

## George Braque, *Still Life: Le Jour*

### Discussion Questions

#### Style:

#### 1. Why is this lively composition called a still life?

##### Still life

This **still life** shows everyday **inanimate** objects, objects that cannot move on their own. The guitar, pitcher, knife, apples, newspaper, and pipe rest on a kitchen table as if ready to use at any moment. The smaller objects in front—apples, knife and newspaper—balance the large pitcher and guitar. The smoke from the pipe represents the only actual movement in the picture.

#### 2. How did Braque combine everyday objects in a Cubist composition?

##### Cubist

**Cubism** is a style that shows movement by combining multiple viewpoints of an object. We see the pitcher and guitar from the top and from the side at the same time. The table is tipped so it is seen from both the top and the front view. In 1929, when Braque painted this picture, photographs could show actual objects, so many artists no longer desired to paint realistic pictures. Braque tried to add a feeling of movement by combining different views of the objects as if the viewer were moving.

#### Design:

#### 3. How are the objects abstract?

##### Abstract

The abstract shapes of the guitar, pitcher, pipe, and newspaper represent recognizable objects, but they are simplified and exaggerated. The guitar appears to be cut in half and reassembled into abstract, or simplified shapes. The pipe and its smoke are exaggerated, like a cartoon.

#### 4. Why is this painting called *Le Jour*?

##### Realistic

*Le Journal* is the name of a daily newspaper in France. The paper is folded so we see only part of the title: **Le Jour**, which is the French word for today. This painting shows the way these objects appear today, at this moment. The background paneling and wallpaper create a **realistic** setting. The apples and knife with their shaded contours, and the wood grain on the drawer are realistic.

#### 5. How are the still life objects in this painting united?

##### Composition

The colors of the wallpaper, wood paneling, and black and green shapes in the background surround the objects on both sides of the central **axis** line that runs through the background and table. The slightly unbalanced **composition** adds to the feeling of movement.

##### Unity

The table top appears tipped forward, yet the objects are not falling off. They are **united**, or held together, by the repeated lines, shapes and colors. The diagonal line of the guitar is repeated in the angle of the knife and the black and green wedge shape, and is reversed in the newspaper and the pipe stem. The round shapes are repeated in the guitar, pitcher, apples, drawer handle, and pipe.

The shape of the knife's jagged point repeats the angle of the guitar, the newspaper, and the two green shapes behind the table. Their angular, arrow-like outlines direct our eye around the composition.

## Line:

### 6. How do repeated lines and shapes unify the composition?

#### Outline

Repeated black **outlines** around the guitar, pitcher, knife, and paneling connect the objects and unify the composition. The outline emphasizes their flat shape.

#### Contour

The realistic apples do not have a black outline. Their outside edge, or **contour**, contrasts with a light background, which makes them appear to pop out from the table.

## Space:

### 7. Where are we, the observers?

#### Viewpoint

We see these objects from different viewpoints. We see the table from a top view and a side view at the same time, as if we were standing up, leaning over, or moving to the side.

#### Negative space

**Negative**, or empty space, shown by the blocks of color behind the objects covers the busy wallpaper pattern and helps emphasize the objects.

## Color:

### 8. Which colors are neutral, and which colors are lively?

#### Neutral

The neutral colors of the tan table, wallpaper, brown walls, and green and black shapes in the background frame the objects. The blue and yellow objects contrast with the neutral background and add to the liveliness.

## Shape/form:

### 9. Which shapes are 3-D?

#### 2-D shape

The newspaper is two dimensional, or **2-D**, in shape. It is flat, without depth.

#### 3-D form

Shading and highlights give the apples form and make them appear **3-D** with height, width, and depth.

#### Highlights

Highlights on the apples create the illusion of form. Highlights on the flat, abstract pitcher also suggests its rounded form.

## Shadows

The blue area on the pitcher represents a **shadow**. The light source from the upper left corner casts a shadow on the newspaper, the guitar, the knife edge, and a table leg.

## Texture:

### 10. Is there real texture in this picture?

#### Actual

Many Cubist compositions were collages, made of patterned wallpaper, real newspaper, wood, and other actual objects with **actual texture** that the viewer could feel.

#### Visual

Since this is a painting, the texture is only visual, not actual. Braque was known for his skill in painting **visual texture**. Although the paint is applied smoothly, the patterns in the wallpaper and paneled walls look textured, as do the table, the shiny knife, and the smooth apples. Compare them with the flat surfaces of the guitar and pitcher.