

## HOLCOMB ART LITERACY, 2017-2018

January

Alma Woodsey Thomas

Slides

### Photo of Alma Woodsey Thomas (slide 1):

Alma Thomas was born in Columbus, Georgia, in 1891, the oldest of four daughters. Education was of great importance in her family. Although her hometown wouldn't allow black people in the public libraries, she had aunts, who were schoolteachers, brought professors and other traveling lecturers into her home. In 1907 her family moved to Washington DC to escape some of the racial violence of the South. While the capital was still segregated it offered more opportunities for African Americans than most cities at the time. After her family's move to DC, Thomas attended Armstrong Technical High School. She had an interest in architecture, but decided art was her passion. By the time she graduated she had taken every art class the school offered. She also earned her teaching certificate and started teaching Kindergarten.

### The Stormy Sea - 1958 (slide 2):

Six years into her teaching career she went back to school and earned her college degree from Howard University in 1924. She was the first person to graduate with a Fine Art degree from that school. Upon graduation she became an art teacher at Shaw Junior High in Washington DC, where she remained until her retirement in 1960. She was devoted to her students and organized art clubs, lectures and student art shows for them.

### Red Abstraction - 1959 (slide 3):

While teaching at the junior high, Thomas earned her master's degree in Art Education from Columbia University. She was painting on the side and exploring the use of color to express what she saw outside.

### Iris, Tulips, Jonquils, and Crocuses – 1969 (slide 4):

Upon retirement she devoted herself to painting full time. She was 68 years old when she first publicly displayed her own art work. It was during this time she developed her signature style and debuted her abstract expressionism work at the age of 75. She created her mosaic style art by drawing in pencil each rectangle and then painting them in with short brush strokes.

### The Eclipse – 1970 (slide 5):

This painting is from her "Space Paintings", which includes at least fifteen works covering topics from rocket launches to sunsets. We don't know if Thomas saw it, but a total solar eclipse was visible in the US in 1970.

### Apollo 12 "Splash Down" - 1970 (slide 6):

Inspired by the world around her, Thomas said; "I was born at the end of the 19th century, horse and buggy days, and experienced the phenomenal changes of the 20th century machine and space age."

### Snoopy Sees Earth Wrapped in Sunset - 1970 (slide 7):

Continuing with the space theme, this painting's title refers to the nickname the astronauts gave the moon vehicle. Thomas said it's "my idea of what it's like be an astronaut, exploring space."

Starry Night and the Astronauts - 1972 (slide 8):

This is the final work in the Space Series. Like many of her other works, this piece doesn't obviously reference an actual space expedition. Instead it shows a small burst of color amidst vertical strokes of various blue tones, which can look like a spaceship traveling in the night sky.

Springtime in Washington - 1971 (slide 9):

Another area of inspiration was nature and in particular the view right outside her window. Washington DC celebrates the National Cherry Blossom Festival each spring. This reminds me of the cherries that will follow the blossoms.

White Daisies Rhapsody - 1973 (slide 10):

Despite her chronic arthritis that made painting difficult, Thomas continued with her art. She believed that by focusing on the natural world and highlighting it in her art, she could convey joy.

Autumn Leaves Fluttering in the Breeze - 1973 (slide 11):

Thomas often talked about "watching the leaves and flowers tossing in the wind as though they were singing and dancing."

Grassy Melodic Chant - 1976 (slide 12):

Throughout her career, Thomas studied color theory and was part of special group called The Washington Color School. In this piece she is has focused on a single color, however it still has lots of movement.

Red Azaleas Singing and Dancing Rock and Roll Music – 1976 (slide 13):

This piece stands over 6 feet high and measures 13 feet wide. It's quite impressive. Thomas once said: "Creative art is for all time and is therefore independent of time. It is of all ages, of every land, and if by this we mean the creative spirit in man which produces a picture of a statue is common to the whole civilized world, independent of age, race, and nationality; the statement may stand unchallenged."

Resurrection - 1966 (slide 14):

She was the first African American woman to have a solo exhibition at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art and exhibited her paintings three times at the White House. This painting is now hanging in the dining room of the White House and was acquired during the Obama administration.

Photo of Alma Thomas beside her art (slide 15):

Alma Woodsey Thomas died on February 24, 1978, while undergoing open heart surgery. She was 86 and was still living in the same house in Washington DC, that her family moved into when they arrived in 1907.

Alma Woodsey Thomas  
Project Ideas

### Mosaic Art

<http://createartwithme.blogspot.com>



Create mosaic art with ripped pieces of construction paper glued onto white cardstock. (Rip the paper lengthwise to create strips and then rip into little squares/rectangles).

### Paint Chip Collage

<http://ourartlately.blogspot.com/2011/04/tint-and-shade-collage.html>



Use surplus paint chips from paint store and cut them up to use as the mosaic pieces. cut all the sample sheets in half and put them in a basket on their tables. Lay them out in "favorites", primary colors, secondary colors, spectrum order, etc. We then discussed tint and shade. Choose 4 sheets of color(s) and arrange them in their personal space from lightest to darkest. Use EVERY SINGLE SCRAP from the four sheets. No one was to throw anything away! We talked about abstract art, also, as they were to NOT make a picture out of anything. We were focusing on color, not on a subject here.

### Autumn Leaves Fluttering

<http://newcityarts.blogspot.com/2010/11/kindergarten-autumn-leaves-fluttering.html>



Watercolor paints and crayons

## Rainbow

<http://thecleverfeather.blogspot.com/2013/03/rainbow-love.html>



Create a cool color background resist with watercolors. Create rainbow with torn or cut scraps of paper. Some may need to draw the arch for the students for them to follow it.