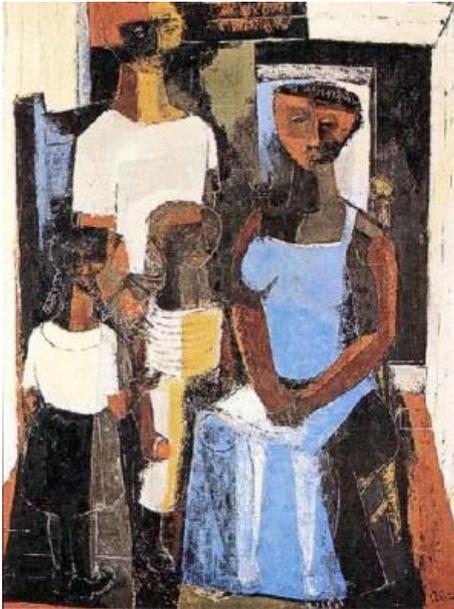


Cunningham Creek Elementary  
Meet the Artist

**Alston, Charles - Family No.1 & Whistler, James - The Artist's Mother**



**ARTIST: ALSTON, CHARLES (OL-sten) (1907 -1977)**

**PRINT: FAMILY NO. 1** 20th Century American  
WHITNEY MUSEUM Date: 1955  
NEW YORK CITY Size: 48 1/4" x 35 3/4"  
Medium: Unknown

**ARTIST** - Charles Alston, painter, sculptor, muralist and teacher of art, was born in North Carolina. He received his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees from Columbia University. He taught Art at the University of the City of New York. Alston's work includes many styles, from pure abstraction to almost pure realism. His later work was influenced by African sculpture. His work is always strong and highly individualistic. It is either warm with rich color, sharp in blacks and clear white, or soft and compassionate in texture and color. It is so varied that it prevents classification. Alston said he "feels a need to relate to humanity in a more direct way...and as a black American... is sensitive and responsive... to the injustice, the indignity and hypocrisy suffered by black citizens." Such responsiveness is "the

predicament of any artist, black or white, concerned with the dignity of man."

**PRINT** - Alston paints in a style called cubism, where shapes are more important than details. It is surprising that Alston took a realistic subject and painted it as a cubist design. He did not pay very much attention to the faces of the people. You can still see that they are a close family group by the way that he has presented the figures. They are arranged in a circle, the father standing behind the mother, who is seated, and two children, a boy and a girl, standing before them. Notice the gestures of the family members towards each other. The members of this family are bound together by their placement and gesture. The little girl is facing her brother. The father has his hand on his son's shoulder. The children stand close beside the mother. The mother is strong and solid, her sturdy legs sketchily outlined beneath her apron. Perhaps this is the artist's way of showing us that the mother of this family is a strong woman.

**ARTIST: WHISTLER, JAMES McNEILL (1834-1903)**

**PRINT: *ARRANGEMENT IN GREY AND WHITE* - 19th Century American  
*THE ARTIST'S MOTHER* Date: 1871  
MUSEE du LOUVRE Size: 57" x 64 1/2"  
PARIS, FRANCE Medium: Oil on canvas**

**ARTIST** - James McNeill Whistler was born in Lowell, Massachusetts. Although he lived most of his life in England, he felt little commitment to either country. Both in art and his personal life, he refused to be stereotyped. His painting ranged from very realistic to Impressionistic. He had many changes in style. Whistler had his own ideas. In his private life, he had many types of friends - both rich and poor. He did not get married until he was 54 years old. Whistler was a tireless, even tiresome joker. He was very witty and used his wit sometimes to cover up his pain. He was a charming man who occasionally liked a challenge. When his wits failed, he used his fists - even though he was only five feet four inches tall.

**PRINT** - Whistler's best known work is *Arrangement in Grey and White - The Artist's Mother* commonly known as *Whistler's Mother*. The portrait of the delicate woman is very realistic. She is placed against a carefully designed background of vertical and horizontal rectangular shapes, which balance the painting. Whistler's title is significant because he loved music and thought of his paintings in musical terms. Whistler used thin coats of color to build up his subtle grays. Every item in the painting is an important part of the design: the

drapes, the pictures on the wall, the floor, and the placement of his mother's hands. The completed picture on the wall is one of Whistler's own etchings. In this picture, Whistler was interested in primarily using impressionist forms.

### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Look at the two paintings. How are they alike? How are they different?  
One shows a family, one shows the artist's mother.
2. Are the pictures painted in a realistic style, or do the artists work with simpler shapes?
3. Do you think that the families are close in Alston's picture? Do you feel Whistler is close to his mother? Why? How does Whistler's mother feel?
4. How many people are there in each picture?
5. Where do you see lines?
6. Can you find straight lines and curved lines?
7. Where do you see shapes? What shapes do you see?
9. Which picture has more colors? Can you name them?
10. Have you ever seen people dressed like the people in these pictures? Where?

### **RELATED ACTIVITIES**

1. Explain your feelings about the pictures in one sentence.
2. Draw/paint a portrait of your friend.
3. Draw/paint a picture of your family and put yourself in it. Show all the people who live in your house, including any pets. Arrange the picture as a portrait, and put the members of the family in any order you like.
4. Draw a picture of a person you know in a dress like Whistler's mother.  
Arrange the surroundings very carefully.
5. Use shapes to make a self-portrait or family picture. Draw around shapes or use pre-cut shapes (preparation needed)