

Kandinsky - Moving towards abstraction

B2 reading development. Work from the text, not outside knowledge. Notice dates, quantities, cause and effect, and the limits of a claim.

A. Read and summarise

1 Vasily Kandinsky was born in Moscow in 1866 and spent his early childhood in Odessa. Before becoming an artist, he studied law and economics in Moscow. In 1896 he decided to pursue art and moved to Munich. His artistic career therefore followed a change of direction rather than beginning with professional training in painting.

2 Music played an important part in his thinking. He was interested in the way music could create an emotional response without showing a recognisable object. Painting, he believed, could also communicate through colour and form rather than simply reproducing a scene. During the years around 1908 to 1914, his work became increasingly abstract.

3 Kandinsky and Franz Marc were central to the Blue Rider group in 1911. The artists explored new ways of expression, including connections between visual art and music. Kandinsky also wrote about art. His book *On the Spiritual in Art* examined ideas about colour and the artist's inner experience.

4 In 1922 he began teaching at the Bauhaus, a school of art and design. His later paintings often explored geometric forms, including circles. After the school closed in 1933, he settled near Paris and continued working as an artist. He died in 1944. His career shows a continuing search for ways to express ideas visually. Abstract work need not resemble an object to have meaning, but viewers may respond to it in different ways.

B. Check the evidence

Label each claim S (supported), C (contradicted) or N (not stated). Underline the evidence for S or C. For N, say what information is missing.

1. ___ Kandinsky spent his early childhood in Munich.
2. ___ He studied law and economics before pursuing art.
3. ___ The text identifies the exact day he first made a fully abstract painting.
4. ___ He thought painting could communicate without copying a recognisable scene.
5. ___ The text compares the influence of Cubism with every other movement.
6. ___ He stopped working as an artist as soon as the Bauhaus closed.

C. Look closely

Choose one word or phrase that limits a claim, such as can, around or possible. Explain how the meaning changes if you remove it.

Kandinsky - Key and distractor practice

B. Answers and evidence

1. **C** Paragraph 1 says he spent his early childhood in Odessa.
2. **S** Paragraph 1 gives this sequence.
3. **N** Paragraph 2 describes a period of development, not an exact first date.
4. **S** Paragraph 2 connects painting with colour, form and emotional response.
5. **N** No such comparison appears.
6. **C** Paragraph 4 says he continued working after settling near Paris.

D. Choose the strongest answer

Why does the writer discuss music?

- A. To explain an influence on Kandinsky's understanding of painting.
- B. To claim that he gave up art to become a musician.
- C. To suggest that all viewers react identically to abstract art.
- D. To prove that he painted only musical instruments.

Answer: A. Paragraph 2 shows how music helped him think about emotional expression without recognisable objects.

Why the other answers are tempting

A distractor may reuse a word from the text while changing its meaning. Others reverse a relationship, exaggerate a claim or add a detail the writer never gives. Explain the problem with each incorrect option.

Teacher notes

Ask learners to explain their evidence before checking the key. For an N answer, lack of evidence is different from evidence that a claim is false. Repeat the exercise with a short text learners choose themselves. This is a general reading-skills lesson; it does not reproduce a full Cambridge reading part.

Sources and provenance

New lesson text and questions written for this worksheet. Factual sources checked on 11 October 2026: Peggy Guggenheim Collection: Vasily Kandinsky biography; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum: Kandinsky teaching materials. Full links and source decisions are in the publishing brief.