



Activity: Music & Visual Abstraction **Age Groups:** All age groups

Goal: Provide insight into the similarities, distinctions, and connections in and among the arts.
Highlight the affinities between and abstract art and music.

Timing: 1 session

Activity Outline

Coupling abstract art with other art forms is an excellent way to help students better understand or identify with certain visual components. Music, for instance, is an accessible medium which can help students focus on specific structural or emotional elements which are also present in the visual language of an abstract painting.

In this exercise, students will listen to a predetermined musical recording while looking at two paintings from **Art in the Abstract**. Ask the students to identify which of the two paintings they think most closely resembles the music, and why? *How are the notes they hear similar to the brush marks they see? Are they paired because both make them feel a certain way, or remind them of a specific experience?* The recommended music has been chosen to closely align with one of the two paintings; however, there are no right or wrong responses.

The student will learn that abstract art and music share similar formal elements which can engage the viewer/listener and create diverse sensations of motion, feeling or association, which can be universal experience or a personal response. This process encourages a different approach towards appreciating abstract art and contributes to a greater comfort level when beginning the journey.

Example #1 (on the next page) provides an explanation of how the music/painting relationship might be interpreted.

Materials

Some sort of music playback device (CD player, Computer, Record player)
Color images of selected examples.

Procedure

Step 1

Select one or more of the examples below.

Step 2

Find recordings of the suggested musical examples, or choose your own (instrumental music without lyrics works best). To locate the selections listed below, do the following:

Check your library for the necessary recordings, **OR**

On your search engine's home page, enter "recording" and then the words bolded in blue which will identify each selection.

Step 3

Use the forward/backward arrows at the top of this page to find the suggested images and print them out in color or project them for the class.

Step 4

Play the first 1-2 minutes of the recommended musical selection, and ask students to identify which of the two paintings most closely links with the music, and why. The exercise may be done as a class or individually. Responses may be verbal or written.



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Project: Music and Visual Abstraction Activity - Examples

Example 1

Paintings: *Angel Dance* (page 4), 1987, Judith Geichman, oil on canvas, Collection of the Illinois State Museum **and** *Measurement and Splatter Matter* (page 5), 1972, Rodney Carswell, acrylic on unprimed canvas, Collection of the Illinois State Museum

Recommended Musical Selection: Overture to *Candide* by Leonard **Bernstein**

Sample responses: the Angel Dance most closely resembles the music because of the energy and the broad, swirling lines found in both the painting and the music; both suggest playful and fun activity; the orange color and buoyant notes are uplifting and suggest happiness.

Example 2

Paintings: *Still Life XIV with Chair* (page 6), ca. 1940, William Schwartz, oil on canvas, Collection of the Illinois State Museum **and** *Variations on an Idaho Theme (Symphonic Forms #34)* (page 7), ca. 1940, William Schwartz, oil on canvas, Collection of the Illinois State Museum

Recommended Musical Selection: *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (theme from film *2001: A Space Odyssey*) by Richard **Strauss**, Op. 30

Example 3

Paintings: *Whistling in the Dark* (page 8), 1974, Elwood Howell, acrylic on canvas, Collection of the Illinois State Museum **and** *Arroyo* (page 9), 1960, Rudolph Weisenborn, oil on canvas, Collection of the Illinois State Museum

Recommended Musical Selection: *Tubular Bells*, Part I, by Mike **Oldfield**

Example 4

Paintings: *Dovetail Space* (page 10), 1973, Susan Michod, acrylic on unprimed canvas, Collection of the Illinois State Museum **and** *Untitled* (page 11), 1939, Carl Kahler, watercolor and gouache on paper, Collection of the Illinois State Museum

Recommended Musical Selection: *Promenade* (also called *Walking the Dog* from the film *Shall We Dance*) by George **Gershwin**

Example 5

Paintings: *Black Wires* (page 12), 1950, Richard Koppe, canvas, oil paint, wire, wood, Collection of the Illinois State Museum **and** *Paris Window* (page 13), 1983, Margo Hoff, color lithograph on paper, Collection of the Illinois State Museum

Recommended Musical Selection: *Take Five* by Dave **Brubeck**

Example 6

Paintings: *Lakeview* (page 14), 1978, oil on canvas, William Conger, Collection of the Illinois State Museum **and** Rosalyn Schwartz, *French Blue II* (page 15), 1999, oil on canvas, Collection of the Illinois State Museum

Recommended Musical Selection: *Songbird* by **Kenny G**

**Page 3****Project:** Music and Visual Abstraction -
Illinois State Board of Education Goals and Standards**Illinois State Board of Education Goals and Standards**

Students completing this project will *directly* address the following I.S.B.E. Goals and Standards for the **FINE ARTS:**

ALL LEVELS

25B *Understand the similarities, distinctions, and connections in and among the arts.*

Through observation, discussion, interpretation and analysis, students will learn much about similarities and differences between the “language” of music and the visual arts.

In addition, upon completion, they will have touched on elements of the following I.S.B.E. Goals and Standards for the **FINE ARTS:**

Early Elementary

25.A.1c *Music - Identify differences in elements and expressive qualities (e.g. between fast and slow temp; loud and soft dynamics; high and low pitch/direction; long and short duration' same and different form, tone color or timbre, and beat).*

Middle/Junior High School

25.A.3c *Music - Identify and describe changes in elements and expressive qualities (e.g., crescendo, ritardando, fermata, meter, sforzando).*

Through careful listening and observation, students will develop a heightened understanding of the sensory elements, organizational principles, and expressive qualities of music and the visual arts.























