiles/alma-woodsey-thomas>
  - Artwork profile: <https://nmwa.org/works/iris-tulips-jonquils-and-crocuses>
  - High-resolution image (page 15)
  - Close-up images (pages 16–17)
- Lilian Thomas Burwell, *Winged Autumn* (2007)
  - Artist biography: <http://burwellstudios.com/>
  - High-resolution image (page 18)

- Artwork exhibition label:
  - *Winged Autumn* embodies Burwell’s practice that blurs the lines between painting and sculpture, which she adopted in the 1980s. Burwell is a pioneer of processes that defy the conventions of painting. While elegant forms show seamless gradient transitions of color and shading that hint at real and perceived shadows, the undulating form and Plexiglas “wings” suggest movement and flight.
- Evangeline “EJ” Montgomery, *Sea Grass* (1998)
  - Artist biography: <http://galeriemyrtis.net/ej-montgomery-bio/>
  - High-resolution image (page 19)
  - Artwork exhibition label:
    - The repeating patterns found in Montgomery’s later prints originated in her early explorations in fiber-based media. The overlapping lines and layers of color in these lithographs recall the textures of her weaving and silk-screening on fabric. With strong similarities to the working style of Alma Thomas, also represented in this exhibition, Montgomery has an improvisational approach to suggestions of nature. She uses warm undertones with a lighter ground, palettes found in the landscape, and layers of color that build a sense of depth.
- Deborah Dancy, *Winter into Spring 2* (2015), from the series “Winter into Spring”
  - Artist biography: <http://www.deborahdancy.com/about>
  - High-resolution image (page 20)
  - Artwork exhibition label:
    - The “Winter into Spring” series showcases Dancy’s signature style, which seems to collapse painting and drawing. In these works of mixed media on paper, thick and gestural geometric lines connect to aqueous gray monochrome washes. The temperature of Dancy’s gray palette shifts subtly between cool and warm tones, mimicking the landscape of the changing season. The meandering line and expressive marks in these large-scale drawings are sourced from what Dancy describes as the “chaotic but . . . intertwined” natural landscape around her home.
- Harvard Project Zero’s See/Think/Wonder Thinking Routine:  
[http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking\\_html\\_files/03\\_ThinkingRoutines/03c\\_Core\\_routines/SeeThinkWonder/SeeThinkWonder\\_Routine.html](http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking_html_files/03_ThinkingRoutines/03c_Core_routines/SeeThinkWonder/SeeThinkWonder_Routine.html)
- Harvard Project Zero’s Colors/Shapes/Lines Thinking Routine:  
[http://www.pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/AT\\_Colors%20Shapes%20Lines.pdf](http://www.pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/AT_Colors%20Shapes%20Lines.pdf)
- Art, Books, and Creativity Curriculum vocabulary terms:  
<http://artbookscreativity.org/curriculum/vocabulary/>

- Nature-related See for Yourself cards or print-outs:
  - <https://nmwa.org/learn/educators/collection-exhibition-resources/see-yourself>
    - Suggested cards:
      - Realistic
        - [Rosa Bonheur](#)
        - [Maggie Fosskett](#)
        - [Amy Lamb](#)
        - [Maria Sibylla Merian](#)
        - [Patricia Piccinini](#)
        - [Rachel Ruysch](#)
      - Abstract
        - [Chakaia Booker](#)
        - [Lee Krasner](#)
        - [Emily Kame Kngwarreye](#)
        - [Joan Mitchell, \*Salé Neige\*](#)
        - [Alma Woodsey Thomas, \*Orion\*](#)
        - [Anne Truitt](#)
- Web graphic organizer such as [https://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/pdf/cluster\\_web3.pdf](https://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/pdf/cluster_web3.pdf)
- Venn diagram graphic organizer such as <https://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/pdf/venn.pdf>
- Images of completed seasonal collages (pages 21–22)
- Haiku worksheet (page 23)

## Supplies

- See for Yourself cards or reproductions
- White craft paper, cut into 16-inch squares, one per student
- Mark-making supplies of your choosing, e.g.:
  - Colored pencils
  - Oil pastels
  - Markers
  - Water colors
  - Charcoal
- Four web graphic organizer print-outs
- Four large foam-core boards
- Bright, colorful paper, cut into one-inch strips
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Pencils



- Rulers
- Large circle templates
- Two haiku worksheets per student
- One Venn diagram per student

### **Vocabulary**

- Abstract art
- Collaboration
- Collage
- Elements of art
- Emotions
- Haiku
- Metaphor
- Nature
- Pattern
- Principles of design
- Realistic
- Reflection
- Seasons
- Syllable

### **Instructional Objectives**

#### **Students will:**

#### **Visual Arts**

- Recognize and identify abstraction in a work of art.
- Understand that they will become detailed observers when they get in the habit of describing what they see, which will help them express and organize their thoughts.
- Understand that nature can influence artists and can be expressed through color, shape, pattern, and design.
- Compare multiple works of art and identify differences in mark-making by the artists.
- Understand and verbalize feelings expressed through art.
- Understand that working collaboratively builds community in the classroom.

