

## **Pablo Picasso (1881-1973)**

### **Introduction.**

Picasso is probably one of the most difficult artists to include in our one-hour Art Appreciation program. The work of most painters can be classified by the familiar “early”, “middle” and “late” periods. But Picasso was not like most painters, so this kind of classification does not seem to work for him. There were many Picasso’s: the neoclassicist; the cubist; the surrealist; the modernist; the ceramist; the lithographer; the sculptor; the superb draftsman; the effervescent and exuberant; the saturnine and surly; the communist; the successful financial man; the publicity seeker; the joker and performer of charades; even the playwright. Thus, we would need many more in-between periods to describe all that he was.

And then, which Picasso do you cover? Do you cover them all? One would probably need a year or two of art appreciation to cover Picasso adequately. His work has sometimes been broken down into up to nine periods, covered next, that can be given as a handout for the children to look at to try to see the immensity of his work. (Please collect them at the end of the class, so that the next class can look at them.) Even this will never convey his incredible career. Probably the best way to show the depth of his art is to show as much of his art as you can. We have four large pieces and numerous smaller ones. Do your best.

### **Biography.**

Pablo Picasso was born in Malaga, Spain on October 25, 1881. His mother was Maria Picasso Lopez and his father was Jose Ruiz Blasco, a painter, though not a very successful one. The origins of his last name come from Spanish traditions, where a child takes two last names: first that of his father and then that of his mother, thus, Pablo Ruiz y Picasso. Later in life, he adopted the single last name of Picasso.

The idea of school did not appeal to the young Picasso. The only lessons the boy enjoyed were his father’s drawing lessons. He was unable to add up a column of numbers at the age of ten, but he was as able to draw and paint as other children are to write their “abc’s.” His drawings seemed to be his words. Drawing was his way of talking and he drew a great deal.

In 1891, the family moved to Corunna. Picasso was beginning to make astounding progress as an artist, under his father’s tutelage. He mastered every technique taught him. The story: One day in 1894, when Picasso was only 12 or 13, Picasso’s father finished half the work on a painting of a pigeon and left the rest of the job to be finished by Pablo, who often assisted him. When he returned, Pablo had finished the painting. The pigeon was so lifelike and accurate that it surpassed anything that the father could have done. Thus, the story goes that the father handed his palette, brush and paints to young Pablo, vowing to never paint again.

In 1895, Picasso’s father was offered a teaching position in Barcelona. Before leaving Corunna, young Pablo had his first one-man show. Picasso, at the age of fourteen, was an extraordinary artist. He continued his training at his father’s new school, but rejected his father’s and the schools’ traditionalists’ approach. Picasso could have undoubtedly have chosen the comfortable path his family would have preferred, and would have been very successful, but this was not his way. His pattern was to reject all he mastered and look for new artistic means of expression. This pattern was repeated

throughout Picasso's life. He witnessed, and often participated in, over seventy-five years of modern art. During his lifetime Symbolism, Modernism, Fauvism, Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism came and went. He borrowed from these trends—except for Cubism, which he created—whatever he felt he could use in his own art.

## **CRS Resources**

### **Books.**

**The Minotaur (1987) by Danielle Giraudy**  
**A Weekend With Picasso (1991) by Florian Rodari**

### **Visuals (CRS larger reproductions).**

*Les Desmoiselles d'Avignon* (detail shown in poster of African art) (1907)  
*Family of Saltimbanques* (1905) National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.  
*Guernica* (1937)  
*The Enamel Saucepan* (1945)

Additionally, there are many smaller prints of Picasso's work, ranging in dates from 1901 to the late 1940s. There are duplicates of some in laminate that you can pass around to the children.

### **Poster of African Art**

This poster shows a detail for the Picasso painting, Les Desmoiselles d'Avignon (1907). This can be used to show how Picasso borrowed from other art forms, in this case anthropological sculpture. It also shows the start or early beginnings of cubism in its lines and forms.

### **Family of Saltimbanques (1905)**

By 1905, Picasso was settled in Paris, and he had new friends. With growing success, he had enough money to go to his beloved Cirque Medrano three or four times a week. Painters have always liked the circus. Picasso was fascinated by the performers, who became the subject for his paintings. With these works and his newfound happiness, his gloomy blue paintings turned into paintings of predominantly rosy pink color. This period in Picasso's art is generally referred to as the Rose Period. It was a period of enormous production. It is extraordinary the number and size of the canvases he painted during this short period, 1904-1906. This entire period is summed up by the magnificent large painting called Family of Saltimbanques.

