Josef Albers, Homage to the Square works

Questions to Ask

- How would you describe this painting (these paintings) to someone who wasn’t here to see them today?
- Was color the first thing you noticed? Or did you notice the shapes first?
- How many squares do you see in each of these works?
- Albers called these paintings Homage to the Square (define homage for them). Sometimes these Homage to the Square paintings have a second part to their title (e.g. In May). If you were going to give these paintings a second part of a title, what would you call them?
- Which one of these might you call “A bright summer day”? What do you see that makes you say that?

→ Albers did thousands of these paintings and wanted to explore different color combinations. Let’s explore our own color combinations, using Albers’ format.

Props to Use

Color wheel
Other Albers Homage to the Square images

Activity for this stop

Give each student a ziplock with 2 7x7” Foami squares in different colors, 2 5x5” Foami squares in different colors & 2 3x3” Foami squares in different colors. Also give each student a word or phrase (The Circus, Birthday Cake, A Hot Summer Day, Growing, Butterfly Wings, Nothing but Net, etc.).

Ask students to create an Albers composition for the phrase using one 7x7, 5x5 & 3x3 inch squares. For the remaining squares, ask students to come up with a title for that color combination.

Students can pair share their two compositions or you can ask students to share their titles and compositions with the larger group.

Ask questions about their color choices and whether or not they chose to imitate Albers’ composition (Albers places one square on top of another, but all of the squares sit toward the bottom of the one below it).
Key Concept(s) about this Work

- Color relationships
- Choices artists make

Most relevant information about this work/artist/architecture

The entire series of Homage to the Square paintings was based on a mathematically determined format of several squares, which appear to be overlapping or nested within one another. This geometric abstraction was Albers’ template for exploring the subjective experience of color—the effects that adjacent colors have on one another, for example, and the illusion of flat planes of color advancing or receding in space.

Albers once said about his paintings of squares: “It's the only dish I serve my craziness for color in.”

In 1963, Albers published *Interaction of Color* which presented his theory that colors were governed by an internal and deceptive logic.