High School Beginning Painting Lesson:
Exploring Color Harmony Through Abstract Painting
How do colors make me feel when they are combined?

Lesson Title: The Power of Color Harmony – Nature & Fantasy in Abstract Painting

Grade Level: High School – Beginning Painting

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students will explore color harmony and emotional impact through **two separate abstract paintings**, **each using a pre-selected palette of colors.**

One painting will focus on natural and realistic tones inspired by landscapes, while the other will use bright, vibrant colors inspired by flowers and fantasy themes looking for motion in the design.

By working with pre-mixed color palettes, students will experience how colors interact without the added complexity of color mixing. The goal is to play, explore, and observe the emotional effects of color combinations in their work. The lesson will conclude with a Friendship Circle discussion, where students reflect on how each palette influenced their feelings and creative expression.

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Understand color harmony and how specific palettes create different moods.
- Explore two distinct color palettes—one for natural landscapes and one for vibrant fantasy themes—through abstract painting.
- Recognize how color choices affect our emotions and visual balance in artwork.
- Experiment with composition and brush techniques in a stress-free, exploratory way.
- Express personal experiences with color through a group discussion and reflection.

Supplies and Materials

- **Acrylic paints**, pre-organized into two palettes - students would learn to mix paint in the next lesson - this would be pre-mixed for them and put into 2 pallets:

    Natural & Realistic Palette (for Landscapes & Nature - mostly warm colors)

    - Sap Green
    - Olive Green
    - Burnt Sienna
    - Raw Umber
    - Yellow Ochre
    - Ultramarine Blue
    - Titanium White

    Vibrant & Fantasy Palette (for Flowers & Surreal Themes - mostly cool colors)

    - Cadmium Red Light
    - Magenta
    - Lemon Yellow
    - Dioxazine Purple
    - Phthalo Green
    - Cobalt Blue
    - Titanium White

- **Canvas panels or thick watercolor paper** (two per student)
- **Brushes & sponges** (variety of sizes for experimenting with texture and strokes)
- **Water cups and paper towels**
- **Palette knives** (optional, for texture effects)
- **Pre-printed handouts of the two color wheels** (one for each palette)
- **Examples of abstract paintings using similar color schemes**
- **Friendship Circle Discussion Prompts** (printed on hand out and on board)
  How do colors make me feel when they are combined?

Vocabulary & Key Concepts

- **Color harmony** – A pleasing arrangement of colors in an artwork.
- **Abstract art** – Art that focuses on colors, shapes, and composition rather than realistic representation.
- **Mood & Emotion in Color** – How colors influence feelings and perceptions.
- **Brush Techniques** – Experimenting with different strokes and textures to create movement and depth.
- **Composition** – The arrangement of visual elements in a painting.

Activity & Procedures

Step 1: Introduction & Warm-Up Discussion (15 minutes)

- Begin by **showing examples** of abstract paintings using each color palette.
- Ask students: What emotions do you feel when looking at the natural-toned paintings? What about the vibrant fantasy-themed paintings?
- Introduce the **two color palettes** and explain that students will explore them separately through **two abstract paintings**.
- **Hand out the color wheels for both palettes**, so students can reference them throughout the lesson.

Step 2: First Painting – Natural & Realistic Landscape Colors (30 minutes)

- Students select their **Natural Palette** and begin working on their first abstract painting.
- Encourage them to focus on balance and movement within their composition.
- Provide guidance on layering and blending without mixing colors too much.
- Some students may want to add texture using dry brush techniques or palette knives.
- Remind them that this is about exploration, not realism or perfection.

Step 3: Break & Color Reflection (10 minutes)

- Encourage students to step back and **observe their work from a distance**.
- Ask: **What does this painting feel like?** Does it remind you of a peaceful place?

