



Abstract Art



Reading Test

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Teacher's Notes

Lesson Contents	
1.	Instructions
2.	Text 1 without reference words underlined.
3.	Text 2 with reference words underlined.
4.	Reading test questions.
5.	Reading test answer key.

Instructions

Option 1 [Medium] *** ** [B2/C1]

1. Distribute **text 1 (without reference words underlined)** a week before the test. Students read, check vocabulary and meanings.
2. Test day. Distribute **text 2 (with reference words underlined)** and the **questions** (no dictionaries or notes allowed).
3. Set **ONE** hour to read the text and answer the questions.
4. Take in and correct or go through answers in class (pass mark is 70%).

Option 2 [More challenging] **** * [C1]

1. Test day. Distribute **text 2 (with reference words underlined)** & the **questions** (no dictionaries allowed).
2. Set **ONE** hour to read the text and answer the questions.
3. Take in and correct or go through answers in class (pass mark is 70%).

Extension Task

1. Students take a set of notes and write a *summary (add 60 minutes to the test or complete as a standalone task).

⇒ Note: the summary lesson also contains additional critical thinking questions as an extension task.

Link for Additional Material

Summary writing	www.academic-englishuk.com/summary
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Understanding Abstract Art (Text 1)

By A. Watson (2025)

Abstract art is a style of visual art that does not attempt to represent an accurate depiction of visual reality. Instead, it uses shapes, colours, forms, and gestural marks to achieve its effect. Emerging in the early 20th century, abstract art represented a radical break from traditional forms of art, such as realism or naturalism, where the goal was to create recognisable images of the physical world (Chilvers, 2019).

One of the earliest pioneers of abstract art was Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky. He believed that art should express the inner life of the artist and that colour and form could convey emotion in the same way music does (Kandinsky, 1912). His paintings avoided direct representation, aiming instead to capture spiritual or emotional truths. Around the same period, Dutch artist Piet Mondrian developed a style known as neoplasticism. Using grids of vertical and horizontal lines and primary colours, Mondrian reduced visual elements to their most basic forms, believing that this would reveal a universal aesthetic order (Blotkamp, 2011).

Another significant figure in abstract art was Kazimir Malevich, the founder of Suprematism. His most famous work, *Black Square* (1915), challenged viewers to confront a canvas with no recognisable imagery at all. For Malevich, this reduction to pure geometric form was a way of freeing art from the burden of representation and engaging directly with feeling and intuition (Bowlt, 2021). His ideas influenced later movements that also sought to distil visual language into its essential components, setting the stage for mid-century developments in the United States and beyond.

The rise of abstract art was not merely an aesthetic movement but also a reflection of changing philosophical and political ideas. As the world underwent rapid industrialisation, technological change, and political upheaval, many artists felt that traditional art forms no longer captured the complexity of modern life. Abstract art, with its emphasis on subjective experience and non-representational form, offered a new visual language to express uncertainty, transformation, and freedom (Harrison and Wood, 2003). For artists, it became a way of questioning conventions and expanding the boundaries of what art could be. Philosophers and theorists, too, began to consider abstraction as part of a broader cultural shift toward modernity, breaking with classical notions of representation and objectivity.

In the United States, abstract art reached new heights in the mid-20th century with the emergence of Abstract Expressionism. Artists like Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Willem de Kooning used scale, texture, and innovative techniques to explore the unconscious mind and emotional intensity. Pollock's drip painting technique, for example, involved pouring or splattering paint onto large canvases laid on the floor. This method allowed him to engage directly with the medium and produce works that seemed to capture movement, chaos, and energy. Rothko, in contrast, used vast fields of colour to evoke deep emotional states, inviting viewers into a contemplative space. De Kooning's work combined abstraction with traces of figuration, suggesting the struggle between control and spontaneity (Varnedoe and Karmel, 1998).

Despite its popularity, abstract art has often divided opinion. Critics have sometimes dismissed it as meaningless or inaccessible, while supporters argue that its value lies in its ability to evoke personal interpretation and emotional response. Unlike figurative art, which tells a specific story or depicts a clear scene, abstract art invites the viewer to participate actively in making meaning. The viewer's reaction becomes part of the artwork's experience, making it deeply subjective and dynamic. This openness has inspired debate in both academic and public circles, where questions about artistic intention, technique, and value continue to surface (Corris, 2013).

