MODERN MASTERS

FROM THE SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM

Educators Guide

TELFAIR MUSEUMS

SCCPSS

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About the Telfair Museums
Three unique buildings, three distinct collections, bridging three centuries of art & architecture…
The Telfair Museum of Art, the oldest public art museum in the South, has been an integral part of the city of Savannah for over a century. Since opening its doors to the public in the 1880s, the museum has grown from a renovated family mansion into a distinguished cultural institution boasting three architecturally-significant buildings; a permanent collection of approximately 4,000 works of art from America and Europe, dating primarily from the eighteenth through the twenty-first centuries; and a history of dynamic educational programming, community outreach, and exciting exhibitions. Located in Savannah's historic district, the museum consists of the Telfair Academy and the Owens-Thomas House—two circa 1820 National Historic Landmark buildings—and the contemporary Jepson Center for the Arts.

About the Exhibition
The nationally traveling exhibition "Modern Masters from the Smithsonian American Art Museum," features 43 key paintings and sculptures by 31 of the most celebrated artists who came to maturity in the 1950s. This was a heady time for American art. *Life*, *Time*, and other national magazines brought images of contemporary abstraction to households throughout the country; museums toured the new abstraction to the capitals of Europe; and the press declared American culture to be an equal partner with technology in establishing the United States as a world power.

The artists of this crucial generation lived through the political and social upheavals of the 1930s and 1940s. Many served in the armed forces overseas during World War II; others labored in factories or hospitals at home. The war touched them all. Living in New York, California, the South, and abroad, they drew on old master art, ancient myth, and modern science and philosophy to create abstract compositions that addressed personal history and the nature of man in the atomic age. *Modern Masters* examines the complex and multifaceted story of abstraction in the late 1940s and its "triumph" in the late 1950s in terms of three broadly conceived themes:

- **Optics and Order** presents artists who used ideas about mathematical proportion and carefully balanced color to explore light, structure, and emotional content.
- **Significant Gestures** introduces artists whose powerful strokes of brilliant color spoke to man's unconscious, recent discoveries in physics, and the built environment.
- **New Images of Man** features artists who used elements of their own lives to address the universality of personal history. Individuals all, they experimented, refined, and readjusted as they sought to express what it meant to live in the mid-twentieth century.

Acknowledgements
The William R. Kenan, Jr. Endowment Fund, the C.F. Foundation in Atlanta, and members of the Smithsonian Council for American Art have generously contributed to *Modern Masters from the Smithsonian American Art Museum*.

About this Guide

This educators guide was designed in collaboration with teachers for use in conjunction with field trips to the *Modern Masters* exhibition, or as a stand-alone classroom resource. The lesson plans included here contain curriculum connections aligned with the Georgia Performance Standards for 4th grade Math and Visual Arts, but are adaptable for use at other grade levels. The guide also contains classroom handouts, suggested reading, and internet links for further exploration. In addition, the Smithsonian provides a Flickr page where you can browse through all the Modern Masters exhibition images:

http://www.flickr.com/photos/americanartmuseum/sets/72157623860986239/

Information in this guide concerning the artists and their work was taken from Modern Masters: American Abstraction at Midcentury. This beautifully illustrated book, co-published by the Smithsonian American Art Museum and D Giles Limited (London), was written by Virginia M. Mecklenburg with contributions by Tiffany D. Farrell. The book features an essay and biographical information on the 31 artists whose work is included in the exhibition, and is available online at http://americanart.si.edu/visit/stores/online/books/?ID=367

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Throughout your exploration of Modern Masters, the following three important questions can improve your student's participation, vocabulary, and critical thinking skills:

- What is going on in this artwork?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can we find?

Use these and other *Visual Thinking Strategies* in your classroom. Consult http://vtshome.org/

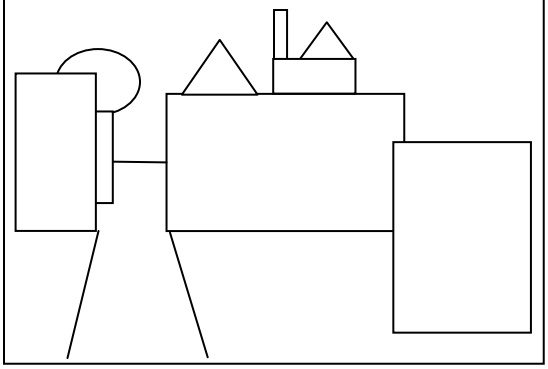
Lesson 1: Romare Bearden, *Village Square*

Parallels, Perpendiculars, and Spatial Concepts

GPS Connections

- M4G1. b. Describe parallel and perpendicular lines in plane geometric figures.
- VA4AR.3 c. Recognizes spatial concepts that show depth in art works (e.g., overlapping, placement, size, color, detail) and uses them in a work of art.

Main Idea: Combinations of parallel lines, converging lines, and overlapping shapes can create the illusion of space on a flat surface.



Village Square, 1969
Romare Bearden, Born: Charlotte, North Carolina 1912 Died: New York, New York 1988 collage on paperboard 20 x 24 in. (50.8 x 61.0 cm)
Smithsonian American Art Museum
Bequest of Edith S. and Arthur J. Levin 2005.5.4

About the Artist

Romare Bearden grew up in Pittsburgh and Harlem, but spent his summers in rural North Carolina with his grandparents. Bearden became active in the civil rights movement and around this time began making collages about the experience of black life in America.

About the Work

In the *Village Square*, we see a woman with a shopping basket, a child holding a treasured object, and a street musician. Their faces are simultaneously real and masklike, giving us the sense that they are not only people of today, but people whose cultural roots go back in time to Africa.

Throughout his life, Bearden studied great works of art, paying particular attention to their composition, or the arrangement of line, shape and color. In this collage, Bearden placed larger figures and shapes in front, overlapping smaller shapes in the background. He arranged these shapes so that we see not just paper rectangles and triangles, but a street scene receding into the distance where a neighborhood of homes stands just beyond a wall.

Objective: Student will create the illusion of space in a collage using parallel lines, converging lines, perpendicular lines and overlapping shapes.

Materials: 8.5" x 11" construction paper, additional paper scraps (newspaper, magazine, etc.), scissors, ruler, protractor, glue.

Vocabulary:
Parallel lines lie on the same plane but never meet no matter how far they are extended.

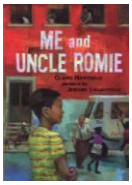
Two straight lines are **perpendicular** if the angles they form when they meet are equal, with each one measuring 90°.

Procedure/Concepts: Demonstrate to students the use of a protractor and ruler in drawing lines perpendicular to the edge of the paper. Use these lines to form and cut out various sized rectangles and arrange them in a composition of overlapping building-like shapes, keeping the smaller shapes in the background. Demonstrate the use of converging lines to suggest receding roads. After successfully demonstrating use of protractor and ruler, students may cut out additional irregular or free-form shapes to complete their composition. When they do so, prompt students to verbalize the differences between shapes produced with parallel and perpendicular lines, and those created free-hand. If possible, extend lesson to include the terms obtuse, right, and acute angles.

