



<http://splattershmup.rit.edu/>

An Interdisciplinary
Teacher's Guide

From the website:

What is Splattershmup?

Splattershmup is a game that explores the intersection of the classic shoot-em-up (or "shmup") arcade game and gesturalized abstraction or "action painting" (a term coined by critic Harold Rosenberg in 1952 and often used to describe the work of American artist Jackson Pollock). It is intended to allow the player to reflect on their in-game actions and strategy through visual record, and to approach the creation of art as an arena of action. Art can thus be created, shared and discussed that comes "from inside the moment" of game-based decision.

Overview:

Students love playing video games and find the action paintings of Jackson Pollock captivating and exciting. The works of Jackson Pollock have had a huge influence on shaping art history and our culture. Through this unit of study, students will not only gain a greater understanding of our artistic past, they will apply this newfound knowledge along with gaming strategies to create their own abstract masterpieces. Depending on teacher time and resources, this could be the end product or the starting point for a multitude of STEAM learning activities.

Grade Levels: Grades 3-8; adaptable for grades 2-12

Objectives:

In this lesson, students will:

- Explore Splattershmup, refining and developing their skills with the game controls as well as their strategy
- Reflect on their Splattershmup artwork, indentifying not only the lines, colors, movement and composition that they created, but also theorizing the results of new gaming moves and investigating the results of these theories
- Be introduced to Abstract Expressionism and discover the works and techniques of Jackson Pollock
- Analyze and critique Pollock's drip paintings, making connections to their Splattershmup creations
- Adjust their Splattershmup strategy and utilize the various controllers to produce an action painting in the style of Jackson Pollock
- Apply the elements and principles of art to create a visually appealing and stimulating work of art

Standards Addressed:

National Core Arts Standards:

Anchor Standards:

1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
2. Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
3. Refine and complete artistic work.
5. Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.
7. Perceive and analyze artistic work.
8. Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
9. Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.
10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
11. Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

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The ISTE Standards for Students:

Innovative Designer: Students use a variety of technologies within a design process to identify and solve problems by creating new, useful or imaginative solutions.

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Teacher preparation and materials:

- Computers or laptops with internet access to open and use Splattershmap

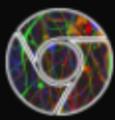
From the website:

Splattershmap is currently in OPEN BETA, and is freely available to anyone who wants to play. (Just to be clear, the final release will also be free.) You can play it online in a browser, or via a downloaded executable.

We are continuing to make improvements and fixes, and have some additional features planned that are pretty great. Your feedback is very important to us, and you can contact us at the RIT MAGIC Center, or through the MAGIC Facebook Page. As with any beta, there are some caveats:

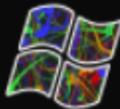
- Game controllers are supported in Chrome, but not IE. (This support is coming in IE 12). All packaged executables support game controllers.
- We currently support the official XBOX 360 game controller. Support for other controllers is planned, and may 'just work', but your mileage may vary.
- Performance in Firefox is poor. This seems to be related to an underlying issue of 'canvas-to-texture' in the Firefox WebGL implementation. We are investigating.
- Performance on some laptops that 'autoswitch' between dedicated and integrated graphics (such as modern Macs) is poor, we are investigating.
- In desktop builds, use 'F' to go to fullscreen (currently works but is undocumented)

Play Online!



You can play Splattershmup right from your browser! We support the latest build of Google Chrome and Internet Explorer 11.

Download and Play!



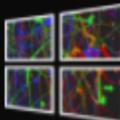
Splattershmup Windows EXE

Windows 7 | Windows 8 | Windows 8.1

Self Extracting .zip Folder

[Splattershmup_win32.zip \[59.8 MB\]](#)

[Splattershmup_win64.zip \[61.8MB\]](#)



Splattershmup Windows "Modern" App

Windows 8.1 | Windows 10

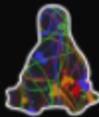
[Online at the Windows Store](#)



Splattershmup Mac OSX Application

Mavericks / Yosemite

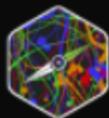
[Splattershmup.dmg \[71.1 MB\]](#)



Splattershmup for Linux

Your milage may vary...

Coming Soon.



Node-Webkit

For those who run things their way.

[Splattershmup.nw \[30.3 MB\]](#)



Teacher tip!

- I had the best gaming experience using Google Chrome.
- Play around with Splattershmup first- get to know the various modes, how to move around, shoot and other gaming options, before you introduce the game to your students.
- The game has sound, so you may want your students to wear headphones.