Picasso has assembled, as if for a final curtain call, six circus performers he had come to know so well: the Jester, old, fat and patriarchal; boy acrobats, a young ballerina and Harlequin. It is one of Picasso's largest paintings (about 7 feet by 7 feet), which now hangs in the National Gallery of Art. The harlequin stands at the left holding the hand of a little girl with a flower basket. The harlequin was a main feature in the canvases of this period. His form is quiet and passive, he is not performing. Curiously, Harlequin wears Picasso's profile. An air of tragedy hovers over him. The woman on the right does not fit in with the others either in costume or composition, and she may have been originally

intended for another painting. Every other figure touches the one next to it as if to link together their lives and destinies. Standing in a featureless setting, they are treated like the objects in a still life, betraying no emotion, no sentiment, suspended in time and place.

### Guernica (1937)

“Painting... is an instrument of war... to be waged against brutality and darkness.”

In January, 1937, Picasso was asked by the Spanish government to create a mural for the International Exposition to be held in Paris in the summer. He was the pride of his country, and it was hoped that the work would be of such importance that it would draw attention to Spain's civil war, a war that many consider the first battle of World War II. The opposing forces were the liberal Republican government and the insurgent military, led by General Franco, a supporter and proponent of Fascism.

The idea for the work came to him with dramatic impact in late April, with the brutal and senseless bombing of the small Spanish town of Guernica by the German air force, under the orders of General Franco. They attacked at the busiest hour of a market day; the streets were jammed with townspeople and peasants. Never before in modern war had noncombatants been slaughtered in such numbers, and by such means. Worse still, Guernica had no strategic value for Franco's armies. It had been a kind of capital for the Basque people from the early Middle Ages onward. Of Guernica's seven thousand inhabitants, 1,654 had been killed and nine hundred injured.

Picasso was to create one of the great works of the twentieth century: his huge painting for the Spanish Pavilion was entitled simply Guernica. Picasso's painting is an outraged indictment and, through abstraction, he has expressed his feelings on brutality. Nothing can resolve the crime of Guernica into anything better than a staggering demonstration of viciousness and brutality -- hence it is painted in terms that are as ugly and as nightmarish as the crime itself: The painting is a carnage of dead, dying, and mutilated animals and human beings.

Guernica is an overwhelming painting. It is difficult to explain with theories or words the reasons for the extraordinary impact this painting has on its viewer. The painting is notable for its lack of color. It is all shades of gray and black -- sometimes the gray has a purple tinge, sometimes a brown one, sometimes a blue one. These somber hues, unrelieved in any way, emphasize the tragedy. Neither in the colors, nor in the figures, nor in the complex symbolism of the painting, is there hope. Even the woman's lamp only serves to illumine calamity. The size is not very well indicated in the reproduction and should be pointed out to the students. The painting was painted in a huge studio, which had once been a theatrical rehearsal hall in one of the oldest sections of Paris. It is an enormous canvas -- 11 feet, 6 inches by 25 feet, 8 inches. It is composed as a central scheme with two wings of half its width strongly divided from it by vertical lines, yet at the same time united to it by repeats and continuations of the main lines of a triangular formula, somewhat like a triptych, although not actually divided into panels. In the right "panel" a woman, her arms stretched upward, her clothes on fire, collapses, and above her a house is burning. Rushing away from this figure is another tormented woman. Above her, a woman's head, leaning out of a window, a lamp in her arm. On the left a bull, symbolizing brute force, rises triumphantly over a woman who shrieks in grief as she cradles her dead child. In the lower part of the central panel a severed arm holds a broken sword, the symbol of defeat. The head of the horse that rears from the center of the picture is grotesque, ugly, and, in a hideous way, ludicrous, as

death by such violence is. Above the human and animal figures, a light bulb which seems to be in the center of an eye.

Guernica is an allegorical painting; its meaning, the ugliness of war, is conveyed by the use of symbols. Art critics and historians have given many interpretations to the different elements in the picture. The bull and the horse are open to different interpretations; it is certainly noteworthy that Picasso used in his painting these two innocent victims of the bullfight. The lamp held through the window could represent the light of truth. Picasso who is usually loathe to expound on his pictures but commented on the work to an American soldier in 1945, said: "The bull is not Fascism, but it is brutality and darkness.. the horse represents the people.. The Guernica mural is symbolic...allegoric." By Picasso's own account the bull would seem to be the villain of the piece. Yet some critics have suggested that even in the "brutality and darkness" of which Picasso spoke, the creature is as guiltless as the victims, and that in surveying the horizon it is no less bewildered than the frantic horse and the screaming women. If, indeed, the bull is not the villain, then the enemy is nowhere on the canvas--an omission that conveys a chilling message: to the victims of modern warfare, the enemy remains impersonal and unknown. Of far greater importance than the discussion of symbolism is the enormous impact of this powerful dramatic work of art—its angry denunciation of war and the slaughter through war of countless innocent Victims.