Investigate: "Why do roads look as if they come to a point in the distance?"

"When I make two lines that are perpendicular to the same edge of the paper, will those two lines ever meet and cross one another?"

Resources:



Me and Uncle Romie
Claire Hartfield, illustrated by Jerome Lagarrigue
A boy from North Carolina visits the Harlem neighborhood where his uncle, Romare Bearden, grew up.
Dial Books, 2001.Ages 5–9.

The Art of Romare Bearden: Children's Guide
An engaging and informative look at the artists' life and work, for ages 8 and up.
http://www.nga.gov/kids/zone/beardencg.pdf

NGAkids Collage Machine
Create an online collage from an generous palette of options.
http://www.nga.gov/kids/zone/collagemachine.htm

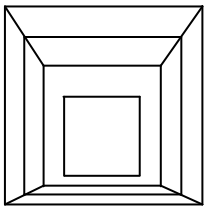
Lesson 2: Josef Albers, *Homage to the Square*

Classifying Quadrilaterals, Part I

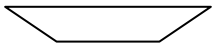
GPS Connections

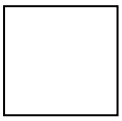
- M4G1. c. Examine and classify quadrilaterals (including parallelograms, squares, rectangles, trapezoids, and rhombi) by their properties.
- M4G1. d. Compare and contrast the relationships among quadrilaterals.

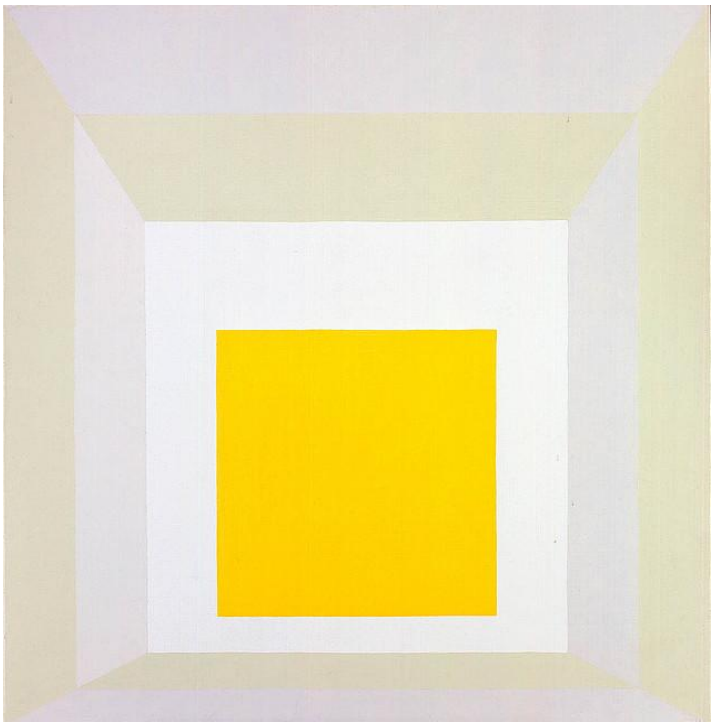
Main Idea:



Squares and trapezoids are clearly different shapes; however, they both belong to the family of quadrilaterals and share some properties.







Homage to the Square--Insert, 1959
Josef Albers, Born: Bottrop, Germany 1888 Died: New Haven, Connecticut 1976
oil on masonite 48 x 48 in. (121.9 x 121.9 cm.)
Smithsonian American Art Museum
Gift of S.C. Johnson & Son, Inc. 1969.47.51

About the Artist

Josef Albers taught throughout his career. For Albers, teaching was an almost sacred endeavor: "Making ourselves and others grow… is one of the highest human tasks." He systematically set problems for himself, as well as his students, in a continuing investigation into the mysteries of perception.

About the Work

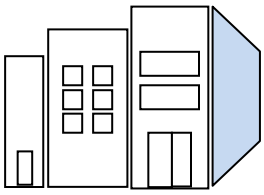
A mathematical formula seems an odd starting point for an artist, but this is the way Josef Albers began more than one thousand panels he called *Homage to the Square*. Restricting himself to a format that was never smaller than one foot nor larger than four feet on a side, Albers concentrated particularly on color and the way it changes its appearance according to its surroundings. In this painting, the central yellow square seems either to recede or project forward, depending on the viewing distance.

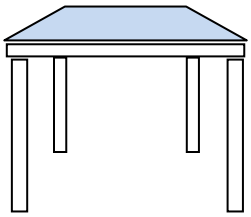
Objective: Student will recognize and name geometric shapes through the practice of observing them in art and in the environment, and by drawing and labeling them.

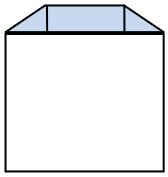
Materials: Paper and pencil

Vocabulary: See accompanying activity sheet, “Classifying Quadrilaterals.”

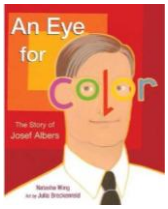
Procedure/Concepts: Following completion of the quadrilaterals activity sheet, lead a discussion with students about the optical effects produced in *Homage to the Square--Insert.* Demonstrate how similar combinations of a square or rectangle, together with a trapezoid, can produce images that appear three-dimensional. (See illustrations below). After allowing time for experimentation, have students produce a set of instructions for creating a three-dimensional drawing. Students should use written instructions accompanied by diagrams with accurate geometric terminology.





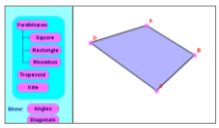


Investigate: Challenge students to find a way to combine two parallelograms and a square to form an image of a cube.

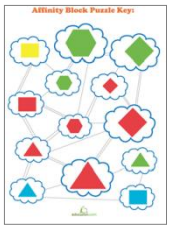


Resources:

An Eye for Color
Natasha Wing, illustrated by Julia Breckenreid
The story of Albers’ life-long fascination with color and his careful scientific approach to understanding its visual effects.
Henry Holt, 2009. Ages 4–8.

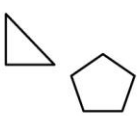
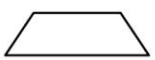
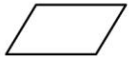


Interactive Quadrilaterals
View different quadrilaterals "in action." Choose a quadrilateral, then click on an drag a corner. Observe what properties can vary for that quadrilateral, and which ones do not vary.
http://www.mathsisfun.com/geometry/quadrilaterals-interactive.html