#### **Writing**

- Understand that creative writing can help them make connections with art.
- Recognize the formula for the classical structure of the haiku.
- Use the haiku to highlight the elements of art and principles of design in artwork.

- Understand that the haiku often focuses on nature or seasons.

## Instructional Plan

### 1. Observing

Using Harvard Project Zero's See/Think/Wonder Thinking Routine, lead a discussion about Thomas's *Iris, Tulips, Jonquils, and Crocuses*. Don't share the title just yet.

- Describe what you see when you look at Thomas's painting.
- What do you think about what you see?
- What questions or wonderings do you have about what you see?

### 2. Diving deeper

After an initial exploration, ask students these directed questions:

- What do you think this abstract painting is about?
- How many different colors do you see in this work? What does each color remind you of? What might the colors represent?
- How would you describe the lines in this work?
- What shapes do you see? What shapes are repeated in the work?
- What patterns do you see?
- Which of the four seasons—winter, spring, summer, or autumn—do you think this work represents the most? Why?

Next, share the title of this work with the students.

- Now that you know the title of this work, what new thoughts do you have?
- What new questions come to mind?

Now explain what abstraction is using the elements of art and principles of design (e.g. line, shape, color, form, space, value, and texture) and the following multiple intelligence modalities:

- Visual-spatial—Display a placard with the word “abstraction.” Students will be shown examples of abstract art by Burwell, Montgomery, and Dancy.
- Musical-rhythmic and harmonic—Students will sing a song or recite a poem about abstraction.

“Abstraction, abstraction  
Looks a little funny, yes I know.  
Wild colors, strange lines, bright colors to show,  
Just a little wacky,  
Variety galore,  
Abstraction, abstraction, roll on a little more.”

- c. Bodily-kinesthetic—Students will exercise their gross and fine motor skills, creating movements that reflect their understanding of the elements of abstraction. Ask students to make:
  - a. Shapes with their whole bodies that express different emotions.
  - b. Stand-in-place movements that suggest different levels of energy.
  - c. Expressive lines using their arms.
  - d. An abstracted flower in the air using their fingers.
- d. Interpersonal—Students will be separated into small groups. These groups will review an assortment of realistic and abstract artworks (on See for Yourself cards) related to nature and will work together to organize them into their correct categories (one pile for realistic; one for abstract). They will share out with the whole class, discussing their reasoning.

### **3. Comparing**

Now revisit images of works by Burwell, Montgomery, and Dancy. Lead brief conversations about each work using Harvard Project Zero's Colors/Shapes/Lines Thinking Routine, drawing students' attention to the artists' color and mark-making choices.

During the course of each conversation, share the title of each work with the students.

- a. How does knowing the title change your feelings about the work? Do you like it more or less? Why?
- b. How does each work make you feel?
- c. How does each artist represent nature?
- d. What question would you ask each artist given the opportunity?

Next take a vote, asking students which two works they would most like in their room at home. Finally, as a class, compare these two works side-by-side, discussing similarities and differences.

- a. What do you like about the works you chose?
- b. If you created your own style of expressing nature, what would it look like?

### **4. Expressing**

Artistic choices impact how the viewer experiences an artwork and are often a reflection of the artist's feelings about her subject matter.

Revisit Dancy's work, mentioning that the artist had strong feelings about a particularly long, hard winter she experienced.

- a. Use adjectives to describe what feelings the artist is conveying in this work. What might this artist be trying to tell us through this work?
- b. What artistic process(es) do you think this artist used?
- c. What ideas do you have regarding how this work was created? Regarding the artist's color choice?
- d. What ideas do you have about how Dancy applied the mediums to the paper?
  - a. What tools do you think the artist used? Does it look like the artist used wet or dry mediums or both? How can you tell?
  - b. Can you find areas where you think the artist used a lot of pressure to add the mediums? Where you think she used a light touch?

