

Shape Collages: Inspired by Jacob Lawrence's *The Shoemaker*

A HANDS-ON ART ACTIVITY
DESIGNED BY LYNN DENADEL



Example by Lynn Prewitt

Description

This lesson focuses on geometric shapes and how they can be used to combine STEM principles with art. Children will explore Jacob Lawrence's painting, *The Shoemaker*, as a model of how shapes can be used for this purpose.

Materials

- Construction paper in assorted colors
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Thick white paper or card stock for the background
- Image from the painting *The Shoemaker* by Jacob Lawrence
- Optional: Book *Mouse Shapes* by Ellen Stoll Walsh
- Optional: Precut construction paper in geometric shapes

Optional opener:

Read a book about shapes to the class, such as *Mouse Shapes* by Ellen Stoll Walsh. [Click here for a read-aloud video of Mouse Shapes.](#)

Instructions

- 1)** Show students *The Shoemaker* painting by Jacob Lawrence and facilitate VTS (Visual Thinking Strategies) with the students. You may wish to share some of his biography (included at the end of this lesson).
 - VTS is an inquiry-based method of facilitating discussion. Tips and resources on VTS are included at the end of this lesson. At the end of this session, students may need a break before starting step #2.
- 2)** Looking at the piece of artwork again, ask students to identify all of the different shapes that they see in the painting. This will give the students a chance to review previous knowledge of shapes and will allow the teacher to recognize what students know and what needs to be taught/reviewed.
- 3)** Lead a discussion about where students can see these shapes in other subjects and real life.
 - Make connections between the arts and other subjects to show the students how shapes can work in different environments, such as animals, clothing, street signs, elements of buildings, etc.
- 4)** Pass out card stock, construction paper and scissors. Students will then cut out shapes or use precut shapes to create their own art pieces, based on the discussion in Step 3.
- 5)** Once students have the pieces arranged the way they want them, they can glue them into place using the glue sticks.
- 6)** Allow students to present their art and move on to the closure/reflection.

Closure/Reflection Activity

Bring students together to discuss:

- What felt successful to you in this activity?
- What difficulties did you have?
- What worked well? If you were going to do this again, what would you do differently?
- When might you use this technique again?



Relevant Vocabulary

- ✓ Shapes
- ✓ Square
- ✓ Circle
- ✓ Rectangle
- ✓ Oval
- ✓ Hexagon

Learning and State Standards

Fulfills **Washington State Arts Learning Standards:**

- **VA:Cr3.1.2** (Discuss and reflect with peers about choices made in creating artwork)
- **VACr2.2.2** (Demonstrate safe procedures for using and cleaning art tools, equipment, and studio spaces)
- **VA:Re9.1.2** (Use learned art vocabulary to express preferences about artwork)

About the Artist: Jacob Lawrence



Portrait of Lawrence
Source:
Smithsonian American
Art Museum

Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000) was an African American painter who specialized in the cubism style. Born in Atlantic City, New Jersey to southern migrants, he spent the majority of his life in New York City. His art was inspired by the Harlem Renaissance and depicted African-American life with vivid color. He moved to Seattle, Washington in 1970 and taught at the University of Washington until 1983. He is most famous for his series of paintings known as the *Migration Series*. This series of paintings depicts the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural south to the urbanized north in the United States.



**"When the subject is strong, simplicity is the only way to treat it."
-Jacob Lawrence**

Visual Thinking Strategies

MoNA's Education programs utilize Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), which is a researched-based teaching method that promotes aesthetic development, including critical thinking and communication skills. Here in the MoNA, we use VTS to engage students and general visitors with art, encouraging them to observe closely, think critically and discuss respectfully; however, VTS can be effectively used across curricula. This approach teaches its participants how to take the time to observe closely, describe what they see in detail and provide evidence for their observations. Students learn that their reflections and thoughts are valued and appreciated in this inclusive teaching method.

In order to facilitate a VTS discussion, you first encourage viewers to take a quiet moment to observe the work you are going to explore. Then you ask the following questions and paraphrase the responses without adding any of your own judgements. You can insert additional vocabulary and point to specific parts of the artwork.

What's going on in this picture?
What do you see that makes you say that...?
What more can you find?

Visual Thinking Strategy Links

If you are interested in learning more about VTS, [here is their website](#). If you already know and love VTS, but want help finding great images to VTS in your classroom, here is a [fantastic gallery](#). You can also visit this website for additional resources: <https://www.monamuseum.org/resources-for-educators>



**Jacob Lawrence, *The Shoemaker*
1945, Watercolor and gouache on paper**

Image source: [Metmuseum.org](https://www.metmuseum.org)