



**Lesson:** Balancing Act

**Curricular Connections:** Designed for K-2 Math and Visual Arts; adaptable to other grades

**Artist:** Dorothy Dehner (American, 1901–1994; Born in Cleveland, OH; Worked in NY, NY)

**Artwork:** *Fortissimo*, 1993, fabricated aluminum, painted black, 19'4" x 4'6" x 4'6"

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**Listen and Learn:**

The [Fortissimo page](#) in deCordova's Sculpture Park Directory offers biographical and artistic information about Dorothy Dehner, her work, and the origins of this sculpture. Short audio files with the words of a Dehner scholar can be found [here](#).

**Lesson Goals**

1. Students will learn to carefully view and describe *Fortissimo*.
2. Students will learn the concept of balance. Students will identify geometric shapes and use visualization, spatial reasoning, and geometric modeling to create balanced sculptures.

### **Vocabulary Words You Can Learn & Use**

*Balance:* The way that objects or images are arranged to create visual or physical stability.

*Abstract art:* Imagery or art that is not representational or realistic.

*Geometric shapes:* Any shape or form having regular, geometric design rather than organic design. Geometric designs are typically made with straight lines or shapes from geometry such as circles, triangles, squares, and rectangles.

*Two-dimensional:* Having height and width, but no depth.

*Three-dimensional:* Having or appearing to have height, width, and depth.

### **Looking Questions** (can be asked in any order)

- Describe the overall shape or form of this sculpture.
- What shapes do you see in this sculpture?
- What colors do you see in this sculpture? How does the color of the sculpture relate to the colors in the surrounding landscape?
- Is this sculpture smaller or larger than you are? How can you tell? Why do you think the artist made it this size?

*NOTE: If you have your own questions, figures out ways to answer them yourselves or do some research on the artist, art movements, math ideas, etc.*

### **Discussion Questions**

- The title of this sculpture, *Fortissimo*, represented courage and strength to Dehner. What does this title or these words mean to you? How does this sculpture represent strength? What title would you give this sculpture if you could name it?
- *Fortissimo* is made from pieces of metal. How do you think the pieces of this sculpture are held together? How other materials could you use to build a sculpture like this?
- What does it mean if something is balanced? How did the artist create visual and physical balance in the sculpture?

### **Sculpture Activity Idea**

Explore the concept of balance through physical and visual activities.

#### **Materials List:**

- Sets of wooden building blocks, small pieces of wood, cardboard, toilet paper rolls, or any other materials you have at home, such as food or shoe boxes.
- Glue (if you would like to make a permanent sculpture – you can also just play with balance and composition and keep rearranging the materials)
- Paint or markers (if you have them and would like to paint your sculpture)
- Paint brushes or sponges to paint with, as needed

## TRUSTEES AT HOME: deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum Lesson Plan #1: **Balancing Act**

1. Discuss the concept of balance. Then stand on one foot, hold a book on your head, and try some other body balancing activities. Discuss what you need to have balance.
2. Experiment with building structures that are horizontal and vertical, square and other shapes, to discover what it takes to make things balance and to make an interesting sculpture. If you create a sculpture that you really like, give it a title.
3. Ask the same kinds of questions about your sculpture as you did about *Fortissimo*.
4. Take pictures and share your sculpture with your friends and family or on deCordova or The Trustees social media. Tell everyone the title of your sculpture and what you learned while making it. Encourage others to explore balance and make sculpture too!

### **Extensions**

*More Balancing Art:* Look at other works in [deCordova's Sculpture Park](#) and discuss balance from what you can see in the photos of them online. Good examples: [Lincoln](#), [Cardinal Points](#), [Eve Celebrant](#), [Kitchen Trees](#)

*Math:* [Math + Art Ideas from PBS Learning](#)

*Science:* Discuss and classify the material (aluminum) that Dorothy Dehner used to create *Fortissimo*, the materials you used to create their own sculpture, and a variety of other possible materials for sculpture, natural or synthetic.

*English Language Arts:* Write a concrete poem about *Fortissimo*. A concrete poem is one that takes the shape of the object it describes.

*Social Studies:* *Fortissimo* is described as a totemic image. Discuss this term and then list examples of totemic imagery from different cultures.

[Visit deCordova](#) in person and see all 50 sculptures across the 30-acre park when you are next able to do so – with your family or your school!