

INTRODUCING ART

HENRI MATISSE

1. Henri Matisse was born on December 31, 1869 in Bohain-en-Vermandois in Northern France. His father was a grain merchant. His mother, having artistic ability, liked to paint decorations on china.
2. Henri's father wanted him to be a lawyer, therefore he went off to school. After graduation he worked in a law office but was not happy. In the summer of 1890, he spent time in the hospital recovering from an illness. His mother brought him a box of paints, and his first paintings were copies of paintings.
3. In 1891 Matisse joined the Academie and worked under Bouguereau, however he did not respect his work and soon quit. Gustave Moreau invited him to study with him and Henri accepted. At 27 years old he had 4 paintings accepted in the Salon of the Societe Nationale des Beaux-Arts.
4. In 1897 he married Amelie Payrayre and went to London on his honeymoon. He did many odd jobs to support his family including painting decorative interiors such as the ceiling of the Grand Palais.
5. He was heavily influenced by the simplistic forms of African sculptures and masks, and the decorative patterns found in Japanese prints.
6. Matisse was a part of the Fauve movement. Fauve means wild beasts and got its name from the very bold colors used by this group of artists.
7. Matisse died at the age of 85 yrs. He worried that young artist might see his work as an excuse for not practicing. He felt practice with certain exercises to be essential for success.

Title: "The Purple Robe"

1. List the colors you see in this painting. How many are there? Are they repeated? Where, how?
Hint: Matisse has used a basic secondary color scheme in this painting - see color wheel charts. The vibrant colors are quieted by the use of blacks, greys and white.
2. What is pattern? Hint: A repetition of line, color, and shape to create a type of texture. How many different patterns are there in this painting? Look more closely to notice all the patterns are a variation of the vertical stripe. By changing the strip, through color and line, Matisse has added interest to the work yet repeated a theme, thus creating unity through repetition. Draw plain vertical strips on the board. Invite children to the board to change the stripe in anyway while keeping its vertical direction. Invite a new set of children to add some horizontal direction to the vertical. However the addition must also be a variation on the stripe.
3. Look at the children's clothing. How many children have some variation of the vertical stripe in their clothing. Have them discover this on their clothing and then in the room.
4. What is the focal point of this painting? Hint: The flowers - particularly the white flowers as that what stands out against all of the color.
5. Why do you think Matisse called this painting "The Purple Robe"? Why not call it "The White Flowers" or "The Stripped Walls"? Do you think he knew this lady? Could she have been a sister or Aunt, or perhaps a friend.
6. If you can, try to find examples of some Japanese prints so that the children can see how he was influenced by their work.
7. Bring in a robe, some old wall paper books or old wall paper to create your own Living Art scene with the children. Compare what you have created with the painting. Discuss the differences.
8. Matisse's work was quite flat, not allowing for much depth or use of perspective. Show the children a painting which uses great depth and compare the two. Overlapping is about the only type of perspective allowed in this work. The woman almost looks like she is standing up - she appears to be so flat. The top of the table is at a definite slant, the floor goes up hill. Matisse knew how to use perspective because of his formal training as an artist. Why do you think he chose to flatten everything out? Hint: He was a type of rebel and enjoyed going against the rules. The flatness of the painting seems to agree with the wild choice of colors. It serves upset your balance. Ask the children if they think the wild colors would be as effective without the flatness or lack of perspective.