Georgia O'Keeffee

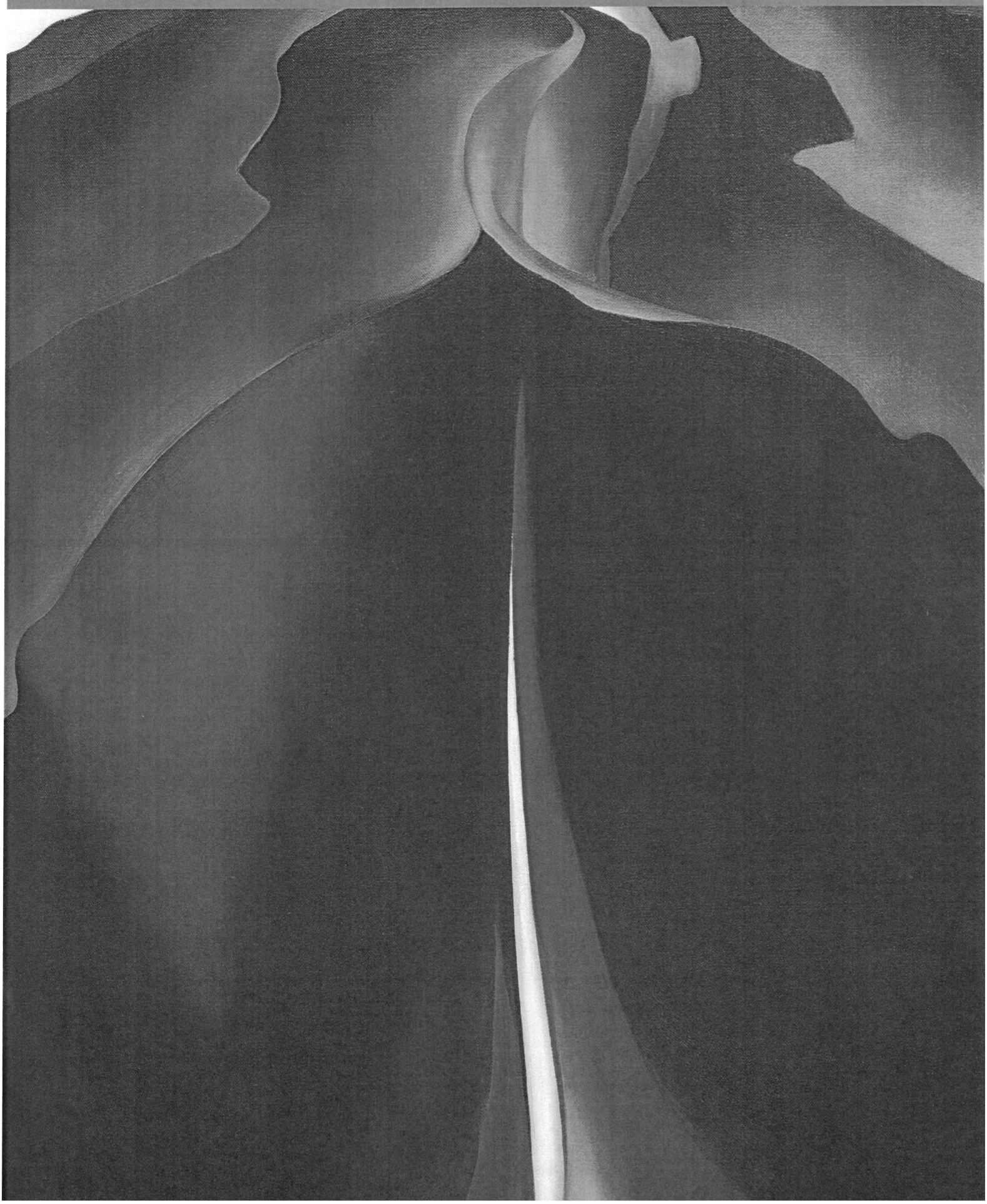
Week 1

1. Read handout
2. Answer questions in section 3, A Closer Look
3. Complete a series of drawings of an object from nature. (instructions on last page.)

