Paper Marbling
Abstract artworks do not look like an exact representation of objects or living things. Instead, artists use shapes, lines, colors, and textures (often called formal qualities of art) to express their ideas, feelings, and emotions. Since abstract art is made up of these elements, it can look like something different to everyone. In this guide, you’ll explore two abstract works and discuss how the artists use color to express themselves, then create your own marbled paper using two different techniques. Each project will take about 20 minutes to complete.

**Project Set Up**
1. Find a large and flat surface, such as a table, where you can do this project. Protect the surface with a tablecloth or newspapers and set your container on top. You may want to wear plastic gloves, an apron, or clothes that are okay to get stained.

2. Choose the colors you’d like to use for marbling. What feelings do you want to express in your art? How does each color make you feel? For example, does yellow make you feel warm, or does it make you feel happy? There is no right or wrong answer, and each color may mean something different to everyone. Assign a color to a feeling or emotion. Remember you can mix your food coloring to create more colors!
Paper Marbling Materials

Paper Marbling With Oil Materials
○ A container (such as a plastic storage bin) filled with 1–2 inches of water
○ Paper that will fit in your container
○ Food coloring in multiple colors or liquid watercolor
○ Vegetable oil
○ Two or three squirt bottles to hold the oil and coloring (If squirt bottles are unavailable, try using straws.)
○ Gloves (optional)

Paper Marbling With Shaving Cream Materials
○ Foaming shaving cream
○ Large plate or baking sheet to hold the shaving cream
○ Sheets of paper cut to a size that will fit on the plate
○ Food coloring or liquid watercolor paint
○ Wooden dowel or something similar for stirring the shaving cream
○ Paper towels
○ Flat piece of plastic, like an old credit card or ruler for scraping off excess shaving cream
○ Access to water
○ Markers
Before you start your paper marbling project, take a look at the two paintings above. They are abstract artworks that are both featured in the Walker’s exhibition *Five Ways In: Themes from the Collection*. First, observe the painting *Time Traveler’s Lover (hua)* by Ta-coumba Aiken. The artist was inspired by musical rhythms to create these patterns and colors.

**Talk it out:**
- What does this painting make you feel? Imagine each color on the painting is a sound.
- What do you think it sounds like? What kind of song would this be?
- Now look at *Further and Farther Than One Expects* by Caroline Kent. She is inspired by language and explores how she can communicate through her paintings.
- What do you notice about this painting? What about the colors? What do the colors remind you of? What about the texture and shape?
- What do you think the artist might be trying to communicate to you using color and texture?
Paper Marbling with Oil Instructions

Now it’s your turn to use color to create an abstract work of art. Paper marbling is a practice that uses water and colors to create patterns similar to a marbled stone.

1. Fill each of your squirt bottles with one-third cup of vegetable oil. Squirt around 10–15 drops of food coloring in a bottle. Make sure to use different colors for different bottles! Put on the cap and give the bottle a shake.

2. Fill the plastic bin with about 1–2 inches of water.

3. Choose a color that represents how you feel. Remove the cap from the squirt bottle and squirt some drops of colored oil into the water.
Paper Marbling with Oil Instructions

4. Choose a different color that represents another feeling. Remove the cap and squirt a few drops of colored oil into the water. Repeat this step with as many colors as you’d like.

5. Gently lay a piece of paper on top of the water and let it float for about 5 seconds. The colored oil will transfer to the paper.

6. Remove your paper from the water. Let any excess liquid drip off. Set your paper aside to dry. You can reuse the water to create another piece of marbled paper or dump out the water and start over with new colors.
Now that you’ve made your own abstract artwork, take a close look at it.

- Does your artwork remind you of anything?
- Why did you choose the colors you used?
- What emotions do you feel when you look at it?
- How did it feel as you were adding new colors? Describe the shapes and colors on the paper.

Share your artwork with us by using @walkerartcenter and #walkerartcenter, or email a photo of artwork to freefirstsaturday@walkerart.org. Check out #walkerartcenter to see what other families are making!
Paper Marbling with Shaving Cream

Now try another technique to create an abstract work of art!

1. Spray a handful of shaving cream on your plate or baking sheet. Use your hands to evenly spread it over most of the surface.

2. Choose a few colors of food coloring and squirt 2-3 drops of each color on the shaving cream.

3. Use a dowel or stir stick to spread out and swirl the food coloring into the shaving cream.

4. Place a sheet of paper on top of the shaving cream. Press it down with your hands and apply pressure evenly.
Paper Marbling with Shaving Cream

5. Peel your paper off of the shaving cream and set it on a hard surface.

6. Use a flat piece of plastic to scrape over the surface of the paper and remove the excess shaving cream.

7. Use a paper towel to wipe off any extra shaving cream from your paper.

8. When there is no more shaving cream on your paper, set it aside to dry.
You can continue using the same shaving cream to marble more paper. Just add more food coloring and stir.

If you’d like, use acrylic paint or permanent markers to add designs on top of your marbled paper.

Fold your marbled paper in half to make a card to send to a family member or friend, or marble an envelope!

To create a notebook, cut 3-4 pieces of white paper to a size that’s a little smaller than your marbled paper. Fold them in half and place them inside the marbled paper. Staple the papers together along the fold.

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