

Painting Dots with Georges Seurat

Life of the Artist

Georges Seurat was born in Paris, France, in 1859. He was known as Post-Impressionist and also as a Neo-Impressionist because he developed a new system of painting known as pointillism. He used the color theories of French physicist, Eugene Chevreul. He was concerned with light, shadow, and color. Seurat devised a system of semi-uniform dots juxtaposed, so that at a distance the colors mixed in the eye of the viewer. It took a great deal of time and skill to achieve the remarkable gradation of light and shadow as well as exquisite color and form in his paintings.



Seurat was strongly influenced by the works of Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro, who applied their colors in delicate layers. The three men were fascinated with color theory, but it was Seurat who developed a more controlled and scientific approach to translating color theory into a workable painting technique.

Seurat painted almost constantly, but he completed few works because of the time it took to apply the dots. His masterpiece, *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* is very large, almost 7' x 10' (2m x 3m). It took years to complete, and may be seen today at the Art Institute of Chicago. Seurat's technique attracted several artists to pointillism. Seurat died of diphtheria at the age of 32 in Paris, where he had lived his entire life.

Vocabulary

- pointillism
a series of dots of pure color, juxtaposed scientifically to be mixed with the eye at a distance
- La Grande Jatte
an island near Paris where people go to enjoy an outing

Painting Dots with Georges Seurat *(cont.)*

Technique of the Artist

Seurat studied the scientific approach to color with its many nuances and devised a system to capture light, shadow and shades of color by juxtaposing dots of pure color, scientifically placed to achieve the effects he desired to make his paintings outstanding.

Seurat's rendition of pictures is extremely complex. He wished to capture the natural world in all its fullness. Each element of Seurat's paintings is filled with nuances of quality and inventiveness.

Suggestions for a Project

Project

Ask the students to select a subject for a composition such as a scene from the circus, from outdoors, or a famous happening or landmark.

Materials Needed

9" x 12" (23 cm x 30 cm) white drawing paper, correction pen, a selection of books and brochures with pictures of the scenes suggested in the project suggestions above, pencil, eraser, a large selection of markers

Directions

Draw a picture of one of the subject matters listed above. Ask the students to fill in the composition using dots placed side by side. Be sure the students understand that they should achieve light and shadow, as well as shades in their compositions as Seurat did. They may use correction pens for errors. *(Note to the teacher: You will need a large supply of markers for this project. Acrylic or tempera paint may also be used with a fine brush if markers are not available. This project needs careful planning and should be emphasized to the student.)*

Painting Dots with Georges Seurat *(cont.)*

Evaluation: Interpretation of the Artist's Technique

1. Did the student stay within the selected subject area?
2. Is the picture well planned and neat in appearance?
3. Does the picture show shaded areas?
4. Does the picture show sunlight areas?
5. Are the dots reasonably uniform so that the colors mix at a distance?
(Example: Red and blue dots appear purple.)

Test Questions

1. Explain the meaning of the term *pointillism*.
2. Who was responsible for the scientific theory that helped Seurat develop his technique with color and light?
3. Who were two artists who had an influence on Seurat's work?
4. Why did Seurat paint so few paintings in his career as an artist?
5. What was the name of Seurat's masterpiece?

Answers to Test Questions

1. *Pointillism* is a technique developed by Georges Seurat, consisting of thousands of tiny dots of color placed side by side which supposedly mix as the viewer looks at the painting.
2. Eugene Chevreul developed the color theory Seurat used to develop pointillism.
3. Two artists who influenced Seurat's work were Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro.
4. Seurat's technique took much time to complete and he died when he was very young.
5. The name of Seurat's masterpiece was *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*.

Sample Project