Today, abstract art continues to evolve, incorporating digital media, installation, and performance. Contemporary artists build on the legacy of early abstract pioneers while experimenting with new materials and ideas. Whether through minimalist colour fields or complex multimedia compositions,

abstract art remains a powerful way of exploring perception, identity, and the boundaries of visual language. As global communication and technology expand artistic possibilities, abstraction persists as a vital and adaptive form of creative expression. Many artists now explore issues such as environmental crisis, race, and gender through abstract forms, connecting personal experience with global concerns (Elkins, 2020).

References

- Blotkamp, C. (2011) *Mondrian: The Art of Destruction*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Bowlt, J. E. (2021) *Kazimir Malevich: Painting the Absolute*. New York: Thames & Hudson.
- Chilvers, I. (2019) *The Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists*. 5th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Corris, M. (2013) *Abstraction and the Politics of Modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Elkins, J. (2020) *What Painting Is: How to Think About Oil Painting Using the Language of Alchemy*. 2nd edn. London: Routledge.
- Harrison, C. and Wood, P. (2003) *Art in Theory 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Kandinsky, W. (1912) *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Translated by M.T.H. Sadler. London: Tate Publishing.
- Varnedoe, K. and Karmel, P. (1998) *Jackson Pollock*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art.

Understanding Abstract Art (Text 2)

By A. Watson (2025)

1. Abstract art is a style of visual art that does not attempt to represent an accurate depiction of visual reality. Instead, it uses shapes, colours, forms, and gestural marks to achieve its effect. Emerging in the early 20th century, abstract art represented a radical break from traditional forms of art, such as realism or naturalism, where the goal was to create recognisable images of the physical world (Chilvers, 2019).

2. One of the earliest pioneers of abstract art was Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky. He believed that art should express the inner life of the artist and that colour and form could convey emotion in the same way music does (Kandinsky, 1912). His paintings avoided direct representation, aiming instead to capture spiritual or emotional truths. Around the same period, Dutch artist Piet Mondrian developed a style known as neoplasticism. Using grids of vertical and horizontal lines and primary colours, Mondrian reduced visual elements to their most basic forms, believing that this would reveal a universal aesthetic order (Blotkamp, 2011).

3. Another significant figure in abstract art was Kazimir Malevich, the founder of Suprematism. His most famous work, *Black Square* (1915), challenged viewers to confront a canvas with no recognisable imagery at all. For Malevich, this reduction to pure geometric form was a way of freeing art from the burden of representation and engaging directly with feeling and intuition (Bowlt, 2021). His ideas influenced later movements that also sought to distil visual language into its essential components, setting the stage for mid-century developments in the United States and beyond.

4. The rise of abstract art was not merely an aesthetic movement but also a reflection of changing philosophical and political ideas. As the world underwent rapid industrialisation, technological change, and political upheaval, many artists felt that traditional art forms no longer captured the complexity of modern life. Abstract art, with its emphasis on subjective experience and non-representational form, offered a new visual language to express uncertainty, transformation, and freedom (Harrison and Wood, 2003). For artists, it became a way of questioning conventions and expanding the boundaries of what art could be. Philosophers and theorists, too, began to consider abstraction as part of a broader cultural shift toward modernity, breaking with classical notions of representation and objectivity.

5. In the United States, abstract art reached new heights in the mid-20th century with the emergence of Abstract Expressionism. Artists like Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Willem de Kooning used scale, texture, and innovative techniques to explore the unconscious mind and emotional intensity. Pollock's drip painting technique, for example, involved pouring or splattering paint onto large canvases laid on the floor. This method allowed him to engage directly with the medium and produce works that seemed to capture movement, chaos, and energy. Rothko, in contrast, used vast fields of colour to evoke deep emotional states, inviting viewers into a contemplative space. De Kooning's work combined abstraction with traces of figuration, suggesting the struggle between control and spontaneity (Varnedoe and Karmel, 1998).

6. Despite its popularity, abstract art has often divided opinion. Critics have sometimes dismissed it as meaningless or inaccessible, while supporters argue that its value lies in its ability to evoke personal interpretation and emotional response. Unlike figurative art, which tells a specific story or depicts a clear scene, abstract art invites the viewer to participate actively in making meaning. The viewer's reaction becomes part of the artwork's experience, making it deeply subjective and dynamic. This openness has inspired debate in both academic and public circles, where questions about artistic intention, technique, and value continue to surface (Corris, 2013).

