

Art week 18

Letters in a picture

Aa-Bee-Cee
kissa kävelee
tikapuita pitkin
taivaaseen.
(traditional Finnish poem)

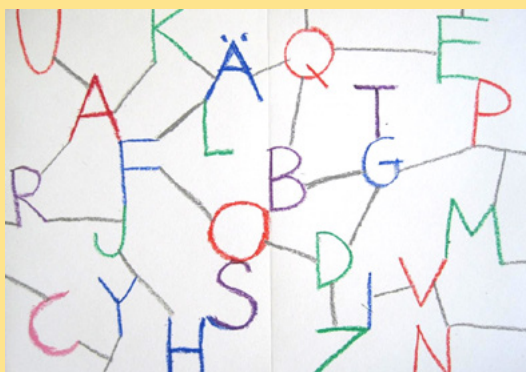
Rough translation:
A – B – C
The cat is walking
On the ladder
To heaven

Do you remember the whole alphabet? Now we will use letters to make pictures – and this time, you can even draw the letters upside-down! Cyrillic letters, Chinese characters and the Latin alphabet are all suitable for this task.

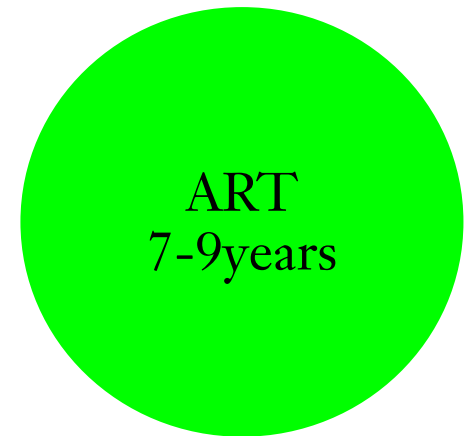
Choose a large sheet of paper (you can tape two smaller pieces of paper together), and take out your crayons. Draw all of the alphabet onto a piece of paper, or as many as you can remember, and in whatever order you like on different sides of the paper, perhaps floating, as in this example:



Connect the letters to each other or to the edges of the paper with straight lines. This way, you get different shapes.



Paint all the shapes you've created using water colours in such a manner that shapes of the same colour are not next to each other.



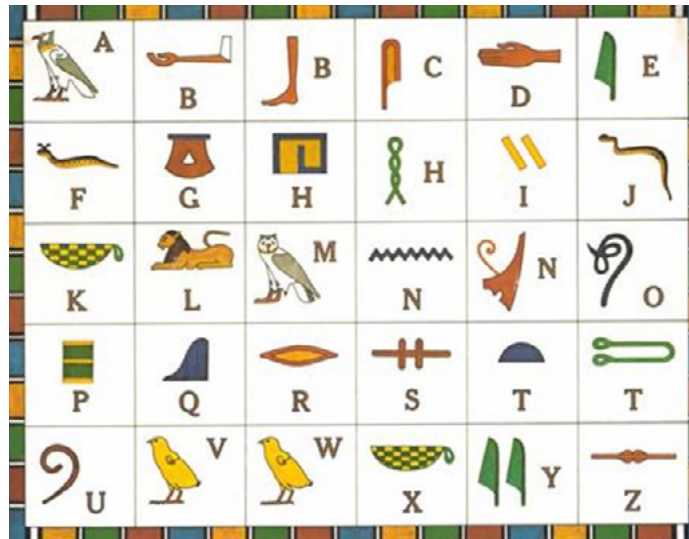
What happened? Some of the letters are hidden in the painting, because the lines of the characters became the outlines of the colourful shapes, separating two such shapes. If you like you can trace over the letters again to make them more visible.

What you need

Paper, A3 or two A4 papers taped together. Oil pastels and watercolours.

Goal

Practice drawing letters. Making a picture using abstract forms. Trying out different colours and mixing new hues. You also refine your logical thinking skills when considering how to lay out the colours in your painting.



Picture: wikimedia commons cc

Background

The shape of letters is fascinating, as they have developed over thousands of years. In prehistoric times, people made pictures on boulders or on the inside walls of caves. The pictures more often than not depicted prey and human figures, but also abstract patterns, the meaning of which we do not know. Little by little, the pictures became pictographs: they still depicted something, but the pictures were simplified, simple shapes. A pictograph typically meant one word. The skill of writing developed in the Mediterranean region around 3000 years B.C. due to necessity, as people had invented agriculture and trade. All traded goods had to be inventoried and counted, when they were being sent from one country to another. After thousands of years, pictographs had become letters, with each letter representing one distinct sound.

Ancient Egyptians wrote using pictographs, or in other words, using hieroglyphs. In the table below you can see what picture represents which letter. In reality, there were over 500 hieroglyphs in use. Using the table below, you can write your own name in hieroglyphs.

Nowadays, letters are simplified, Latin letters composed of geometric forms. It is possible to write whatever you like with them – but it is also possible to play with them! Many artists have used letters as part of their works of art.

A well known painting that is comprised of letters in Paul Klee's [Einst dem Grau der Nacht Enttaucht](#) from 1918, or from about 100 years ago. In the painting, there is a poem, with all of the words and letters in the right order. Click on the name of the work, and you can see the letter painting.

Here are two more links to Paul Klee's paintings, where letters are in an important role: [LINK1](#) and [LINK2](#)

