

MONA

Museum of Northwest Art

Mandala Color Wheel Inspired by Ruth Asawa and Prasun Balasubramaniam

A HANDS-ON ART ACTIVITY
DESIGNED BY MONA EDUCATORS

Age: Fifth Grade

Lesson Duration: One Hour and a Half

Subjects: Art & Religion



Student examples

Image Source: Museum of Northwest Art

Description

Students will create a color wheel using only primary colors: red, yellow, and blue. This will be the inspiration for a mandala they will paint using primary colors, and mixing the secondary colors within a specific pattern. Students will use white to tint colors and black to shade colors within their pattern.

Relevant Vocabulary

- Primary/Secondary colors
- Negative and positive space
- Analogous colors
- Complementary colors
- Shade
- Tint
- Values
- Mandala
- Symmetry
- Cardinal points

Materials

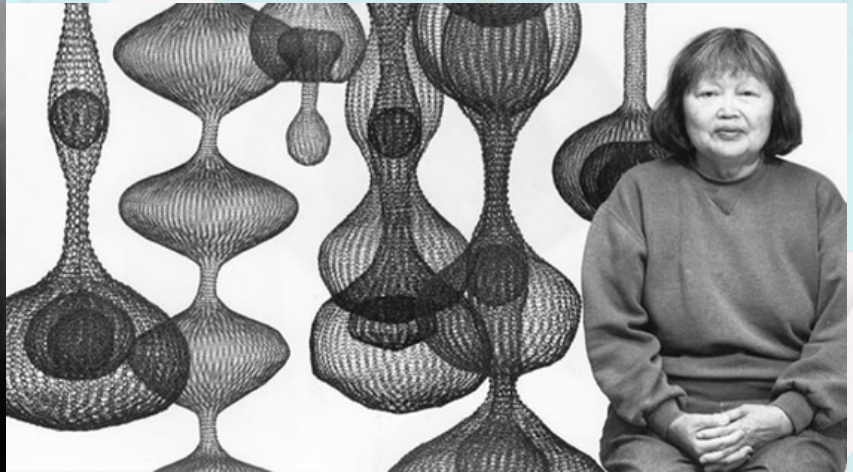
- Tempera paint
- Brushes
- Thick paper precut into squares
- Thinner paper for cutting into circles
- Pencils
- Rulers
- Glue
- A square and a circle template
- Cups of water
- Paper towels or newspaper

Instructions

1. Lead a discussion about mandalas with the students. There are resources included at the end of the lesson to guide and enhance your conversation. This can be a sensitive topic as there are religious and cultural factors involved.
2. Next, share the work of Ruth Asawa and Prasun Balasubramaniam (included in this lesson.)
3. Pass out paint, brushes, square pieces of paper, pencils, and rulers to each student. The templates, cups of water, glue, and paper towels/newspaper can be shared by a few students if needed.
4. Have students fold their square piece of paper into quarters. Then fold again into eighths.
5. Using the circle templates, or tracing a different circular item, students will cut out 6 even circles of a different piece of paper.
6. Arrange circles on the square paper like the following directions on a compass: north, south, northeast, southeast, northwest, and southwest. This should create a symmetrical design. Glue them in place to keep the symmetry.
7. Using the primary colors, have students paint three of the circles; one red, one blue, and one yellow.
8. Next, have the students mix their secondary colors; green, purple, and orange, and paint the remaining circles with one color each.
9. The middle of the page will remain a white circle. Students will practice adding white and black paint to the colors they mixed to tint and shade them and create more variety for their background.
10. Students can fill in the background any way they would like.

Optional: review complimentary and analogous colors for design inspiration. Paper towels and newspaper can create texture on wet paint as well.

Meet the Artist: Ruth Asawa



Ruth Asawa was born in 1926 in California, the fourth of seven children. Her parents were both Japanese immigrants, and the family faced years of discrimination before her father was arrested by the FBI in 1942. The Asawa's were sent to an internment camp in Arkansas where Ruth stayed until she graduated high school. She made several attempts to go to college for art, but the racism she was met with forced her to leave for San Francisco in 1950. She hoped the city would be more welcoming and allow her to continue making art professionally. While working on her art career, she also had six children by 1959, creating new pieces while they slept. By the 1960's, Ruth had exhibited her work in multiple museums and was becoming more vocal about her social and political views. Her passion also led her to build a public high school for the arts, which was renamed the Ruth Asawa San Francisco School of the Arts in 2010.

Her art explores pattern, repetition, and the motif of meandering. She used a variety of media to create her abstract forms like wire, paint, and pencil, but is mainly known for her looped wire sculptures.

“Sculpture is like farming, If you just keep at it, you can get quite a lot done.”- Ruth Asawa

