



## Abstract Expressionism and Jackson Pollock

**Lesson Description:** This lesson will focus on abstract art, specifically the post-World War II American art movement Abstract Expressionism and the work of Jackson Pollock, an influential artist in that movement. In this lesson, students will experiment with more non-traditional forms of art focused on “expression” over technical accuracy or technique. The focus of this lesson should be creating loose, fluid art which conveys a meaning or emotion in its abstract form.

**Lesson Objective:** In this lesson, students will experiment with different techniques used by abstract artists, especially that of Jackson Pollock. Fluidity and movement in their art should be emphasized, and they should aim to make loose, expressive art instead of art with a more technical and rigid quality

**Art History/Theory Relation:** Abstract Expressionism is an art movement which originated in New York City post-World World II. The various artists involved in this movement had multiple drastically different styles but the main focus of the movement was that of emotional expression and creative, spontaneous art (like the “action paintings” by Jackson Pollock). In fact, this project focuses specifically on Pollock and his “action paintings,” which were made through a “drip technique” which involves pouring paint onto a horizontal canvas. This technique enables painting from all sorts of angles (it was also called “all over painting” for this reason) and defies the typical notion of painting being made on a canvas. Laid horizontally, the canvas could now be painted with the force of Pollock’s whole and thus show a certain sense of movement and fluidity not seen on an easel-bound work. Thus, this was a concept important to abstract expressionism and something that students should try out during this project! William C. Seitz, an American artist and Art historian described the movement best: *“Abstract Expressionists value the organism over the static whole, becoming over being, expression over perfection, vitality over finish, fluctuation over repose, feeling over formulation, the unknown over the known, the veiled over the clear, the individual over society and the inner over the outer.”*



## Materials Needed:

NOTE: All for Art lesson plans are always flexible with materials and students can use whatever they have on hand! We always strive to make art available to everyone, no matter how limited the resources available to them are. Thus, the following list is simply an ideation of possible materials for the above project.

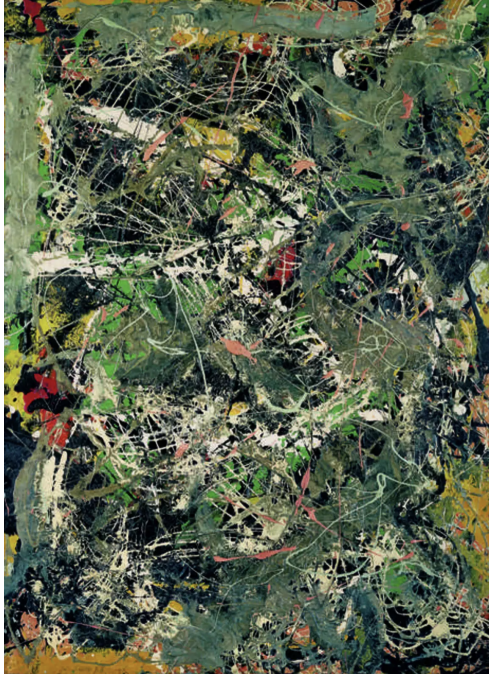
1. Large canvases/paper
  - a. Other drawing surfaces can also be used! Cloth is a cheap, easy alternative (old sheets, etc.).
  - b. This project is most fun when done on a large scale, so if you have access to large paper/canvases, definitely use them! However, if that isn't an option for you, doing it with smaller paper/canvases is still fun!
2. Paint
  - a. Tempera paints are a relatively cheap and easy option for this project!
  - b. Make sure to slightly water down the paints to make splattering and dripping easier.
3. Brushes
4. Suitable clothes/shoes
  - a. This project gets pretty messy, so make sure everyone is wearing the appropriate attire and the project is done in an appropriate space.
5. Any other fun materials that you think the kids can use!

## Step-by-Step Procedure:

1. Prepare materials and make sure everyone is in proper attire for the project!
  - a. Setting up the canvases outside is generally the easiest way to avoid mess.
2. Introduce students to Abstract Expressionism and Jackson Pollock.
  - a. This website provides great background information: [Jackson Pollock | MoMA](#)
  - b. This video shows Pollock himself demonstrating his famous “drip” technique: [Jackson Pollock: Paintings have a life of their own · SFMOMA](#)
  - c. This video will show students how they can emulate Pollock’s style of painting:  
[▶ How to paint like Jackson Pollock – One: Number 31, 1950 – with C...](#)



3. Show them some examples! Here are some of my favorites:



a.

Untitled, 1949



b.

"Alchemy," 1947

- c. This website has many more examples: [Jackson Pollock - 122 Artworks, Bio & Shows on Artsy](#)
4. Have students get started! Give them brushes, paints, etc. and have them try out the drip and splatter techniques.



5. Continuously assess students' work and give feedback! Make sure to emphasize body movement, fluidity, and having fun!
6. Have students share their work at the end!

### **What Students Should Aim to Accomplish with their Final Piece:**

1. To have made an abstract "action painting" which has a sense of motion or fluidity.
2. To have experimented with different drip and splatter techniques in their works.
3. Most importantly, students should have fun and let loose with this piece!