Jazz Up Your Drawing!
Jazz Up Your Drawing!

Artists sometimes invent new tools and methods to express themselves. Jack Whitten was inspired by the jazz music created by Miles Davis and John Coltrane who experimented with their instruments and collaborated with other musicians to create new and unique sounds. Jack Whitten experimented with different ways to create paintings using special tools he made himself. In this guide, you will create your own unique drawing tool. Then, you will listen to songs from some of Whitten’s favorite jazz albums while using your tool to create an abstract artwork!

It will take about 20 minutes to complete this activity.

Project Set-Up

1. Find a large and flat surface, such as a table or the floor, where you can do this project.

2. Cover the surface with a tablecloth or newspapers.

3. Gather all of your materials.

Materials

• Paper

• Something to color with (markers, paint, crayons, chalk, anything!)

• Tape or string

• Small household objects to put underneath the paper
  (for example, pennies, legos, spoons, toothbrush, etc)
Connect with art at the Walker

Abstract art represents an artist’s ideas or feelings using colors, shapes, and lines, but does not exactly represent objects or living things. Jack Whitten used his abstract artwork to experiment with new ways of making art and to reflect on things that were important to him, like African-American history and culture, science, math, and jazz music. Take a look at Whitten’s piece *Sigma Group IV*.

Instead of using a typical paintbrush, Whitten used tools like squeegees, rakes, and Afro combs to apply paint to his canvases, and he placed objects like stones, bits of wire, and pieces of string underneath the canvases to create unexpected designs. These techniques borrowed elements of the jazz music Whitten loved by incorporating both experimentation and improvisation, or creating something new without knowing how it will turn out. Look again at *Sigma Group IV* and see if you can find evidence of these unique tools and objects Whitten used.

Talk It Out

• What do you notice about this painting?

• What shapes and colors do you see?

• How would you describe this painting?

• What does this painting make you feel?

• If this painting made sound, what kind of sound do you think it would make?
Instructions

Now it’s your turn to create an abstract artwork inspired by the work of Jack Whitten!

1. Find your coloring implements (markers, crayons, paint, whatever you like). Using tape, string, or anything else you can find, combine your materials to build your coloring tool. For example, you could tie a bundle of markers together or tape a few crayons, a marker, and a paintbrush to a ruler. Use your imagination!

2. Spread out your paper. Place the small objects underneath it. You may want to tape your paper to the table so that it does not move while you are drawing, or tape down the objects so that they stay where you put them.

3. Pick a song from the list on the next page to listen to while you work. Use your drawing tool to create lines and shapes on the surface of your paper. Let the tempo of the music inspire how fast or slow you draw. What shapes does the music remind you of? Keep drawing for a couple of minutes. You might need to press lightly with your tool so you don’t move your objects or the paper around.

4. Put your drawing tool down and choose a different song. Now, let this new song guide you as you complete your drawing.
Keep Exploring

• What was it like to draw with objects under your paper?

• Can you see a difference between the drawings you made during the first song and those you made during the second? How do you think your drawing might change if you listened to a different type of music?

• Whitten drew inspiration for his paintings from the jazz musicians he loved. What if you created an artwork celebrating your favorite music? What do you think that would look like? How might it look different from the work you just made?

• After experimenting with your drawing tool, is there anything you would change about it?

Songs/albums to listen to while creating your drawing tool and abstract drawing!

MILES DAVIS
“So What” (from Kind of Blue)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIXk1LBvlqU

“Flamenco Sketches” (from Kind of Blue)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTwp1sgUJRm

JOHN COLTRANE
“Giant Steps” (from Giant Steps)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8QnKWPYRCs

“Blue Train” (from Blue Train)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HT_Zs5FkDZE

THELONIOUS MONK
Misterioso; full album
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81E90VMdkeg&list=PLv4PEAoZeRvxhu6cIvALfZ2SYQgE9h0c1

SUN RA
“Astro” (from Visions)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4t-s30tteU