

Matisse - Painting with Scissors

THE PROJECT

Preparation

- Become familiar with the life and cutouts of Henri Matisse.
- Gather examples of Matisse's cutouts.
- Set out background papers, planning one for each child.
- Set out scissors and construction paper to be cut.

How to Begin

- Display as many examples of Matisse's cutouts as possible. As the children look closely, tell them about his life and his work. Explain that in this session they will be learning to cut and arrange paper as Matisse did to make collages.
- Explain to the children that Matisse did not use a pencil to draw his shapes. Instead he cut directly into the paper, using his scissors as a pencil. Demonstrate some of the cuts that Matisse made, such as spirals, zigzags, and curves. These are called *positive* shapes. The holes left in the paper after the shapes have been cut are called *negative* shapes. Matisse included both positive and negative shapes in his collages.
- Along with a *theme* or unifying idea in each of his cutouts, Matisse used a simple palette of only two or three colors, as well as *shades* (black added) or *tints* (white added) of these colors. The children should plan the colors and themes for their collages.
- Have the children choose their background paper, reminding them that this paper is not for cutting. For their shapes, they should choose from the paper designated for cutting. Have them use their scissors instead of pencils and cut directly into the paper, just as Matisse did. Remind them to save their negative shapes along with their positive shapes.
- Explain that in this session the children will be arranging their shapes on the background papers before gluing them in place.
- Show the children how to *overlap* shapes while keeping the more interesting parts visible. Point out that Matisse often placed smaller shapes on larger shapes, sometimes building three to four layers in areas.
- Have the children arrange their cut shapes on their background papers.
- Glue sticks should be made available only after all cutting and planning have been completed. Be sure the children understand that the glue should be applied to the back of the cut pieces instead of on the background paper.
- When all gluing is finished, have the children complete their work with a title.

NOTES

- To further experience Matisse's process, older children enjoy mixing colors with tempera paint and then painting papers to be shared for cutting along with the construction paper.
- The children should use their own ideas for their collages while learning from Matisse's use of scissors, positive and negative shapes, and limited color schemes.
- Do not use stencils, precut shapes, or pencils. It's fun to draw directly into the paper with scissors as Matisse did.
- It's important to make the glue available only after all cutting and decisions are made.

