# MoNA
## Museum of Northwest Art

**Age**: Fourth Grade
**Lesson Duration**: Two Hours
**Subjects**: English, Language Arts & Art History

# The Art of the Alphabet

A HANDS-ON ART ACTIVITY DESIGNED BY MONA EDUCATORS



*Above: Student Example*
*Image Source: Museum of Northwest Art*

## Materials

- *Once Emerged from the Gray of Night* by Paul Klee and excerpt from *Designing Type* by Karen Cheng (included at the end of this lesson)
- Video on acrostic poems
- Drawing paper
- Drawing pencils (2H and 6B)
- Chalk pastels
- Erasers
- Cotton swabs
- Rulers
- Fixative spray
- Sample sans-serif block lettering alphabet (included)

## Description

During this activity, students will learn about acrostic poetry. Taking inspiration from Paul Klee and the typography work of Karen Cheng, students will design their own acrostic poems in color-filled blocks using sans serif typography styles.

# Instructions

**1)** Introduce students to the lesson by showing them <u>the attached video on acrostic poems.</u>

**2)** Show students *Once Emerged from the Gray of Night* by Paul Klee and the excerpt from *Designing Type* by Karen Cheng and use Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) techniques to talk more about the work. VTS is an inquiry-based method of facilitating discussion. Tips and resources on VTS are included at the end of this lesson.

- Look at how technical the rules for typography are. How does this show up in your own handwriting?
- Be sure to identify the poem hidden in the colored blocks of Paul Klee's painting.
- Artist biography information is included about both artists at the end of this lesson.

**3)** Instruct students to create their own acrostic poems. They will use these in the next steps as the basis for their work.

**4)** Create a grid with 1 x 1" squares, large enough for the text (one letter per square), using a 2H pencil and ruler.

**5)** Carefully have students add their poems (or a portion of them) to the grid one letter at a time, using 2H pencil, so that each letter completely fills each square.

- Be sure to use all capital letters.
- Some blank squares may be filled in with symbols.

**6)** When lettering is complete, go over it with the 6B pencil to darken the lettering.

**7)** Use chalk pastels to fill in the shapes created by the letters.

- Use more than one color per square. Blank squares may be filled with a single color.
- Evenly distribute color throughout the grid to achieve balance in the composition.

**8)** Use cotton swabs to blend colors and smudge to completely fill in shapes.

**9)** When drawing is complete, smudge marks may be erased from edges of the paper.

**10)** Using the ruler and 6B pencil, trace over the outer border of the grid to create a frame.

**11)** An instructor or adult aide will spray the pastel drawing with fixative to set the drawing. This should be done outdoors and away from students.

**12)** When students are finished with their pieces, allow time for them to share their poems with the class.

# Vocabulary

✓ Type

✓ Type case

✓ Typography

✓ Uppercase

✓ Lowercase

✓ Font

✓ Serif

✓ Sans serif

✓ Fixative

## Learning and State Standards

Fulfills **Washington State Arts Learning Standards**:

- **VA:Cr2.1.4** (Explore and invent art-making techniques and approaches)
- **VA:Cr2.2.4** (When making works of art, utilize and care for materials, tools, and equipment in a manner that prevents danger to oneself and others)
- **VA:Re9.1.4** (Apply one set of criteria to evaluate more than one work of art)

# Sans Serif Alphabet Template

Image Source: Delicious Themes

ABCDEFGHIJKLM
NOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklm
nopqrstuvwxyz
0123456789!?#

# Visual Thinking Strategies

MoNA's Education programs utilize Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), which is a research-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...?*
> *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 use in your classroom, here is a fantastic gallery. You can also visit this website for additional resources: www.monamuseum.org/resources-for-educators

# About the Artist:
# Karen Cheng



*Karen Cheng*
*Image Credit: University of Washington*

Karen Cheng is a graphic designer and professor of visual communication and design at the University of Washington. Originally trained as an engineer, Cheng found her passion for design during an engineering internship. She then attended the University of Cincinnati where she obtained her masters degree, and eventually moved on to teaching at the University of Washington. Karen Cheng is the author of *Designing Type*, a comprehensive guide to designing letters. This book has been translated into many languages and is regarded as one of the top typography books in the field.