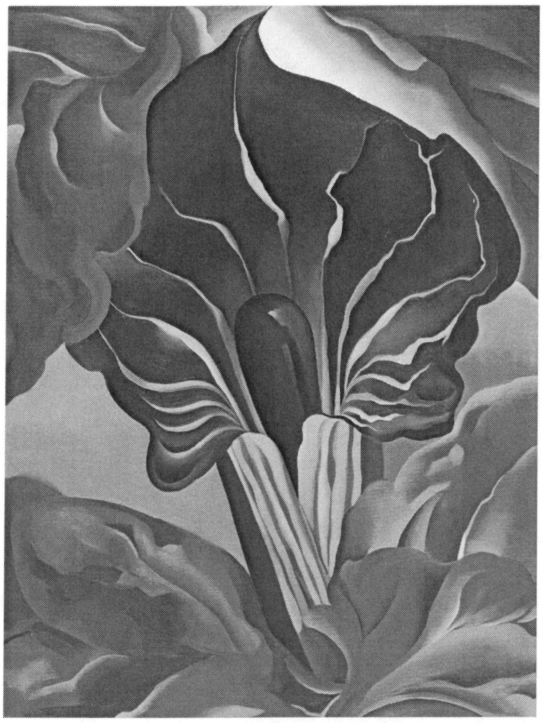
Week 2

1. Complete the Experiment with color project found on the last page.

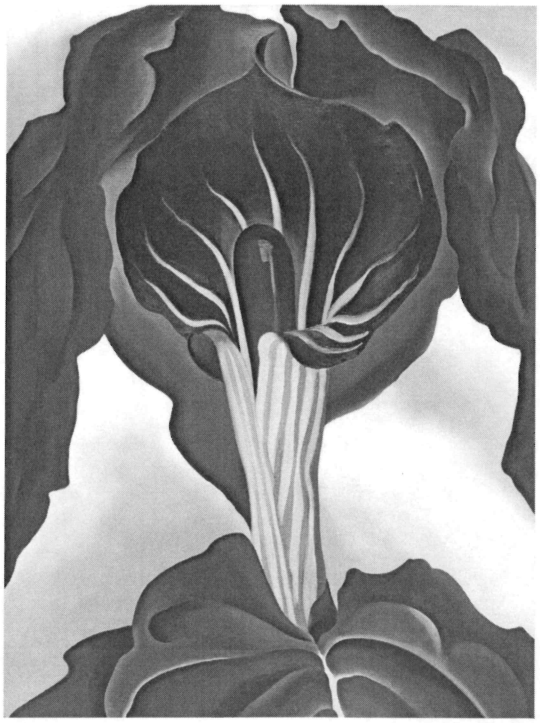
There is an additional drawing project, explore design, if you have extra time on your hands.



Jack-in-Pulpit – No. 2



Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. 3



1 Inspiration from Nature

American artist Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986) is known for her paintings of flowers, bones, shells, stones, leaves, trees, mountains, and other natural forms. She first painted flowers when she was a child growing up in rural Wisconsin. O'Keeffe decided to become an artist at the age of twelve, and during her long career—she lived to be ninety-nine years old!—she made more than two hundred paintings of flowers. Some of her favorite subjects were lilacs, daisies, irises, petunias, calla lilies, orchids, sunflowers, roses, and jack-in-the-pulpits.

O'Keeffe's high school art teacher first introduced her to jack-in-the-pulpits during a lesson. Her teacher pointed out the plant's unique shapes and color variations. The artist recalled, "This was the first time I remember examining a flower. . . . She started me looking at things—looking very carefully at details. It was certainly the first time my attention was called to the outline and color of any growing thing with the idea of drawing or painting it."

In 1930 O'Keeffe found jack-in-the-pulpits in the woods near her summer home at Lake George in Upstate New York, and she was inspired to create a series of six paintings. These works show the artist's deep interest in the design of nature.

