

PMA CLASSROOM
BEST FOR
Middle School
High School

Abstracting Nature

Brook by Lois Dodd



Brook, 1961

Lois Dodd (United States, born 1927)

Oil on linen, 72 x 76 inches

THEMES

- Elements of Art (Line, color, shape)
- Nature
- Abstraction
- Maine landscape

Content Areas and Standards Met

What Maine Ed Standards will this lesson meet?

What content areas does this lesson connect to?

VISUAL ARTS

A2. Elements of Art and Principles of Design

Students compare features of composition both within an art work and among art works.

B1. Media Skills

Students choose suitable media, tools, techniques, and processes to create original art works.

C1. Application of Creative Process

Students describe and apply creative-thinking skills that are part of the creative problem-solving process.

E2. The Arts and Other Disciplines

Students explain skills and concepts that are similar across disciplines.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) COMPETENCIES

Responsible decision-making: Reflecting

Objective

What will students do/experience/think about, etc?

What is the overall goal of the lesson plan?:

Students will explore the concept of abstraction and how to abstract elements of nature

Students will understand how and why artists use abstraction

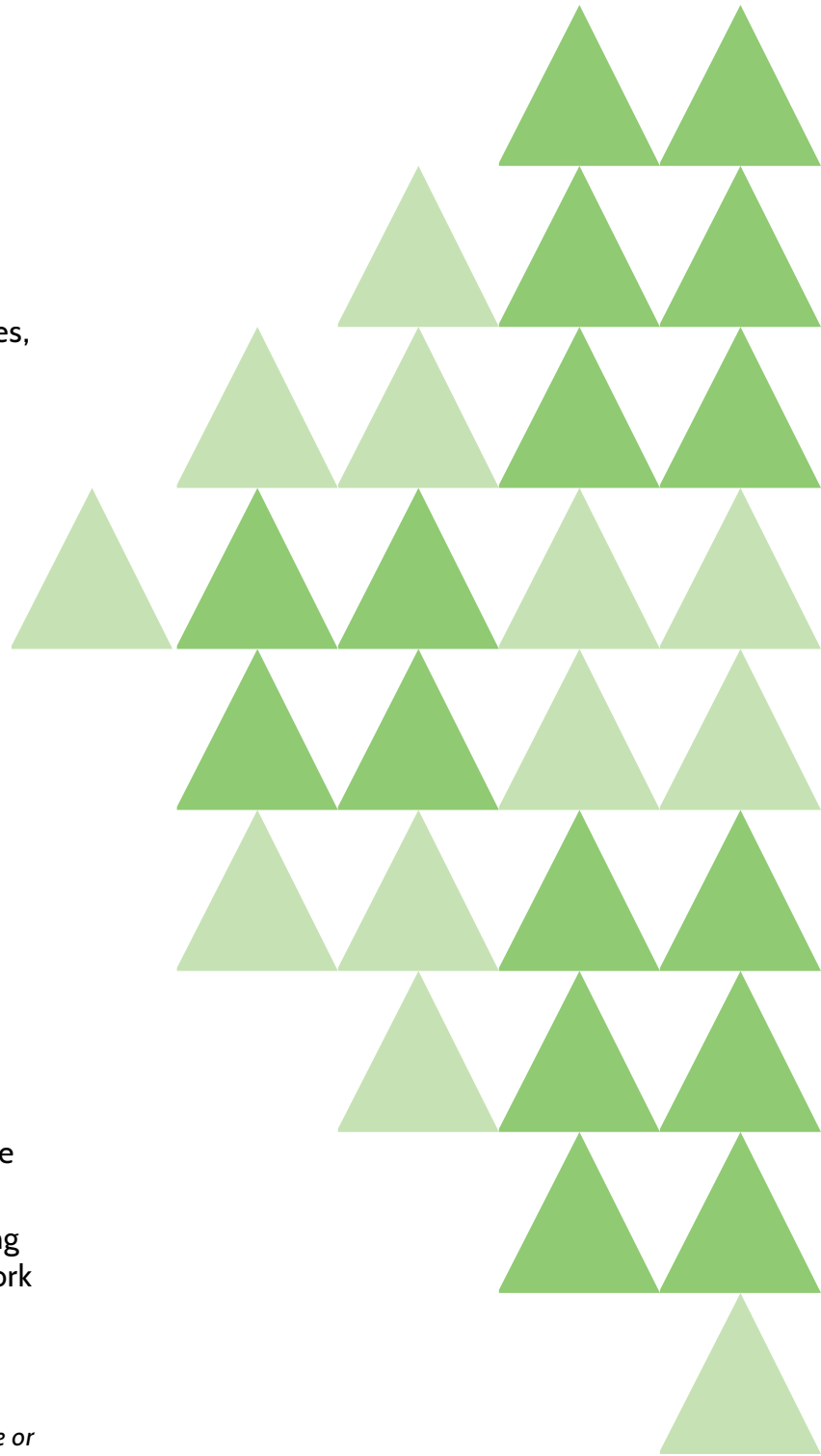
Students will experience time in nature, practicing close observation and utilizing expressive line work

