Masterpiece: I saw the Figure 5 in Gold
Artist: Charles Demuth
Concept: Value of color and contrasting colors (warm vs. cool colors)
Lesson: Abstract numbers in tempera

Objectives:
A. Understand the terms value and contrast in relation to colors
B. Recognize how depth is created in a painting
C. Relate the 4 elements of art focusing on color, lines and shapes

Vocabulary: Contrast-colors with different values, Cool vs. warm colors, Shape, Recede, Advance

Materials:
- 8 x 10 sheet of white construction paper (you will need to cut down)
- Tempera paints: warm color - yellow, cool colors - blue, green and violet
- Pencil
- Paintbrushes
- Paper plates
- Water cups
- Paper towels
- Newspapers to protect desks
- Rulers

**Note:** Explain to the students that the cool colors will look as if they "recede" (go back into the picture). Yellow is a warm color and it looks as if it "advances" (pops out or comes forward).

Make sure that the students DO NOT mix paints. In other words, only true blue, green, or violet for the background and only true yellow for the number.

It the students have time they can write a poem in the style of William Carlos William to go along with their painting.

Process: * Examples of process 1 - 4 are in the notebook, along with several completed projects to show the class.
1. Make sure paper is placed “Portrait” style. NOT “Landscape”. LIGHTLY draw a large numeral in the center of the paper. This is the “skeleton” number.
2. Draw around the skeleton number on both sides to turn the skeleton into a solid shape. Try to stay the same distance away from the skeleton all the way around. NOTE: the number should be large, but not reach any sides of the paper.
3. Erase the skeleton line.
4. Starting at the edge of the number, draw lines (with ruler) off the edge of the paper. Space these out around the number. NOTE: do not make too many lines.
5. Give students a paper plate with blue, green, violet, and yellow.
6. Paint the background (cool colors first). Students can use all three cool colors or use two colors. Make sure the entire paper is painted. NO WHITE showing. See examples in Notebook.
7. Paint the number yellow last!
8. Have the student initial their work anywhere on the cool colors. DO NOT put initials on the yellow number.
6th GRADE--PROJECT #4

Artist: Charles Demuth
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Project Samples:
Charles Demuth was an American painter, known as a “Cubist-Realist”. Cubist artists arrange geometric shapes on canvas in various colors and textures. Realist artists create artwork that looks like what we see around us. Demuth combined the two styles in daring and unusual ways, often using symbols to make his works abstract as well. This art form is also known as Precisionism. The artwork we discussed was, “I Saw the Figure Five in Gold”. This painting was inspired by a poem of a friend titled, “The Great Figure”, referring to the side of a bright red fire engine. Demuth created this painting, using contrasting color, shapes and symbols to show us things not as we see them, but as a new way of looking at things in a fragmented and more complex form.
Charles Demuth  
(1883-1935)

Growing up in Lancaster, Pennsylvania as a rather sickly child, Demuth received his training in art at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art and in the art world of Paris. Over the years, Demuth developed a delicate and sensitive watercolor style—clear, see through washes with soft changes in color. His personal Cubism began in still life painting (arrangements of ordinary objects) and interesting old houses. He liked to “take the ordinary and unattractive subject and make it a work of art.”

Demuth continued his art training during trips to Europe between 1907 and 1921. In 1925 he was included in a group exhibition organized by Alfred Stieglitz, who later gave him a few one-man shows at his galleries. Demuth, a versatile artist, tailored his style to his subject matter. His delicate, loosely handled watercolors of fruits and flowers pulsate with subtle, exquisitely balanced color. His paintings of the modern urban and industrial landscape, on the other hand, are tightly controlled, hard, and exact — in a style aptly called Precisionism. In his later years he produced for his friends an unusual series of poster portraits. One of these is, *I Saw the Figure Five in Gold.*

Although these works show the influence of Cubism and Futurism, their sense of scale and directness of expression seem entirely American. Charles Demuth created most of his art in his home where he worked in a small second floor studio of the rear wing, overlooking the garden. The garden was tended by his mother Augusta and was the source of inspiration for many of Demuth’s paintings. The Demuth home, built in the latter part of the 18th century, is one of the oldest in Lancaster and once served as a Colonial era tavern. Located next door is the Demuth Tobacco Shop. Founded in 1770, it is the oldest tobacco shop in America. When Charles Demuth died at age fifty-one, after suffering from diabetes for much of his life, an important and prolific career was cut short. In all, Demuth produced over one thousand paintings. The house that Demuth created most of his paintings at in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is now a museum dedicated to Charles Demuth’s life. Next door is still the famous Demuth Tobacco Shop.

“The Great Figure” By William Carlos Williams (a friend of Demuth)  
Inspired the painting, *I Saw The Figure Five In Gold* (1928)
Among the rain
and lights
I saw the figure 5
in gold
on a red
firetruck
moving
tense
unheeded
to gong clangs
siren howls
and wheels rumbling
through the dark city.

Possible Questions to talk about:

- Would you consider this painting real or abstract?  (It's abstract, but there are real elements that we recognize.)

- What light colors do you see?  (Gold, yellow, tan, white)  What dark colors do you see?  (Red, blue, gray, brown, black)

- Value is the lightness or darkness of a color.  How many different values of gold can you find?  Of Red?  Of Black?

- Look at the largest number five.  How has the artist make it look as if beams of light are shining on it?  (By changing the value within a diagonal band)

- What has the artist done to create depth in the painting?  (The fives move from large to small, from dark to light, many of the shapes around the fives point inward, creating a tunnel effect; light colors against dark ones create contrast, and light colors tend to move forward while dark one tend to move back)

- Can you find Demuth's and William's initials in the painting?
Charles Demuth
(1883-1935)
“Futurism-Cubism”
“I Saw the Number Five in Gold”
Charles Demuth's painting

*The Figure 5 in Gold*

inspired by

William Carlos Williams'

poem: *The Great Figure*

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**The Great Figure**

Among the rain
and lights
I saw the figure 5
in gold
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fire truck
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**Charles Demuth** (1883-1935)

*The Figure 5 in Gold* (1928)

Alfred Stieglitz Collection

Metropolitan Museum of Art

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**William Carlos Williams** (1883-1963)

*Sour Grapes: A Book of Poems*

Four Seas Company, Boston, 1921
The Red Wheelbarrow

William Carlos Williams

so much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens.