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**Henri Matisse**  
**"Icarus" (1947)**

Henri Matisse was a painter who turned to creating collages as his health deteriorated.

"Icarus" was a mixed-media collage created for his landmark self-published book: "Jazz".

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## **A Paper-Cut Collage Lesson Plan** inspired by the works of Henri Matisse

### **Brief Description:**

Students will exercise their scissor-skills, learn a few things about artistic composition, practice planning their own simple compositions, and learn about the famous painter and collage artist Henri Matisse.

### **Keywords:**

collage, composition, Henri Matisse

### **Materials Needed:**

white printer paper, colored printer paper or construction paper, crayons, markers, or paints.  
ArtHouse is highly recommended for display and class discussion!

### **Lesson Plan - Motivation:**

In this lesson we'll show you simple tricks that make striking results come quickly and easily. This project is a real self-esteem builder. With supervision and perhaps small modifications, it's appropriate for students ages five and up. Even adults will enjoy making Matisse-inspired mixed-media collages!

This lesson exercises scissor skills, and more generally the fine motor skills that are important to pre-literacy because they're fundamental to hand writing.

### **Lesson Plan - Background and Historical Information:**

Henri Matisse was a French painter who became very famous for using extraordinarily bold colors. Later in life, as his health began to fail, Matisse turned to making collages. His last, and most important works were a collection of mixed-media collages. Matisse arranged boldly colored paper cutouts into striking compositions, and added text in his own handwriting to produce a book that has been referred to as "the visual counterpart of jazz music".

Henri Matisse made his famous collages from white paper hand-painted with specially pigmented gouache. (He was sick, so he had an assistant prepare the paper. The pigments Matisse selected were the same pigments he planned to use when printing the book.)

Henri Matisse wrote: "The paper cutouts allow me to draw with color. For me, it is a simplification. Instead of drawing an outline and then filling in with color - with one modifying the other - I draw directly in color... It is not a starting point, it is a completion."

Matisse originally planned for his book to be called "The Circus", but changed his mind as he wrote the text. Many of the collages feature circus performers. Just 250 copies were printed in the first edition. "Jazz" has been reprinted over and over, and it's still in print today!

Inferential learning: What do you think the person in Henri Matisse's "Icarus" is doing? Dancing to jazz music? The name of the composition suggests something different! "Icarus" was a character from Greek legend. He was the son of Daedalus, the most famous inventor of his era. According to the story, Daedalus invented wings of wax and bird feathers for himself and his son to escape from the island of Crete. Daedalus warned Icarus to be careful, but Icarus wouldn't listen. He loved flying so much, he got excited and flew too close to the sun. The sun's heat melted his wings, and he fell to his death in the sea below.

When asked about this picture, Henri Matisse said it was actually inspired by resistance fighters in World War Two. Matisse began creating the Jazz collages during the war while living in occupied France. When France collapsed, former French military pilots went to England and flew with the British Air Force. Jazz wasn't published until well after the war ended.



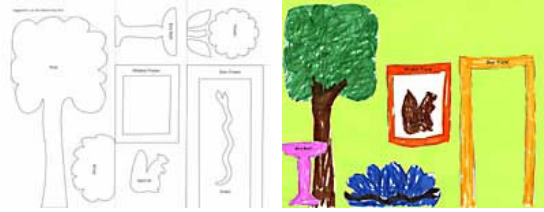
### **Lesson Plan - Activity:**

The first trick to make this lesson suitable for young children is to draw or print age-appropriate shapes onto paper. (We've provided four pages of shapes you can download and print for free! Our patterns are intended for kids 5 and up, but you can simplify the shapes for younger kids. If you like, you could substitute die-cut shapes, or help kids cut the more difficult details.

enter

Notice: Although you could print the shapes onto colored paper (as Claire's class did), it's more fun to paint or draw colorful patterns onto the back side of the printed pages. The pattern lines will be on the undecorated "glue side" of the paper, so it won't matter how accurately shapes are cut-out. Don't cut-out the shapes until after painting/coloring.

Suggested activity variation: the kids could color the pattern side of the template...



Is regular paint too messy? We suggest using "bingo markers" for these paintings. (They come in many brand names. What we're talking about are unspillable pre-filled paint bottles with sponge tips.) They make painting and clean up very easy.

Suggested activity variation: challenge students to mix their own colors, like Matisse did.

While the paint is drying, select a sheet of colored paper to use as the collage's background. Usually, it's best if the background doesn't match any of the paint colors.

When the paint dries, cut out the shapes.

Students should lay their cut-out shapes across the background paper to plan their compositions. Now is a great time to talk about composition. Depending on the sophistication of the students, you might discuss with them what they can do to communicate distance (from the viewer's perspective) in their two-dimensional compositions. Specifically, how:

- (1) larger design elements tend to look closer,
- (2) overlapping one object in front of another makes in-front element seem closer,
- (3) being close to the bottom edge of the page makes an element look closer,
- (4) brighter colors make elements appear closer.

You might also suggest to students that they don't have to use all their cut-outs. Ask the students which shapes they think are most important, and then ask them why. Show them that it's okay for shapes to run off the edge of the background because they can trim off the parts that hang over, if they want to.

We recommend glue sticks for quick and easy collages. "Disappearing Glue Stic" is easy to apply because it goes on purple and yet dries clear. "Removable Glue Stic" makes elements re-positionable; the adhesive doesn't have to be strong if you'll be displaying the collages inside ArtHouse's protective walls.

#### Lesson Connections:

Language Arts / Literacy Connections - we suggest challenging students to:  
title their compositions,  
write poetry around the edges of their collages,  
bind collages and writing into books.

Isn't art most interesting when it tells a story? Children love making up and telling stories through their own art with ArtHouse "storyboards". Collage techniques work particularly well for this because kids can experiment with changing around their compositions until they tell the story just right. ArtHouse is a powerful teaching aid that facilitates project based lesson plans and teaching "across-the-curriculum".

Social Studies Connections - we suggest challenging students to:  
reflect on a historic or current event and portray it in collage.

#### Lesson Plan - Assessment :

Assessment rubrics for this lesson ... are coming soon !

Here's another resource for creating your own [Henri Matisse Lesson Plan](#).

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