

NORTON SIMON MUSEUM

STUDENT PREPARATORY PACKET, GRADES K–4

CREATIVE PLAY

About the Norton Simon Museum

The Norton Simon Museum is known as one of the world’s most remarkable private art collections. Seven centuries of European art dating from the Renaissance to the 20th century are on permanent display, including Old Master paintings by Raphael, Rubens, Zurbarán, Rembrandt, Goya and Vigée-LeBrun. The Museum also boasts a celebrated Impressionist and Postimpressionist collection—with paintings by Manet, Degas, Cézanne, Monet, Morisot and Van Gogh—as well as 20th-century works by Matisse, Brancusi, Picasso and Hepworth. Moreover, the Museum has one of the premier collections of South and Southeast Asian art in the country, spanning a period of 2,000 years.

Curriculum Materials

The following curriculum materials are intended to help introduce your students to art and art history. These materials include discussion questions, activities and vocabulary guides for a selection of artworks. You may also find it helpful to visit our [website](#), where you can find more activities, tools for talking about art with your students, videos and more information about the collection.

Lesson Overview

Each lesson provides brief background information about the artwork and artist, followed by questions that promote observation and discussion. Suggested classroom activities offer students the opportunity to explore the collection through writing and art-making projects.

Learning Objectives

Students are encouraged to:

- *take time to look closely*
- *describe what they see*
- *connect the visual arts with historical periods and religious traditions*
- *create original artworks focusing on themes and formal elements of art found in works from the Norton Simon Museum*

Curriculum Standards

The materials address content standards for California public schools in visual arts, history–social science and Common Core English-language arts for grades 5–12.

411 West Colorado Boulevard, Pasadena, California 91105

phone: 626.449.6840 e-mail: educate@nortonsimon.org www.nortonsimon.org



INTRODUCTION: CREATIVE PLAY

Creativity and art are fundamental to the growth of the whole child. In the words of psychology professor and writer Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, “When we are involved in [creativity], we feel that we are living more fully than during the rest of life.” Creative play supports physical and cognitive development through the use of gross and fine motor skills and problem-solving. It encourages social and emotional development by providing an outlet for children to express and cope with their own feelings as well as establish relationships with others. Creative play allows children freedom of expression, and it gives them the opportunity to gain independence by making choices.

Defined as play that satisfies the need for self-expression, creative play means using one’s imagination to think of a familiar object in a new way—for instance, taking a flat piece of paper and transforming it into a remarkable sculpture—or converting a cardboard box into an elaborate diorama. [Paul Klee](#) wanted to see and express the world around him in a new way, and he was inspired by the simplicity and honesty in the artwork of children; he even once copied one of his son Felix’s artworks into his own painting. [Pablo Picasso](#) also said, “It took me four years to paint like [Raphael](#), but a lifetime to paint like a child.”

Teachers can inspire creativity in the classroom by designing an environment that sparks curiosity and wonder. The classroom should have spaces in which students can experiment with and explore a variety of materials, spaces in which students can work independently or choose to collaborate. By filling the classroom with images of artwork by diverse artists that reflect students’ interests, and by displaying students’ own artworks and inviting them to take turns being the “[curator](#)” in arranging these works, teachers can empower students with spaces designed to foster creative play.

The artworks in this curriculum explore creative play through color, imagination and drama. Through these artworks and the related activities in this packet, students will be encouraged to be curious, experiment and express themselves, but most of all *play*.

Open Green

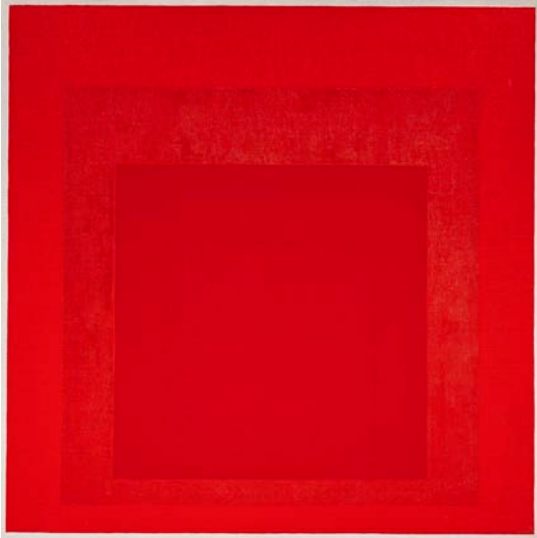
1923

Vasily Kandinsky (Russian, 1866–1944)

oil on canvas

38¼ x 38¼ in. (97.2 x 97.2 cm)

The Norton Simon Foundation



***Homage to the Square/Red Series,
Untitled II***

1968

Josef Albers (American, 1888–1976)

Oil on masonite

32 x 32 in. (81.3 x 81.3 cm)

Norton Simon Museum, Gift of the Artist

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Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Color Play

Josef Albers was an observer of the world around him. He noticed things that other people overlooked, like the shape of a football stadium, the way a red roof points into the sky or the way that the color of tea darkens in a glass. He was also an art teacher who was fascinated by colors and how they interact. He created over a thousand works in his *Homage to the Square* series, in which colored squares seem to overlap or sink into each other, depending on the color.

