

Goldfish 1912

by Henry Matisse

Print Facts

- Medium: Oil on canvas
- Date: 1911
- Size: 140 x 95 cm
- Location: Pushkin Museum, Moscow, Russia
- Style: Fauvism
- Genre: Still Life
- The Goldfish is a painting that shows Matisse's extraordinary talent for creating paintings which make great use of color. It is an example of Fauvism – a movement that Matisse himself made popular.
- The background is a rainbow of different colors, which are bright and warm in the top section and dark and cold in the lower part of the painting.
- The four goldfish in the glass, which are the focus of the painting, are a bright and brilliant orange.
- They are surrounded by a whole host of bright plants and Matisse makes excellent use of the water to reflect the colors and brighten the picture further.

Artist Facts

- Born December 31, 1869 in Le Cateau-Cambrésis, Nord, France
- Died November 3, 1954 (age 84)
- Born Henri-Émile-Benoît Matisse in France, he was the first son of parents who owned a seed business (some call it a flower business).
- In 1887 he went to Paris to study law and later worked as a court administrator.
- He first started to paint in 1889 (20 years old), after his mother brought him art supplies during a period of convalescence following an attack of appendicitis. He discovered "a kind of paradise" as he later described it, and decided to become an artist. His father was deeply disappointed.
- In 1891 he went to Paris to study art and initially he painted still-lives and landscapes in the traditional Flemish style. In 1897 the painter John Peter Russell introduced him to impressionism and to the work of van Gogh. Matisse's style changed completely, and he would later say, "Russell was my teacher, and Russell explained color theory to me."
- Matisse went into debt from buying work from painters he admired. The work he hung and displayed in his home included a plaster bust by Rodin, a painting by Gauguin, a drawing by van Gogh, and Cézanne's Three Bathers.
- Around April 1906 he met Pablo Picasso, who was 12 years younger than Matisse. They became life-long friends as well as rivals and are often compared; one difference between them is that Matisse drew and painted from nature, while Picasso was much more inclined to work from imagination.
- With the model Caroline Joblau, he had a daughter, Marguerite, born in 1894. In 1898 he married Amélie Noellie Parayre; the two raised Marguerite together and had two sons, Jean (born 1899) and Pierre (born 1900). Marguerite often served as a model for Matisse.
- Matisse was a draughtsman, printmaker, and sculptor, but he is known primarily as a painter.
- Although he was initially labeled a Fauve (wild beast), by the 1920s he was increasingly hailed as an upholder of the classical tradition in French painting. His mastery of the expressive language of color and drawing, displayed in a body of work spanning over a half-century, won him recognition as a leading figure in modern art.

- A French artist, noted for his use of color and his fluid, brilliant and original draughtsmanship.
- Matisse is one of the best-known artists of the twentieth century.
- In his 80s he became ill and could no longer stand up to paint. He began to make art with paper and scissors while in his wheelchair. He created many paper collages, which were called Cut Outs. (See picture in packet.)
- Fauvism - Fauvism as a style began around 1900 and continued beyond 1910, the movement as such lasted only a few years, 1904–1908, and had three exhibitions. In 1905 several artists exhibited paintings with wild, often dissonant colors to express emotions, without regard for the subject's natural colors. The artists were soon called Fauves (wild beasts). Matisse was recognized as one of its leaders. The decline of the Fauvist movement, after 1906, did nothing to affect the rise of Matisse.

Key Element of Design to Teach

- **Shape** is a two-dimensional line with no form or thickness. Shapes are flat and can be described as being geometric or organic. Geometric shapes have hard, defined lines and angles. Often man-made things have these kinds of forms, which usually must be measured to come out correctly. Circles, squares and rectangles are geometric shapes. Organic shapes have no set form, and no geometric lines or angles. Things found in nature are often organic shapes such as clouds.

Possible Questions to Teach Shape

- What shapes did the artist use to create this painting? The fish? The leaves? The table?
- Are any of the shapes repeated? (The fish and the leaves are repeated. A round shape is repeated in the table, the fish bowl, some of the leaves and the polka dots in the background.)
- Show the difference between geometric shapes (circles) and organic shapes (fish and leaves). Use the extra painting in the packet to show geometric shapes.
- Tell them that Matisse loved art so much that when he was in his eighties and too old to stand up and paint he started making cut outs, or collages. Show them the extra print in the packet and then show them the shapes in the packet. Talk about what a collage is and how it is made up of different shapes overlapping each other. See if you can help them understand the difference between geometric and organic shapes.

Keywords

- Abstract, two-dimensional, shape, pattern, repetition, cool colors

Other Possible Questions

- What do you see in this painting? (Consider taking some inexpensive feeder fish to the classroom to show the students how the fish look swimming in a glass bowl. Note their reflections on the glass and water just like Matisse painted.)
- Do you see people in this painting? Animals? Plants?
- What kind of place do you think these fish are at? Inside? Outside? What else do you think might be next to the table just not in the painting?
- What do you think you would hear? (Ask the children to make the sound fish make. Point out that fish are silent. They don't bark or meow. It would be very peaceful.)
- What colors do you see in this painting? How would you describe them? Bright, happy, muted, dull?
- Can you see dark values? Light values? (The top half is light and the bottom half is dark. Have them squint to see it.)
- What lines do you see in this painting? Are they straight or curvy?
- What is the mood of this painting? How does it make you feel?