Step 4: Second Painting – Fantasy & Flowers Vibrant Colors (30 minutes)

- Students switch to the **Vibrant Palette** for their second painting.
- Encourage bold strokes, **more expressive mark-making**, and an experimental approach.
- Ask students to consider:
    a. How does this palette make you feel compared to the first?
    b. Does it feel more playful, exciting, or chaotic?
- Allow for freedom in composition, but encourage them to stay within the palette for consistency.

Step 5: Friendship Circle Discussion & Sharing (20 minutes)

- Students gather in a circle, bringing both of their paintings.
- One by one, they hold up their work and share:
  How each palette made them feel while painting.
  Which was easier or more enjoyable for them.
  If they were tempted to mix palettes and what that felt like.
  If they would use these color choices in future paintings and why.
- Emphasize that there are no wrong answers—this is about personal experience and expression.

Accommodations for Diverse Learners

Visual Learners

- Handouts with color wheels and examples of abstract paintings.
- Demonstrations of brush techniques and color application before students begin painting. Solid colors or translucent (watercolor-like) by how much water is used.

Kinesthetic Learners (Hands-On Approach)

- Option to use palette knives or sponges instead of brushes for texture play.
- Encouraged to experiment with layering, thick vs. thin paint, and different motions.

Auditory Learners

- Verbal explanations and storytelling about how famous artists (Monet) used his garden with all kind of flowers of all difference color combinations - to evoke different moods.
- Discussion-based Friendship Circle where they can express their experiences.
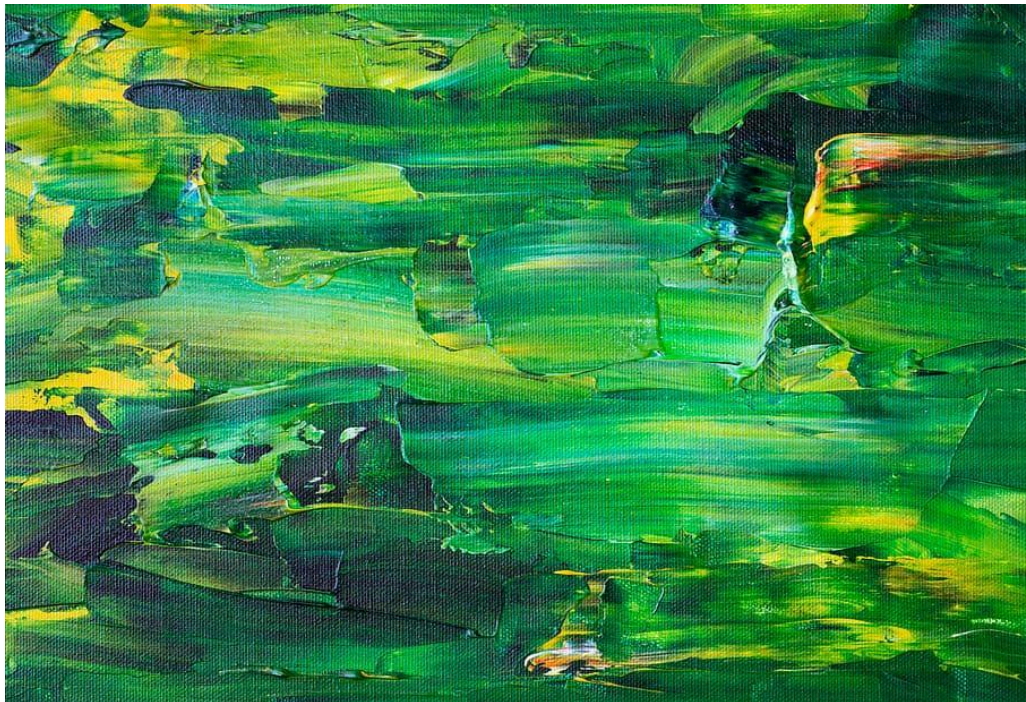
Students with Learning Disabilities (LD)

- Mnemonic strategy for color harmony with Color Chart: C.A.M. Colors – Complementary (Opposite color on the color wheel), Analogous (Adjacent colors always get along), Monochromatic (Make shades smooth in transitions from one color shade to the next).
- Breaking the lesson into two clear, separate tasks to reduce overwhelm.
- Encouraging freedom and personal interpretation—no "right" way to do it.
- Extra time for students who need it to complete their paintings at their own pace.