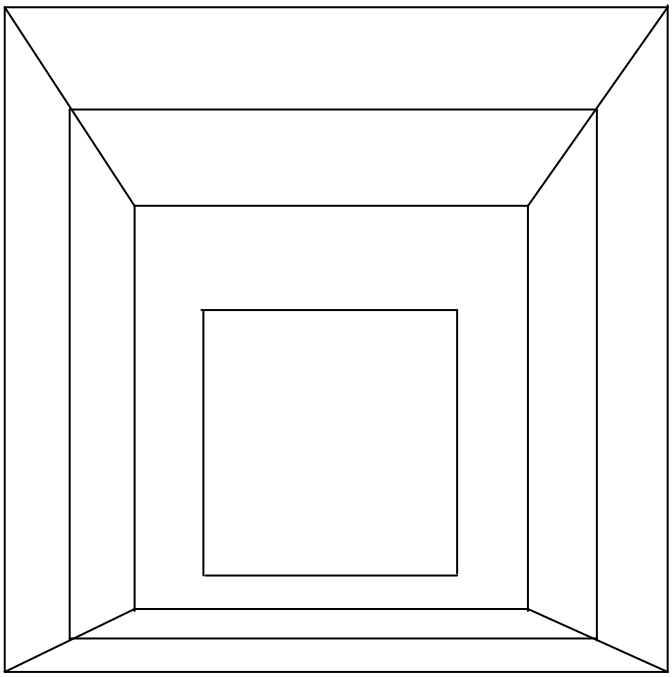
Create Affinity Block Puzzles
Designed to support geometrical thinking and logical processing for 4th grade math students.
http://www.education.com/activity/article/affinity_puzzles_fourth/

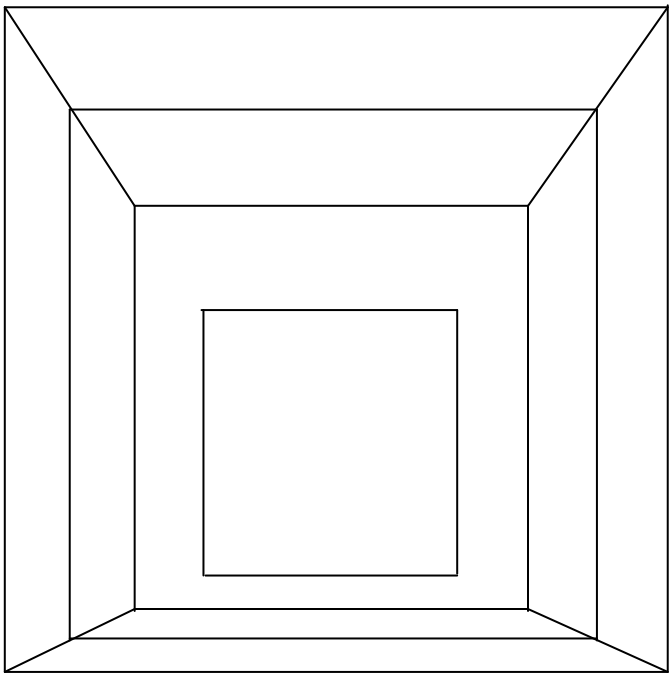
Place a check in each box where the shape matches the written description.

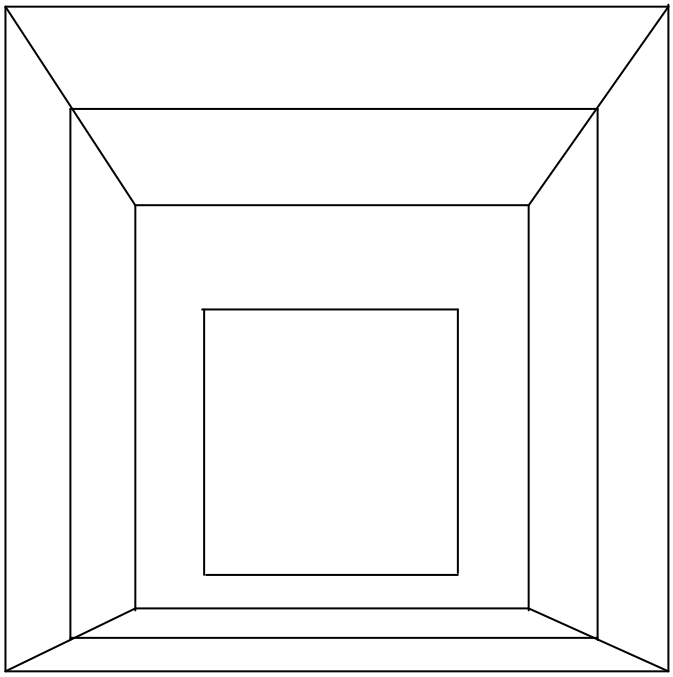
Classifying Quadrilaterals							
A **polygon**: closed figure with straight sides							
A **quadrilateral**: a polygon with 4 sides and 4 angles							
A **trapezoid**: a quadrilateral with only 1 pair of parallel sides							
A **parallelogram**, a quadrilateral with 2 pairs of parallel sides							
A **rhombus**: a parallelogram with 4 sides of equal length							
A **rectangle**: a parallelogram with 4 right angles							
A **square**: A rectangle with 4 right angles							

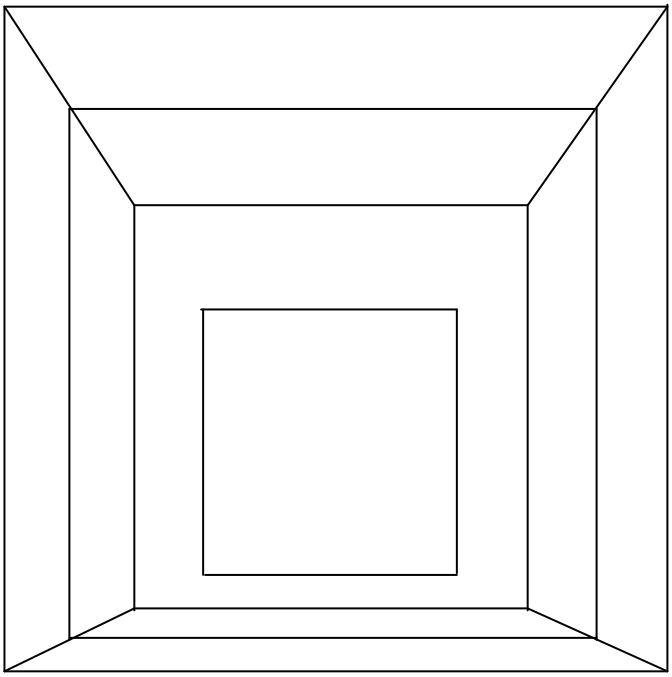
A square may be accurately called by any of the above terms, except for one. Which one is it?

Continue Albers' exploration of color. Experiment with your own color combinations on these outline images of *Homage to a Square--Insert*.









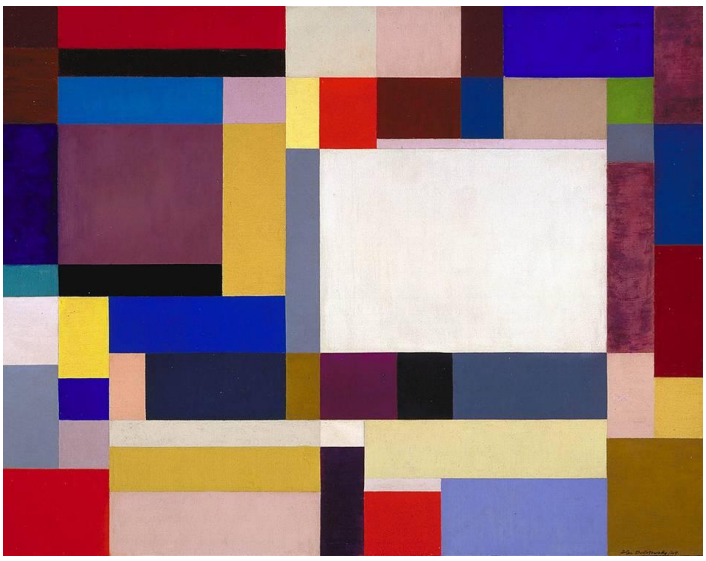
Lesson 3: Ilya Bolotowsky, *Architectural Variation*

Classifying Quadrilaterals, Part II

GPS Connections

- M4M2. a. Use tools, such as a protractor or angle ruler, and other methods such as paper folding, drawing a diagonal in a square, to measure angles.
- M4P4. c. Recognize and apply mathematics in contexts outside of mathematics.

