

Family Guide

Josef Albers

Formulation : Articulation

Josef Albers (1888-1976) is known as a teacher and artist, and for his ideas on color. Many of the shapes in his work are basic in order to emphasize color relationships. He printed multiple versions of the same shape composition, the *constant*, to make color the only element that changes, the *variable*. This let him study color much like a scientist. Scientists isolate variables to understand relationships. By using similar methods, Albers was a color scientist.

GLASS

Josef Albers began his art career in Germany by working with glass. Albers liked collecting interesting pieces of glass he found near his house. He also collected glassmakers' samples, later filing them down to create even square pieces. He would place the squares into wire frames using symmetrical patterns, such as checkerboards. Eventually, Albers began creating stained glass windows for churches, museums, and other institutions. After that, he became a professor and taught glass-working techniques to art students.

One of the effects that Albers studied was optical color mixing. He observed changes when he layered different colors of glass on top of each other. He also saw that the color and thickness of glass affected how much light could pass through. In addition, the amount of light passing through the glass affected his perception of the color intensities.

- How many places can you name where glass is found?
- How can one piece of glass be different from another one?
- Where are stained glass windows found?

PAINTING & PRINTS

All throughout his life, Albers worked on creating paintings and prints. Near the end of his career, he painted a series called *Homage to the Square*, which he later interpreted in printed form. Albers used paint right out of the tubes—with no mixing. As with his work in glass, Albers noticed optical color mixing when using paint. This is similar to how tiny dots of color create the picture we see on televisions.

Albers liked the idea that when people look at his work, there are three approaches they may take: some tend to focus first on favorite colors, others work from the outside in, and still others from the inside out.

- Do your eyes start on the inside or outside square? Do you start with your favorite color?
- What do the different colors mean to you?
- Which primary colors (red, yellow, blue) mix to create which secondary colors (green, orange, purple)?

OTHER ALBERS CONCEPTS

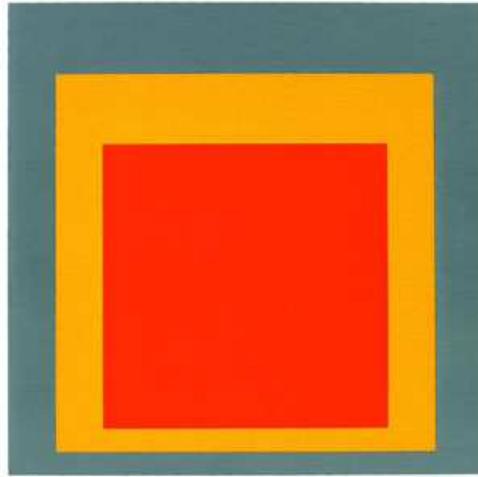
After leaving Germany and spending some time teaching at an American college, Albers toured Mexico and other parts of Latin America. What he brought back from his travels was the idea of using unusual materials and using common materials in unusual ways. An example of this is his woodcuts: they were printed from rough wooden boards instead of smooth ones to reproduce the wood-grain texture in ink.

He also experimented with the different effects created by using only lines. Albers felt that even though lines are very simple, they have endless possibilities. Lines can be straight and of any length. Lines can turn or curl; they can even form three dimensional shapes. You can see examples of this throughout the exhibition.

- Have you ever used an item for something other than what it was meant for? What was it?
- What would be an unusual item to make into art?
- How can you use lines to add dimension to a shape? Where do you see Albers do this in the exhibition?

Activity

The goal of this activity is to create a cube of Albers-style squares. Start this by coloring a square in the center of each section of the figure on the following page. Trace that square in a different color with a thick line. Lastly, fill in the remaining white area with a third color. After you have done that for each side, cut it out, fold along the lines, and glue on the spots marked on the figure. Make sure that your colors are on the outside. Now you're finished!



Josef Albers

Free Educational Program

Date: April 21, 2007 Time: 10-11:30 A.M.

The Museum Studies students at Northern Illinois University would like to invite students in grades 3-5 to an educational and artistic event to explore the world of Josef Albers.

The event is limited to 20 students so make your reservations now!

(815) 753-1936

The art museum is located in the Altgeld building (castle) on the NIU campus. For more information, visit

<http://www.vpa.niu.edu/museum/index.html>

