Henri Matisse
1869-1954
Post-Impressionism, Fauvism

In the vertical art storage rack you will find the following reproductions and posters:

Small reproductions:
• Portrait of Madame Matisse (Green Stripe) (1905) (Portrait)
• Woman with a Hat (1905) (Portrait)

Large reproductions:
• Purple Robe and Anemones (1937) (Portrait)
• The Beasts of the Sea (1950) (Figurative Painting)

Posters:
• The Art Elements & Principles posters to use in the discussion

In the black cabinet you will find a white binder with a copy of this presentation.
In the plastic bin you will find the book When Pigasso Met Mootisse, Matisse the King of Color, and Getting to Know the World's Greatest Artists: Henri Matisse
Personal Information

Name: Henri Émile-Benoît Matisse (first name pronounced “On-ree”)
Nationality: French
Born: December 31, 1869 in Le Cateau-Cambresis, North France
Died: November 3, 1954 in Nice, Alpes-Maritimes, France (84 years old)
Lived: France
Family: Henri Matisse was the son of well-to-do shopkeepers. Before he discovered painting, Henri studied to become a lawyer. Later, he married a woman named Amelie and they had three children together.

Elements of Art

Note to Presenters: When looking at Matisse’s work, keep in mind the Elements of Art: the line, shape, color, form, and texture. This laminated print is available to bring into the classroom, it shows and describes all the things that go into making a work of art and can be shown to the children so that they may keep these things in mind as they look at the paintings.

Artist Background

When he was only 21, Matisse fell ill with appendicitis. During the long recovery from his sickness, his mother tried to entertain him by getting him a box of paints, a set of brushes and a how-to-paint book. Painting with these art supplies made Matisse feel free and happy and what started as a hobby quickly became his passion. Soon after fully recovering, he entered art school and spent the next 10 years studying art.

Back when Matisse was a painter artists were taught specific styles of painting. It was thought that Matisse had a lot of catching up to do because he had begun painting as an adult—rather than a young child who had been trained to paint throughout the years. At first, Matisse's early style was a conventional form of naturalism, and he made many copies after the old masters. He also studied more contemporary art, especially that of the impressionists, and he began to experiment, earning a reputation as a rebellious member of his studio classes.

A lover of all art, he spent a lot of time enjoying and collecting works of art from his fellow painters and often spent a lot of money buying their paintings and drawings. His artist friends inspired Matisse, and encourage him to try new things in his paintings, but by age 35, Matisse’s paintings were still only
Henri Matisse

in the style of others. He had yet to produce a painting that was uniquely his own style, which was something he really wanted to do.

Matisse began to stress the importance of painting from your heart. He believed that an artist did not have complete control over color and form, and instead, colors, shapes, and lines would come together in just the right way if the artist follows their heart.

Matisse liked to travel to places that were sunny and joyful. He went to Spain and Morocco, seeking warm light and bright colors and the beauty of these places influenced his use of colors and they became brighter and brighter. His unique style was emerging and becoming noticed and through his life there were many people who became dedicated fans of his art.

As he grew older, Matisse decided that he would only paint the joyful side of life. Even when he fell seriously ill, he continued to work on his art. Propped up in his bed, he began to make cutouts because he could no longer stand and paint at an easel.

Style and Technique

Henri Matisse was well known for his paintings, sculptures, prints, and collages and he is regarded as an expert in using color and form to convey emotions. Whatever style Matisse worked in bold color was nearly always a prominent feature of his work. While he explored many different styles he is considered one of the leaders of a style of art called Fauvism (pronounced “foe-v-izm”). Quick, wild brushstrokes, bold colors, and simplified objects and people were typical of this style of art. Matisse said he wanted his artwork to give people pleasure, and be soothing--kind of like a comfortable armchair you can rest in after a hard days work.

Fellow artists nicknamed him "Fauve" (pronounced “foe-v”), which means wild beast, because of his use of bold color. There were no colors Matisse didn't like! Instead of applying his colors in tiny dots, like the Impressionists did, he would apply them generously across the canvas in whatever way suited the picture. He went away from using the natural colors of things. For example, a tree was not shades of brown and green but rather maroon, bright blue, scarlet and purple! Often he left parts of the canvas blank, and let pure white of the canvas show. This would contrast with the colors.

Ask: Does anyone know what contrast is and how it is used in art?
Contrast is a principle of art. When defining it, art experts refer to the arrangement of opposite elements (light vs. dark colors, rough vs. smooth textures, large vs. small shapes, etc.) in a work of art so as to create visual interest, excitement and drama. The colors white and black provide the greatest degree of contrast.

Color is used to express emotions. An artist can feel a certain way when they paint and it can show in the artwork they end up painting. Matisse used blue to show truth, orange to show love or gentleness, red to show excitement or fire, and green to show growth or change.

In his old age, often confined to a wheelchair, Matisse began creating collages.
Henri Matisse

Ask: Does anyone know what a collage is? *Paintings created by using a cut out method: shapes are cut out and pasted together.*

Matisse thought of his new artwork as a kind of sculpting and used his scissors as he might a chisel. Matisse cut out human figures, leaves, flowers, and imaginative shapes. He placed the cutouts on white or multicolored backgrounds. Although Matisse created collages for a short period of time, he is well known for this type of artwork.