Next, ask students to think about how they are feeling about the current season (e.g. temperature, relative daylight, anticipated holidays/school breaks). If helpful, have students select an emotion emoji that expresses their current state.

- a. I wonder how you would express your feelings or emotions through color choice and mark-making?
  - a. If you are sad, what colors represent sadness for you? If happy, what colors suggest joy?
  - b. What types of lines and shapes reflect excitement? Anticipation? Anxiety? Anger? Happiness?

Using the mark-making materials provided, each student should create an abstract work of art by making a series of marks and using appropriate colors to visually communicate how they are feeling about the current season.

## 5. Collaborative Making

Share Thomas's story and quote with your students, explaining that she is the inspiration for their collaborative collage art project.

Thomas was born in Columbus, Georgia, in 1891. She would sometimes visit her grandfather on a farm in Alabama, where flowers were plentiful. It was there that she learned to love nature's bounty. As an adult living in Washington, D.C., she was inspired by the view of her garden from her kitchen window. Her abstract paintings represent her own special way of seeing the many flowers nestled in her garden. She expressed her feelings about her garden with color and mark-making—specifically by creating shapes, patterns, and designs—like we just did.

Of her process, Thomas said, “I got some watercolors and some crayons, and I began dabbling—little dabs of color that spread out very free—that’s how it all began. And every morning since then, the wind has given me new colors through the windowpanes.”

First, divide students randomly into four seasonal groups by counting off 1–4, to form Team Spring, Team Summer, Team Autumn, and Team Winter. All number 1s will be Team Spring; number 2s will be Team Summer; number 3s will be Team Autumn; number 4s will be Team Winter.

Next, each team will brainstorm, using a web graphic organizer, to discuss and list the likely characteristics associated with their assigned season. Each student will use this information to create a color and pattern sketch of their design, using oil pastels or colored pencils.

Finally, once all the designs are completed, each group will convene to discuss their group’s individual designs, and collectively decide on one design for their seasonal group. As Thomas did, students will lightly sketch their design onto the large foam-core board. Show students close-up photographs of Thomas’s work to point out her meticulous sketches, evident by the parallel vertical pencil lines that guided her in the preciseness of her artistic process. Then, students will begin to glue the colored, rectangular paper pieces on top of their sketched design onto the foam board, carefully leaving a little white space around each shape, as did Thomas.