Image Source: <https://ruthasawa.com/>

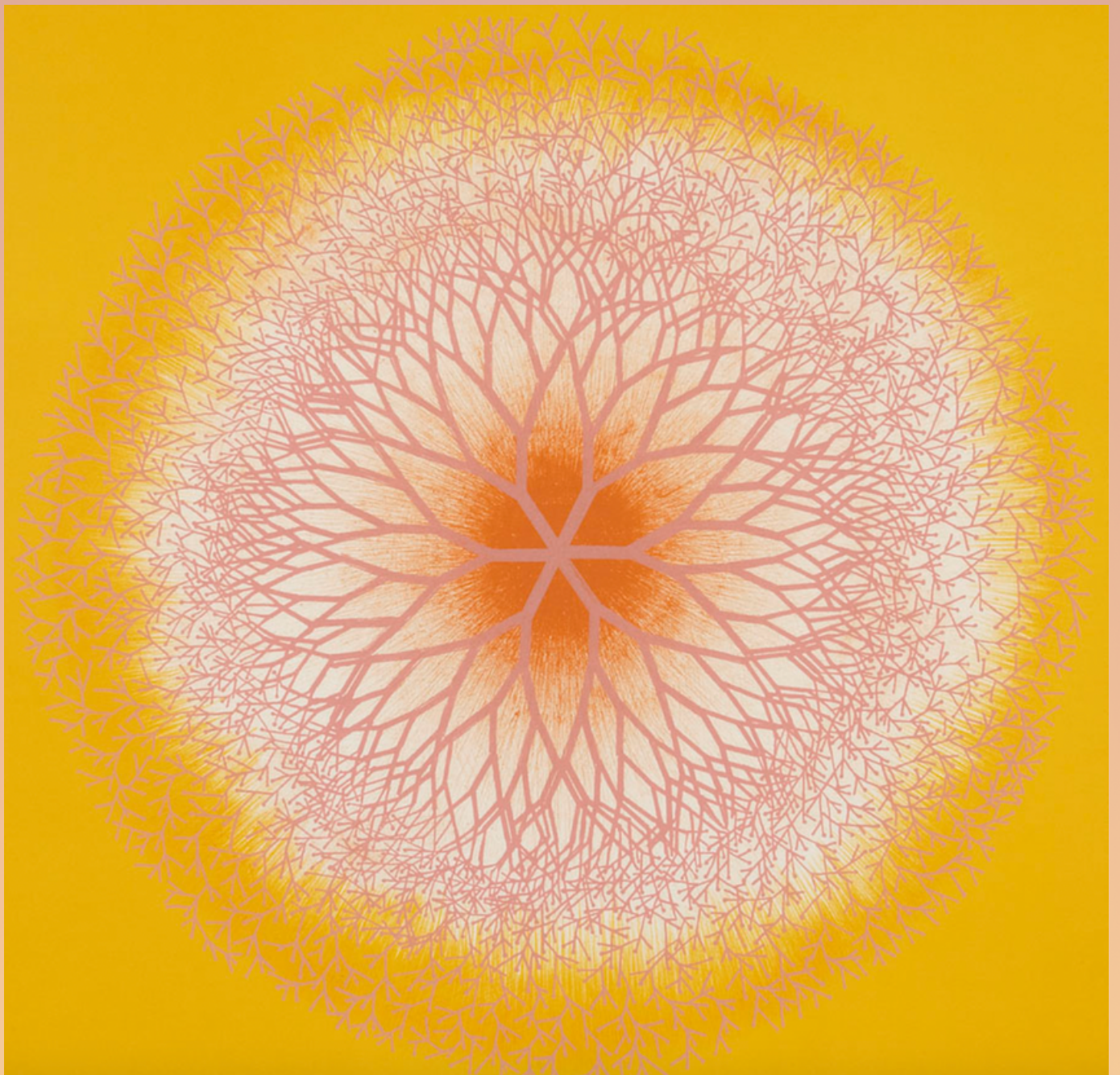


Image Source: <https://ruthasawa.com/>

Meet the Artist: Prasun Balasubramaniam



Prasun Balasubramaniam is an artist, educator, and entrepreneur who specializes in mandala drawing. She is based in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu in southern India and began taking teaching workshops in 2016. Having researched mandalas for several years, Prasun used the meditative art form to help combat her depression and escape the stress of daily life. She currently has her business, Prasun Fine Arts, and creates customized art for logos, tattoos, private commissions, and holds workshops to share her skills.



Image Source: <https://www.instagram.com/prasunfinearts/?hl=en>

What is a mandala?

Mandala is a Sanskrit word meaning "circle" and is used in Hindu and Buddhist practices. It is a symbolic diagram that is used during meditation, worship, or to perform sacred rites. The mandala serves as a representation of the universe, and one is meant to mentally "enter" and "proceed" towards the center. Mandalas can be painted onto cloth or paper, drawn on prepared ground with rice or colored threads, or even made of stone or cast in bronze.

The details that go into the design can vary based on the culture or purpose of the mandala. They often include concentric circles or triangles, and are bordered with symbols of fire, diamonds, graveyards, and lotus leaves which all offer different meanings.

The making of a mandala is a sacred and spiritual practice, and some practices destroy the mandala after it is finished to represent the impermanence of things in life. Even the colors used to create the design have different meanings based on what the artist's intentions are.

Below is a video of Tibetan monks creating a sand mandala and then destroying it:



<https://youtu.be/GzSi5sbSfZc>

Sources:

Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2023, February 9). mandala. Encyclopedia Britannica.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/mandala-diagram>

Here is what you don't know about mandala meaning. (2019, January 21). East Asian Cultures.

<https://east-asian-cultures.com/mandala-meaning/>



Mandala from the collection of the British Museum, London

Image Source: Britannica

Reflection

1. What are some of the ways different cultures use Mandalas?
2. What did you learn about dividing your paper, drawing your lines, and using the circle templates? Why is this division so important?
3. List as many of the different kinds of colors or color terms that we used today that you can remember. Why are they named what they are named?

Learning and State Standards

Fulfills [Washington State Arts Learning Standards](#):

- **VA:Cr1.1.5** (Combine ideas to generate an innovative idea for art-making)
- **VA:Cr2.1.5** (Experiment and develop skills in multiple art-making techniques and approaches through practice)
- **VA:Re9.1.5** (Recognize differences in criteria used to evaluate works of art depending on styles, genres, and media as well as historical and cultural contexts)
- **VA:Cn11.1.5** (Identify how art is used to inform or change beliefs, values, or behaviors of an individual or society)