Space, in a work of art, consists of positive space and negative space. Positive space refers to the main focus of a picture, while negative space refers to the background. Artists use positive and negative space together to create a visual composition, which tells a story.

In this painting, Sarasota artist Syd Solomon created positive space with abstract geometric shapes of color throughout the painting, such as the aqua green to the left and the yellow in the center. These colorful shapes consist of positive space as they are in the foreground of the painting. The white area between the colorful shapes is called negative space, which is simply defined as the space that surrounds an object in an image.

In this work, the white and bright background contrasts sharply to the bright and colorful shapes. This distinction draws attention to the abstract shapes and bold marks to create a sense of movement, depth, and a three-dimensional environment.

Solomon titled this painting Shoreblocks, reminiscent of the rocks found on a beach to help prevent erosion. The artist explored positive and negative space in many of his paintings, covering sections of the canvas with masking tape before spraying aerosol paints onto the surface, and then removing the tape to reveal the layers of paint underneath.

As illustrated above, the shapes in the featured painting occupy the positive space, while the background surrounding them is the negative space.
ACTIVITY
NATURE SPACES

MATERIALS:
FOUND NATURAL OBJECTS, DILUTED PAINT IN A SPRAY BOTTLE (WE RECOMMEND WASHABLE LIQUID WATERCOLORS), ABSORBENT PAPER (WE RECOMMEND WATERCOLOR PAPER)

DIFFICULTY LEVEL:
SIMPLE

NEGATIVE SPACE NATURE STENCILS

Negative space can be hard for students to visualize—seeing the space around something can be a difficult concept to grasp. The following activity can be done at home to make that visualization easier—and to create some fun art in the process!

DIRECTIONS

1. Gather natural materials from outdoors, such as leaves, sticks, rocks, or flowers.
2. Arrange these objects flat on top of the paper.
3. Discuss how the area around the objects (anywhere you can see the paper) is the negative space. The next step will help reveal it even more clearly.
4. Spray the objects with the diluted paint. Let the paint dry for a few minutes before removing the objects.
5. Remove the objects and discuss how the negative space was colored by the paint while the positive space was not.

WE WOULD LOVE TO SEE WHAT YOU CREATE!

Click here to share your masterpiece on our Family Programs Facebook Group!

This activity was adapted from the book Stencil Craft: Techniques for Fashion, Art, and Home by Margaret Peot.