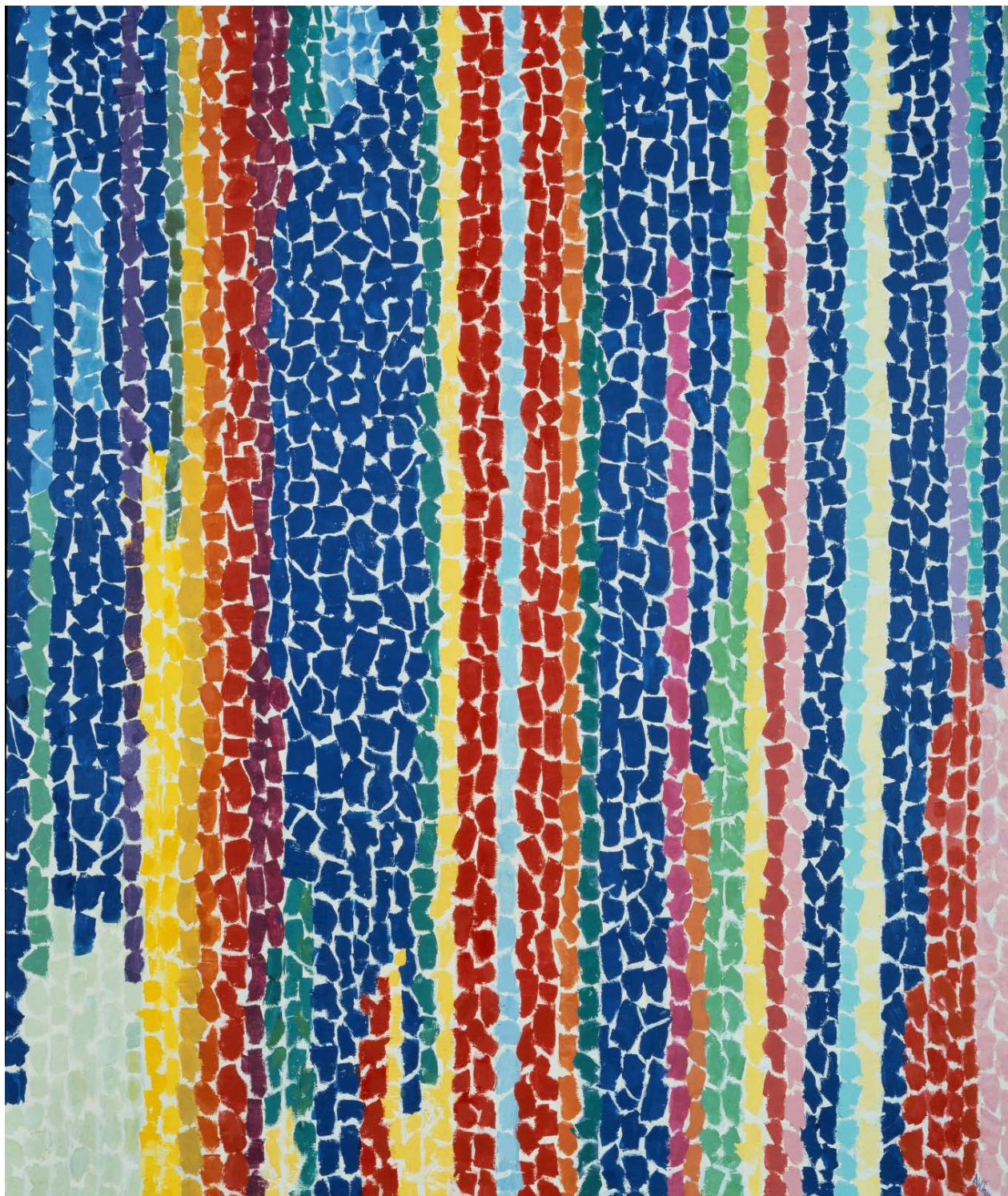
## 6. Reflecting through Writing

- a. Write a haiku poem, a traditional form of Japanese poetry whose subject is related to nature or seasons, about your collage. Write about what your abstracted collage portrays. Is it an extreme weather condition, or something else related to your season of choice?
- b. As a writing extension inspired by the special exhibition *Magnetic Fields: Expanding American Abstraction, 1960s to Today*, students will write a second haiku, selecting the work of one of the three artists they learned about in this lesson:
  - a. Lilian Thomas Burwell
  - b. Evangeline “EJ” Montgomery
  - c. Deborah Dancy
- c. As a writing extension inspired by the special exhibition *Magnetic Fields: Expanding American Abstraction, 1960s to Today*, revisit Deborah Dancy’s *Winter into Spring 2*. This work shows an artist’s anticipation of emerging spring, after a long, hard, bitter Connecticut winter.
  - a. How do you think Thomas would have portrayed winter?

Use a Venn diagram graphic organizer to compare Team Winter's collage with Deborah Dancy's *Winter into Spring 2*. Things to consider in your observations:

- How do you think the artistic process of making each was similar? Different?
- How are the materials, colors, shapes, etc., similar? Different?





Alma Woodsey Thomas, *Iris, Tulips, Jonquils, and Crocuses*, 1969; Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 50 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; © Estate of Alma Woodsey Thomas; Photo by Lee Stalsworth





Alma Woodsey Thomas, *Iris, Tulips, Jonquils, and Crocuses* (detail), 1969; Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 50 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; © Estate of Alma Woodsey Thomas; Photo by Adrienne L. Gayoso





Alma Woodsey Thomas, *Iris, Tulips, Jonquils, and Crocuses* (detail), 1969; Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 50 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; © Estate of Alma Woodsey Thomas; Photo by Adrienne L. Gayoso



Lilian Thomas Burwell, *Winged Autumn*, 2007; Oil on canvas over carved wood and Plexiglas, 23 x 46 x 6 1/2 in.; Courtesy of the David C. Driskell Center at the University of Maryland, College Park; 2011.06.001; Gift of the artist; © Lilian Thomas Burwell; Photo by E. G. Schempf





Evangeline “EJ” Montgomery, *Sea Grass*, 1998; Offset lithograph, ed. 8/24, 30 x 21 1/2 in.; Courtesy of the Brandywine Workshop and Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; © Evangeline Montgomery; Photo by Gustavo Garcia

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Deborah Dancy, *Winter into Spring 2*, from the series “Winter into Spring,” 2015; Charcoal, gesso, and acrylic on paper, 50 x 38 in.; Courtesy of the artist and Sears Peyton Gallery, New York, Los Angeles; © Deborah Dancy; Photo by E. G. Sempf





Alma Woodsey Thomas-inspired season collage, created by Seaton Elementary School students;  
Photo by Adrienne L. Gayoso

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Alma Woodsey Thomas-inspired season collage, created by Seaton Elementary School students;  
Photo by Adrienne L. Gayoso

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# Haiku Worksheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

My haiku's title is: \_\_\_\_\_

The haiku poem originated in Japan and typically describes seasons or elements of nature.