## "I THINK IT'S EASY AS A DESIGNER TO GET CAUGHT UP IN YOUR OWN THINKING, IDEAS AND EMOTIONS."
### -KAREN CHENG

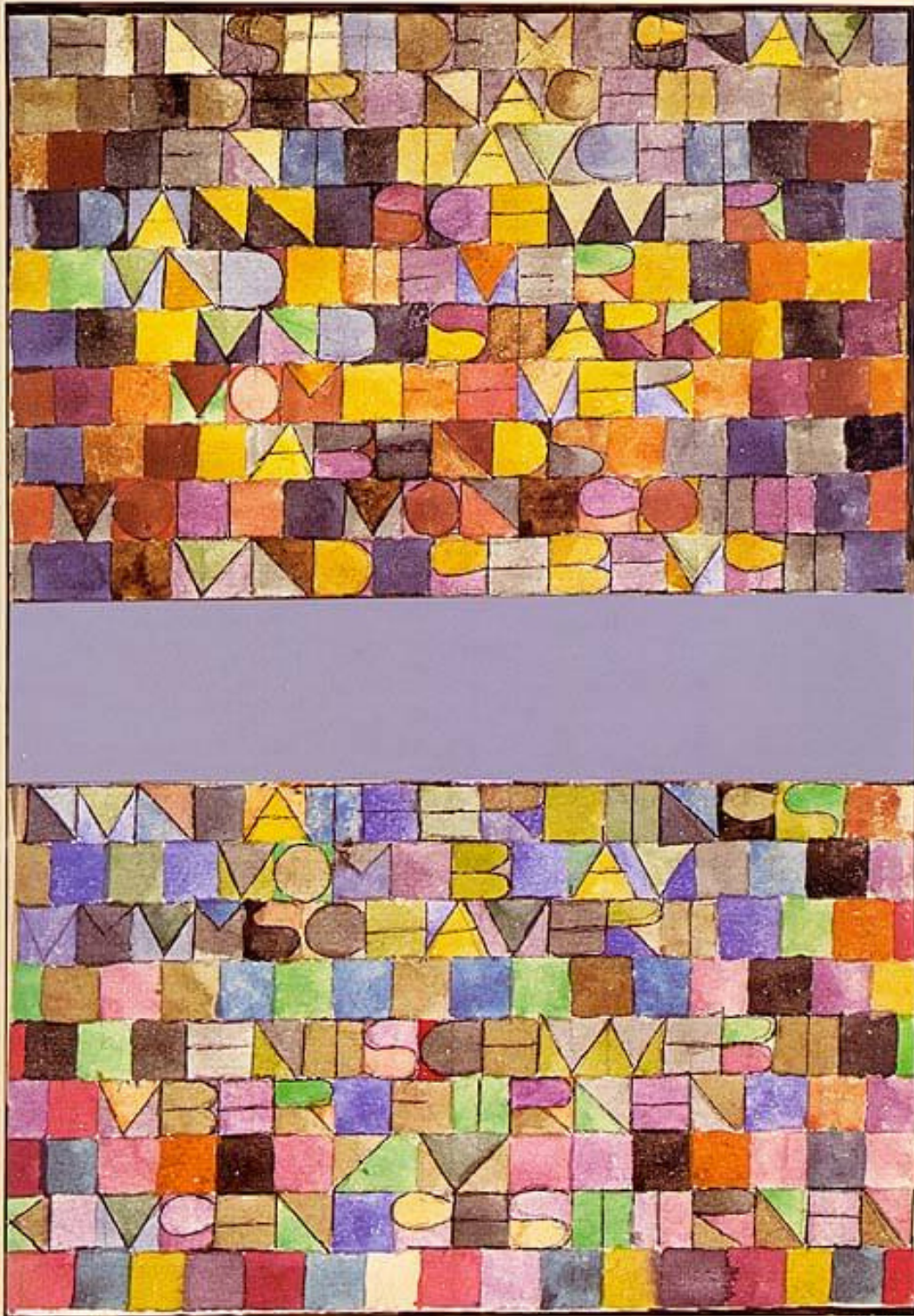# About the Artist: Paul Klee



Paul Klee
Image Source: Wikipedia

Paul Klee (1879-1940) was a German artist. Born in Switzerland, he began his art training at the age of 19 in Munich, Germany. He is best known for his unique style, which spanned expressionism, cubism, and surrealism. Often, these styles were accompanied by childlike motifs, such as stick figures, faces, and quilts of color.