Main Idea:
Are the quadrilaterals in this painting restricted to those that are a single color? No. Geometric shapes are sometimes composed of smaller shapes, and they may form part of an even larger shape.



Architectural Variation, 1949
Ilya Bolotowsky, Born: St. Petersburg, Russia 1907 Died: New York, New York 1981 oil on canvas 20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm.)
Smithsonian American Art Museum
Gift of Patricia and Phillip Frost 1986.92.4

About the Work

The title Bolotowsky chose for this painting, *Architectural Variation*, tells us something about the artist's intent. Architecture can refer to the process of building, or the construction of anything. Like a building, a painting can be "built" of geometric shapes.

A moderately scaled canvas of colored rectangles, the solemn cadence of *Architectural Variation* comes from the careful consideration of proportion and of the relationships among blocks of color. Although each color is contained within a strict geometric configuration, it pulses with a slow, quiet energy. Bolotowsky had the idea, he said, of "creating a counterpoint of colors," that would work together harmoniously, like a musical motif.

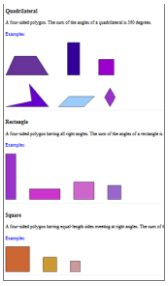
About the Artist

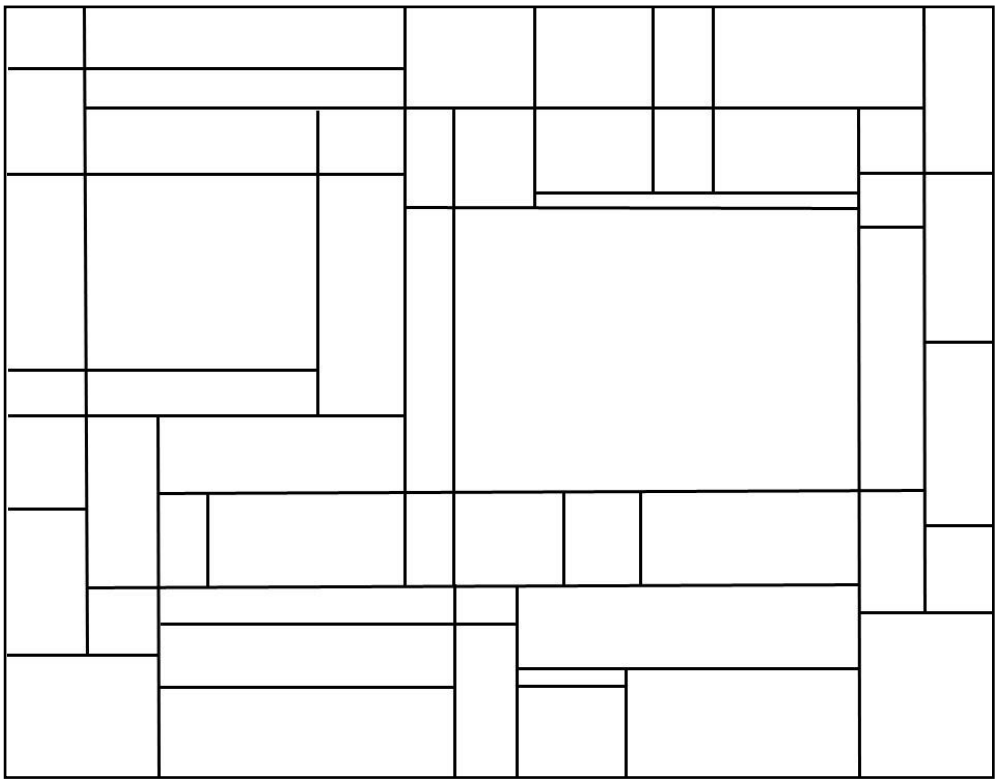
Bolotowsky came to America from Russia. After the "upheavals in my early life," he said, "I came to prefer a search for ideal harmony and order." Within self-set limitations of line, edge and right angles, he experimented until he achieved a compositional balance. "As I start dividing the canvas, he said, "somehow the divisions suggest colors. Then I wipe them out, change proportions, and a different set of colors imposes itself."

Resources

Figures and Polygons
A comprehensive list of defined and illustrated geometric shapes

http://www.mathleague.com/help/geometry/polygons.htm#polygon





Introduction:

- The drawing above is an outline based on the painting *Architectural Variation* by Ilya Bolotowsky (pronounced bo-lo-TOV-skee).

Objective:

- Find four squares.
- Shade each in with a pencil.

Vocabulary:

- All of the shapes are **rectangles** because they each have four right angles. A **square** is a rectangle with four right angles AND four equal sides. Use a ruler to check that all the sides of each square you find are equal. Some of these rectangular shapes look like squares, but are not.
- A **quadrilateral** is any four sided shape. Two of the squares are made of one quadrilateral (Ex:). Two of the squares are made of a group of quadrilaterals (Ex:).

Investigate:

- Are all the angles in *Architectural Variation* equal? How could you prove this?

Lesson 4: Ilya Bolotowsky, *Tondo Variation in Red*

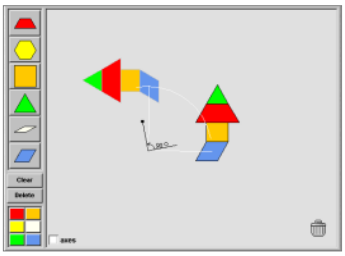
Half Rotation and Full Rotation

GPS Connections

- M4M2. b. Understand the meaning and measure of a half rotation (180°) and a full rotation (360°).
- VA4MC.3 Observes how the visual relationship of objects and ideas (juxtaposition) affects contrast and/or proportion and how placement may affect meaning and/or significance.

