

Rhythm & Pattern

Lesson Plan

Suggested for K–5th grades



Rico Gatson (born 1966) is an artist whose work lives at the intersection of abstraction and political commentary. By utilizing visual rhythm, abstract motifs, and bold design choices he blends together powerful racial and social justice issues with formal geometric painting techniques.

Rico Gatson
Panel Painting #4, 2016

Gatson uses historic references such as the election of President Barack Obama, the formation of the Black Panther Party, or the Watts Rebellion to explore topics of identity and African-American history.

In totemic paintings such as *Panel Painting #4*, Gatson utilizes a limited color palette borrowed from the Pan-African Flag and creates a graphic composition. This lesson will allow students to explore abstraction and visual rhythm through repetition by creating a print related to an important moment in their life.

Objective

Students will create an abstract artwork that explores visual rhythm and color.

Essential Question

How can we create visual rhythm and build an abstract narrative only using repeated symbols and colors?

Vocabulary

Abstraction

The quality of dealing with ideas rather than events.

Rhythm

A strong, regular, repeated pattern. The systematic arrangement of elements.

Composition

The way in which something is put together or arranged.

Repetition

The act or instance of repeating or being repeated.

Narrative

The art, technique, or process of narrating or telling a story.

Materials

Black construction paper, cut into thin rectangles

Styrofoam plates or containers

Scissors

Acrylic paint

Sponges, cut into small pieces

Craft cups

Preparation

1. Introduce the work of Rico Gatson and discuss *Panel Painting #4* through visual inquiry.
2. Prepare materials by cutting black paper for backgrounds, distributing acrylic paint in craft cups to be shared, and cutting sponges smaller if needed.

Methods

1. Discuss the vocabulary and ask students why they think the artist made the choices he did about composition, color, and repetition.
2. Demonstrate how to create a geometric stamp by cutting the Styrofoam with scissors, sponging on the acrylic paint, and pressing it onto the paper.
3. Have students create 3–5 Styrofoam stamps that they will stamp repeatedly and layer onto their paper to create a composition that shows visual rhythm.
4. Have them choose colors and create a palette that relates to a moment in their life that is important to them.
5. While students are working, go around and provide feedback and engage students in a dialogue on the aesthetic choices they are making.
6. Experiment with playing different types of music while students work, challenging them to make connections between the patterns and rhythms in the music and their composition.

Reflection

1. Have students volunteer to share their work; have them describe the composition they created and explain the colors they used.
2. Engage in a group discussion about the colors that are used and why students are personally connected to those colors.



Rico Gatson
Panel Painting #4, 2016
Acrylic paint and spray paint on wood
96 1/2 x 11 1/4 x 1 in.
The Studio Museum in Harlem; Museum purchase with funds provided by Holly Peterson
2017.32