

B B C BITESIZE

A shape is defined by its outline. Shapes have two dimensions - height and width. There are two types of shape - geometric and organic.

Geometric shapes are mathematical shapes like squares, triangles or circles.

They can appear formal, man-made or even hard.

Organic shapes are natural, flowing and irregular.

When you draw a shape, you automatically create a negative shape in the area around it. Learning to see positive and negative shapes helps us understand the relationship between objects in a composition.

Remember shapes are always two-dimensional. By adding light and shade you can give a flat shape the illusion of three-dimensional form.

Designers often simplify shapes for greater impact. In this textile design, Aino-Maija Metsola has used basic shapes to create stylised illustrations of fruit and vegetables. The regular repetition of the positive and negative shapes creates a pattern. But the variety of organic shapes means it remains irregular and doesn't feel rigid.

Artist Georgia O'Keeffe is known for her large-scale paintings of plants. She magnified the organic shapes until they become abstract and we no longer recognise the original plant. By showing us the tiny detail on a large scale we can simply appreciate the flowing natural shapes.

This painting by Pablo Picasso is called 'Weeping Woman'. Picasso constructed part of the woman's face from angular, geometric shapes. These contrast with the natural organic curves of her hair, and disjoint and flatten the face. The woman's tears stand out because they look like shards of broken glass which communicates her pain and anguish.

Artists and designers can use shapes to control a composition's atmosphere. They can use flat 2D shapes or make them appear as 3D forms. They can be positive or negative. They can be flowing and organic or rigid and geometric.

Learn to recognise which shapes an artist or designer has used and stop for a moment... consider how these shapes make you feel.