



1st Grade: SEPTEMBER

The Blue Vase

Paul Cezanne

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About the Artist

The following information is provided to give classroom teachers a comprehensive understanding of the artist and artwork. Use your judgment on what to share with your students based on their level of curiosity, observation/inquiry skills, comprehension and age-appropriateness.

Paul Cezanne

Paul Cezanne was born in 1839 in Aix-en-Provence which is located in the south of France near the Mediterranean coast. Despite being raised in an affluent family and enjoying an easy life-style, Cezanne emerged from childhood a hypersensitive and repressed young man, often fearful of his father. As an adolescent he studied law and attended drawing classes in his home town. Cezanne's early experience with art created a strong desire to move to Paris and become a painter—an idea that was not well accepted by his banker father. In time Cezanne gained some financial support from his father to paint. As he ventured into the world and began his career as a painter, repercussions from Cezanne's troubled childhood presented themselves. Psychological conflicts played out in violent outbursts, depression and isolation. Cezanne constantly experienced feelings of insecurity and incompetence despite success as a painter.

Cezanne's work shifted in style throughout the duration of his life. Early expressionistic work executed in Paris (1865-70) was dark and rough with dramatically violent or fantasy themes. He applied paint with a palette knife in heavy thick strokes capturing the emotion of both the subject matter and the artist. This work was often dismissed, leaving Cezanne feeling defeated, however in time and with encouragement and guidance from fellow artist Camille Pissarro, Cezanne began an artistic encounter with nature, which made a significant impact on Cezanne's work. As a result, Cezanne identified himself with the Impressionistic painters who appreciated the role of the brushstroke of color and of the interpretation of light cast on an object. A distinctive quality of Cezanne's work which set him apart from other Impressionistic painters however, was his perception of solidity and durability. In other words, objects were placed on the canvas with a sense of architectural consideration to insure balance. Objects outlined in black took on a flat two-dimensional appearance. Brushstrokes and color gave weight to objects. This relationship between the "solid and durable"^{1,2} (form and structure) was the overarching focus of Cezanne's work and the distinctive quality that set his work apart from others.

Paul Cezanne is identified with fellow artists Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Georges Seurat, Paul Gauguin, Edgar Degas and Vincent Van Gogh in the Post-Impressionist group (1880-1910),

those whose art advanced beyond the constraints of Impressionism. They developed their own style, and while very different from one another, were extremely influential.

Living on an inheritance from his father, Cezanne spent the last twenty-eight years of his life in isolation near his childhood home where he continued to paint. Later works included still life paintings, figures and landscapes. Some give Cezanne credit for laying the ground work for modernism, including cubism. Cezanne died on October 22, 1910 at a time when his work was publicly recognized and accepted across Europe as worthy.

About the Art

The Blue Vase was painted between 1883 and 1887 at a time when Cezanne was in his late 40s. It was painted with oil on canvas and measures 24 x 19 5/8 inches in size. The painting is part of the collection at Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Most of the paintings executed by Cezanne fall into the genre of still life and were usually painted in his studio using props. In *The Blue Vase*, a modest blue vase with a casual bouquet of flowers is placed in the center foreground with an orange next to its base. Two additional oranges are positioned to the right of the vase and share the same horizontal line of the single orange and vase. This horizontal line runs parallel to the bottom edge of the canvas. A scalloped-edge plate sits behind the vase just a bit to the right and appears to hold some food—perhaps a section of orange. A tall bottle, almost matching the height of the flowers, sits to the left side of the vase. The left side of the bottle is cropped off the canvas. While the bottle is unidentifiable, it most likely is a wine bottle. An additional object on the table takes the shape of an ink bottle. The overall placement of objects is very formal, positioned with a great deal of intentionality following vertical and horizontal lines.

In counter balance to the placed objects is the wonderful addition of the obvious diagonal line that runs along the wall behind the vase. The informal arrangement of flowers serves to break up the stiffness of the table setting. The diagonal leaves and stems offer the eye a line of interest—a pleasant journey. The circular outlines of the oranges and plate add to the softness as well.

Cezanne chose to use pure, intense colors—yellow, orange, red, blue, and green, to bring intensity and brightness to this work. In addition, the use of graduated tones such as the grey-blue on the background wall adds substance to the work and anchors the brighter colors. The large vertical area taken up by the vase is dominant, pulling the eye of the viewer to it and then shifting the eye upward into the bouquet.

Discipline-Based Art Education

The following components are integral to students having a complete, well rounded art experience:

Art Aesthetics

Providing opportunities to develop perception and appreciation of visually expressed ideas and experiences.

Art Production

Providing opportunities to develop skills and techniques for creative visual expressions of emotions and ideas.

Art History

Providing opportunities to develop an understanding of the visual arts as a basic component of personal heritage.

Art Criticism

Providing an opportunity to develop an intellectual basis for analyzing and making aesthetic judgments based on an understanding of visual ideas and experiences.

