Felix Klee once said of his father, artist Paul Klee, "I would like everybody who looks at him to come with open eyes and open hearts." After making the choice to pursue his love of painting over his musical talent with the violin, Paul Klee proved himself a creative genius whose desire to "reach the heart" of everything earned him many admirers. By the time he died in 1940, he had produced approximately 10,000 paintings, drawings, and watercolors.

*Dancing Girl* is characteristic of the work he completed near the end of his life after falling ill in 1935. With rougher and cruder lines than in his earlier pictures, this example of his later work is generally thought to express Klee's disagreement and unhappiness with the suffering of World War II (1939–1945). Nevertheless, some of his typical whimsicality remains evident in this piece, which offers a light-hearted portrayal of a girl dancing in the rain.

The blotchy white paint and black lines that form her body give her substance and life. She almost appears to be glowing with energy and excitement as she moves. Although her shoes and hair are defined by no more than a few patches of brown paint, they provide enough information for the viewer to understand what they represent. Her ponytail is formed by a simple line and circle, as are her arms, hands, and facial features. With one well-placed arc, Klee created the girl's swinging skirt. An arc of the same shape also forms an umbrella to cover her head. On the left, five black strokes surrounded by green paint make up the trunk and branches of a tree. Klee's thoughtful rendering and place-
ment of lines enabled him to express so much with what seems like very little.

The unusual stance of the girl is highlighted by more bold lines and bright hues. Her central position in the painting and the subtlety of the rainy, grayish green background ensures that the attention of the viewer is focused on her. Klee captured a single instant of the girl's movement, with arms outstretched and one leg raised dramatically. She seems to be tossing her head as she dances, an effect created by painting her head tilted at an angle and unconnected to her body.

The art of children delighted Klee for its truthfulness and creativity, qualities he found to be lacking in adult artists. He even said, "The pictures my little Felix has painted are better than those which often dribbled through my own brain." Like his son's scrawls, Klee used simple, universal forms that could be interpreted in a multitude of ways. Perspective, as he said, bored him. A significant development in his style occurred after a trip to North Africa in 1914. Upon his return he declared, "Color has taken hold of me. No longer do I have to chase after it. Color and I are one. I am a painter."

Much of Klee's work revolved around a sense of fantasy and the mythical. He described himself as a transcendentalist who attempted to reveal the reality behind visible things, "thus expressing the belief that the visible world is merely an isolated case in relation to the universe." He looked to nature for inspiration and examined the world around him with the meticulous care of a scientist. To express his vision of reality Klee employed a wide variety of materials. He filled his collages with odds and ends like fabric and threads from his wife's sewing drawer. Writing was an important element of his work, and, beside alphabet letters, Klee sometimes featured symbols such as arrows, commas, and clefs. He called art "a language of signs."

The flexibility Klee allowed himself in the studio also surfaced in his kitchen. As a father who stayed at home to cook and clean while his wife taught piano lessons, Klee discovered a better way to stir his son's pudding—with a clean paintbrush!
CLASSROOM SUGGESTIONS

[1] Although this painting looks simple at first glance, the artist has given us a great deal of information to read with our eyes. Have students determine the answers to the following questions: Is this a boy or girl? Where is this person? What is the weather? What is the person doing? What is the person’s mood? Discuss how the artist has told a story about an individual, her environment, and her actions with a minimum of lines and details.

[2] The artist who painted this portrait has a very different style than Ingres who painted Amédée-David, Marquis de Pastoret (slide 2). Discuss with students the differences between the two paintings: the artists’ depictions of the human figure, use of color and line, the degree of realism, etc.

[3] Extend this concept of individual style to a discussion about the different ways we dress, talk, write, make art, etc. Create different exercises to make students more aware of their individual styles (e.g. making and decorating large name signs for their desks) and discuss the importance of celebrating differences among people.

[4] Have students discuss their personal experiences of being outside in the rain. Do they like or dislike it? Can they share with fellow students a memorable time in the rain? Have students write about and illustrate their experiences, paying careful attention to their individual styles.