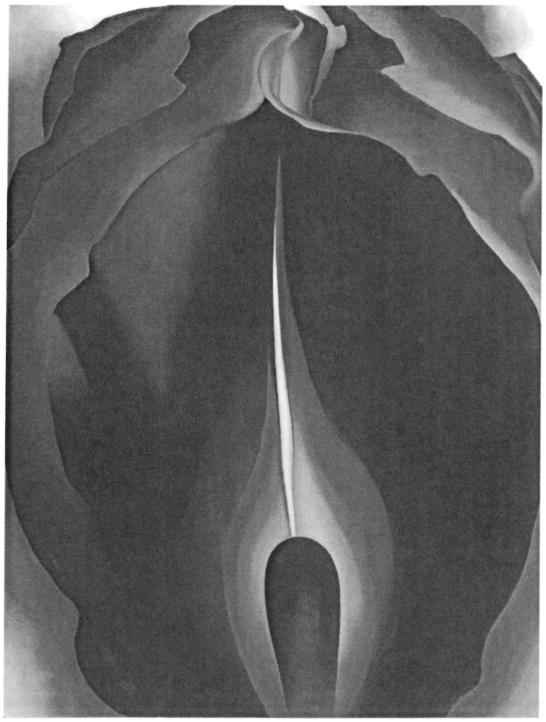
2 A Unique Flower

The jack-in-the-pulpit is a North American wildflower found in shady, cool woods and swamps. It can grow from one to three feet tall. The plant's shape begins as a sort of green vase (called a spathe) made from a single leaf. A stalk, or spadix, grows in the middle of it. A leaf-hood folds gracefully over the top to protect the tiny flower within the spathe from the wind and rain. Typically green with deep purple or red-brown stripes, the flower blooms from April through June. During late summer and early autumn, the stalk grows a cluster of red berries.

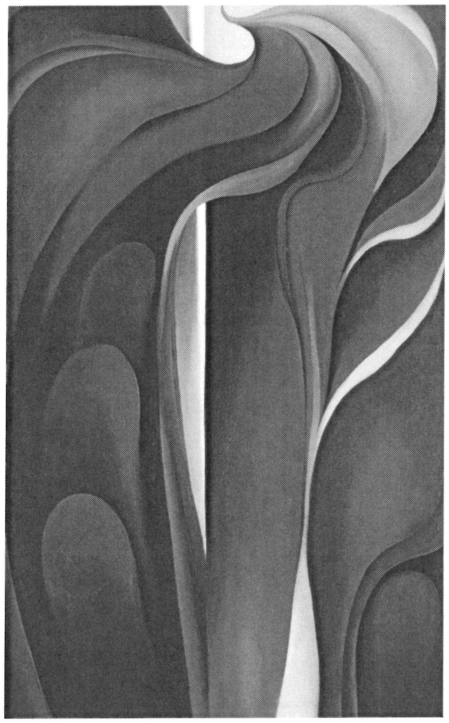
It was named jack-in-the-pulpit because in early New England preachers delivered sermons from covered pulpits in churches. A preacher standing in a pulpit resembles the way a spadix sits inside a hooded spathe.

"When you take a flower in your hand and really look at it, it's your world for the moment. I want to give that world to someone else."
Georgia O'Keeffe

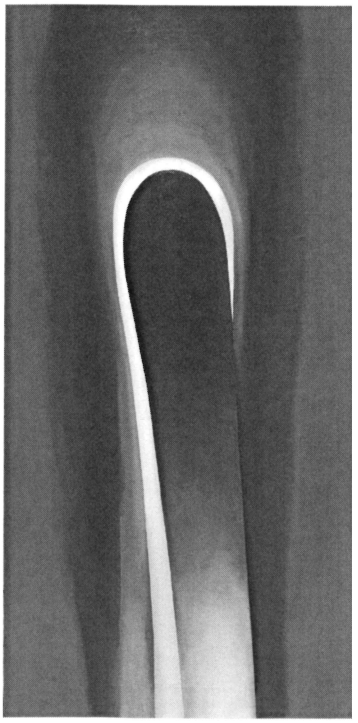
Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. IV



Jack-in-Pulpit Abstraction – No. 5



Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. VI



Nos. 2 – 6: Georgia O'Keef
1930, oil on canvas, Natio
Gallery of Art, Alfred Stie
Collection, Bequest of Ge
O'Keeffe

"It is only by deduction, by elimination, by emphasis, that we get at the real meaning of things." Georgia O'Keeffe

Alfred Stieglitz, *Georgia O'Keeffe*, 1925, gelatin silver print, National Gallery of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection

Photographer Alfred Stieg
exhibited O'Keeffe's work
in New York City. They we
married from 1924 until h
death in 1946.