Teacher preparation and materials continued:

- Examples of Jackson Pollock's action paintings, such as:
 - Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist), 1950, National Gallery of Art
 - Convergence, 1952, Albright-Knox Art Gallery
 - Number 1A, 1948, The Museum of Modern Art



Teacher tip!

- A poster will work, however, if available, project the Pollock paintings on a large screen. Pollock's paintings are very large (around 10 feet) and can inspire a sense of awe, wonder, and engrossment when discovered and studied. This awe is not achieved in the same way on a small scale.

Time Requirements:

- 45-60 minutes without suggested lesson extensions or resources
- Three 30-45 minute classes with lesson extensions and additional resources
- Can be expanded into an entire unit of study

Activities/Procedures:

1. As an anticipatory set, you can start by asking your students if they have ever played video games before and to share some of the games they have played as well as what types of devices they play the games on. You could even share some of your favorite games from either the present or when you were a child. Next, you may want to ask what the objective (or goal) of those games were and if the students think that some games may have more than one objective or goal. Perhaps, there was a secondary outcome to the game. Finally, you can ask your students if they learned something new from a game or gained a skill that was unrelated to gaming.

Lesson Extension:

You can expand on this lesson by teaching your students how video games are created. BrainPOP has videos and activities on the subject for a more basic overview and the RIT MAGIC Center contains a wealth of resources.

2. Tell your students that today they are going to get to play a video game called Splattershmu. Although some of your students may easily understand how to navigate the game and jump right in, it would be beneficial to demonstrate how to maneuver, target and shoot in the game using the arrow keys and control pads.



Teacher tip!

- For younger or inexperienced students, you may want to already have the game open and ready to go on their computers or create a link on your teacher website that will easily take them to the game.

3. Allow your students time to explore and play in Arcade Mode, where the objectives are to avoid enemy weapons, shoot enemies and create art. This does take some practice.

From the website, start in Arcade Mode.



When the student's ship is destroyed, the game will display the artwork their movements and activities created. It may look something like this.



When your students receive their artwork, have them stop and analyze their creation. A great way to do this is to use an Artful Thinking Strategy.

Artful Thinking Strategy

I see...

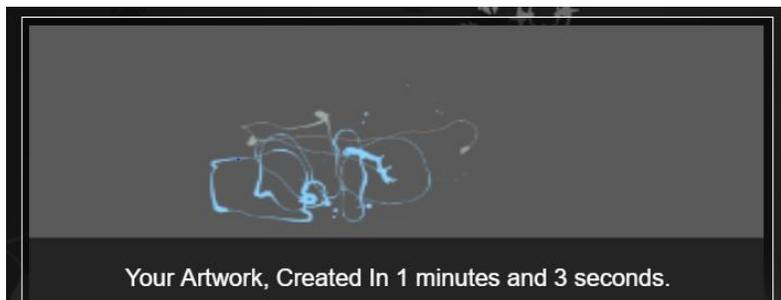
I notice...(or I think...)

I wonder...

(For more information on the Artful Thinking Strategy, please visit educationcloset.com or Project Zero <http://www.pz.harvard.edu/>)

Students can perform their analysis/artful thinking strategy by themselves, through a peer share, or in a small group. Have your students work through these statements to explore, reflect on and theorize their work.

Here's an example:



*I see...*squiggly blue and gray lines, thick and thin lines, drops or splatters of paint, overlapping lines and circular shapes.

*I notice...*that the lines followed the movement of my spacecraft

*I wonder...*how did I get different colors? Can I try to do that again? What would happen if I was able to play the game longer? How were the drops and splatters of paint created?

4. Then, have your students take their “I wonder” questions and try the game in Arcade Mode again, exploring and trying out their “I wonder” thoughts and questions to see if they get a better artistic result from these ideas. At this point, students may want to share their discoveries with their classmates and exciting collaborations may develop.
5. Next, have your students explore the game in Zen Mode, where there is no shooting or evading, just the creation of a work of art with meditative music playing (pressing 1, 2, 3, and 4 changes the colors). When students finish this activity, perform a reflective discussion on their experience.

Discussion Questions:

1. How was Zen Mode different from Arcade Mode?
2. What did you notice?
3. How was your strategy different?
4. Did you start to plan more? Did you start to think about line quality? Movement? Color? Composition?
5. Did your artwork remind you of anything? Why do you say that/please explain?
6. Did your artwork remind you of anything you have seen before, such as a famous artwork?

6. Project as large as you can a Jackson Pollock action painting, such as one of the paintings listed in the materials section.



Teacher tip!