Picasso's passion and love for life and freedom are illustrated in Guernica. "What do you think an artist is?" Picasso is quoted. "An imbecile who has only his eyes if he is a painter, or ears if he is a musician, or a lyre at every level of his heart if he's a poet, or even if he's a boxer, just his muscles? On the contrary, he is at the same time a political being, constantly alive to heartrending, fiery or happy events, to which he responds in every way. How would it be possible to feel no interest in other people and by virtue of an ivory indifference to detach yourself from the life which they so copiously bring you? No, painting is not done to decorate apartment. It is an instrument of war for attack and defense against the enemy."

### **The Enamel Saucepan (1945)**

To understand Picasso, we have to begin by accepting his complete rejection of photographic imitation, which is obvious from this picture, but not always easy for people to accept. Picasso was something of a child prodigy. In his teens he had already mastered the conventional techniques of painting and drawing, then abandoned them to work abstractly. In so doing, he sacrifices--for most people--the interest inherent in the objects comprising the picture, an interest on which many painters capitalize. Next, he sacrifices the fascination and variety of natural textures. He sacrifices the harmonies of flowing light, the satisfaction of building solid forms out of light and shade. He did this in order to gain complete freedom to manipulate the forms in his picture. He didn't bother with the true proportions of objects or their parts. He may adjust every shape within his picture area quite arbitrarily. If he has sacrificed the advantages of perspective, which would have permitted him to create an illusion, he has also gained freedom from its limitations, which would have forced him to show the table legs, the background, or any of the other objects according to a rigid system. For perspective is after all only a systematic distortion by which objects are shown larger or smaller and at different angles from their real ones in order to represent their position in a third dimension, and all according to rule. Picasso's distortion is his own, not that of a geometrical system. All of these sacrifices and gains are a means to an end, that is, the enjoyment of pure form, pure

color, and pure arrangement because we are less diverted by incidental interests, and our curiosity about the details of these interests.

People might have an uncomfortable feeling that this painting is too “easy” because Picasso is not obliged to demonstrate a high degree of craftsmanship. This obviously was not his intention. The painting is so simplified that any faulty relationship would be glaring. By examining the structure of the painting, we can discover how well constructed it is. The most obvious element tying the picture together is the repetition of lines and angles, the pitcher lip and the shadow of the candlelight, for example. Then there are other parallels or near parallels, such as the lines of the pan and the tabletop. Many similar relationships can be discovered; they form a kind of supporting structure. Every element in the painting affects every other one. The brilliant color of the pan seems to demand its position and size, or both. There is no room for accidental or unconsidered elements. It takes time and adjustment to see these points in abstract painting.

One of Picasso’s most familiar techniques in depicting a human or an object is the rearrangement of structure so that front, sides and sometimes the back appear simultaneously on the canvas. A carry-over from Cubism, such alteration is often seen in his works after 1940. This exaggeration is apparent here in the angle of the light and shadows, the view of the pitcher and the table position.

Picasso had become a celebrity; everybody loved him by the end of World War II. Six weeks after the Liberation, the Salon d’Automne opened its doors for the first time since the Germans had occupied Paris four years before. For years the Salon d’Automne had held the most important of all the exhibits in Paris in the course of any season. It had particular meaning in 1944, for it expressed the triumph of survival; it was jubilantly named the “Salon de la Liberation.” Giving homage to the hero of the hour, the jurors of the Salon offered Picasso a gallery to himself. The Salon had previously only given this honor to outstanding French painters, but never before to a foreigner. This painting reflects a peacefulness of this time.

### **Suggested Projects.**

1. Give each child two half pieces of construction paper and have them make two very different abstract faces on (one face per page), using markers, color pencils and crayons. When the faces are complete, pass out one more whole piece of paper to each student. Instruct the children to cut out pieces and parts of the two different faces that they had created and to glue them down to make a new Picasso face. The children should be encouraged to mix and match, and then add any details they want, as long as they are creative and cubic.
2. Have the children create a collage using geometric forms. The children can do a familiar still-life; their desk, their chair, their instrument, etc. in a room setting. Have them first make the room; one or two walls, meeting a floor and/or a ceiling. They should cut these items from construction paper, magazines, whatever works and paste them on their paper. Then they can cut shapes to build the object of their still life. If possible, send a letter home with the student one or two weeks before the presentation and ask them to send in materials that can be used for collage. The more textures and patterns available the better. The more layers they build, the more they will see how collage allows depth not as readily available using paints only.

**ADDENDUM**  
**Pablo Picasso (1881-1973)**  
**Nine major periods of his work**

1. **The early years.** Picasso was recognized as an artistic prodigy at an early age. His early work illustrates his technical capability at the beginning of his career. However, he was not satisfied with the limited possibilities in such a traditional mode of representation. His constant, incessant striving throughout his life for new means of expression is the primary lesson of Picasso's art.