3

A Closer Look

Concentrating on a single flower, O'Keeffe contemplates the intricate structure of the jack-in the-pulpit. Some of her paintings show curling leaves and sky, and in others the flower fills the entire canvas. Each painting in the series goes deeper inside the center of the flower; with the last one only the jack/spadix is seen. O'Keeffe focuses attention on the flower by magnifying and simplifying its form.

Compare the five paintings. Look for similar elements, such as colors, lines, and shapes.

What do some of the paintings have in common?

What differences do you observe?

Which painting do you find most intriguing? Why?

"Each shell was a beautiful world in itself. . . . I have always enjoyed painting them – and even now, living in the desert, the sea comes back to me when I hold one to my ear." Georgia O'Keeffe

try this

Nature Study

One of O'Keeffe's favorite activities was to pick up seashells as she walked along the beach. She displayed her collection at her home in New Mexico, and she often drew her favorite shells. By surrounding herself with objects from nature, she could carefully observe shapes, patterns, colors, and other essential details.

O'Keeffe believed that "to see takes time like to have a friend takes time." It takes a lot of careful looking to get to know something well.

Make a series of drawings

You will need:
A pad of paper
A pencil, colored pencils, crayons, colored chalk, pastels, markers, and/or watercolors

First, select something from nature to study—a flower, leaf, shell, or stone. Place it on a table and sit nearby with your paper and drawing materials. Examine the object carefully. Study its colors, shapes, patterns, and designs. What makes the object unique?

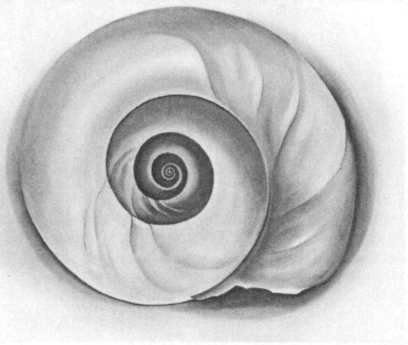
Explore this object in a series of drawings on separate sheets of paper. Try to fill the entire sheet of paper each time as you draw.

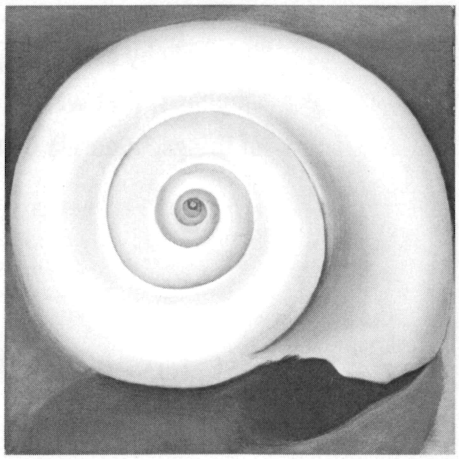
Experiment with color

- Use only a pencil to draw the object.
- Draw it again with colors that are as close to the natural object as possible.
- Next, draw it using only two colors.
- Now, draw the object with as many colors as you like. Use your imagination!

Explore design

- Draw the entire object.
- Then, draw a different view. Turn the object around to show another side.
- Select just one detail and draw it as if you were looking through a magnifying glass. Enlarge it to the edges of your page.
- Imagine how the object would look to an insect. Make a drawing showing a "bug's-eye" view of your object.
- Draw the object in an imaginary landscape. Include sky, water, land, animals, and/or buildings in your picture.





top: Georgia O'Keeffe, *The Shell*, 1934, charcoal on laid paper, Lynes 1999, no. 827, National Gallery of Art, From the Collection of Dorothy Braude Edinburg

bottom: Georgia O'Keeffe, *Shell No. I*, 1928, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Bequest of Georgia O'Keeffe