Each haiku has three lines.

The formula:

The first line has 5 syllables.

The second line has 7 syllables.

The third line has 5 syllables.

$5 + 7 + 5 = 17$  total syllables

**My haiku:**

# High School Lesson Plan

## Abstraction from Different Angles

**Author:** Faylinda Kodis, high school art teacher, H-B Woodlawn Secondary Program, Arlington, Virginia, in collaboration with Adrienne L. Gayoso, senior educator, [National Museum of Women in the Arts](#)

**Grade level(s):** High School Art 3, 4, and Advanced Placement

### Essential Questions:

- How do artists work?
- How do artists and designers learn from trial and error?
- What is the value of engaging in the process of art criticism?
- How can the viewer “read” a work of art as text?
- How does knowing and using visual art vocabularies help us understand and interpret works of art?

### National Core Arts Standards:

- Creating
  - Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
  - Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
  - Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work.
- Responding
  - Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
  - Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

### Lesson Overview

Students will describe, analyze, and interpret three abstract artworks from the collection at the National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) and its special exhibition [Magnetic Fields: Expanding American Abstraction, 1960s to Today](#) (October 13, 2017–January 21, 2018) to gain an understanding of the various ways artists develop unique visual voices and express ideas and emotions abstractly. Each student will select one of the three artworks and create an original work inspired by it.

**Length of Lesson:** Variable

**Vocabulary:** See Word Bank list of descriptive terminology (pages 28–29)



## For the Teacher

- Georgia Mills Jessup, *Rainy Night, Downtown* (1967)
  - Artist profile: <https://nmwa.org/explore/artist-profiles/georgia-mills-jessup>
  - Artwork profile: <https://nmwa.org/works/rainy-night-downtown>
  - High resolution image (page 32)
- Joan Mitchell, *Sale Neige* (1980)
  - Artist profile: <https://nmwa.org/explore/artist-profiles/joan-mitchell>
  - Artwork profile: <https://nmwa.org/works/sale-neige>
  - High resolution image (page 33)
- Alma Woodsey Thomas, *Orion* (1973)
  - Artist profile: <https://nmwa.org/explore/artist-profiles/alma-woodsey-thomas>
  - Artwork profile: <https://nmwa.org/works/orion>
  - High resolution image (page 34)
- Grading rubric (page 35)

## Supplies

- Sketchbook
- Pen
- Pencil
- Paper
- Self-selected art making materials
- Word Bank list (pages 28–29), one per student
- Abstraction Project Proposal form (page 30), one per student
- Student Reflection form (page 31), one per student

## Instructional Objectives

### Students will:

### Visual Arts

- Understand and engage in the process of art criticism—describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating.
- Draw parallels between the creative processes of professional artists and their own.
- Be able to name four women abstract artists and identify characteristics of their work.
- Visually express inspiration and personal voice within a single work of art.

### Writing

- Understand and engage in the process of art criticism—describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating.

- Understand that an artist must be able to clearly articulate her/his ideas in writing throughout the creative process—from initial proposal to final reflection.
- Engage in reflective practice and critiques through writing.

### **Instruction Plan**

Teacher will present an introduction to abstraction and abstract art, including biographies of Georgia Mills Jessup (1926–2016), Joan Mitchell (1925–1992), and Alma Woodsey Thomas (1891–1978), three women artists featured in NMWA’s collection. Students will take notes in their sketchbooks and create visual journal pages for the three artists.

For the following activities use a method (such as slips of paper with titles and artists in a jar) to divide up the featured artworks, *Rainy Night, Downtown* (1969), *Salé Neige* (1980), and *Orion* (1973), among students.

#### **1. Writing, describe:**

Imagine you are writing a postcard about this artwork to someone who can’t see it. In 200 words or fewer, describe in detail what you see. Use the Word Bank provided and your past knowledge of art terms to write about the artwork, but don’t mention artist’s name or artwork title. Consider answering the following questions in your postcard:

- a. What do you see?
- b. What do you think about what you see?
- c. What do you wonder?

Students will pair up to share their writing and will be asked to guess which artwork their classmate described.

#### **2. Writing, analyze:**

Analyze the artwork for aesthetic/formal concerns. Identify principles of design and elements of art. Using your knowledge of color theory, analyze the artist’s use of color. Consider composition and analyze concerns like arrangement, overlapping, cropping, and balance. Students will share writing in discussion.

