



Jasper Johns Design

Note to parents: All lessons include suggested art materials; a book to read to student artists to further their understanding of the artist and their work; information about the artist; discussion questions; and step-by-step instructions for completing the artwork. Whenever possible, ideas for changing the lessons to make them age appropriate for student artists are suggested. These lessons should be educational, fun, and offer a chance to spend some time using their brains in a different way. We suggest turning on some classical music while they (and you!) create.

Lesson: This lesson will introduce the contemporary artist, Jasper Johns. Artists will complete a composition using a **number or alpha template**. This lesson plan is designed for adults at home to learn the process, art history and art techniques. All adults should create a sample first with the art materials on hand. Be creative with available materials. Use timelines, maps, internet images and cross curricular connections to the famous artist studied.

Art Supplies

- **A Number or alpha template** (Parents: please create a stencil template for young artists. You may ask student artist to draw the letter or number, then use their drawing to create the template. Cutting shapes is difficult for young artists, so please assist. Johns used stencils!)
- Black crayon
- Watercolor or any white paper approximately 12 X 12 inches for young artists. Use larger paper as desired for older artists.
- Watercolor, brushes, water, blotter if available
- If watercolors are not available, this lesson could be colored using crayons or markers

Book: Chicka Chicka Boom Boom by [Bill Martin Jr.](#) (Author), [John Archambault](#) (Author), [Lois Ehlert](#) (Illustrator) This is a classic picture book many of you may have in your home library. It shows the illustrators use of the alphabet as an artistic form in a creative way. If you do not own it, you can find a video of it being read on YouTube.

Famous Art and Artist Discussion

Jasper Johns was born in 1930 and is still living today. He is considered by art historians to be a POP artist. “Pop” is an art term originating from the word popular. Johns uses themes, ideas and images that are

contemporary and recognizable. Often, he uses an idea of something that exists in popular culture such as numbers, words, letters and even the American Flag. He uses the image as a shape to create. The created work may have nothing to do with the image itself.

Red is not red, a number is not a number and the alphabet is not as we understand and use them in everyday life.

Sister Wendy, an art historian, interprets his work with this statement, “His wish is to free art from narrative interest, from an obsession with meaning. He sees art as utterly independent and of itself- a creation of the beautiful that can only be weakened by anecdotal elements or any engrossment with the actualities of life.”¹

Johns fills his paintings with new ideas using everyday images. Through his work, the viewer sees the ordinary in an entirely new way. Johns created many works that use stencils of letters and numbers. He uses these symbols in his own unique expression of beauty.

Parents and older artists: Create a stencil if you do not have one available. Use heavier paper, such as the cover of a magazine or cover stock paper if you have it available. This stencil can be used to create several art pieces in a variety of ways. The layout I am suggesting is just one example.

Parent note: Google Jasper Johns Numbers and select an image or two that shows numerals or alphabet used as a form to create art to show student artists. I particularly like the Color Numeral Series.

Discussion Questions

Look at artwork- Ask and answer questions- Cite your reasons- Explain and elaborate

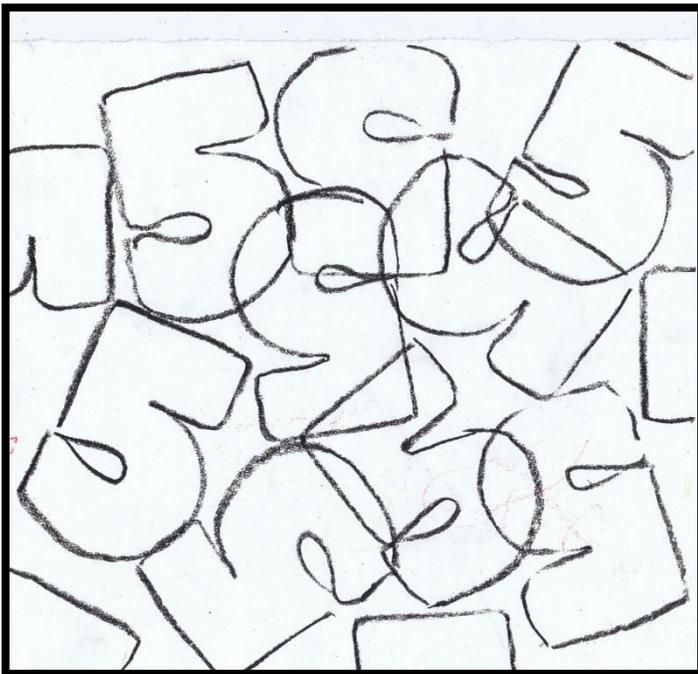
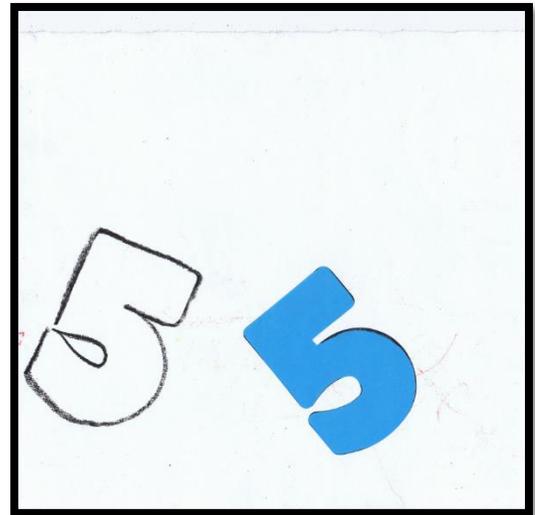
- Can you see a recognizable image?
- How is Jasper Johns using the number (or letter)? (purely as design)
- Does the symbol mean anything in the painting?
- Why would an artist use an ordinary thing (like a letter, number, target, and map) in their artwork?
- Where was Jasper Johns born (use a map of the United States)
- What year was he born? How old is Jasper Johns?
- Would his artwork be considered abstract or realistic?
- Why might an artist limit the colors they are using?
- Jasper Johns sometimes piles numbers on top of numbers. What is the mood of this art?
- Do you like the artist’s designs? Explain why or why not?
- What every day objects would you pick to use in your artwork?
- What is POP art? How was POP art different?

