

# Composition



Alma Held, *The Young Artist (Self Portrait)*  
Circa 1920, Oil on Canvas  
Collection Muscatine Art Center



Grant Wood, *In the Spring*, 1939  
Lithograph  
Gift of the Muscatine County Museum and Fine Arts Association



John Bloom, *Self Portrait*, 1924  
Oil on Canvas  
Gift of Marilyn Pilgrim Memorial

## Overview

Geometric shapes within a work of art can strengthen the composition of a painting, print, or photograph. A triangle is one of the strongest composition shapes. Since ancient times, people have recognized that composition based on geometry is especially pleasing to the eye.

## Compare and Contrast

Look at the composition of each work of art. Imagine drawing a triangle or upside down triangle over the main subject of each.

- In which works of art would the center of the triangle fall in the center of the work of art?
- Which are most symmetrical?

Focus on the print by Grant Wood.

- How many triangles can you find within the composition?
- What other shapes can you find?
- Why do you think Grant Wood placed the farmer off center?
- Does this make the print more or less dramatic than the two portraits? Explain your answer.

## Be the Artist

Use a ruler to lightly draw an upright triangle centered on your paper. Draw the shape of your face so the top of the triangle is located just above the top of your head. Draw the left side of your body to be symmetrical to the right side of your body. Use a variety of textures and patterns to fill in the background.

Make a photocopy of a picture of your face. Cut the face in half. Tape or glue the half face to a full sheet of drawing paper, leaving room to the left or right to draw the other half of your face. Use a ruler to measure key features such as the width of your face (top, middle, and bottom), eyes, ears, nose, etc. Use a pencil to mark these measurements on the second half of your face. Refer to the photo to help get the details right. Draw shadows and highlights to give your face a 3-dimensional look.