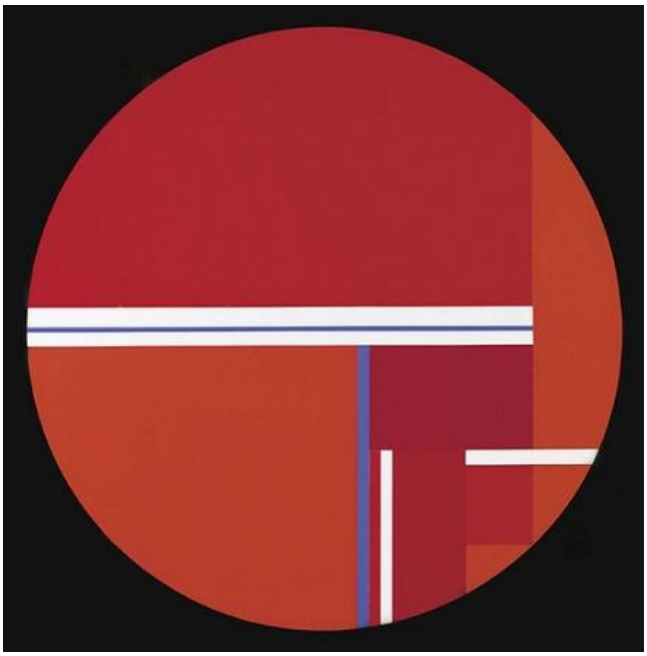
Main Idea: Rotation means turning around a central point. Rotating an object does not change it, but does affect our perception of it.

Resources:



Transformation-Rotations
With this virtual manipulative you can create objects with pattern block pieces and explore rotations.

http://nlvm.usu.edu/en/nav/frames_asid_207_g_1_t_3.html?open=activities&from=topic_t_3.html



Tondo Variation in Red, 1978
Ilya Bolotowsky, Born: St. Petersburg, Russia 1907 Died: New York, New York 1981 acrylic on canvas 39 1/4 in. (99.8 cm) diam.
Smithsonian American Art Museum
Gift of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters through its Hassam and Speicher Purchase Fund 1979.11

About the Artist

When Bolotowsky was teaching in Wyoming, a farmer gave him several wagon wheels. He stripped away the spokes and stretched the canvas over the rims. He called these round paintings tondos, as a reminder of the circular paintings by Renaissance masters. Although he used wagon wheels only briefly, he was intrigued with the special challeges posed by the round format. Straight lines tended to appear curved or bowed out when placed on a circular plane, and, unless visually anchored, round paintings might easily appear unbalanced. Over the years, Bolotowsky experimented with creative solutions to these optical phenomena.

About the Work

In *Tondo Variation in Red* (1978) a few elements produce a powerful, dynamic impact. The weighty, dark red of the upper half of the painting is supported by horizintal whites that stabilize the composition. An even darker red, vertical plane below, bounded by a slim, straight, blue band, anchors the plane above and balances the composition.

Objective: Student will draw a geometric shape and reproduce it in 90°, 180°, 270°, and 360° rotations.

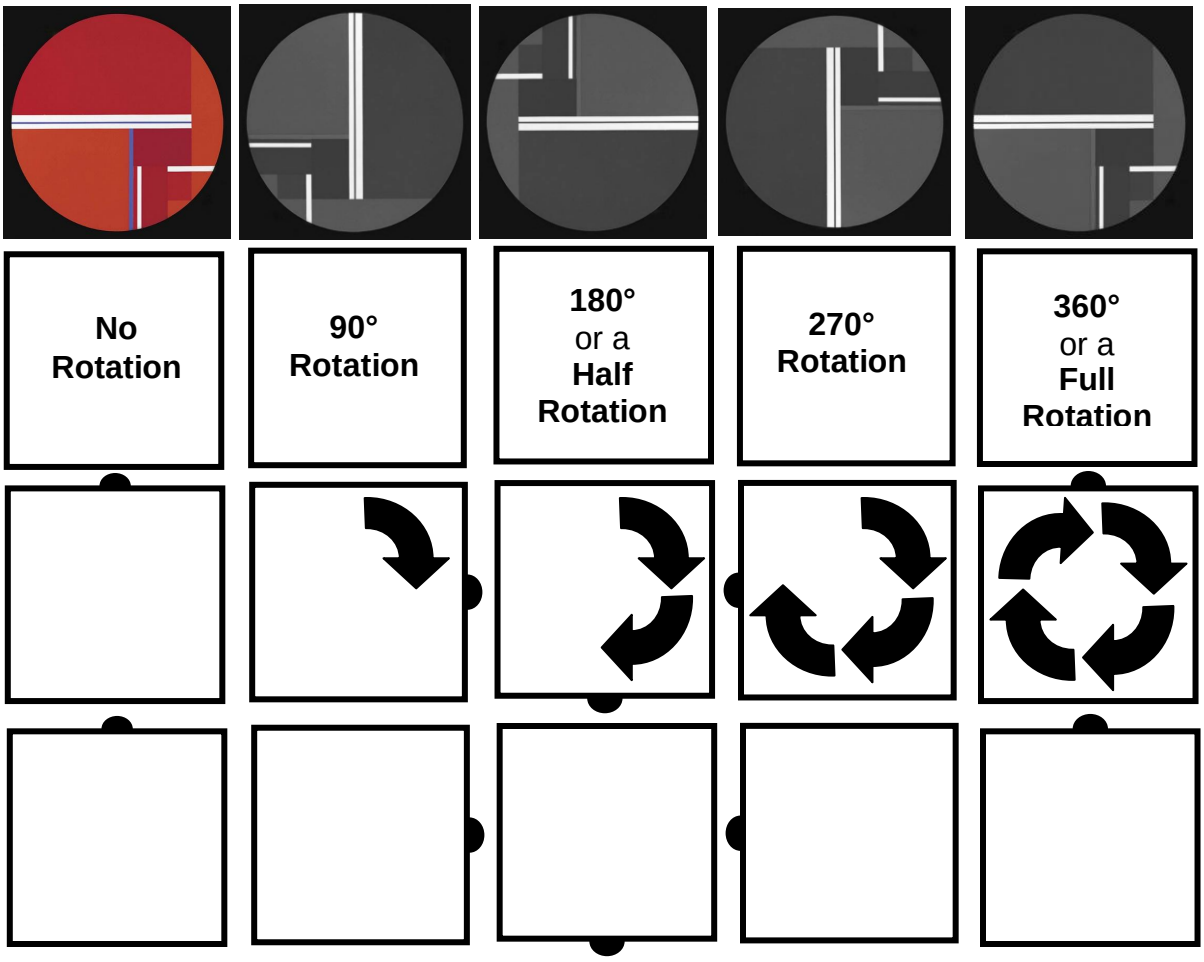
Materials: Small square sheets of paper (2”- 3” sq.), reproductions of the template on the lower half of this page, and pencils.

Vocabulary: Rotation means turning around a center point. An object that is moved one **half rotation** travels half way around a circular path. An object that is moved one **full rotation** travels back to its starting point.

Procedure/Concepts: Ask students to mark one side of a paper square as the top, then have them draw a geometric shape on it. Instruct students to reproduce their drawing in different rotations, by rotating their original clockwise, and using the template to guide them. Note the semi-circular tabs on the template that indicate where the “top” is located.

Investigate: If student chooses a shape such as a square or circle, no variation will be apparent. Return to Bolotowsky’s composition and rotated images above. Note how the outline of the square and circle remain the same but the shapes inside have changed position.

Guide a discussion with students about the rotated images of *Tondo Variation in Red* reproduced below. Ask, “Why do you think the artist choose this orientation? Do you prefer one of the rotated images? Why or why not? “



Lesson 5: Maurice Golubov, *Untitled*

Geometry Terms and Symbols

GPS Connections

- M4P4. c. Recognize and apply mathematics in contexts outside of mathematics.
- 4th Grade Math focus on frequently misunderstood terms/symbols:
  Parallel, parallelogram, trapezoid, right triangle, perpendicular, diagonal line.

