

PAINTING WITH JOY: THE ALMA STRIPE

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SD#73

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THE ALMA STRIPE

The “Alma Stripe” refers to the signature style of abstract mark-making developed by Alma Thomas. Her paintings are characterized by vibrant, rhythmic, rectangular brushstrokes arranged in structured yet dynamic compositions. These stripes often appear as radiating patterns, circular formations, or cascading columns of color.

Thomas developed this technique later in life, inspired by nature, music, and the movement of light. She carefully placed short, deliberate strokes of pure color next to each other, creating a sense of energy, joy, and harmony. Rather than blending, she allowed each color to stand out boldly, contributing to the mosaic-like effect of her work.

In this project, students will explore the Alma Stripe by layering dabs of paint in rhythmic sequences, using color to evoke emotion and movement.

BIG IDEAS

- Artists experiment to express personal meaning
- Art reflects the interconnectedness of the individual, community, history, and society

LEARNING STANDARDS

- Analyze the artistic style and techniques of Alma Thomas.
- Experiment with colour theory and mark-making to create an abstract painting inspired by Alma Thomas.
- Express personal meaning through abstract composition.
- Reflect on your artistic process and the connections between your work and Alma Thomas’ artistic approach.

MATERIALS

- Acrylic paints (vibrant colors)
- Flat brushes
- canvas or heavy-weight paper
- Palette knives or old credit cards (for texture)
- Plastic lids or palettes
- Water cups
- Sketchbooks or paper for planning



Aurora Waters, by James H., Westsyde Secondary School

RESOURCES

- Video: “Alma Thomas: Your New Favourite Artist” (National Gallery of Art)
- Video: “Alma Thomas Inspired Landscape Video” (Cassie Glidewell)



PROCESS

INTRODUCTION & EXPLORATION

- Show the Alma Thomas video and discuss her work.
- Discuss Thomas’ use of color, pattern, and abstraction.
- How does her work reflect themes of joy, resilience, and history?

PLANNING

- Have your students experiment with small color studies using markers or colored pencils.
- Encourage them to consider warm/cool color contrasts, repetition, and rhythm.

REFLECTION

- “What emotions or ideas do you want to express in your painting?”

PAINTING FOUNDATIONS

- **Demonstration.** Show the video demonstration of Thomas’ signature mark-making technique. Note that while the style allows for simple compositions, many of her designs are more complex, and students can be encouraged to challenge themselves appropriately.
- **Initial Painting.** Begin painting, working in sections. Consider layering and experimentation.
- **Clean-Up & Midway Reflection.** “How is your color choice affecting the mood of your painting?”

REFINEMENT & FEEDBACK

- **Refining Techniques.** Encourage students to try techniques for creating depth and vibrancy (mixing, layering, adding small details).
- **Continue painting.** Students can use this time to refine their compositions, ensuring balance and movement.
- **Group Critique.** Students can work in partners or small groups for peer feedback.
 - “Discuss how your work connects to Alma Thomas’ approach.”
 - “How does it differ?”

FINALIZING & REFLECTION

- **Final Touches.** Students add final details and highlights.
- **Artist Statement.** Short reflection on color choices, inspiration, and artistic process.
- **Gallery Walk.** Display the work, and students can leave positive comments on sticky notes.

EXTENSIONS

Students could challenge themselves by choosing a more complex design, exploring unconventional color schemes, or integrating mixed media.



Alma, by Maddie S., Westsyde Secondary School

ASSESSMENT

CRITERIA	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	PROFICIENT	EXTENDING
Understanding of Alma Thomas' Style	Limited use of color and marks inspired by Thomas.	Some understanding of Thomas' approach with partial application.	Clear inspiration from Thomas' techniques, with creative choices.	Deep understanding, with innovative interpretation of Thomas' methods.
Use of Color & Composition	Minimal engagement with color theory; lacks balance.	Some color variety; composition somewhat effective.	Strong color contrasts and effective use of repetition.	Exceptional color choices with dynamic, well-balanced composition.
Technical Skill & Effort	Limited effort in layering or mark-making.	Some control of technique; minor inconsistencies.	Good control of brushwork, layering, and texture.	Highly skilled execution with expressive, well-developed marks.
Personal Expression & Creativity	Little evidence of personal connection.	Some unique elements but not fully explored.	Strong personal interpretation with meaningful color choices.	Deep personal expression, demonstrating originality and emotional depth.
Reflection & Artist Statement	Very brief or incomplete reflection.	Some insights into choices and process.	Thoughtful reflection with clear connections to process and meaning.	Insightful, deep analysis of artistic process and personal expression.



Acrylic on canvas, by Victoria R., Westsyde Secondary School



The Alma Stripe, by Hudsyn M., Westsyde Secondary School