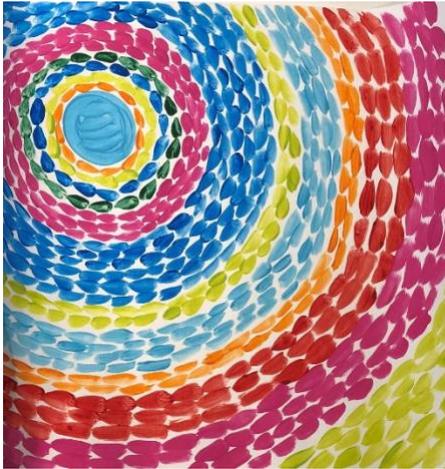


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# Alma Thomas-Inspired Painting: Radial Symmetry



**Grade:** 2nd

**Medium:** Tempera Paint

**Learning Objective:** After learning about the artist Alma Thomas and viewing examples of her work, students will use repeated brushstroke techniques, similar to Thomas', to create a radially symmetrical balanced painting.

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## Elements of Art

**Color:** the visible range of reflected light.

**Primary colors:** the basic colors from which all other colors are mixed: red, yellow, and blue; no other colors can be mixed to make primary colors.

**Secondary Colors:** created by mixing two primary colors: blue & yellow=green, blue & red= violet, and red & yellow= orange.

**Shape:** a two-dimensional (flat) area enclosed by a line. Shapes can be geometric (straight edges, often symmetrical) or organic (curved edges, asymmetrical).

## Principles of Design

**Balance:** the way the elements are arranged so that individual parts appear equally distributed visually throughout the composition. i.e. spread out in a visually interesting way.

-**Radial Symmetry:** a type of balance that is equally symmetrical from the center point throughout. All elements radiate from the center point.

-**Symmetrical/Formal Balance:** exact appearance on opposite sides of a dividing line or plane.

**Pattern:** elements that repeat. In this lesson it is color and the shape of the brushstrokes.

## Additional Vocabulary:

**Brushstroke:** the shape the brush makes when it touches the surface.

**Craftsmanship:** neatness, control of tools. In this lesson it's making careful, repeated brushstrokes.

**Non-representational Art:** a design not intended to be a picture of anything.

**Representational Art:** a picture of something, however simplified.

## **Materials & Supplies**

- 12"x12" white cardstock
- Tempera paint in primary and secondary colors
- Classroom set of size 7 round (not flat) paintbrushes
- Paint pallets (paper plates, or reusable plastic trays)
- Classroom set of water cups
- Images of Thomas' paintings
- Scrap paper for practice
- Simple color wheel
- Paper towels to dab brushes

## **Context (History and/or Artists)**



"Man's highest aspirations come from nature. A world without color would seem dead. Color is life. Light is the mother of color. Light reveals to us the spirit and living soul of the world through colors."—Press Release, Columbus Museum of Arts and Sciences, 1982, for an exhibition entitled *A Life in Art: Alma Thomas 1891–1978*

Alma Thomas retired from teaching art in 1960, after thirty-eight years in Washington, D.C. and she began to paint seriously. In the years that followed, she would come to be regarded as a major painter of the Washington Color Field School. This painting style involved using large fields of solid color. Alma Thomas used large repeated dabs of color, separated by white space in both representational and non-representational ways.



## **Tips & Tricks**

- Paint brush should be “washed and dabbed dry” between colors.
- Start this work from the center and work out, turning the paper as you go.
- Students slowly turn the work either clockwise or counter-clockwise, depending on their handedness: for example, a right-handed student will turn it clockwise so as not to smear brushstrokes just painted.

## **Discussion Points**

What does Alma Thomas's work remind you of? (Small colored pebbles, small tiles/mosaics, colored glass, rainbows, etc.; there are no wrong answers.)

What colors do you see in her work? (Primary & secondary.)

Which paintings show symmetry? Which show radial symmetry?

Which paintings are representational? Which are non-representational?

## **Reflection Point (Assessment of Learning Objectives)**

Students will: create a radially symmetrical balanced painting; view work and use painting techniques of Alma Thomas; use art vocabulary; use good craftsmanship when repeating brushstrokes.

## **Instructions for Lesson**

### **Before students arrive:**

- Post vocabulary words and color wheel on the board.
- Pass out scratch paper and brushes for practicing brushstrokes on.
- Have the paint and water pre-poured in containers for table groups, **don't** hand this out until after your discussion and demo.

1. Go over vocabulary words. When talking about symmetry ask for visual examples in the classroom, from nature or from memory. Use the color wheel to remind them of primary and secondary colors. Don't spend too much time on color. This should be a kind of review.
2. Talk about Alma Thomas and show images of her work. Look for examples of symmetry, primary and secondary colors and representational/non-representational compositions.
3. Demonstrate dipping the brush in the paint, rolling it gently on its side to load it. Advise against 'scooping' paint with the brush, which may result in blobs on the paper. Any extra blobs on the brush can be removed with a paper towel.
4. Demonstrate making different marks with the paint brush without spreading the brush out like a fan. "We use light to medium pressure, if we press too hard the brush fans out and can't hold paint well." As you demonstrate, have students copy with their dry brushes.
  - a. Dots – tip of brush
  - b. Medium dashes – medium pressure (no fans!)
  - c. Long dashes – medium pressure and drag the brush down longer
5. Demonstrate washing your brush in the water, brushing it off on the edge of the container to get out the excess water and dabbing it on the paper towel to dry before changing colors. Have students copy this without paint and water.
6. Hand out the paint, water, and paper towels.
7. Have the students practice making the above 3 type of marks on the practice paper.
8. Have everyone make a tiny dot or circle on their paper, it doesn't have to be in the center.
9. Demonstrate making a repeated brushstroke (short dash) around the circle as you turn the paper. Go slow and avoid smearing.
10. Have students choose their best brushstroke to repeat around the circle. Go slow!
11. When they finish a row, have them wash and dab dry the brush on the paper towel. Choose another color and make another dot type line around the last one. Demonstrate how close to start so as not to leave large white gaps between rows.
12. Continue on in this method until they have four or five rounds.
13. Let them continue painting dotted or dashed circles and mixing colors, repeating colors if they like.
14. As you circulate around the room, hold up examples of students who are using careful strokes and various choices of dots/lines.

15. If time is running short, encourage students to make outer strokes larger.

**Examples:**



**References and Attributions**

Artist Bio from Artsy website: <https://www.artsy.net/artist/alma-thomas> and Smithsonian American Art Museum: <https://americanart.si.edu/artist/alma-thomas-4778>. Drawing for Mindfulness video featuring similar project:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzN6onGTIOY&fbclid=IwAR33nufOxFOqWz6rhMjdHpwENYHrQ4AGjnSxbP2A63JBcliX-U7a34Af6q4>; additional Alma Thomas art lesson video:

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=alma+thomas+art&view=detail&mid=1A67E68A4A0DA57F8B021A67E68A4A0DA57F8B02&FORM=VIRE>.

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**Notes for Educators**

**21<sup>st</sup> Century Thinking Skills**

Goal setting, creating, innovating, taking responsible risks, reflecting, observing, making connections, sequencing, predicting, comparing/contrasting, determining main idea, problem solving, cause and effect, evaluating.

**WA State Learning Standards**

VA:Cr2.1.2 a. Experiment with various materials and tools to explore personal interests in a work of art or design.

VA:Cr2.2.2 a. Demonstrate safe procedures for using and cleaning art tools, equipment, and studio spaces.

VA:Cr3.1.2 a. Discuss and reflect with peers about choices made in creating artwork.

VA:Re7.1.2 a. Perceive and describe aesthetic characteristics of one's natural world and constructed environments. This happens when identifying the artist's choice of representing images.

VA:Re8.1.2 a. Interpret art by identifying the mood suggested by a work of art and describing relevant subject matter and characteristics of form.

**Arts Integration Opportunities**

Math: use sequenced patterns of numbers to make a 'number circle'. In markers or pencils.

Spelling: use spelling words repeated as circles radiating from central point.

Use stamps instead of dots.

Use colored rectangular or square paper 'chips' and glue in circles.

Radiate straight lines from a central point using a ruler.

Science: look for evidence of symmetry in nature.