Main Idea:
Different geometric shapes and properties do not necessarily exist in isolation, and can often be found combined, or embedded, one within another.

Maurice Golubov: Untitled, 1948
Untitled, 1948
Maurice Golubov, Born: Vetka, Russia 1905 Died: Peekskill, New York 1987
oil on canvas 41 1/2 x 45 1/4 in. (105.4 x 114.9 cm.)
Smithsonian American Art Museum
Gift of Patricia and Phillip Frost 1986.92.28

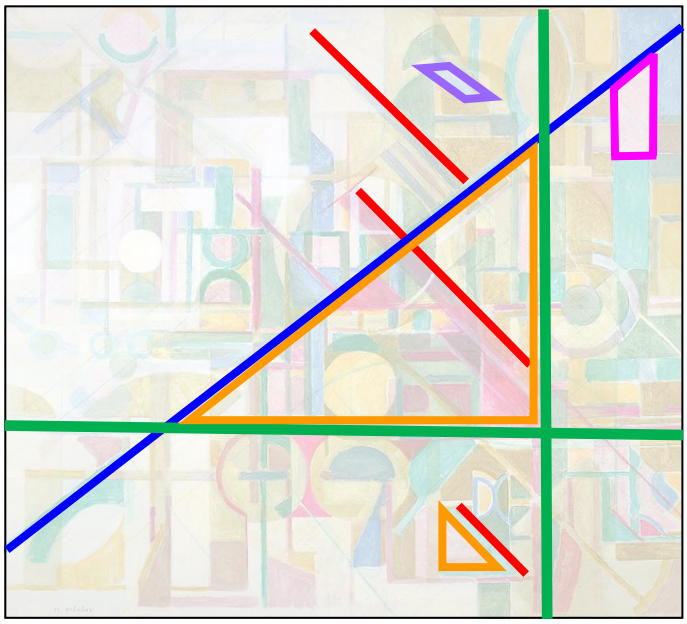
About the Artist

Golubov arrived in New York in 1917, twelve years old and a refugee with his family from tsarist Russia. He began studies to become a rabbi, but he happened upon an art class and subsequently changed ambitions. However, as he later admitted, "Mysticism was grounded into me." In his early studies, he excelled at figurative work, but made abstract drawings in the margins of his drawing paper. Although he had begun doing abstractions as experiments in design, he eventually came to see them as a way to explore the mystical and spiritual. Abstraction became a way to convey a personal realism that embraced the seen and the unseen, the timely and the timeless.

About the Work

Untitled (1948) is a complex of arcs, diagonals, bands of color, and circles within circles. It resembles a partially planned cityscape seen from above to reveal spaces and structures that abut and overlap. Golubov said that in his work, he hoped to capture the "essence of a landscape in an abstract way. How this particular world would look from the top, the side"

The canvas is based on a regular grid overlapped by a second grid that is rotated 45°. The composition is bisected by a dynamic diagonal, running from the lower left to upper right, separating the paler tones, from the denser, more intense colors.



Color Key:

parallel

parallelogram

trapezoid

right triangle

perpendicular

diagonal line

Objective: Analyzing Maurice Golubov's *Untitled*, 1948, students will identify and label one example of each vocabulary term.

Materials: Colored pencils, rulers, protractors, black and white reproductions of Golubov's *Untitled* from page 16 of this guide.

Vocabulary: See page 16. Symbols are included where appropriate

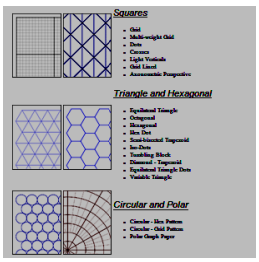
Procedure/Concepts: Create a color key for students or use the one provided above. Instruct students to fill in key on the worksheet. Students should use the color corresponding to the geometric term when outlining that example on their worksheet.

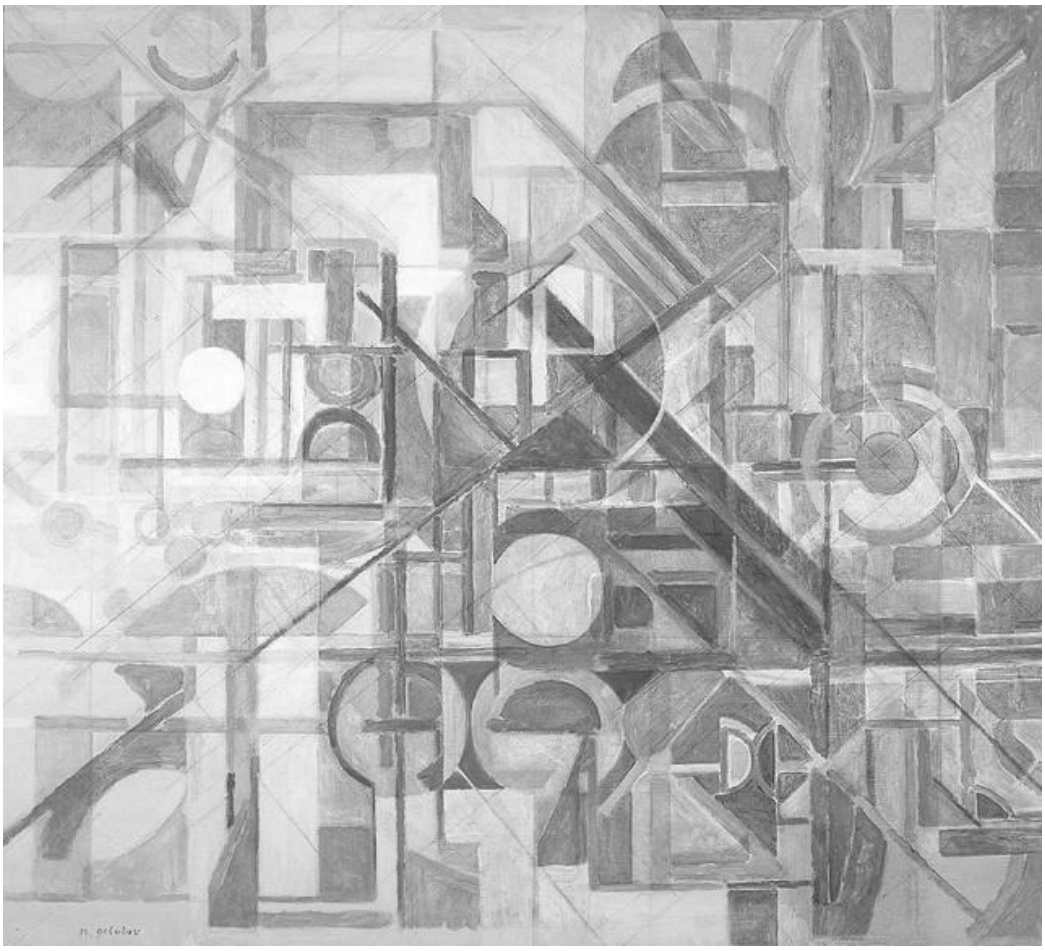
Investigate: Using the diagonal grid paper on page 17, invite students to create a composition inspired by Golubov's work, accompanying it with a written description of its key geometric elements.

