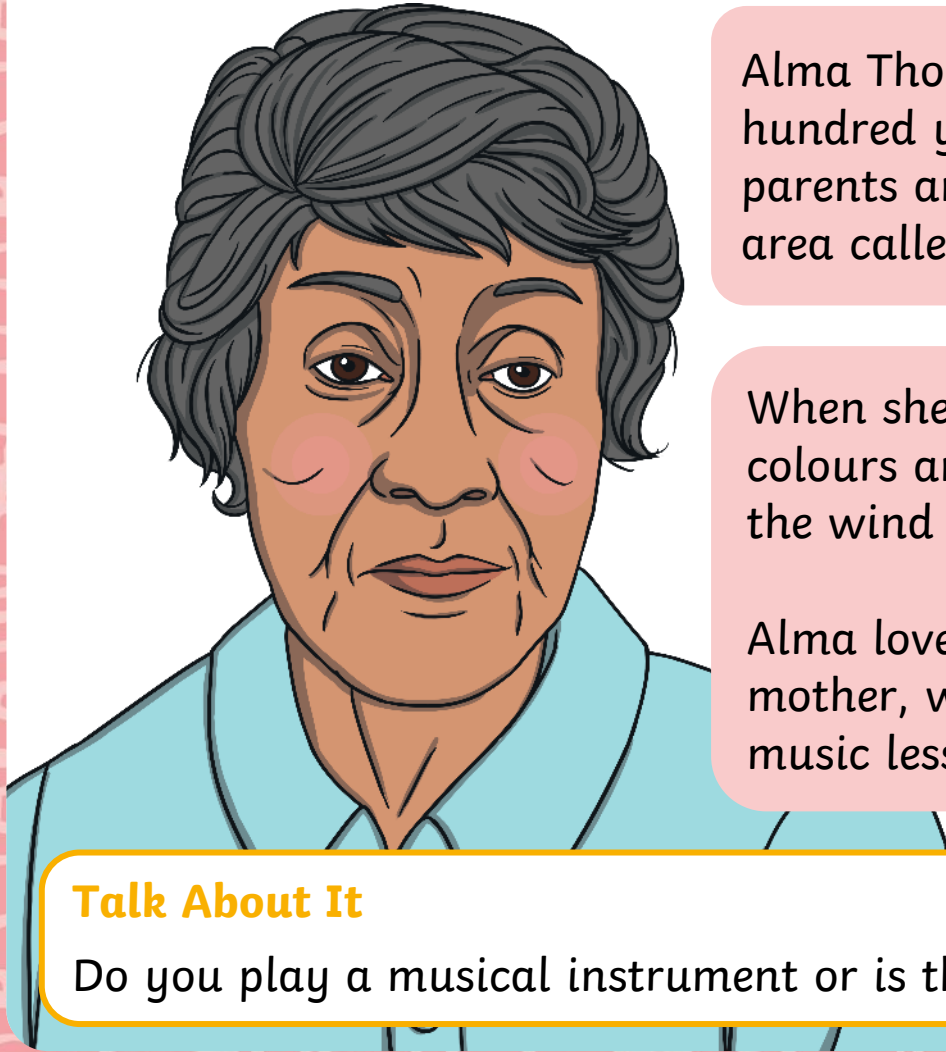


All About...

Alma Thomas



Alma Thomas



Alma Thomas was born in the USA over one hundred years ago. She grew up with her parents and her three younger sisters in an area called Georgia.

When she was young, Alma enjoyed the colours and light of nature and the way the wind made leaves move.

Alma loved art and being creative. Alma's mother, who played the violin, gave Alma music lessons.

Talk About It

Do you play a musical instrument or is there one you would like to learn?

Early Challenges

Although Alma loved art from an early age, she wasn't allowed to visit art galleries. This was because Alma was Black. Where Alma lived, Black people were often treated unfairly. They weren't allowed to sit in certain areas in parks and on buses and there were many places, such as restaurants, cinemas and museums where Black people weren't allowed to go at all.

When people are treated unfairly because of the colour of the skin, it is called racism.



Talk About It

How do you think Alma felt when she wasn't allowed to visit art galleries?

Moving

Alma's family didn't feel safe where they lived because of racism. When Alma was 15, the family decided to leave Georgia and move to Washington D.C. Although racism was also a problem in Washington, Black people had more opportunities there. For example, Alma was able to visit her local library in Washington but she hadn't been allowed in the library where she'd lived in Georgia.

Talk About It

Do you go to the library? If so, what kinds of things do you do there?



A Career

At Alma's new school in Washington, she had art lessons for the first time. She said, 'it was like entering heaven' because she felt it was a wonderful, happy place.

Alma worked hard at school. She wanted to become an **architect** but at the time this was very difficult to achieve. Because many Black people didn't get the same chances as White people, there were very few Black architects and no Black women architects. Instead, Alma decided to become a teacher.

architect — A person who designs buildings.

Talk About It

What are your favourite things to learn about at school?