#### **3. Writing, interpret:**

What clues does the artist provide—visual or verbal (e.g. title)—that this work was inspired by the world around her? What might be the subject of this work and what story is the artist telling us about it? If you were to tweet your interpretation of this work, what would you say it is about (in 140 characters or fewer). When asked, be able to offer evidence—from the artwork and about the artist—to substantiate your inferences. Students will share writing in discussion.

**4. Writing, propose:**

Write up your proposal for your art project that is inspired by one of the three artists introduced in this lesson. Include the title of the artwork that is your inspiration and the name of the artist.

**5. Planning:**

Jessup, Mitchell, and Thomas planned their compositions carefully before putting paint to canvas. Adopting this process, use your sketchbook to plan your composition and your color palette. Include thumbnail sketches, color mixing experiments, and detail sketches.

**6. Creating:**

You will have **(X number of)** classes to work on this project. Complete your artwork and present for group critique by **(deadline)**.

**7. Writing, reflect:**

- a. Describe what you gained from the experience of working in another artist's style using the Student Reflection form.
- b. Using the Word Bank provided and your past knowledge of art terms, describe, analyze, and interpret a classmate's completed artwork.

# Word Bank

## Balance

Asymmetrical  
Radial  
Symmetrical

## Contrast

## Color

Advance  
Analogous  
Complementary  
Cool  
Expressive  
Hue  
Intensity  
Intermediate/Tertiary  
Monochromatic  
Neutral  
Primary  
Realistic/Local  
Recede  
Secondary  
Shades  
Spectrum  
Tints  
Warm

## Emphasis and Subordination

Directional force  
Focal point

## Line

Broken  
Continuous  
Contour  
Crosshatching  
Curved  
Descriptive  
Diagonal  
Expressive  
Gestural  
Hatching  
Horizontal  
Implied  
Outline  
Parallel  
Perpendicular  
Stippling  
Straight  
Thick  
Thin  
Vertical

## Pattern

Density

## Proportion

## Repetition

## Rhythm/Movement

## Scale

**Shape** (2-dimensional) and **Form** (3-dimensional)

- Geometric
- Organic
- Negative
- Positive

**Space**

- Cropping
- Depth
- Flat
- Framing

**Texture**

- Actual
- Implied
- Negative
- Overlapping
- Positive

**Unity within Variety**

**Value**

- Dark
- Light
- Range
- Shading

# Abstraction Project Proposal

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Identify the artist and title of the artwork that has inspired you. What about this artist inspired you?

What will your artwork be about? Write a brief description of the theme/concept/big idea that is the basis of your art.

Thinking of the artist who inspires you, describe your work method. What materials will you use? What techniques will you employ?

Given the opportunity, what two questions would you ask the artist who inspires you?

What research will you do to inspire your artwork?

What planning will you do to ensure that your artwork is successful and creative?

# Student Reflection

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

The title of your artwork:

Medium (what materials did you use):

Describe your theme (use complete sentences):

What did you learn from working abstractly?

Look at your artwork. What are you proud of?

Thinking back on your process, what would you do again that was successful? What would you do differently?

Articulate a moment in your creative process when you tried something that didn't work. What steps did you take to problem-solve and make corrections?

Identify and discuss at least two advantages to working abstractly.



Georgia Mills Jessup, *Rainy Night, Downtown*, 1967; Oil on canvas, 44 x 48 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Savanna M. Clark; © Georgia Mills Jessup