Resources:

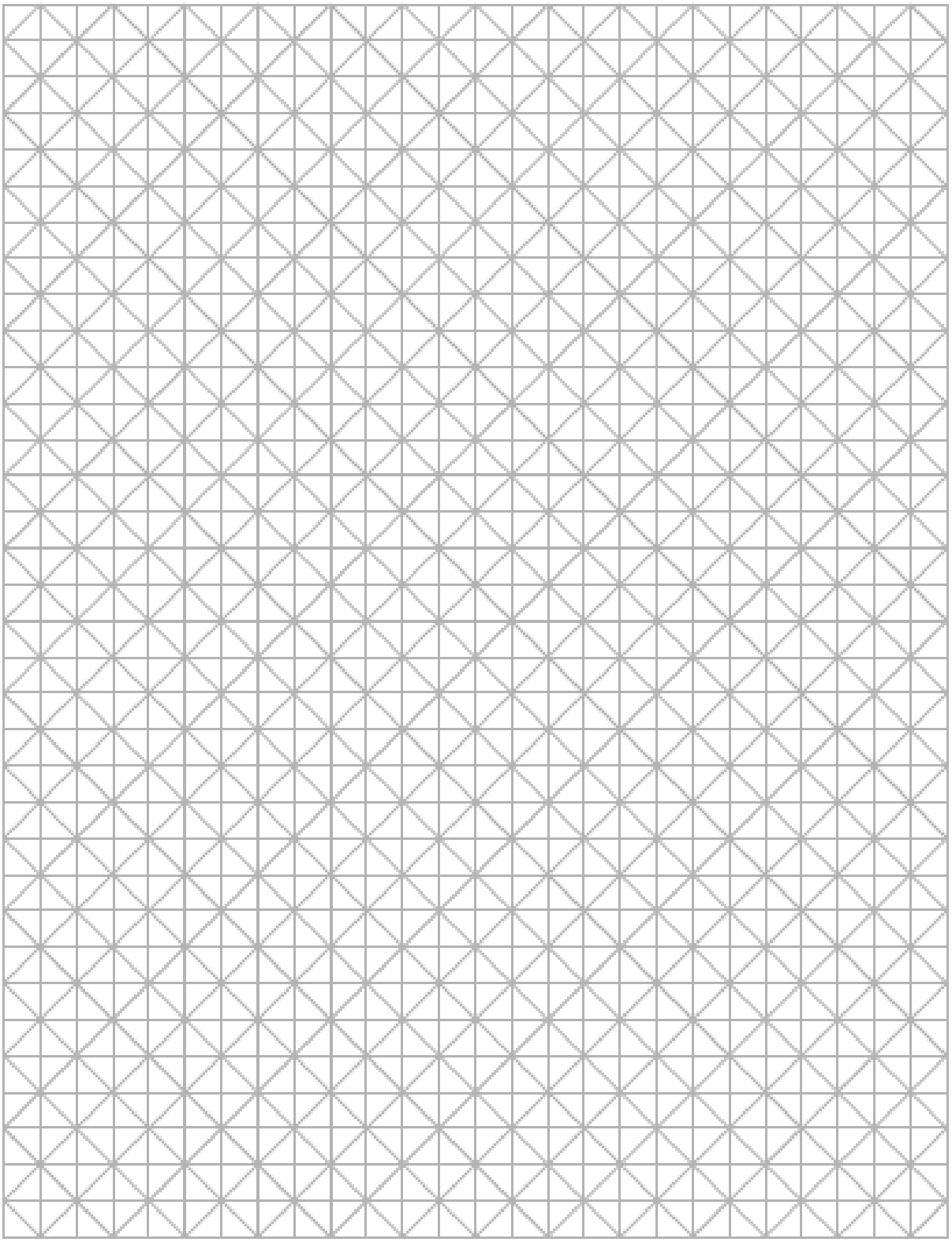
Incompetech: Free Online Graph Paper / Grid Paper PDFs
http://incompetech.com/graphpaper/

Choose among grids composed of squares, triangles, hexagons, octagons, trapezoids and more, then customize the formatting to suit your needs.





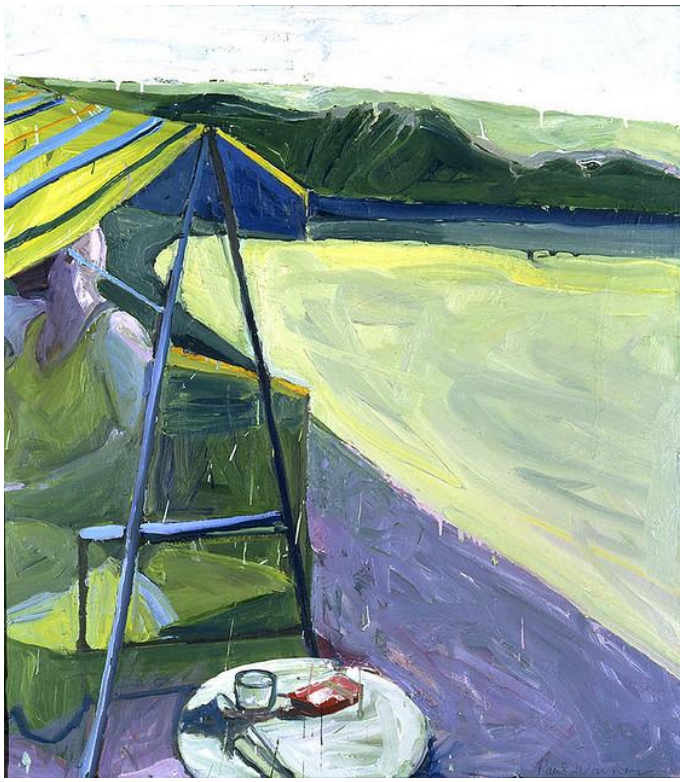
Color Key	Symbol	Term and Definition
		Parallel lines lie on the same plane but never meet no matter how far they are extended.
		A **trapezoid** is a quadrilateral with only one pair of parallel sides.
		A **parallelogram** is quadrilateral with two pairs of parallel sides.
		A **right triangle** has one 90° angle.
		Lines are **perpendicular** when they intersect to form 90°, or right angles.
		A **diagonal line**, in general terms, is a slanting line. In geometry, it specifically refers to a line traveling across a polygon that intersects two angles.



Free Axonometric Graph Paper from http://incompetech.com/graphpaper/axonometric/

Lesson 6: Paul Wonner, *Girl in Swing*

Classify and Identify Triangles



Paul Wonner: Girl in Swing, 1957
Girl in Swing, 1957
Paul Wonner, Born: Tucson, Arizona 1920
oil on canvas 52 5/8 x 46 1/4 in. (133.7 x 117.5 cm.)
Smithsonian American Art Museum
Gift of Ruth J. Chase in memory of Dr. William Chase 1997.45

GPS Connections

- M4G1. a. Examine and compare angles in order to classify and identify triangles by their angles.
- VA4AR.2 Uses a variety of approaches to understand and critique works of art.