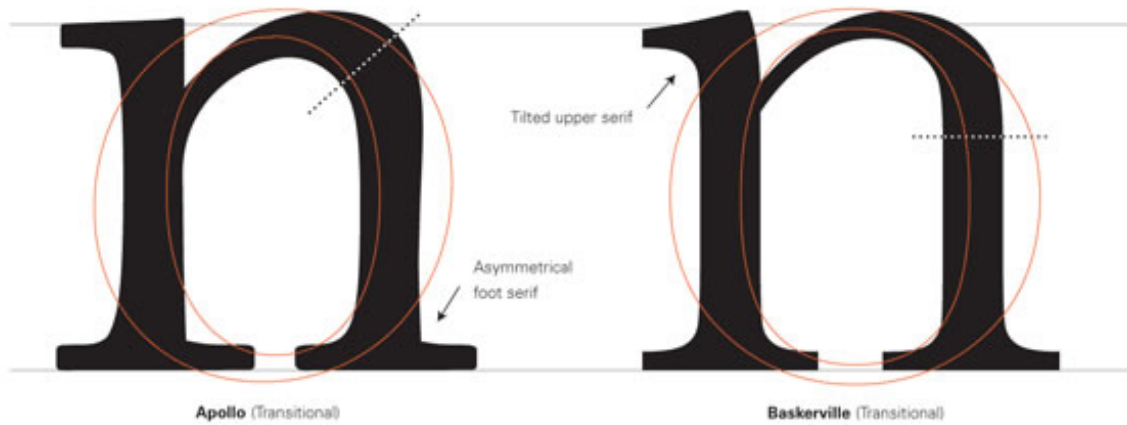"ART DOES NOT REPRODUCE WHAT WE SEE; RATHER, IT MAKES US SEE."
-PAUL KLEE

*Once Emerged from the Gray of Night*, Paul Klee
Image Source: www.paulklee.net

Tilted upper serif

Asymmetrical foot serif

**Apollo** (Transitional)

**Baskerville** (Transitional)

For even colour, the counter of the n must be narrower than the counter of the o.
The maximum stroke width can occur at 2 o'clock (oblique axis) or 3 o'clock (vertical axis).

h counter slightly wider than n counter

n form condensed within m

u serifs point left

u bowl deeper at left and higher at right

First shoulder thinner than second

Stroke thinned at join

**Centennial**
(Slab Serif)

**Rockwell**
(Slab Serif)

Half serifs on n and m
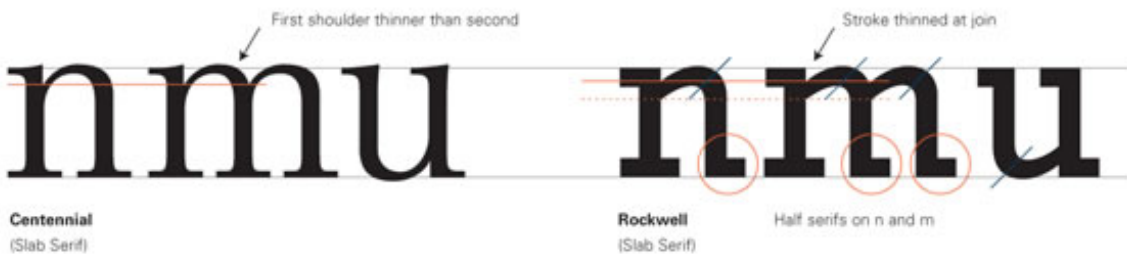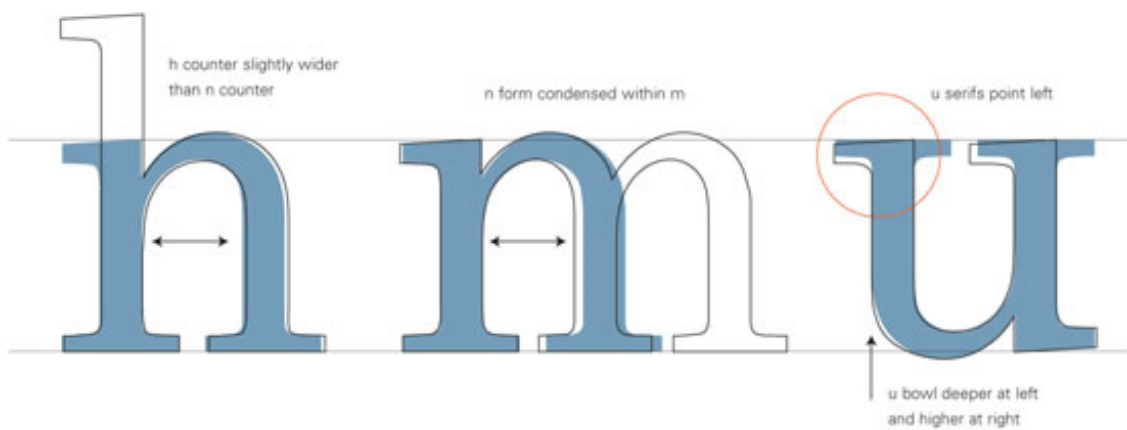
Excerpt from *Designing Type,* Karen Cheng
Image Source: Yale University Press