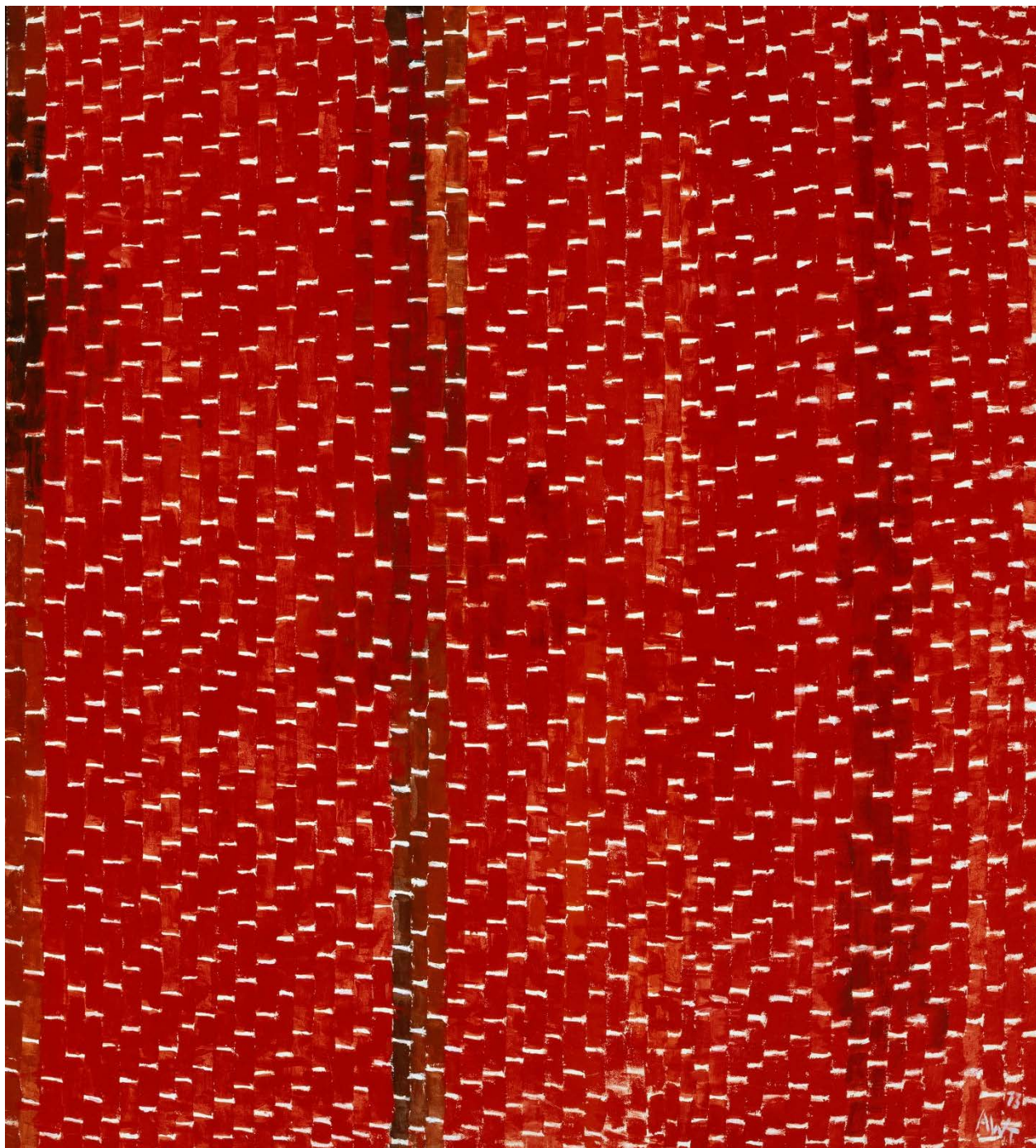




Joan Mitchell, *Sale Neige*, 1980; Oil on canvas, 86 1/4 x 70 7/8 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; © Estate of Joan Mitchell

*Magnetic Fields* Educator's Guide  
National Museum of Women in the Arts





Alma Woodsey Thomas, *Orion*, 1973; Acrylic on canvas, 59 3/4 x 54 in.; Courtesy of the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; © Alma Woodsey Thomas; Photo by Lee Stalsworth

# Grading Rubric

100 points

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Principles of design included \_\_\_\_\_

Elements of art included \_\_\_\_\_

20 points each:

**Composition**—Attention paid to arrangement of elements, negative, and positive shapes

**Value**—Include strong contrast to add drama

**Color**—Chosen palette demonstrates understanding of color mixing and is intentional

**Craft**—Attention to detail, time, and pride went into the making of this work

**Creativity**—Project is original and reflects personal voice

# Gallery Games

## Call and Response

*Magnetic Fields: Expanding American Abstraction, 1960s to Today* featured artist Lilian Thomas Burwell speaks about her artistic process as an ongoing conversation between her materials and her actions:

“The visual manifestation operates much like point and counterpoint, or call and response—meaning that each cut or direction of the tool on the wood, each color or swipe of the brush on the canvas, takes place in response to the previous action. I rarely, if ever, have a game plan, but I do reach toward the something in me that shares the something in you.”

Burwell believes strongly that every person is innately creative and that we are able to harness our inner artist when we learn to ignore judgment—both internal and external.