Main Idea:

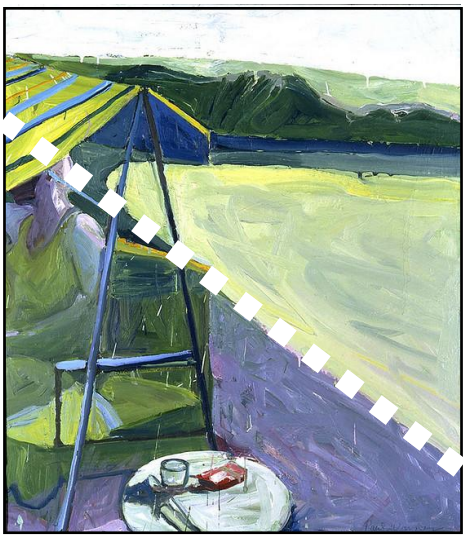
Close observation can reveal geometric structures in a wide variety of places.

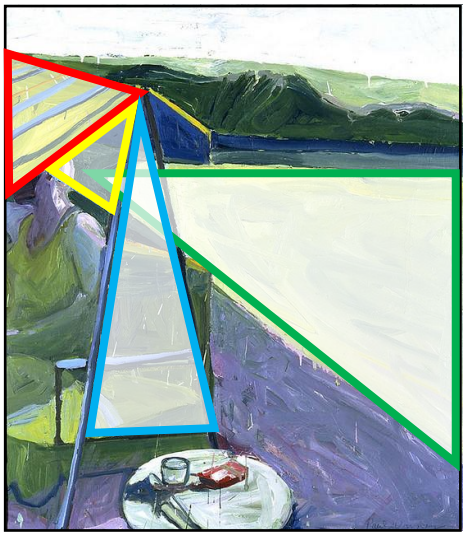
About the Artist

Paul Wonner was born in Tucson and raised in California. His supportive family helped jump-start his career by hiring an art tutor during high school. After serving in the U.S. Army during World War II, Wonner lived for a time in New York, continuing to study art while working as a commercial designer. Returning to California, he earned his master's degree from U.C. Berkeley, and eventually became part of an association of artists known as the Bay Area Figurative painters.

About the Work

Although the *Girl in Swing* appears to be a spontaneous impression, Wonner sketched the composition in advance, then cropped, or cut in close to the image to give the scene its casual snap-shot feel. The beauty of the curvaceous shoreline draws the viewer into the painting with a strong diagonal. Yet the oblique view of the figure, with her face obscured by shadow and her limbs severed in the tight cropping, is unsettling. The figure is cramped within the architecture of the swing. Overall, Wonner's composition, while not strictly geometric, relies heavily on triangular shapes. (See diagrams on the facing page.)





Objective: Students will search for and identify other compositions that incorporate triangular shapes, a triangular arrangement, and/or a strong diagonal. Students will identify the type of triangle(s) and /or angles used in the composition.

Materials: Protractor, ruler, markers, and magazine illustrations or similar images.

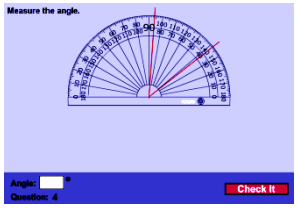
Vocabulary:
An **equilateral triangle** has sides of equal length, and each angle measures 60°.
An **isosceles triangle** has two sides of equal length.
The sides of a **scalene triangle** each have a different length.
A **right triangle** has one 90° angle.
A **right angle** measures exactly 90°.
An **obtuse angle** measures more than 90°.
An **acute angle** measures less than 90°.

Procedure/Concepts: Model analysis of images for strong diagonals and triangular elements. (You can reproduce images in advance from the internet. Search Google Images under "triangular composition," "strong diagonal," and "diagonal.") Use a ruler and marker to outline triangles and diagonals, and a protractor to measure them.

Investigate: A diagonal composition is often referred to as dramatic, or unstable, while a composition organized around a single broad-based triangle is usually described as stable. Why is this?

Resources:

Math Playground
Measure angles with a protractor
http://www.mathplayground.com/measuringangles.html



Lesson 7: Anne Truitt, *Keep*; and Louise Nevelson, *Sky Totem*

Analyze, Compare and Contrast

Keep, 1962
Anne Truitt, Born: Baltimore, Maryland 1921 Died: Washington, District of Columbia 2004
acrylic on wood 72 x 39 1/4 x 10 1/8 in. (182.9 x 99.7 x 25.7 cm.)
Smithsonian American Art Museum
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Philip M. Stern 1972.172

About the Artist and Her Work

At six feet high, the presence of Keep is both intimate and intimidating. The initial impression is of a crenellated battlement. But "keep" also means possession, restraint, protection, and preservation

Discipline, *order*, *structure* and *endurance* are words used by Truitt to characterize her life and thought. But meaning in her sculptures comes from deeply felt, personal associations. "It is the human experience that is distilled into art that makes it great," she said.

Louise Nevelson: Sky Totem, 1956
Sky Totem, 1956
Louise Nevelson, Born: Kiev, Russia 1899 Died: New York, New York 1988 painted wood 70 3/4 x 9 1/2 x 5 1/2 in. (179.7 x 24.0 x 14.0 cm.)
Smithsonian American Art Museum
Gift of the Sara Roby Foundation 1986.6.67

About the Artist and Her Work

Sky Totem reveals Nevelson's fascination with Native American, Mayan, African and other ancient cultures.

Nevelson poured her soul into her art. "The very nature of creation is not a performing glory on the outside, it's a painful, difficult search within," By the time Nevelson created Sky Totem, after decades of struggling to find success as an artist, she - like her work – embodied perseverance, strength, and spiritual depth.

Objective: Student will choose two art works, then create a compare and contrast chart modeled on the example below.

Procedure: Facilitate a classroom discussion comparing two works of art while recording similarities and differences on a chart. Visit the Smithsonian's *Modern Masters* Flickr page:

http://www.flickr.com/photos/americanartmuseum/sets/72157623860986239/

to browse through and choose exhibition images to analyze, or choose from other sources, including art produced in your classroom.

GPS Connections

- GPS Math Overview: Students will use tables, graphs, and charts to record and analyze data.
- M4P4. Students will make connections among mathematical ideas and to other disciplines.
- VA4AR.2.a. Develops multiple strategies for responding to and reflecting on artworks (e.g., formal and informal art criticism techniques).

Compare and Contrast Anne Truitt's *Keep* / Louise Nevelson's *Sky Totem*		
created by female artist	✓	✓
produced around 1960	✓	✓
sculptural, three-dimensional	✓	✓
black or mostly black	✓	✓
rectangular	✓	✓
vertical	✓	✓
composed of straight lines and right angles	✓	
curves, straight lines and angles of different measures		✓
free standing	✓	
wall mounted		✓
smooth, flat planes	✓	
multi-layered surfaces		✓
basic form subtracted from	✓	
basic form added to		✓