**Featured Artwork**

(Presenter may select from any or all of the featured works)

These portrait paintings Matisse did of his wife Amelie were very different than anything that people were used to seeing. Some people were shocked and angry about how Henri just seemed to slop wild colors on the canvas, but these 2 paintings marked the beginning of Matisse’s special style. No one in real life would look so colorful and the quick brushstrokes Matisse applied the paint wit showed that he did not really worry about detail. Color was chosen because the artist felt it was the right one and “fun” was a word that could be used to describe the final painting.

**Portrait of Madame Matisse (1905)**
Also known as *The Green Stripe*  
(Portrait, oil on canvas) Fauvism

Ask: Can anyone guess why this painting is also often referred to as “*The Green Stripe*”?  
Amelie’s oval face is divided in half with a slash of green and her purpled and top-knotted hair juts against a frame of colors.

**Woman with a Hat (1905)**  
(Portrait, oil on canvas) Fauvism

Amelie is dressed as a wealthy French woman. Her costume's is colorful, but not detailed and when someone asked Matisse about the hue of the dress Madame Matisse was actually wearing when she posed he said replied, "Black, of course."
Ask: What colors did Matisse use in these paintings? What do you think of his choices? Would you do try something like this?

Ask: Did you know colors could be described as cool or warm? Are the colors in these paintings warm or cool? Cool (blues, green, and purple) and War (reds and yellows).

Ask: What about the shapes do you see in these paintings -- are they more geometric (squares, circles, rectangles) or free form?

Ask: What lines do you see in the paintings?

Purple Robe and Anemones (1937)
(Portrait, expressionism, oil on canvas)

This is a portrait of a young woman sitting in a chair next to a vase of flowers called anemones. This is described as one of Matisse’s Expressionist paintings and like the name Expressionist suggests, it is a painting that is intended to expresses emotion.

Matisse wants the viewers to feel relaxed and comfortable.

Ask: How does this painting make you feel? Is he successful? Why or why not?

Ask: What do you think of the color in this painting compared to his earlier paintings of his wife? Brighter and more brilliant color.

Ask: Do his paintings have more geometric shapes or free-form shapes?

Ask: Why do you think Matisse used more free-form shapes? They say he did not think about every brushstroke because he was an emotional painter. In this painting, his free-form shapes are supposed communicate a message of freedom and relaxation.

Ask: What lines depict movement or stillness in this painting and where do you see these types of lines in the painting? Diagonal lines for movement and straight lines for calm.

Ask: Do you see any shadows? None. It actually described as a “flat” painting; one with no depth or dimension that would be created by having an obvious light source and because of that there are no shadows. In these paintings it is harder for the person looking at the painting to tell what is in front and what is behind.
The Beasts of the Sea (1950)
(Figurative painting, collage - gouache on paper, cut and pasted)

This is another example of Matisse’s bold use of color, something he did throughout his entire life, but here he was using a collage technique of cutting out paper shapes.

Before Matisse started to cut, he observed his subject for a long, long time. He made many drawings, sometimes working on them for an entire week before ever picking up a pair of scissors.

When he finally discovered the perfect shape, he would close his eyes for a moment and think about it and then draw the final shape onto some colored paper. To get the exact color he wanted Matisse made his own colored paper by painting whitesheets with paints he mixed himself.

The Beasts of the Sea is a large work of art: ten feet by five feet that was made by using gouache (pronounced “gwash”) on paper that was then cut and pasted onto card.

Gouache is a special type of paint consisting of pigment or color and something to make it stick together.

This painting is particularly fascinating because it is a painting that is in two halves. Several of the same symbols are visible in both halves of the work. Matisse used geometric shapes to symbolize certain things you might find in the sea.

Ask: What kinds of shapes do you see in this painting? What do you think they represent? Plants, fish, shrimp, water, the horizon

Ask: Where do you see similar shapes on each half?

The long curling shapes suggest the creatures that live in the sea, the leafy shapes the sea’s vegetation, and the spiral shapes are symbolizing the sea itself. On the left side of the artwork, there is a natural order of things, with the vegetation on the bottom and the creatures in the sea at a higher level. The triangular shapes seem to symbolize fish rather than sea mammals. With the right side of the artwork, things become more complex, as the creatures are seen at the bottom.

In Beasts of the Sea, Matisse uses the blue for the sea, which we would expect, but his use of color is random in other parts of the painting.

Ask: What do you think the other colors might represent? Deep sea? The colors of the sun? The colors of animals?
Activities

Reading options:

Grades 1-2: *When Pigasso met Mootisse* by Nina Laden
Grades 1-5: *Matisse the King of Color* by Laurence Anholt
Grades 3-5: *Getting to Know the World's Greatest Artists: Henri Matisse.*

Try at Home:

Try using color differently to paint a picture of something in your room or house. Maybe your pet has fur the a color that you would use to show how your pet makes your feel (red fur for an excited puppy or blue fur for a sleeping cat). Use different colors in the background that you think show how you feel at that time.

Collage can be a lot of fun too. Cut out shapes of something you find interesting or makes you feel a certain way. Use construction paper or pieces of cloth, color them differently if you wish. Paste them on a bigger piece of paper to form your subject. Try overlapping them to make other shapes.

Resources

http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/henri-matisse
http://www.flamingnet.com/matisse.cfm
http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/matisse/green-stripe/
http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n16/tj-clark/madame-mattises-hat