

Abstract Expressions: Exploring Kandinsky with Zara

Learning objective: To analyse the artistic style of Wassily Kandinsky and apply the principles of abstract expressionism using geometric shapes and colour theory.

Read the prompts carefully and use your knowledge of abstract art to complete the tasks. Zara the zebra wants to see how you interpret rhythm and emotion through shapes and lines.

Wassily Kandinsky was a pioneer of abstract art. He believed that colours and shapes could convey emotions and musical rhythms, a concept he linked to synaesthesia—the ability to 'hear' colours. Unlike traditional artists who painted objects like houses or trees, Kandinsky focused on the relationship between forms, lines, and the canvas, creating compositions that felt like visual music.

Word bank: Abstract · Geometric · Composition · Synaesthesia · Primary colours · Rhythm · Expressionism · Non-representational

1. Explain why Kandinsky chose to move away from painting realistic objects in favour of non-representational, abstract shapes. How does this change the viewer's experience? (3 marks)

2. Kandinsky often described his paintings as 'visual music'. If you were to compose a painting based on a fast-paced, loud drum beat, what types of lines and shapes would you use? Justify your choice. (3 marks)

3. Compare and contrast the use of primary colours in a Kandinsky composition versus a traditional landscape painting. How does the impact on the viewer differ? (3 marks)

4. What might happen if Kandinsky had used only muted, dull colours instead of his signature bright, contrasting palette? Would the 'musical' quality of his work be affected? (2 marks)

5. Look at a typical Kandinsky 'Circles' study. Analyse how the repetition of circles creates a sense of rhythm across the canvas. (2 marks)

Draw: Using a pencil and ruler, divide your page into a grid. Fill each section with overlapping geometric shapes—circles, triangles, and intersecting lines—using a bold colour palette to represent the emotion of 'joy'.



Extension challenge: Research the theory of synaesthesia. Write a short paragraph explaining how a person with this condition might perceive a painting. Then, create a new piece of art inspired by a specific piece of music you enjoy, ensuring the visual 'rhythm' matches the tempo of the song.