¹ Sister Wendy’s 1000 Masterpieces, by Sister Wendy Beckett DK Publishing, Inc. New York, 1999

Process:

Begin by showing the artists how to use the template to to:

- Trace with the black crayon
- Reposition the letter
- Use the letter or number as a design element
- Move paper around and number around
- Encourage some of the numbers to go “off edge” of paper



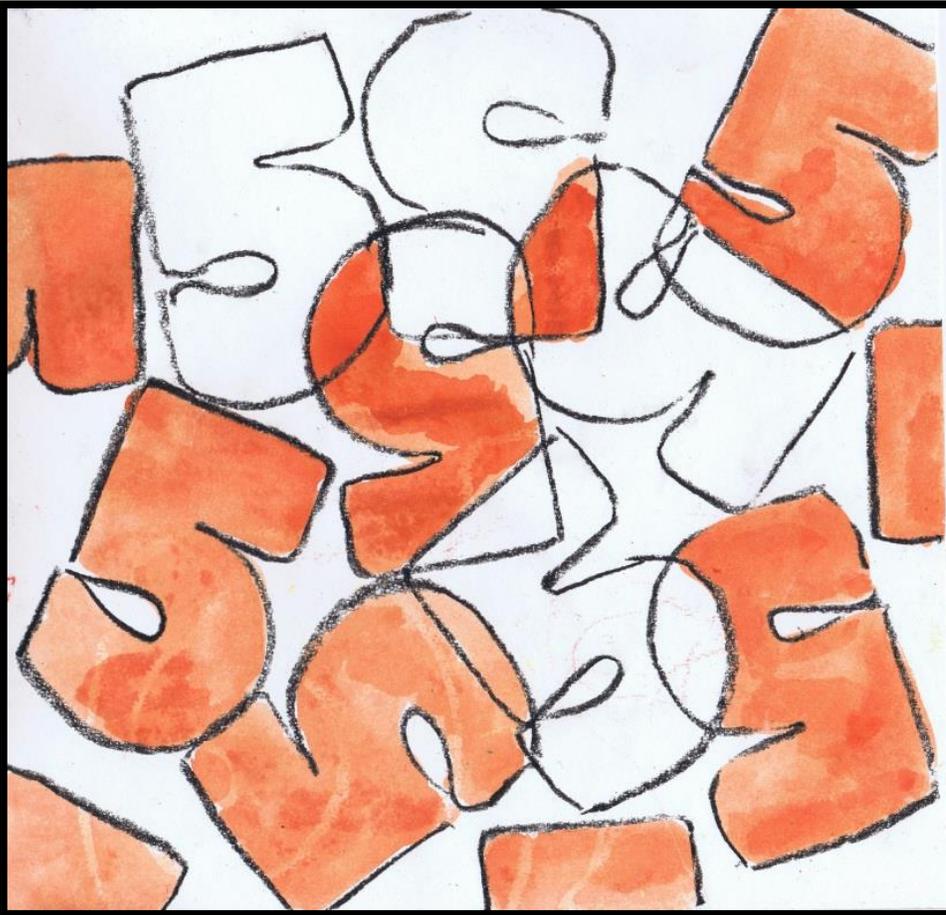
Artists will fill their composition with as many overlaps as they choose.

NOTE: Too many outlined shapes for young artists will be confusing.

Press black crayon to create dark lines. Do not worry about overlapping. Create interesting negative space.

If using watercolors: Ask artists to select three colors to “wake up.” Waking up means that plain water drops are placed onto the watercolors to activate them before using.

If watercolors are not available, select three crayon colors.



Remember, Jasper Johns used the image as a design element. Don't worry about perfect outlines. Jasper Johns never worried about going outside the lines!

Artists will start with one color and paint sections of the composition that one color.

They can "hop" around – painting areas they choose – but still working with the one color. Demonstrate how painting areas all over the composition will give a balance.

Also show how to rinse the brush properly and use blotter to remove excess water.

When artists feel they have filled in as many areas as they would like, select a second color, then a third.

- Artists may use more than the three colors but encourage them to work with each color before going on to the next.
- Black may be a selected color but suggest using black as the last of their color selections.
- Artists may add a second layer of watercolor to intensify colors.
- Do NOT mix complementary colors (red and green, orange and blue, purple and yellow) Mixing complementary colors will cause them to become muddy.

“Fives in Four Colors”



Design suggestions:

- Use big templates.
- Use white crayons in negative space. It will resist the watercolors.
- Create work in just black and white. Overlap many different numbers/letters.

Note: Paper will look rather bumpy after it dries; flatten overnight under heavy books or weighted board. This will greatly improve the finished piece.



OTHER OPTIONS:

Use ledger paper and create a grid (hand-drawn numbers) in black and white.

Crayons: black and white

Watercolors: black and white



Use one large stencil/template

Black crayon

Black and white watercolors

Hand-drawn numbers with
White and black poster paint