A Closer Look at *Homage to the Square*

- Albers was interested in how colors appear to change, depending on their surroundings. Here he explores the color red by painting different sizes of nested squares in different shades of red. This approach plays with how the viewer sees the painting. It could look like a stack of different-sized blocks, one on top of the other, or the squares can seem to sink into each other like a tunnel, into the painting.
- For his *Homage to the Square* paintings, Albers painted flat on a table, squeezing paint directly from the tube onto a board and spreading the paint evenly using a **palette knife**.

Discussion Questions

- Albers once said that if you say the word “red,” and there are 50 people listening, the 50 people will each be thinking of a different kind of red—from dark like a cherry to bright like a tomato. By using different shades or intensities of red, he invites us to spend more time thinking about how we see and think of the color red. What words would you use to describe the reds in *Homage to the Square*?
- How many squares do you see in the painting?

Activity

- Gather three pieces of paper in different colors (for example, red, yellow and blue). Then cut out two small squares from one of the sheets (red). Glue the square (red) in the middle of each of the two other sheets (yellow and blue). What do you notice about the color of the square? Does the color of the square look lighter or darker, depending on the background color? Explore adding to your **collages** with shapes in other colors, and notice if the same colors change in appearance, depending on their background.
- Learn how colors can express mood by creating a collage with different colors of paper:

[Color Expressions Art-Making Activity.](#)

Vocabulary

Collage: an artwork made of different materials glued to a surface.

Homage: special honor or respect given to something or someone.

Observer: a person who watches or pays attention to something.

Palette Knife: a tool with a wooden handle and flexible metal blade that is used by artists to mix or apply paint.



Guardian Lion

12th century

Cambodia: Angkor period

Sandstone

42 x 21½ x 28 in. (106.7 x 54.6 x 71.1 cm)

Norton Simon Art Foundation, from the Estate of Jennifer Jones Simon

Imaginary Play

Strength, royalty and courage are just some of the traits associated with lions. Lions were also considered to be personal symbols of the **Khmer** kings. Sculptures of **stylized** lions were used to guard the staircases and terraces of temples, and they offered protection by warding off evil. Large temple complexes like [Angkor Wat](#) would have had hundreds of these sculptures. Because lions are not native to Cambodia, artists drew from their imaginations to create images of these frightful creatures.



A Closer Look at Guardian Lion

- Ready to spring into action, *Guardian Lion* sits in an alert position with bulging eyes and its mouth wide open to reveal sharp teeth. Its tail curves upward along its back.
- Artists used **chisels** to carve details like its patterned chest, mane and fanciful moustache into stone.

Discussion Questions

- How would you compare the image of *Guardian Lion* with this image of a real [lion](#)? What is similar? What is different?
- Imagine that you are the artist who created *Guardian Lion*. Take a close look at your sculpture. If you could add details to make the sculpture even more frightening, what would you add? How would you emphasize other traits of a lion?

Activity

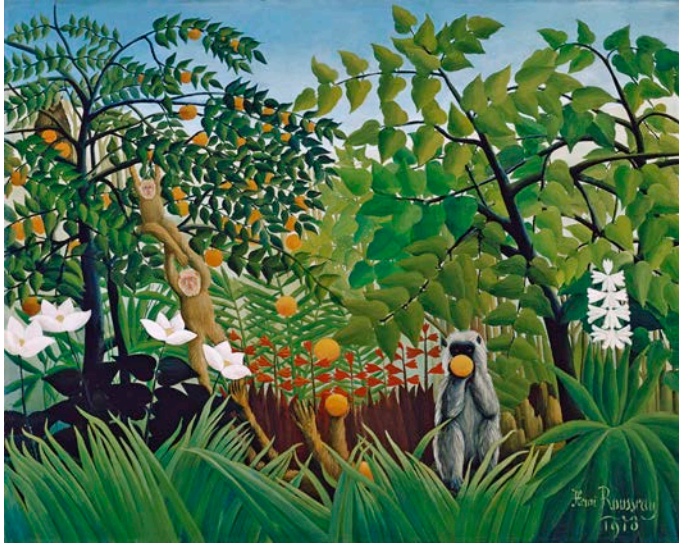
- Imitate the pose of *Guardian Lion* and imagine moving like him. How would you move? Then, roar like the *Guardian Lion*. How would you roar? Finally, pounce like the *Guardian Lion*. How would you pounce?

Vocabulary

Chisel: a long-bladed tool that is struck with a hammer or mallet to carve hard surfaces like stone.