Teaching

After graduating from high school, Alma taught young children for seven years. When she was 30 years old, she decided to study at university. She started a **degree** in home economics but then later changed to art. It is thought that she was one of the first Black women to get a degree in art.

After university, Alma became an art teacher for 11 to 13 year olds. The school she taught at was only for Black pupils. Black and White children having to go to different schools was called segregation. Schools for White children were in better condition, had newer books and more teachers.

degree — A qualification that people get after they have studied at university.



Developing Art

Alma taught at another school for 35 years. During that time, she continued to develop her own art. Alma painted using watercolours, a water-based paint that is easy to blend and dries quickly.

Alma visited art galleries and studied more art at a university during the school holidays. She organised art projects for her pupils and also helped run an art gallery.

In 1960, when Alma was 68, she retired from teaching and made being an artist her main job.

Talk About It

What would you rather be, a teacher or an artist? Why?

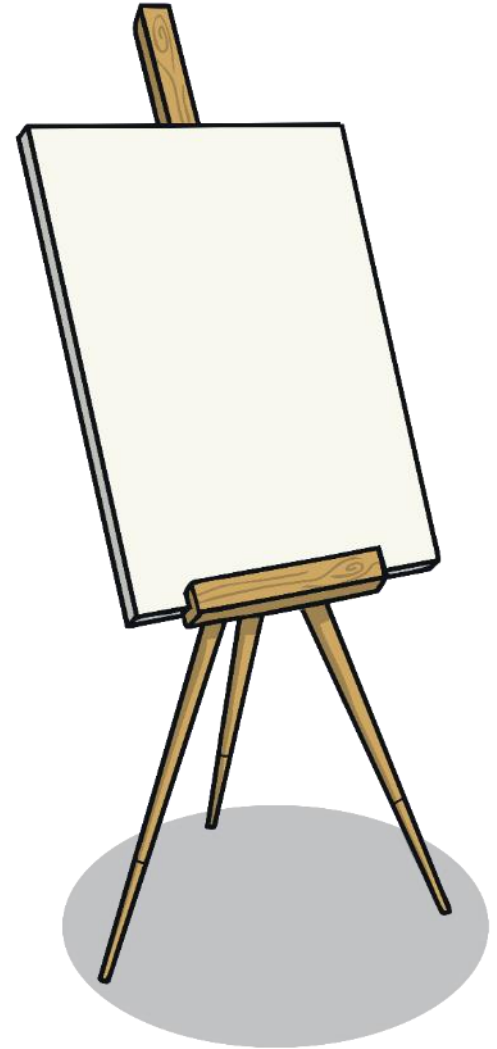


Full-Time Artist

Alma started to create art on large pieces of material stretched over frames, known as canvasses. She also painted using acrylics - paint that shows bright, strong colours and dries quickly.

Alma's paintings became popular and many art galleries displayed her art. Some of her paintings were displayed in museums across the USA.

Alma had an illness called arthritis, which made movement difficult and caused her pain. Although it was sometimes difficult for her to hold a brush, Alma continued to paint.



Iris, Tulips, Jonquils, and Crocuses (1969)

Do you know what irises, tulips, jonquils and crocuses are?

Irises, tulips, jonquils and crocuses are types of flower.



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Springtime in Washington (1971)

What spring colours can you see in this painting?



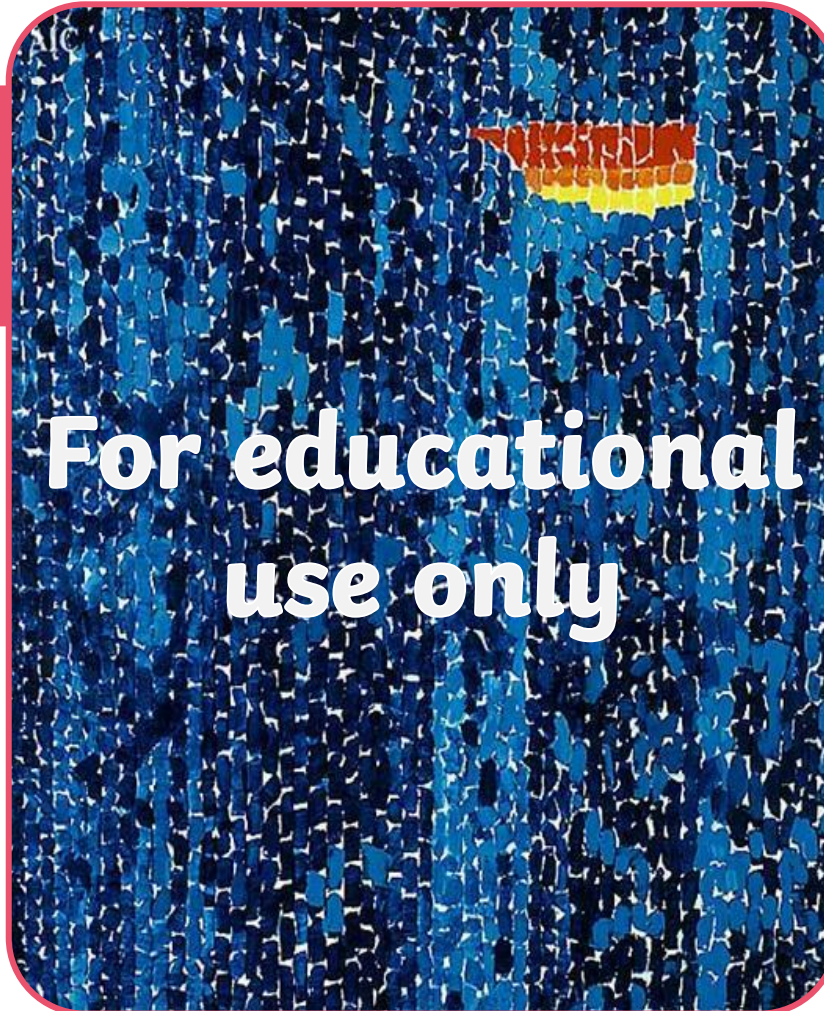
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Why do you think Alma made this painting as a circle?