Essential Question

What is the big question that this lesson plan seeks to explore or have students grapple with?

What is abstraction?

How do artists abstract nature into basic elements?





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Brook, 1961

Oil on linen, 72 x 76 inches

Museum purchase with support from the Peggy and Harold Osher Acquisition Fund
and the Bernstein Acquisition Fund, 2013.7

Image courtesy of Luc Demers

Materials Needed

- Multiple pieces of plain paper
- Pencil or other drawing utensil
- Paint, markers, colored pencils, crayons, etc. (OPTIONAL)
- Access to the artwork (See previous page or visit collections.portlandmuseum.org)

Instructions:

Look

Take about a minute to look closely at this artwork.

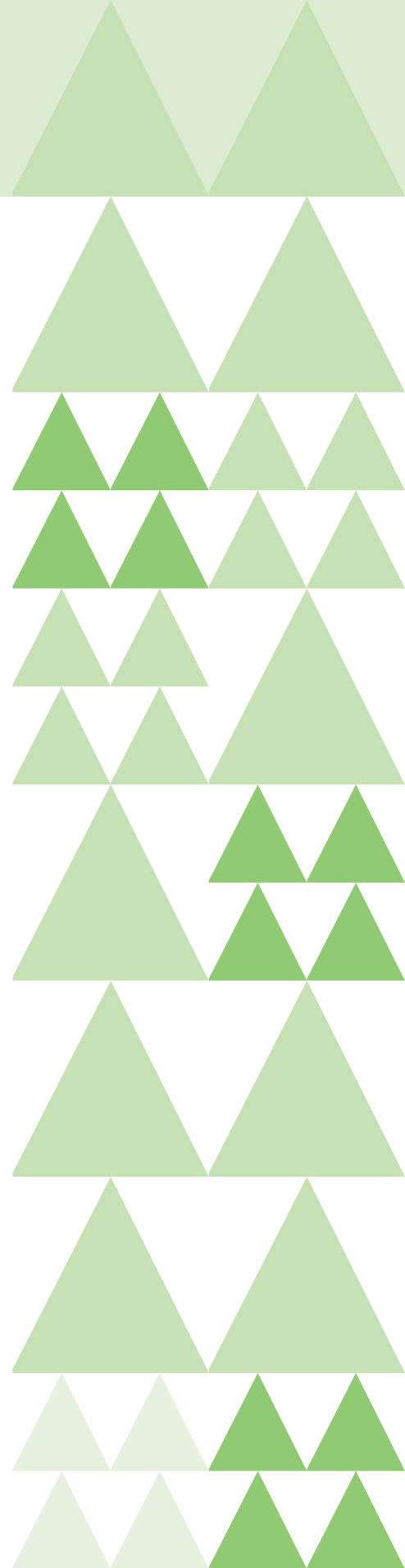
Respond

Think to yourself:

- What do I see happening here?
- Would I describe this as abstract or representational art? What am I seeing that is making me answer that way?
- How would I describe the colors? The lines? The shapes?
- Which of these shapes or forms are recognizable/familiar to me? Which ones are unfamiliar?
- What mood am I feeling from this painting?
- The title is *Brook*, what elements of a brook, or a small stream, do you see here?

Respond to the questions posed above.

Write your responses down using your paper and writing utensil, share them with someone in your house, or discuss.





Learn

Use this section to learn more about the artist, the process, and the subject.

Lois Dodd has ties to both New York City and to Maine. She became a painter in NYC after World War II during a time when a movement called abstract expressionism became popular. Abstract expressionism is a movement of art that uses expressive brush strokes or mark-making and appears to be spontaneous. She first came to Maine in 1951 and has come every year since. Maine is highly influential in her artwork, and the Maine landscape is usually the subject matter of her paintings.

