

FILTERS:

- **Grade Level (range):** Grades 6-8; Grades 9-12
- **Subject Area:** Arts
- **Themes:** Color, Line, & Shape; Narrative & Storytelling
- **Prism.K12 Strategy:** Identify, Express, Synthesize

HOVER:

Lesson Plan title: From Representational to Abstract: The Art of Alma Thomas

Specific grade levels (not a range): 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

LESSON PLAN PAGE**Top Banner Image:**

<https://i0.wp.com/www.culturetype.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/alma-thomas-g199420262.jpg?ssl=1>

Lesson Plan Title: From Representational to Abstract: The Art of Alma Thomas

Lesson Plan Overview:

Alma Thomas—a Black artist and teacher from Washington, DC— began her career creating representational art, but later in her career, her art became more abstract. Thomas loved to depict the natural world and current events in her art. In this lesson, students will:

- Understand the different artistic styles that Alma Thomas used in her artwork, specifically representational and abstract art
- Explore some characteristics of representational and abstract art
- Create their own two-part artworks using characteristics of representational and abstract art

To expand your students' knowledge of other types of artistic styles Alma Thomas used, have your students try out the lesson [Alma Thomas and Expressionism](#).

Materials:

- Copies of [Alma Thomas: Artistic Evolution Art Guide](#)
- Copies of [Alma Thomas's Representational Art Guide](#)
- Copies of [What is Abstractionism?](#) Guide
- Copies of [Alma Thomas's Abstract Art Guide](#)
- Paper
- Paint, markers, crayons, colored pencils, watercolor
- Water in cups for watercolor and paint
- Pencils

Part 1: Exploring the Art of Alma Thomas

Introduce:

- Share with students that today they will learn about Alma Thomas, a Black artist and teacher from Washington, DC. Specifically, they will learn about how her art changed over time.
- As a whole class, give students the [Alma Thomas: Artistic Evolution Art Guide](#). Students will have the opportunity to jot down their thoughts to the questions and then they should discuss their responses to the questions as a whole class.

Part 2: What is Representational Art?

Reflect

- Explain to students that they can see from the three paintings that Alma Thomas moved between different types of artistic styles over the course of her career. Some of her earlier works were more representational.
- Share the [Alma Thomas's Representational Art Guide](#). In pairs, students should jot down what they notice about the artwork.
- Students should SYNTHESIZE their observations from the Art Guide to reach an understanding of **representational**. Discuss:
 - What do you think **representational** means based on the artwork we just looked at?
- Remind students that Alma Thomas's artwork changed over time and that eventually her artwork became more abstract in nature.

Part 3: What is Abstractionism?

Explore

- Have students watch this [short video](#) about abstractionism.
 - As they're watching, they should answer the questions on the [What is Abstractionism?](#) Guide.
 - Have students share responses to the questions on the guide as a part of a whole class discussion.
- In partners, have students study the artwork on the [Alma Thomas's Abstract Art guide](#) and answer the questions.
- As a whole class, discuss:
 - From your study of Alma Thomas's representational art and abstract art, what are the main differences you noticed about the works of art?
 - In what ways were the artworks similar?
 - What were some consistent themes you noticed in Alma Thomas's paintings across artistic styles?
 - With which piece did you connect the most? Why?

Part 4: From Representation to Abstraction

Express:

- Have students create a two-piece series of the same object from nature, using materials such as paint, markers, crayons, colored pencils, and/or watercolor.
 - The first artwork in the series should demonstrate characteristics of representational art.
 - The second artwork in the series should depict characteristics of abstract art.

Reflect:

- In a written or verbal reflection, students should describe how they decided to change their art across the two pieces and respond to the following questions:
 - What choices did you make to change the presentation of the object across the different artistic styles?
 - How did you feel as you made each piece?
 - Which artistic style did you enjoy the most? Why?
 - Which artistic style was most challenging to you? Why?
 - Based on your experiences, why do you think Alma Thomas may have shifted her artistic style over time?
 - How do these shifts in style change the meaning behind what you chose to paint?

Additional Images:

<https://i0.wp.com/www.culturetype.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/alma-thomas-g199420262.jpg?ssl=1>

https://s3.amazonaws.com/pastperfectonline/images/museum_94/012/g19942028.jpg

<http://www.artnet.com/WebServices/images/I100149IldZjUFFgUNECfDrCWvaHBOcjGE/alma-thomas-babbling-brook-and-whistling-poplar-trees-symphony.jpg>

FOR VISUAL CONTEXT (listed in the same order as above)

- **Thomas. *Vase with Flowers and Bibelot*:** Thomas's art evolved over the course of her career, moving from representational art to abstract art. In this painting, we see an example of Thomas's representational art. Thomas captures the delicacy of the flower petals and the deep strength and health of the dark green leaves. She captures the light and shadowing on the vase, which creates an almost exact depiction of what we might see in real life if we were looking at a vase of pink flowers. While Thomas started her career painting in this way, she eventually decided that she wanted to paint more abstractly so that she could better express the emotional experience of the natural world that she loved so much.
- **Thomas. *Sketch for March On Washington*:** Thomas spent much of her career painting the beauty of the world. For Thomas, she found beauty in nature, science, and

even current events. In this painting, Thomas, who grew up and lived in Washington, DC, joined the thousands of men and women who participated in the 1964 March on Washington, a demonstration for racial equality and civil rights. Inspired by this event and finding the beauty in people coming together to fight for equal rights, Thomas depicted the historic event. In this painting, we can see the transition Thomas made from representational art to more abstract art. While it is somewhat clear that she's depicting a march, it is much more abstract because the figures are less formed and more interpretive of the feeling of the experience.

- **Thomas. *Babbling Brook and Whistling Poplar Tree Symphony*:** Later in her career, Thomas decided she wanted to try something completely new with her art. Shifting from representational art to abstract art, in this painting, we see an example of the artwork that Thomas is most known for. Thomas uses her iconic mosaic-like pattern and bold blue color to evoke the whimsical and lyrical elements of nature. Adapting due to health issues and limited mobility, she strays away from her previously orderly mosaic-like patterns within approximately 1-inch bands, and instead shifts to a more free-form use of her mosaic style.

EXPANDABLE FIELD 1 - Context:

Alma Thomas, a Black artist and teacher from Washington, DC, became an artist later in her life. At the age of 30, she enrolled in Howard University and studied home economics and costume design. Eventually, she decided to major in Fine Arts and became the first graduate of Howard University's new Art Department. Thomas created ceramic and plaster sculptures as well as marionettes.

Much of her early art was representational in nature. Then, her perspective shifted. Thomas once said, "I was doing representational painting. But I wasn't happy with that, ever. I watched other people painting abstractly, and I just kept thinking about it, turning it over and over in my mind." Her paintings became more abstract and often captured the natural world and current events such as the March on Washington and space exploration.

Over time, Thomas wanted to create something completely different and, in her 70s, she began painting in a completely new way. Her new style, which featured bright, vibrant colors and mosaic-like patterns, was even more abstract, and it was this body of art for which she is most known today.

EXPANDABLE FIELD 2 - Keywords:

- **Abstract art:** A style of art that does not attempt to represent the real world as is.
- **Representational art:** Artwork that clearly depicts real objects. The artist represents something that is real and the audience is able to easily recognize the objects or figures in the artwork.