7. Today, abstract art continues to evolve, incorporating digital media, installation, and performance. Contemporary artists build on the legacy of early abstract pioneers while experimenting with new materials and ideas. Whether through minimalist colour fields or complex multimedia compositions,

abstract art remains a powerful way of exploring perception, identity, and the boundaries of visual language. As global communication and technology expand artistic possibilities, abstraction persists as a vital and adaptive form of creative expression. Many artists now explore issues such as environmental crisis, race, and gender through abstract forms, connecting personal experience with global concerns (Elkins, 2020).

References

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Comprehension Questions

1. Headings: Choose **ONE** subheading for each paragraph (P). One title is NOT needed.

P1.	A	The role of abstract art modern American culture
P2.	B	A turning point in abstract art
P3.	C	Abstract art as a response to societal transformation
P4.	D	Debates and controversies surrounding abstract art
P5.	E	Defining abstract art
P6.	F	Abstract art on the contemporary world
P7.	G	Abstract expressionism and the power of emotion
	H	Key figures who defined the movement

___ / 7

2. Multiple Choice: Choose **ONE** answer for each paragraph (P).

P1.	Which of the following best explains the difference between abstract art and traditional realism?	a.	Abstract art seeks exact imitation of nature
		b.	Abstract art applies perspective to increase realism.
		c.	Abstract art avoids depiction, focusing on form.
		d.	Abstract art prioritises photographic detail.
P2.	Piet Mondrian's style of neoplasticism can be recognised by:	a.	Detailed portraits using light and shadow.
		b.	Grids and colours expressing universal order.
		c.	Landscapes painted with Romantic themes.
		d.	Abstract drip techniques with layered textures.
P3.	What idea was central to Malevich's Suprematism?	a.	Imitating nature through fine brushwork.
		b.	Using Renaissance techniques of proportion.
		c.	Limiting art to geometry beyond realistic images.
		d.	Emphasising the beauty of decorative patterns.
P4.	Why did abstract art resonate with some early 20th-century artists?	a.	They aimed to preserve classical harmony.
		b.	They saw it as a language for modern complexity.
		c.	They wanted to revive mythological subject matter.
		d.	They believed realism alone could show truth.
P5.	Abstract Expressionists such as Pollock and Rothko sought to:	a.	Capture precise detail of the external world.
		b.	Promote decorative interior design.
		c.	Explore unconscious emotion and states of mind.
		d.	Reinforce academic traditions of fine art.
P6.	What is one common criticism of abstract art?	a.	It may seem obscure or insignificant.
		b.	It relies too heavily on historical narrative.
		c.	It eliminates emotion from painting.
		d.	It values technique over interpretation.
P7.	What characterises much of today's abstract art?	a.	An exclusive focus on geometric purity.
		b.	Engagement with global issues and diverse media.
		c.	A rejection of all previous art traditions.
		d.	A strict return to naturalistic representation.

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End of page 1

3. True / False: Choose **ONE** answer for each paragraph (P).

		T / F
P1.	Abstract art began in the 20th century as a break from realism.	
P2.	Kandinsky believed colours, like music, could express emotion.	
P3.	Malevich's <i>Black Square</i> was intended to celebrate a political event.	
P4.	Some abstract artists responded to industrial and political change.	
P5.	All Abstract Expressionists used drip painting techniques similar to Pollock.	
P6.	Critics universally agree that abstract art has high artistic value.	
P7.	Modern abstract art blends historical influences with innovation.	

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3. Reference words: Choose what the underlined word in each paragraph (P) refers to.

	Word	Connection
P1.	its	
P2.	This	
P3.	His	
P4.	It	
P5.	This	
P6.	Where	

___ / 6

4. Key language: Search for the word in the paragraph (P) that means:

	Explanation	Word
P1.	A style of art showing objects or scenes as they appear in life.	
P2.	Art using basic shapes and colours to create harmony.	
P3.	A strong factor that helps shape or guide later developments.	
P4.	A major and rapid change in politics, society, or technology.	
P5.	A large painting surface, often made of fabric, used by artists.	
P6.	To be involved in creating meaning or understanding something.	
P7.	A form of work that incorporates varied media into one artistic outcome.	

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5. Citations: Match the source with the point they make about abstract art.