Example: *Self-Portrait*. 1896. Oil on canvas. Museo Picasso, Barcelona, Spain.



2. **The blue period.** Shortly after moving to Paris from Barcelona, Picasso began to produce works that were suffused in blue. This particular pigment was effective in conveying a somber tone. The psychological trigger for these depressing paintings was the suicide of Picasso's friend Casagemas. The Blue Period work is quite sentimental, but we must keep in mind that Picasso was still in his late teens, away from home for the first time, and living in very poor conditions.

Example: *Self-Portrait in Blue Period*. 1901. Oil on canvas. Musee Picasso, Paris



3. **The rose period.** In 1905-6, Picasso's palette began to lighten considerably, bringing in distinctive beige or "rose" tones. The subject matter also is less depressing. Here are the first appearances by the circus performers and clowns that will populate Picasso's paintings at various stages through the rest of his long career.

Example: *Lady with a Fan.* 1905. Oil on canvas. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



4. **The beginning of cubism (Facet Cubism).** The first decisive break from Picasso's Rose period was his interest in African Sculpture. This African interest lasted only a few months, but greatly influenced the development of cubism. In late 1906, Picasso started to paint in a truly revolutionary manner. Inspired by Cezanne's flattened depiction of space, and working alongside his friend Georges Braque, he began to express space in strongly geometrical terms. These initial efforts at developing this almost sculptural sense of space in painting are the beginnings of Cubism.

Example: *Green Pan and Black Bottle.* 1908. Oil on canvas. State Museum of New Western Art, Moscow



5. **Analytical Cubism.** By 1910, Picasso and Braque had developed Cubism into an entirely new means of pictorial expression. In the initial stage, known as Analytical Cubism, objects were deconstructed into their components. In some cases, this was a means to depict different viewpoints simultaneously; in other works, it was used more as a method of visually laying out the facts of the object, rather than providing a limited mimetic representation. The aim of Analytical Cubism was to produce a conceptual image of an object, as opposed to a perceptual one.

At its height, Analytical Cubism reached levels of expression that threatened to pass beyond the comprehension of the viewer. Staring into the abyss of abstraction, Picasso blinked.., and began to start putting the pieces of the object back together. In this period, they removed bright colors from their compositions, favoring monochromatic earth tones so that they could focus primarily on the structure. The paintings of this period look as if they have deconstructed objects and rearranged them on the canvas. One goal of this is to depict different viewpoints simultaneously. Traditionally, an object is always viewed from one specific viewpoint and at one specific (stopped) moment in time. Picasso and Braque felt that this was too limiting, and desired to represent an object as if they are viewing it from several angles or at different moments in time. Innovative as this was, the danger was that many of the works of this period are completely incomprehensible to the viewer, as they start to lose all sense of form.

Example: *Portrait of Kahnweiler.* 1910. Oil on canvas. Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA.



6. **Synthetic Cubism.** The artists soon grew tired of analytical cubism and after 1912 found themselves searching for new forms of cubism. Picasso and Braque continue to introduce new and controversial changes with the introduction of collaged objects into their paintings. (There seems to be some discussion as to whether collage preceded Synthetic Cubism as the end of Analytic Cubism or was an example of Synthetic Cubism as stated above.)

Example: *Guitar, Sheet Music, and Glass* (1912) Pasted papers, gouache and charcoal, on paper. McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX



7. **Between the Wars.** The collaboration between Picasso and Braque ended by the First World War. After the war, Picasso pursued various artistic paths. He reverted to a Classicist mode of representation in some works. At the same time, however, he was continuing to push Cubism into new paths. During the '30s Picasso became tangentially connected with the Surrealist movement.

Example: *Sleeping Peasants*. 1919. Tempera, watercolor and pencil. The Museum of Modern Arts, New York, NY, USA.



8. **Picasso, the legend.** By the late '30s, Picasso was the most famous artist in the world. He was called upon to depict the brutality of fascist aggression in the Spanish Civil War with his monumental "Guernica". Many other paintings from this period reflect the horror of war, but there is a consistent depiction of personal interest as well.

The women in Picasso's life had a major impact on his artistic production, and some of the best examples are from this period.

Example: *Portrait of Françoise*. 1946. Drawing. Musee Picasso, Paris, France.



9. **Late Works.** In the last two decades of his long career, Picasso produced more work than at any other time of his life. During this period, some works are not only dated by month and day, but with a numeral (I, II, III, etc.) indicating multiple works created that single day. This late period contains some of the finest of Picasso's works. Some critics maintain Picasso was creatively lazy at this point, but a close look at the work is very rewarding. He had achieved a level of effortless artistic expression that has still not been fully appreciated after more than 25 years. Compare the first self-portrait to this, his final self-portrait.

Example: *Self-Portrait*. 1972. Crayons.