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Starry Night and the Astronauts (1972)

Can you see the spaceship in the painting?

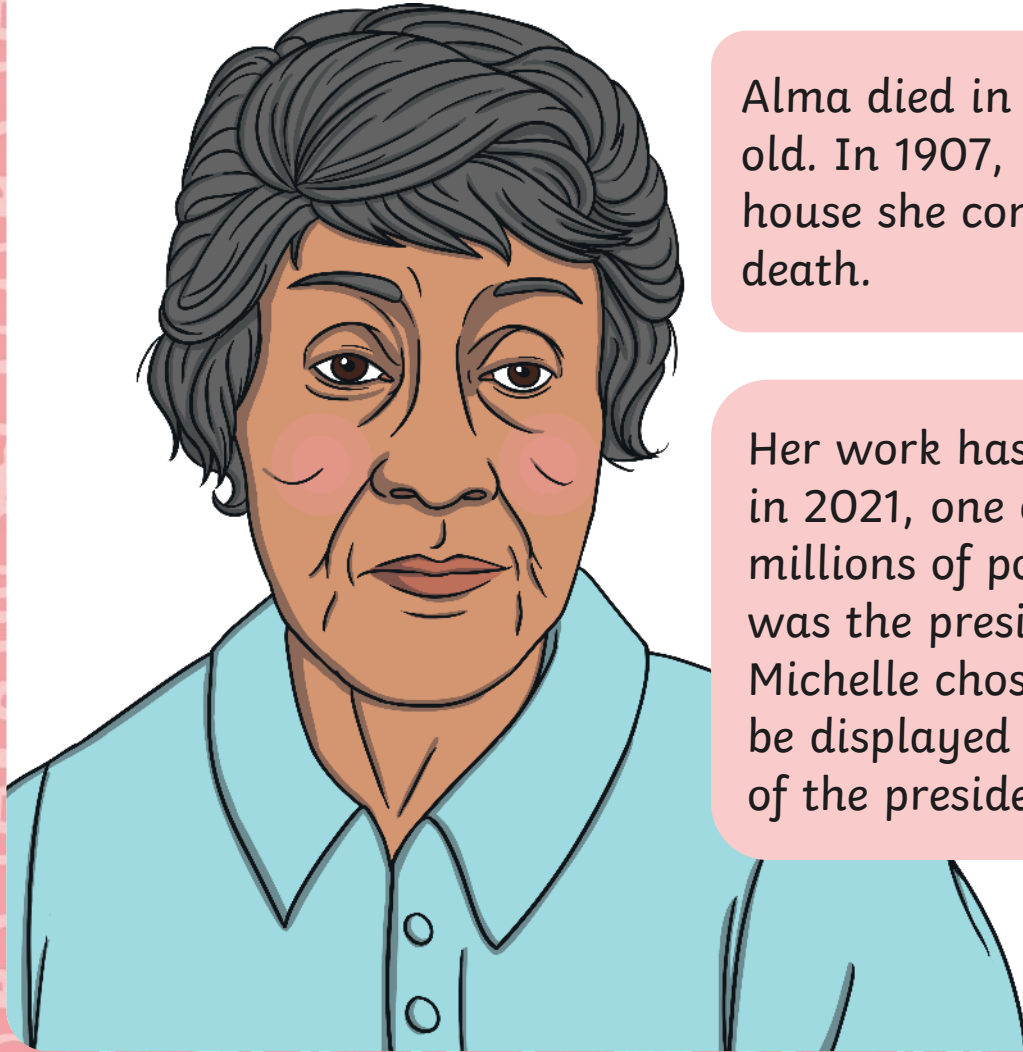


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This was painted in 1972. Three years before, astronauts had landed on the moon for the first time.

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Alma Thomas



Alma died in 1978, when she was 86 years old. In 1907, her family had moved into the house she continued to live in until her death.

Her work has continued to be popular and in 2021, one of her paintings was sold for millions of pounds. When Barack Obama was the president of the USA, his wife Michelle chose two of Alma's paintings to be displayed in the White House, the home of the president and family.