In the spirit of Burwell, find a work in *Magnetic Fields* that calls to you. Spend at least one minute just looking at it (set your phone timer!), and then create something original in response to it. Consider some of these prompts (inspired by Project MUSE’s Experiential QUEST):

- Turn your back to this work of art. Using a pencil, **sketch** the objects or shapes that you remember most clearly. Why do you think you remembered what you did?
- *Magnetic Fields* featured artist Jennie C. Jones is inspired by African American music history and her artworks allude to musical concepts. Informed by Jones’s process, **create a 30-second song or sound piece** that expresses the emotions you see in your chosen work of art. Use Voice Memo or another recording function on your phone to capture your aural response.
- Imagine this work of art is the artist’s half of a conversation with you. What do you say back to the artist? **Respond** by creating a written or visual composition. Check out the art cart for writing and art supplies.
- If you could **rearrange** the works of art in one gallery, where would you place them? Draw a diagram of your arrangement and your ideas with a partner.
- *Magnetic Fields* featured artist Barbara Chase-Riboud is an author and a visual artist. Her poem “Why Did We Leave Zanzibar?” (1971) is an antecedent to her sculpture *Zanzibar/Black* (1974–75). Inspired by the multitalented Chase-Riboud, consider the title of your chosen work of art. **Write** a poem that would have the same title.

## Buy or Return (inspired by Museum Hack)

Pair up and explore the *Magnetic Fields* galleries together for 10 minutes. As a team, choose an artwork that you both respond to, positively or negatively. Take a picture of it. Decide whether you would:

- **Buy it:** Spend money to have it in your home.
- **Return it:** Bring it back to the store and ask for your money back.

Come back together as a large group so that each pair can share their work and their reasoning.

## If/Then

Works in *Magnetic Fields* are visual manifestations of their creators' thoughts and feelings. Consider how you are feeling in this particular moment.

Now, wander through the galleries for 10 minutes and find a work that, for you, represents that emotion. Take a selfie with your chosen work. Also take a picture of, or write down, the title of the work.

Come back together as a large group to share your selfie and answer the prompt: "If I'm feeling \_\_\_\_\_, then \_\_\_\_\_ (artwork title) speaks to me because \_\_\_\_\_."

## "Don't Stand So Close to Me"/"From a Distance"

The act of creating abstract art is often time consuming, physically taxing, and even tedious. Look for the work in *Magnetic Fields* that you feel was the most difficult to make.

Take a close look and a close-up photo (please maintain at least an arm's length distance from the work) of your chosen artwork. Notice the details—lines, colors, shapes—for their individuality.

Now step back and notice the overall composition of this work. Take a picture from a distance, to capture the entire work in your frame. Share your images and ideas with a partner.

## You Be the Critic

NMWA museum educators love to play the gallery game "You Be the Critic" with school groups. It allows students to express their opinions, interpretations, and educated guesses about artworks through close looking, careful consideration, and conversation.

To give this game a try, pick up an envelope of tokens and a You Be the Critic worksheet (page 39) from the art cart. Each token represents a judgment you can make about a work:

- Heart = favorite work
- Diamond = least favorite work
- Clock = took the most time to make
- Hand = required the most skill to make
- Light bulb = best idea

As you explore the *Magnetic Fields* galleries, deposit your tokens in front of the applicable artworks and complete the worksheet. As the event goes on, swing back through to see where there is agreement and discord.






## Abstraction Soul Mates

Using the *Magnetic Fields* See for Yourself packet (pick one up at the art cart in *Magnetic Fields*), find the featured artworks in the collection galleries (Mezzanine and 3rd floor).

Some of the artworks in the packet represent three main strands of abstraction—**gestural abstraction** (works that record the artist’s physical actions), **minimalism** (works that are orderly and appear machine-made; typically in a neutral, monochromatic palette), and **hard-edged abstraction** (works primarily made up of geometric shapes and/or forms).

Once you have located and spent time looking at these works, find soul mates for each strand in the *Magnetic Fields* galleries.

	Collection galleries	<i>Magnetic Fields</i>
Gestural Abstraction		
Minimalism		
Hard-Edge Abstraction		

You Be the Critic		
Name:	Date:	
Token	Artwork: Artist/Description	Response
 <p>Which piece do you find the most visually interesting? Why?</p>		I like it because:
 <p>Which piece do you find the least visually interesting? Why?</p>		I don't like it because:
 <p>Did the artist create a large work? Manipulate unusual materials?</p>		I think it took a long time to make because:
 <p>Which artwork makes the best use of materials? Why?</p>		I think it is well crafted because:
 <p>What makes this piece so distinctive?</p>		I think it is a very original idea because: