

*Revised Sept. 2011*

**FAMOUS ARTISTS SERIES:**

**PIET MONDRIAN (1872-1944)**

“Composition (Blue, Red & Yellow)”

Oil on canvas, 1930

28 5/8” x 21 1/4”

**Supplies needed:**

- \* Framed print “Composition (Blue, Red & Yellow)
- \* Picasso “Three Musicians” laminate
- \* **Special white paper** from supply box
- \* Black electrical tape from supply box
- \* Students will need scissors and primary color markers
- \* Laminated copies of examples of work from supply box (7 total)
- \* Large construction paper from supply box
- \* Project sample
- \* **Mondrian**, by Jose’ Faerna in the supply box for reference

**Reference Books**

- \* Mondrian, Fauchereau
- \* Mondrian, Victor Stoichita

***AHEAD OF TIME NOTE: Please make copies of the master “Famous Artist Series” note to hand out to students. PLEASE make sure to use the special slick paper for the project (1 piece per student).***

***Present laminate #1, Mondrian’s self-portrait.***

Piet Mondrian (pete moan-dre- on) was an artist from Holland, born in 1872. Mondrian is considered one of the founding artists of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Abstract Painting. He is most well known for a type of painting he called “Neo-Plasticism”, which is grids of black on a white canvas with primary colored shapes within the lines. He felt that his art was a creation of elementary relations – between lines and planes, as well as between colors and non-colors. At the time Mondrian was painting, plastic was newly created – “neo” means “new”, and “plasticism” refers to “plastic” – the idea of something very abstract being made which is moveable and “different”.

***Present framed picture of Mondrian’s “Composition”. Using a large piece of construction paper, block off all but one “square” of picture, showing only a bit. Have the students try to guess what is the subject matter of painting. Then reveal more squares a bit at a time, until whole composition is displayed.***

**Discuss with students what they “see” in his picture. Is it a representation of something? What does he mean by relation between line, planes, colors & non-colors? (“Non-Color” refers to the non-painted space in his work). Is his work “Modern”? Explain he painted in the 1920’s – when their grandparents were babies...**

Like many other artists, Mondrian’s work evolved over his life-time. In his younger years, he painted somewhat traditional landscapes. Later, around 1907, he began to paint using only “pure” colors. **Ask the students if they know what he meant by “pure” colors – can they guess from his art work? The idea of “primary” colors – colors that are undiluted by other color – is what he meant.** Then, in 1911, he discovered the “Cubist” works by Picasso and others.

**Present the Picasso “Three Musicians” laminate then show the laminates #1a & #2, Ginger Pot I and Ginger Pot II. Discuss the difference with the students: is the 1<sup>st</sup> work a “photograph” or more an “impression” of the still life on the table? In the 2<sup>nd</sup> work, what has he changed? Cubism is just that – reducing a scene to cube-like shapes.**

Mondrian soon veered away from “cubism”, though, as he felt art should be even more “abstract” than the Cubist works. By 1913, Mondrian’s paintings ceased to represent any specific object: compositions were reduced to patterns, lines and color. Mondrian himself said of his art that his intention was to represent nothing else but “the physical expression of universal beauty”. Mondrian called this type of art “neo-plasticism”. Art Historians refer to Mondrian as an “Abstract” artist.

**Ask students to look at his painting again. Does it look “Cubist” like the Ginger Pot II? Is his work “busy” or “calm?” What might the colors he uses signify? Do the students know what “primary” colors are? Does Mondrian use many colors or few?**

Mondrian would use each primary color only once in his works to represent “purity” of the art form. If you should get to see a work by Mondrian look at it closely – it is not simply black lines with solid blocks of color – in the original painting you can see different shades of color. And notice, too, that the colors are painted carefully – without masking tape – right up to the edges of the black grids. Often, too, the grids did not run right to the edge of the canvas or outline the canvas.

**Show laminate of Mondrian in his studio (Laminate #3). Note that most of Mondrian’s adult life was spent alone, without a family.**

**Discuss how this environment could have affected his life and artwork.**

**Present Laminate #4, “Broadway Boogie-Woogie”.** This is the last painting Mondrian completed. **How is it different from the other’s we’ve looked at? (No black, smaller shapes, busier composition).** “Broadway is a street that crosses Times Square in New York City. Mondrian had escaped Europe during World War II and moved to New York City. He loved the City and the jazz music he encountered there. “Boogie Woogie” is the name of a fast-tempo, jazzy music. **How does this painting match its title? (Reflects a growing city, traffic, repetition of small squares showing rhythm, larger blocks of color rising like buildings).**

Art historians refer to Mondrian as an “Abstract” artist and one of the reasons he is celebrated today is because he was an innovator of his time. He made it his life’s work to break away from convention and to show the world around him in a different way.

**PROJECT:**

**Before the students begin their project, you may want to share the “Pac-Mondrian” information with them (laminate #5). Some can spend a minute trying to locate one of the websites while the others start their project. The websites are included in the note they will take home.**

**You can also use the board in classroom to go to Google Images. Type in Mondrian and watch the screen fill with his work!**

**Have the students get out their scissors and colored markers. Give each student a piece of white paper and distribute as much “electrical tape” as you have. Show the example – electrical tape is not too sticky so it can be repositioned as they like. It does stretch, however, so they should cut it as they design their work. Once the placing of tape is complete, they should choose which spaces to color and with what color. Make sure all put names on the work. And let them know Mondrian did not always outline his works in black, nor have the black run to the edges all the time.**

**PLEASE ALLOW AT LEAST FIVE MINUTES AT THE END OF THE PRESENTATION FOR THE STUDENTS TO PRESENT THEIR WORKS TO THE CLASS.**

## FAMOUS ARTISTS SERIES

### PIET MONDRIAN

Today in class a volunteer parent presented the works of Dutch artist Piet Mondrian to your child's class. They learned a little bit about Mondrian, as well as made an art project in the style of his work. Ask your student about Mondrian's work – what is he most famous for? Ask them if they recall what "Abstract Art" means, or even "Cubism". If you should have access to the Web, the following site offers very good ideas and tours of Mondrian's work:

[www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/mondrian\\_piet.html](http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/mondrian_piet.html)

In addition, the Art Institute of Chicago owns "Diagonal Composition" 1921.

Finally, the children's book Anna's Art Adventure by Elling talks about Mondrian's artwork. And there is a wonderful "pac-man" style web sites which utilize Mondrian's works for the games – find these at <http://pfbf.ca/pac-mondrian/play.html>

Sincerely yours,

**Art Volunteer**