

Lesson Title

Alma Thomas-Inspired Quarter Circle Color Mixing (Liquid Tempera Dash Painting) for Grades 2–5

Grade Levels

Grades 2–5 (works beautifully as a whole-school display project)

Lesson Objective

Students will paint an **Alma Woodsey Thomas–inspired** quarter-circle using **short, repeated “dash” brushstrokes** and **3 analogous color choices** to create a **smooth color graduation** (tint/shade shifts) from one hue to the next.

NCAS Visual Arts Standards

(Condensed across grades 2–5 where the intent is the same.)

- **VA:Cr1.1.2/3/4/5a:** Brainstorm, elaborate, and/or combine ideas to generate art-making approaches. ([National Arts Standards](#))
- **VA:Cr2.1.2/3/4/5a:** Experiment, create, and develop skills using a variety of materials and techniques through practice. ([Smithsonian Learning Lab](#))
- **VA:Re7.2.2/3/4/5a:** Determine/analyze messages communicated by an image (connecting student choices to Thomas’s visual “rhythm”). ([Smithsonian Learning Lab](#))

Lesson Description

This is a **fast, high-success, low-drama** painting lesson: kids paint inside a quarter-circle template using **short dash strokes** (Thomas vibes!) while practicing **color mixing** and subtle transitions. When four quarters are displayed together, you get a full radiant circle—aka: instant hallway wow.

Teaching notes (your sanity savers):

- Keep choice tight: **3 analogous combo options only** (yellow→orange, red→purple, blue→green) to avoid the “what color should I doooooo” spiral.
- The magic is in **repeating small strokes**—not perfection. If a dash goes rogue, we call it “movement.” 😊
- Plan ahead: **adult trimming + assembling** later is what makes the finished circles look so crisp.

About Alma Thomas (kid-friendly):

Alma Thomas developed a signature abstract style using **vibrant, rhythmic dashes/strokes** of color, often inspired by nature and light. ([Smithsonian American Art Museum](#))

Vocabulary

- **Analogous colors:** Colors next to each other on the color wheel (ex: yellow, yellow-orange, orange).
- **Secondary color:** A color made by mixing two primaries (orange, green, purple).
- **Gradient/Graduation:** A smooth change from one color to another.
- **Dash stroke:** A short, repeated brush mark (like a little rectangle).
- **Abstract:** Art that doesn't try to look exactly like real life—focuses on color, shape, rhythm.

Materials

- **Template pages (download):** *Left* quarter-circle + *Right* quarter-circle versions (light dashed guides included)
- **Liquid tempera paint:** six primary colors available (students use only what fits their chosen combo)
- **Flat brushes** (key!): $\frac{1}{2}$ " or $\frac{3}{4}$ " work best for clean little rectangles
- **Thin paper plates** (cheap palettes with just enough "wall" to hold paint)
- Water cups + paper towels
- Drying rack / drying space
- Scissors + backing paper + stapler or glue (for *adult* assembly later)

Prep (5 minutes that saves 50 headaches):

- Portion paint in table sets: only the colors for that table's combo.
- Put "Brush Rules" on the board: **Dip** → **Wipe** → **Dash**.
- Write names on the back before painting.

Materials list disclaimer (include as-is):

Some links in this materials list are affiliate links—meaning I may earn a small commission at no extra cost to you, and I only share the exact stuff I'd use in my own art room because your sanity (and your supply budget) matters.

Lesson Sequence

Option A: One 30-minute class (your plan)

Introduction (3 min)

- Show 1–2 Alma Thomas images with dash marks.
- Quick prompt: “What do these little strokes *do* to your eyes? (They feel like music/movement!)”

Guided practice/demonstration (7 min)

- Demo dash stroke with flat brush (single stroke rectangle).
- Demo mixing “degrees”:
 - Color A (pure) → A + tiny bit of B → half/half → B + tiny bit of A → Color B (pure)
- Show how to stay between template guides.

Independent practice (15 min)

- Students paint from one side of the quarter circle to the other, gradually shifting color.

Clean up (3 min)

- “Wipe plates, rinse brush, bristles up.” (Or whatever ritual keeps your brushes alive.)

Closure (2 min)

- Quick share: “Point to the area where your color shift is smoothest.”

Option B: If you can steal a second 15-minute session later

- Day 2 mini: add a few extra dash layers for richer gradients + quick reflection.

Student Art Examples

Show at least **3 examples** (one strong gradient, one “chunky” gradient, one wild-but-successful) so kids see there’s **no single ‘right’** result—just different rhythms.

Teacher script: “We’re borrowing Alma Thomas’s idea—*dashes of color*—but your gradient will be uniquely yours.”

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. **Choose ONE combo:**
 1. Yellow → Orange
 2. Red → Purple
 3. Blue → Green
2. On your palette, set up **5 paint puddles** (like stepping stones):
 1. Color A (pure)
 2. A + tiny bit of B
 3. Half A / Half B

4. B + tiny bit of A
5. Color B (pure)
3. Start at the corner edge of the quarter circle with **pure Color A**.
4. Paint **dash strokes** between the template guides (one flat-brush stroke per dash).
5. Move to puddle #2 and keep dashing.
6. Continue through puddles #3, #4, #5 so the color **graduates** across the quarter circle.
7. If paint gets muddy: **wipe brush, fresh puddle, keep going**.
8. Put work on the drying rack **flat**.

PDF Lesson Download

Your download should include:

- **Teacher lesson PDF** (this plan)
- **Template pages:** *Left* quarter circle + *Right* quarter circle with light dashed guides

Cross-Curricular & Extension Resources

- **Social Studies / Biography connection:** Alma Thomas was a longtime educator who developed her signature abstract style later in life—great tie-in for perseverance and growth mindset. Smithsonian profile: <https://americanart.si.edu/artist/alma-thomas-4778> ([Smithsonian American Art Museum](#))
- **Science connection (light + color):** Simple explanation of how we see color (light, reflection, perception)—tie it to why Thomas’s colors “vibrate.” National Air and Space Museum story: <https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/art-alma-w-thomas-colorful-response> ([Air and Space Museum](#))

Differentiation Strategies

1. **Decision-fatigue buster:** Pre-assign tables to one combo (all blue/green table, etc.). Kids still get ownership, you get fewer paint traffic jams.
2. **Motor support:** Let students use **bigger flat brushes** and make fewer, larger dashes (still looks awesome, less strain).
3. **Early finisher extensions:**
 - Add a second layer of dashes to intensify the gradient
 - Create a tiny “color key” on the back showing the 5 mixing steps
 - Paint a second quarter using the *same* colors but reverse direction (dark → light)

Assessment & Reflection

Quick rubric (fast + fair)

Criteria	4	3	2	1
Dash technique	Consistent dashes, careful spacing	Mostly consistent	Some rushed/uneven	Minimal effort
Color mixing	Clear 5-step graduation	Mostly smooth shift	Some abrupt jumps	Little/no mixing
Craftsmanship	Stayed in template well	Minor slips	Frequent slips	Off-task/unfinished
Participation	Focused + followed routines	Mostly focused	Needed reminders	Disruptive/off-task

Two assessment options

- **Super simple self-check (30 seconds):**
“Circle one: My gradient is (smooth / kinda smooth / still practicing). My best section is _____.”
- **Quick peer response (2 minutes):**
“I notice your colors change most here... I wonder what mix you used...”

Call to Action

If you try this, send photos of your quarter circles *in progress* and the final hallway circles—seriously, these displays are instant school pride. I’d love to feature your class results (with your permission).

Would you like me to create Google Slides for this lesson?