For *Brook*, Dodd created sketches in the fields of Maine, near where she stayed, and brought them back to New York to complete. The finished artwork was created in her studio from her sketches done outdoors. Using her sketches as reference, Dodd abstracted the scene of the brook. However, we can still see and infer some elements of the outdoors and of being near a brook through her use of color, shape/ form, and line. The greens, browns, and grays are reminiscent of rocks, plants, and earth. Her lines are expressive, or energetic and full of movement, which contrast with the areas of flattened shapes and forms that recall natural elements. Although this artwork is abstracted and created indoors from sketches, we can still feel and see the connection to nature.

“I’m not looking for details or surface description that’s for sure. But I am looking for the light, how it hits volumes. I am looking for the light and the color.” —Lois Dodd



Lois Dodd photo by Christina Wnek

Act

Dodd always turned to her immediate surroundings for inspiration. In *Brook*, she used the Maine landscape in an abstracted form. Echoing her process, you will create your own abstracted landscape.

Abstracted Landscape Drawing

Take your pencil or other drawing utensil and paper outdoors. Walk around a little bit until you find a scene, or a detail in a scene that you want to focus on.

DRAWING #1: Using your drawing utensil, draw what you are seeing as you observe it. Focus on the shapes and lines that you are seeing. Try not to spend more than 8 minutes on this one drawing – you should focus on capturing the essence or the basic elements of what you are seeing.

You can either continue the rest of these steps back inside, or you can stay outside – just make sure you aren't still looking at the same view.

DRAWING #2: Get out a new piece of paper and do the same drawing using fewer lines than you did in your original drawing. You can use your original drawing as reference. Try not to spend more than 5 minutes on this.

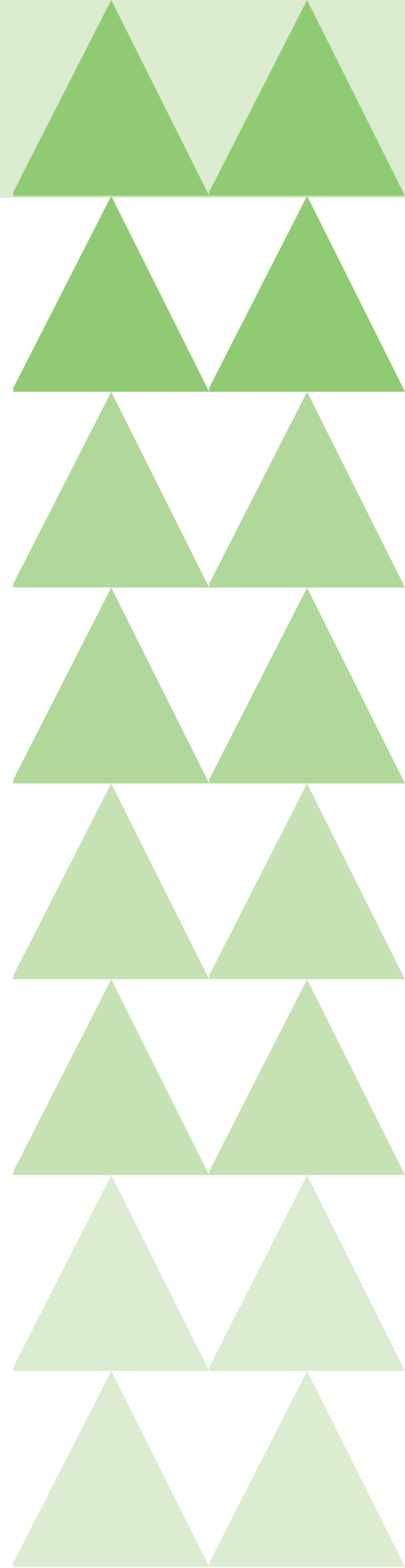
DRAWING #3: Take out another piece of paper and do the same drawing, using **DRAWING #2** as reference, but use fewer lines than you did in **DRAWING #2**. Try not to spend more than 3 minutes on this.

Keep doing this process of creating a new drawing using the previous one as reference and with fewer lines until you have a drawing that you feel is truly abstracted from your original drawing.

OPTIONAL: Use 2 or 3 colors to add color to your drawing. Think about why you chose these specific colors.

Variations:

- Try spending **MORE** time on each drawing (ex. 15 minutes, then 10 minutes, then 5 minutes, etc.)
- Try spending **LESS** time on each drawing (ex. 3 minutes, then 2 minutes, then 1 minute, etc.)
- Have an eraser? If you used pencil for your original drawing, you can just try erasing lines that you drew in your original drawing until you have only a few shapes and lines remaining.



Reflect and Share

Reflect on your experience.

What was this process like for you? What was easy?

What was more challenging?

In what ways was this process similar to other processes you may go through in other areas of study (such as Social Studies, English/Language Arts, Mathematics, etc.)?

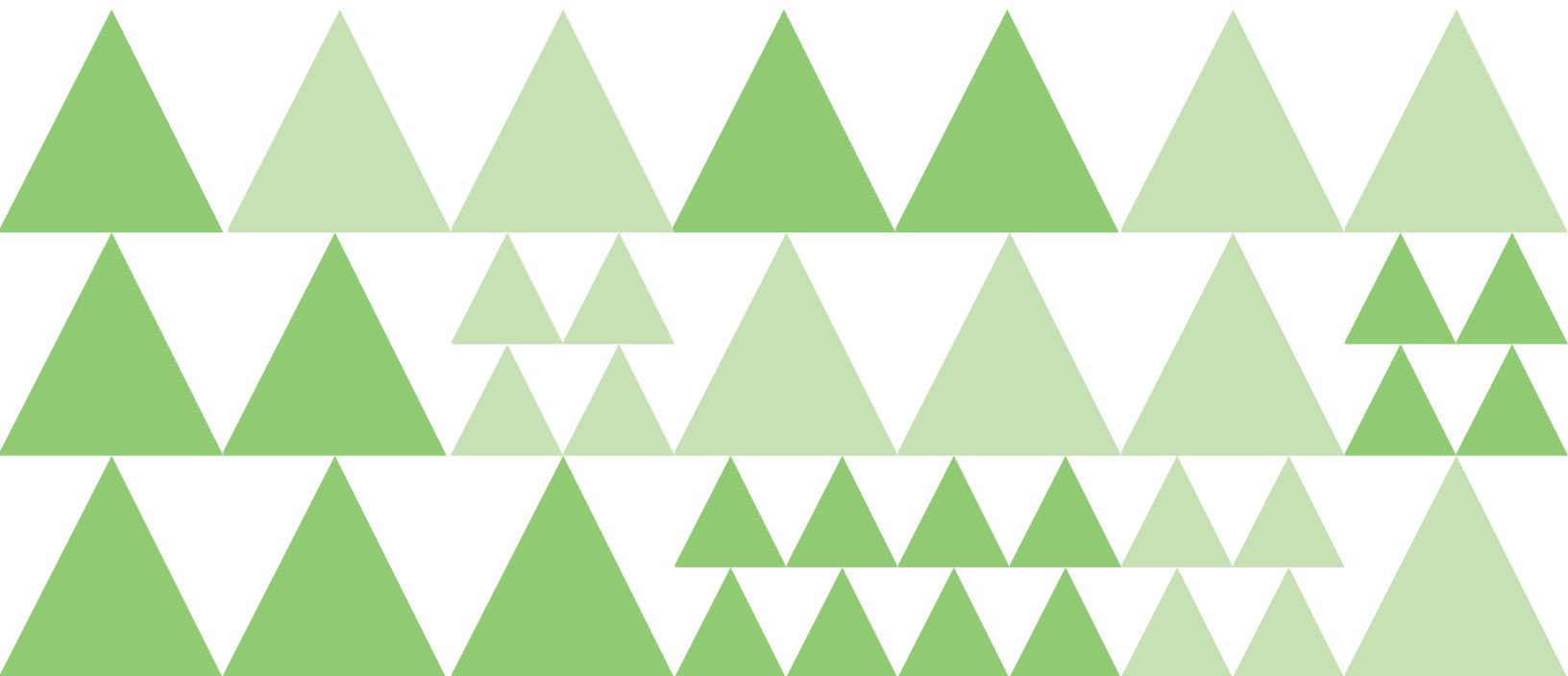
What differences did you notice in your drawings or approach depending on how much time you had for each drawing?

The last step in interacting with art is to share your experience with others. Share your artwork with the PMA! Or, share your artwork with others in your home or class.

Resources

For further exploration

paintingperceptions.com/conversation-with-lois-dodd/





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PortlandMuseum.org

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