- You can find these artworks on each of the museum websites that own the piece (www.nga.gov, www.moma.org, www.albrightknox.org).
- Each museum has amazing resources for teachers and students.
- NGAkids has a great pdf on Jackson Pollock (<https://www.nga.gov/kids/scoop-pollock.pdf>)

Lesson Extension:

Of course, nothing compares to seeing the real artwork! If you have the opportunity, take your students on a field trip to appreciate a Pollock in person.

After giving your students a few moments to take in the artwork, lead them through an analysis and critique of the artwork.

Looking at a Jackson Pollock...

- What do you see? (For younger students, ask about the types of lines and colors they see. For older students, ask about the movement, rhythm, unity, and composition they see.)
- What stands out to you the most and why?
- What materials do you think the artist used to make this piece of art?
- How do you think the artist made this work of art?
- What do you think it would feel like if you could touch it?
- If you had to describe this painting to someone who didn't see it, what kinds of words would you use?
- What questions do you have about this work of art? What do you wonder about it?
- Choose one line to follow. Use your finger or even your whole arm to follow the line. What did you notice about this line? Where did following the line take you?
- Imagine you could climb into this painting. What is it like inside the artwork?
- How does this artwork make you feel and why?
- Does this painting remind you of anything? Why?
- *Imagine it was your spacecraft from Splattershmup making these lines. How would you have to move and navigate your ship to create this work of art?*

A little bit about Jackson Pollock:

Jackson Pollock (1912-1956)

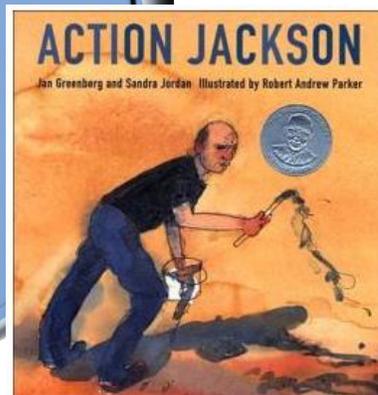
Jackson Pollock was an Abstract Expressionist who transformed and shocked the art world with his “drip paintings” and “action paintings.” Spreading his large, raw canvases across the floor of his barn, Pollock would dip sticks, knives, spatulas and hardened brushes into cans of house paint, and then proceed to drip, drizzle, splatter and pour the paint onto the canvas, working from all four sides. Almost like a dancer, he would use his whole body to create tangles of lines and webs of colors, infusing his paintings with his emotions, movements and energy. His paintings were unlike anything ever seen before and revolutionized art for future generations.

Abstract Expressionism

Abstract Expressionism was an American art movement that began in the 1940s after WWII in New York City. This movement marked the beginning of New York City as the center of the western art world. The artworks created by the Abstract Expressionist were extremely varied. They did not employ a similar style, however, they were all trying to convey some type of strong emotion or expressive nature and their artwork contained no recognizable subject.

Lesson Extension:

For younger students, read [Action Jackson](#) by Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan. Rather than being a typical biography, this book follows Pollock through the methods, movements and materials he used to create one of his most famous paintings.





Teacher tip!

YouTube has some great videos to help introduce your students to Jackson Pollock. Here are some that I have used:

- For younger students: Art with Mati and Dada- Jackson Pollock
- For middle grades: Artrageous with Nate: Who was Jackson Pollock?
- For upper grade levels: How to paint like Jackson Pollock- One: Number 31, 9150 (1950) IN THE STUDIO (The Museum of Modern Art)

Art Teacher Warning!

Jackson Pollock's artwork can spur some students to say "anyone can do that!" or "how is that art!?!"

Rather than squelching these responses, this can be a wonderful opportunity to debate the age old question, "What is art?" or "What makes something a work of art?"

While there is no universal definition of art, the Oxford Dictionary defines art as "the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power." Lisa Marder on thoughtco.com defined art in this way, "art is the conscious creation of something beautiful or meaningful using skill and imagination."

In addition, you could have your students write on post-it notes what their definition of art is (you will most likely get as many different answers as students in your room), post these up for all to see, and then using their own definitions of art, determine if Pollock's artwork or that of other Abstract Expressionists meets their criteria of what is art.

Of course, you could also show them this TED-ed video which directly answers this question:

What is abstract expressionism? -Sarah Rosenthal which is available on YouTube.

7. Share with your students this quote by Jackson Pollock:

“When I am painting I have a general notion as to what I am about. I can control the flow of the paint...There is no accident, just as there is no beginning and no end.” While it seems very intuitive and spontaneous (and in many ways it was), Pollock spent hours reflecting on and pondering the canvas spread across his floor before taking action. He carefully controlled his movements to direct the paint into curving lines, dynamic arcs and rippling splatters (<https://www.nga.gov/kids/scoop-pollock.pdf>).