Khmer Empire: now known as Cambodia, the Khmer Empire was once the most powerful empire in Southeast Asia. It ruled over what is now Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. The Angkor period, which lasted from 802 to 1463, is considered the most important era in Khmer history.

Stylized: to represent or design a subject in a non-natural manner.



Exotic Landscape

1910

Henri Rousseau (French, 1844-1910)

Oil on canvas

51¼ x 64 in. (130.2 x 162.6 cm)

The Norton Simon Foundation

Imaginary Play

Henri Rousseau, a self-taught artist, created paintings of fantastical jungles and wild animals, but he never left France or saw an actual jungle. Instead, he was inspired by his visits to botanical gardens, the Paris zoo, the dioramas he saw at the Paris Natural History Museum and images from books and magazines. Critics found Rousseau's paintings shocking because they showed his lack of training. They weren't **realistic** like the artworks they were used to seeing. But artists like [Pablo Picasso](#) championed Rousseau and admired his work for this very reason.

A Closer Look at Exotic Landscape

- Rather than a **realistic** picture that gives a sense of depth, space and shadow, Rousseau's imaginary scene of monkeys swinging from a tree, playing and eating fruit in a lush, tropical **landscape** is relatively flat, like a theater set or a collage.
- Rousseau painted using crisp lines defining each shape of leaf, flower and animal to create **patterns** that fill the scene.

Discussion Questions

- If you look closely, in the upper left of the painting, a mysterious creature hides behind the branches of a tree. What do you think it is? What is it doing?
- Critics were used to seeing **realistic** paintings like Jacob van Ruisdael's [Three Great Trees in a Mountainous Landscape with a River](#). If you could imagine yourself in Ruisdael's or Rousseau's **landscape**, which would you choose? Why? What would you do there?

Activity

- Use your imagination to piece together images from what you see in your surroundings, books and magazines, and create a painting or drawing of your own extraordinary **landscape**.

Vocabulary

Landscape: the depiction of natural scenery in art.

Pattern: a design in which an element in art is repeated, like line, shape or color.

Realistic: representing a subject accurately or true to life.



Portrait of a Young Noblewoman

1593

Alonso Sánchez Coello (Spanish, 1531/2–1588)

Oil on canvas

48¾ x 39¾ in. (123.8 x 101.0 cm)

Norton Simon Art Foundation, from the Estate of Jennifer Jones Simon

Dramatic Play

Alonso Sánchez Coello specialized in **portraiture**, and he was the favorite **court painter** of King Philip II of Spain. Rather than focusing on the personality of the sitter, portraits of **nobility** displayed their wealth, values and position in society through their elaborate dress. In his paintings, Coello recorded the fashion trends and extravagant costumes of the **nobility** of 16th-century Europe, which featured contrasting fabrics, slashes, embroidery, trims, ruffs, corsets and all kinds of ornamentation.

A Closer Look at *Portrait of a Young Noblewoman*

- Here, we see a 14-year-old **noblewoman** with flowers in her fancifully arranged curly red hair and lavish gown. She wears an open, high-collared white gown with diagonal slits, which reveal slivers of its red lining, with a matching red corseted bodice and skirt, and fitted striped sleeves, all of which appear to be trimmed with gold stitching. A stiff lace collar called a ruff frames her young face atop this elaborate, and heavy, costume.
- With her right hand, she grasps one of several gold and beaded necklaces reaching down to her waist, a reference to her wealth, while her left hand rests on a Bible, a sign of her modesty and faith.

Discussion Questions

- In *Portrait of a Young Noblewoman*, the girl shows her status and faith through her elegant dress and accessories. If you were to have your portrait painted, what qualities would you like to emphasize about yourself? How would you display these qualities in a picture? What belongings would you display around you? What would you wear?
- Imagine wearing these heavy layers of clothing, paired with a starched white collar and heavy waist-length chains around your neck. How would it feel? How would wearing this outfit affect how you ate your meals? How you walked? How you played?

Activity

- Design your very own ruff with intricate designs and accordion folds and imagine yourself living in the 16th century: [Design your own Ruff Activity](#).

Vocabulary

Court Painter: an artist who painted for members of a royal family.

Noblewoman: a woman of high status in society.

Portrait: a painting, photograph or sculpture that represents a particular person.

RELATED READINGS FOR CLASS

Color Play

Monsters Love Colors by Mike Austin

The Color Kittens by Margaret Wise Brown

DIY Stories: *Sky Color*

Imaginary Play

Perfect Square by Michael Hall

This is Sadie by Sara O’Leary and Julie Morstad

DIY Stories: *Ish and Exotic Landscape*

Dramatic Play

Fancy Nancy series by Jane O’Connor and Robin Preiss Glasser

Julian is a Mermaid by Jessica Love

DIY Stories: *Where the Wild Things Are*

Related Coloring Sheets

Vincent van Gogh’s *Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier)*

Henri Rousseau’s *Exotic Landscape*

Alonso Sánchez Coello’s *Portrait of a Young Noblewoman*