	Source		Point
i.	Kandinsky (1912).	a.	Abstract art allowed artists to express transformation and uncertainty in response to rapid industrial and political change.
ii.	Blotkamp (2011)	b.	Early abstract art aimed to communicate emotional truths through colour and form rather than direct representation.
iii.	Bowlit (2021)	c.	A canvas reduced to geometric form became a way of freeing art from representation and connecting to feeling.
iv.	Harrison and Wood (2003)	d.	Abstract artists used straight lines and primary colours to create a universal aesthetic order.
v.	Varnedoe and Karmel (1998)	e.	These artists developed new techniques to explore the unconscious mind and emotional intensity.
vi.	Elkins (2020)	f.	Contemporary abstract artists now explore global themes such as gender and climate through new media.

i.		ii.		iii.		iv.		v.		vi.	
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Overall Total: ___ / 40

That is the end of the reading test.

Comprehension Questions **KEY**

1. Headings: Choose **ONE** subheading for each paragraph (P). One title is NOT needed.

P1.	E	A	The role of abstract art modern American culture
P2.	H	B	A turning point in abstract art
P3.	B	C	Abstract art as a response to societal transformation
P4.	C	D	Debates and controversies surrounding abstract art
P5.	G	E	Defining abstract art
P6.	D	F	Abstract art on the contemporary world
P7.	F	G	Abstract expressionism and the power of emotion
	A	H	Key figures who defined the movement

___ / 7

2. Multiple Choice: Choose **ONE** answer for each paragraph (P).

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		c.	It eliminates emotion from painting.
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P7.	What characterises much of today's abstract art?	a.	An exclusive focus on geometric purity.
		b.	Engagement with global issues and diverse media.
		c.	A rejection of all previous art traditions.
		d.	A strict return to naturalistic representation.

___ / 7

3. True / False: Choose **ONE** answer for each paragraph (P).

		T / F
P1.	Abstract art began in the 20th century as a break from realism. <i>it was a radical break from realism/naturalism</i> .	T
P2.	Kandinsky believed colours, like music, could express emotion. <i>[colour and form could convey emotion in the same way music does]</i> .	T

P3.	Malevich's <i>Black Square</i> was intended to celebrate a political event. <i>[it was about freeing art from representation and engaging with pure feeling, not politics].</i>	<i>F</i>
P4.	Some abstract artists responded to industrial and political change. <i>[a reflection of changing philosophical and political ideas].</i>	<i>T</i>
P5.	All Abstract Expressionists used drip painting techniques similar to Pollock. <i>[The paragraph describes different techniques used by Pollock, Rothko, and de Kooning].</i>	<i>F</i>
P6.	Critics universally agree that abstract art has high artistic value. <i>[abstract art has divided opinion].</i>	<i>F</i>
P7.	Modern abstract art blends historical influences with innovation. <i>[contemporary artists build on the legacy of early abstract pioneers while experimenting with new materials and ideas].</i>	<i>T</i>

___ / 7

3. Reference words: Choose what the underlined word in each paragraph (P) refers to.

	Word	Connection
P1.	its	<i>Abstract art</i>
P2.	This	<i>The basic forms</i>
P3.	His	<i>Kazimir Malevich</i>
P4.	It	<i>Abstract art</i>
P5.	This	<i>Drip painting technique</i>
P6.	Where	<i>Academic and public circles</i>

___ / 6

4. Key language: Search for the word in the paragraph (P) that means:

	Explanation	Word
P1.	A style of art showing objects or scenes as they appear in life.	<i>Realism / naturalism</i>
P2.	Art using basic shapes and colours to create harmony.	<i>Neoplasticism</i>
P3.	A strong factor that helps shape or guide later developments.	<i>Influenced</i>
P4.	A major and rapid change in politics, society, or technology.	<i>Upheaval</i>
P5.	A large painting surface, often made of fabric, used by artists.	<i>Canvases</i>
P6.	To be involved in creating meaning or understanding something.	<i>Participate</i>
P7.	A form of work that incorporates varied media into one artistic outcome.	<i>Multimedia</i>

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5. Citations: Match the source with the point they make about abstract art.

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vi.	Elkins (2020)	f.	Contemporary abstract artists now explore global themes such as gender and climate through new media.

i.	<i>b</i>	ii.	<i>d</i>	iii.	<i>c</i>	iv.	<i>a</i>	v.	<i>e</i>	vi.	<i>f</i>
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Overall Total: ___ / 40