With their new discovery of Jackson Pollock’s art and processes, have your students go back into the Splattershmap and in **Zen Mode** carefully control their movements to create an “action” painting in the style of Jackson Pollock.

Jackson Pollock Splattershmap Painting

Things to consider:

- *Line variation (thick, thin, direction, etc.)*
- *Layering of lines and colors*
- *Composition (filling/using the space)*
- *Strategic splatters and drips*
- *Anything else??*



Teacher tip!



In the Options menu, students can choose different background colors and color palettes to use in Zen Mode to help them emulate the colors in some of their favorite Pollock paintings.

After they make their Pollock-inspired Zen Mode painting, have your students reflect on and compare their new artwork that applies their knowledge of Pollock's action paintings to their initial (or Pre-Pollock) tries.

- *What is different about your artworks?*
- *How have you grown as an artist?*
- *Which one appears more developed? Why?*
- *What did you find challenging about trying to create a Pollock-inspired artwork in Zen Mode?*

8. Next, have your students attempt to create a Pollock-inspired action painting **Arcade Mode**, again applying their knowledge of his action paintings to their gaming strategy. When their artwork is created and displayed, have your students once again reflect on their creation.

- *What is different about your artworks?*
- *How did your gaming strategy need to change?*
- *Were you able to develop your artwork? Why or why not?*
- *What did you find challenging about trying to create Pollock-inspired work of art in Arcade Mode?*

9. In conclusion, lead your students through a final self-reflection. This could be done individually, through a peer share, in small groups, or even as a whole class dialog.

*Splattershmup blurs the line between being a gamer and
being an artist.*

In this experience, were you a gamer, an artist, or both?

Please explain your reasoning behind your answer.

Activities and Procedures at a glance:

1. Teacher performs a quick demonstration of the Splattershmup controls and movements.
2. Students play in Arcade Mode, shooting and evading their enemies.
3. Students reflect on their artwork, finishing “I see, I notice, I wonder...” statements for their artwork.
4. Students test their “I wonder” hypotheses in Arcade Mode to see how they may improve their artwork.
5. Students then explore Zen Mode, where instead of shooting and evading, they only navigate their ship to create a work of art.
6. Teacher leads the class through a discussion on the differences they discovered between Arcade Mode and Zen Mode.
7. Teacher shows the students an example of a Jackson Pollock action painting and leads the students through an analyzation and critique of his artwork. The teacher may include information on who Jackson Pollock was, his methods, as well as his place in Abstract Expressionism.
8. After exploring Pollock’s paintings and methods, students apply their new art knowledge to Splattershmup, first in Zen Mode and then in Arcade Mode, creating a Pollock-inspired action painting. After creating an artwork in each mode, students reflect on their process and results.
9. Teacher leads the class through a final self-reflection, asking the students to contemplate whether, through this experience, they saw themselves as a gamer, an artist, or both, and why.



Teacher tip!

Expand your students' learning!

This lesson can stand on its' own or it can launch a multitude of learning experiences.

Depending on the level of the students you teach, here are some ideas:

- Let your students create a real “action” painting! Once surfaces are covered (or outside if weather allows), encourage students to drip, splatter, and drizzle paint onto paper to create their very own piece of abstract expressionism. Urge them to try out different techniques and find their own artistic style!
- If this seems a little too much for your classroom, students can experiment with marble painting (rolling marbles covered with paint on paper placed in a box), string painting (dipping strings held with clothespins in paint that are then “danced” on the paper), or experimental painting (such as using Koosh balls, shower poufs, dishwands, etc., instead of brushes).
- Encourage your students to find other (school-appropriate) video games that connect gaming with art. Bonus points if they research and present the artist that the game mimics!
- There were many Abstract Expressionist artists, each with their own personal style. Have your students research a different Abstract Expressionist and design a video game that explores that artist’s style. This can simply be a description of the proposed game and what it can do, or depending on your students’ abilities, they can actually try to make the game. There are some amazing resources online and at the RIT MAGIC center to help with this.
- Combine physics and art by creating Pollock inspired pendulum paintings! Teachertombsblog.blogspot.com and www.studiosproutsantacruz.com both have great tutorials and the pendulum drip paintings make beautiful artworks.

About the Author:

Sara M. Cometto

- B.A. in Art History from SUNY Geneseo
- NYS K-12 Permanent Art Education Certification from Buffalo State College
- M.S. in Elementary Education Specializing in Arts for Children from SUNY Brockport
- 18+ years teaching Art Education, grades K-12 and special needs, at Alden Central Schools