Assessment & Reflection

- **Observational Assessment:** The teacher will observe students' engagement with the two palettes, use of color balance, and willingness to experiment.
- **Student Reflection:** Through the Friendship Circle, students will express their experiences and emotions related to each painting.
- **Informal Peer Feedback:** Students will discuss which colors they felt most drawn to and how they interpreted their abstract work.

This lesson allows students to play with color harmony in a low-pressure, expressive way while considering how different palettes influence their emotions and artistic choices. The structured exploration of natural vs. vibrant color palettes helps students recognize the power of color in storytelling and self-expression. By eliminating "wrong answers," students gain confidence in their own creative instincts while learning fundamental concepts of color balance and composition. RTI if there are any issues. Appreciation for everyone helps in all situations.

WARM COLORS: Acrylics can look like water colors with lots of water. Or thick with paint.

Suggestive of nature in your abstract is great for natural tones.
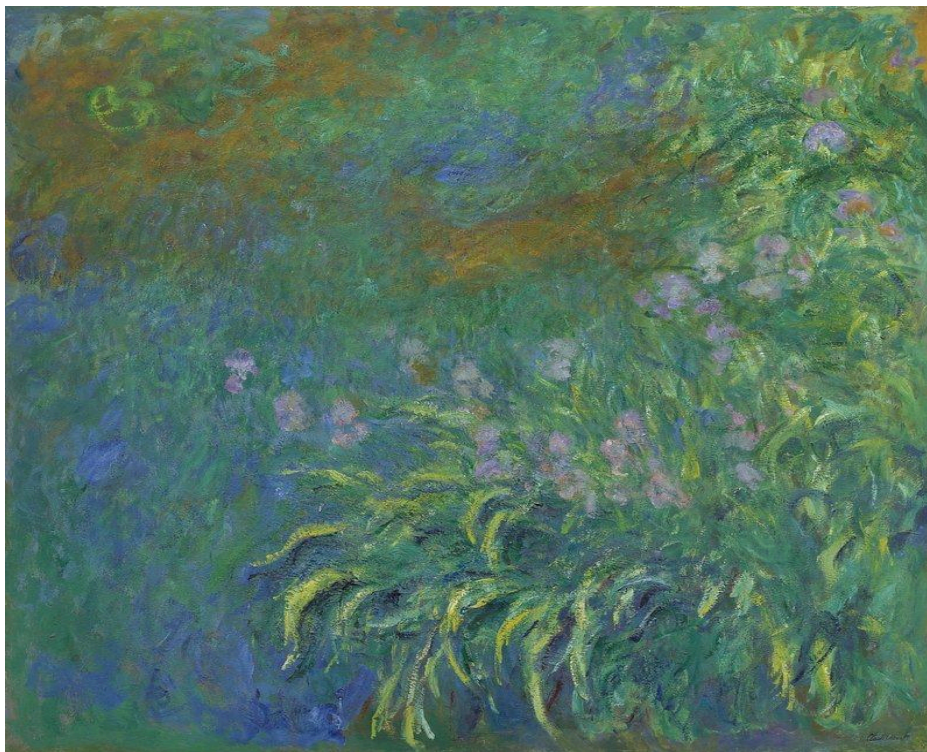
COOL COLORS: Acrylics can look like water colors with lots of water. Or thick with paint.

It can be translucent or not by how much water you use. And letting layers dry, and add more.

Mnemonic strategy for color harmony: C.A.M. Colors –
C = Complementary (Opposite color on the color wheel),
Analogous = Adjacent (harmonious) colors always get along),
Monochromatic = (Make shades smooth in transitions from one color shade to the next).

Color Wheels

Complementary Colors

Contrasting Colors

Harmonious Colors

Monochrome Colors