ELEMENTS OF ART

- Line: A continuous mark
- Shape: Area enclosed by a line
- Color: Hue, reflection of light.
- Texture: Surface quality, real or implied
- Form: 3D shape or illusion of 3D
- Value: Graduated areas of light/dark
- Space: Illusion of depth

PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

- Repetition: Imagery repeating pattern
- Variety: Contrast/variation
- Rhythm: Issues of eye movement
- Balance: Even visual weight
- Emphasis/Economy: Dominance/minimalism
- Proportion: Compare size relationships

COMPOSITION

- Symmetrical: Mirrored imagery
- Asymmetrical: Random placement
- Radial: Mirror image from center point
- Repetition: Repeating pattern, motif

ARTISTIC STYLES

- Realism: Realistic representation
- Abstraction: Personal interpretation
- Non-Objective: No recognizable depiction

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN IN PICTURE BOOKS

Children's literature that relate to this lesson due to elements of art or story content are:

- *Shadow* by Marcia Brown
- *Once a Mouse* by Marcia Brown
- *Hiroshima No Pika* by Toshi Maruki,
- *Daughter of Earth* by Gerald McDermott
- *Stevie* by John Steptoe

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- Stokstad, Marilyn. *Art History, Volume Two*. New York. Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1995: 1024
- Wood, James N. *Impressionism and Post Impressionism in The Art Institute of Chicago*. Chicago, Illinois: The Art Institute of Chicago. 2000

Observing *The Blue Vase* takes the viewer into Cezanne's concern for the stability and durability of composition. He sets up the "architecture" of the composition by strategically placing objects in a grid of horizontal and vertical lines. He weighted his objects with the use of bold true colors, outlining many of them in a darker color for additional weight. *The Blue Vase* is about balance and weight and offers the viewer a wonderful opportunity to enjoy the captured moment.

Directed Observation

Show students an image of *The Blue Vase* and tell them it was painted by Paul Cezanne. Invite students to quietly study the work, then encourage students to share what they see. Welcome all comments. The following questions are provided to help students use art vocabulary to talk about the work.

1. What do you see in this painting?
2. What room in the house might this be?
3. Can you explain what time of year this might be?
4. Where do you think Cezanne got these flowers? How can you tell?
5. What kinds of lines and shapes do you see in this painting? Where are they?
6. What colors did Cezanne use? How do the colors make you feel? How would it change if Cezanne used softer colors?
7. Describe the objects in the front, middle and back of the painting. How can you tell their placement?
8. What do you think is the most important object in this painting? What has the artist done to tell you that?
9. If you were to add another flower to this painting, where would you put it? Why?
10. Provide floral paintings by a few additional artists such as Monet and Van Gogh. Invite students to compare and contrast the different styles. Notice the special things Cezanne did to his painting to make it look different from other painters.
11. Of the different styles (above), whose painting do you like best and why?
12. What would you like to know about Paul Cezanne?
13. Why do people paint still lifes?
14. If you were to paint a still life, what objects would you put in your painting?
15. Do you like this painting? Why or why not? Would you hang it in your house?

Things to do

1. Play "20 Questions" where students ask the teacher "yes" or "no" questions about the artist to gain additional information.
2. Pretend you are Cezanne. Have students interview you to learn about Cezanne.

3. Think about the painting, *The Blue Vase*, and then write a story about it. Consider the person/people who might live in this house and what their day is like. Where did the flowers come from? What do you see, hear, smell, taste, or touch?
4. Imagine Cezanne's painting in a different light. How would the feeling of the painting change? Use a lamp to shine on a small still life. Ask students to describe the changes that take place as the light source shifts.
5. Visit a flower shop and examine the colors and shapes of flowers or take a walk to view flowers outdoors. Smell the different flowers. Create small sketches of the flowers. Choose one of your sketches and create a painting from it.
6. Name and describe different flowers you know and then write a haiku about your favorite flower.
7. Take a photograph of a vase of flowers and use it as a reference to develop a painting.
8. Create a story about flowers. Illustrate your story on paper.
9. Consider the uses of flowers. When do people give or receive flowers? How are they used for decoration? If you could give a beautiful bouquet of flowers to someone, what kind of flowers would you give, to whom would you give it and why? Draw a picture of a bouquet.
10. Pull together some of your favorite objects and set up your own still life. Outline objects with a dark color to add weight to each object, then fill in the outlined spaces with various colors.
11. Gather some flowers and put them in a vase. Paint the flowers in the vase. You can try painting the flowers in true colors using only primary and secondary colors. Tint colors with white to lighten them. Add black to colors to create shades.
12. Collect flowers and press them between pages of a heavy book or in a flower press. Once dry, glue the pedals onto a drawing of stems and leaves.
13. Study the artwork of Georgia O'Keefe. Draw the blossom of your favorite flower with a thin marker on a 3x5 inch index card. Use a copy machine to enlarge the drawing onto 11x17 inch paper. Use tempera paint to complete the painting.
14. Take a scientific approach. Make a drawing of the flowers and label all its parts.
15. Design your own flower. Consider the shape, texture and color of the petals as well as the leaves. Draw your newly invented flower as a single flower or as a bouquet in a vase. Be sure to give your new flower a name!