ART LESSON PLAN – GRAFFITI ART

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Date – Spring 2025

**ACTIVITY TITLE** - **GRAFFITI ART**

You may choose to use this lesson during Black History Month featuring Black Artists.

Create a graffiti style art

Working in teams or individually, use symbols and words to communicate through art

. **Essential Question:** Why are stories important in our lives?

**BIG IDEA** – Communication Through Art

Communication helps to connect us to others and the world. Everyone has a story to tell. Artists

are always looking for ways to tell their stories in a new and unique way.

**THEME** - Public Art / Street Art

**LEVEL** – 4TH OR 5TH This lesson can be adapted to higher levels. I often revisit and revise my plans to

adapt accordingly.

**APROX. TIME SPAN:** 4 – 5 Class periods, 40 min. long

**MEDIA** – Mixed Media/Street Art/Public Art

Create a mixed media piece of Street Art or Grafitti art in the style of Jean Michel Basquiat

**BIG PICTURE** - Everyone has a story of themselves. Throughout history artists have shared their stories or experiences through their art work. Sometimes they express their views of the world through their art. Artists look for new interpretations and inventive ways to express their personal or cultural history. By understanding this broad theme, students can begin to make connections into their own world.

**PREPARE:**

**FOCUS ARTIST**– **Jean Michel Basquiat** Compare and contrast art work of Basquiat and “Lady K.” Use any of these other suggestions: (I may show them all the additional four as variety but stick to one other to compare and contrast with). Lady K.- Paris, Bansy - London, Keith Haring, Pavlos Tsakonas - Athens (Hands) to name a few. A Venn diagram is a good tool to use for this step of comparing and contrasting.

**STANDARDS:**

* V.A.S.3 Identify symbols and ideals to communicate meaning in art
* Determine potential content for art
* Apply problem solving skills to choices in creating art relative to subject matter, symbols and ideas.

**OBJECTIVES**: Students will:

* Understand the unique style of Street Artist, Jean Michel Basquiat
* Identify and discuss Basquiat’s style with use of symbols and words along with line, color, shape and emphasis in his art
* Create a mixed media Graffiti piece inspired by artist, “Basquiat” that identifies the student and expresses a message by using color, line, shape, symbols and emphasis.

**Pre-test**: Can be done orally as a class with 4th and 5th grades, or written with older kids.

1. What is Graffiti Art or Street Art?

**2.**

1. Is Graffiti Art legal or illegal? (Illegal) When is it legal? (when given permission by the owner) Where does graffiti art usually appear?(outdoor walls of buildings, subway walls, on train cars)
2. List any famous Graffiti artists or Street artists that you may know.

**MATERIALS:**

Large white butcher paper from roll- aprox. At least 3 ft. x 4 ft. ea. Big enough for 4 people to work as a group, Pencils, Markers, oil pastels, Paint, air marker sprayers (if available) old magazines or any print that can be cut up, pre-made stencils or hand-made stencils

**IMAGES-** Examples of works by OTHER Graffiti artists: Jean Michel Basquiat, “Lady Pink” and Banksey. Are there any local muralists is your area? If so: show examples of their work and discuss similarities and differences of Graffiti artists vs. muralist.

**VOCABULARY:**

Graffiti, street art, emphasis, expressionism, symbol, tag line, icon, mural, stencil, center of interest, focal point, visual symbols, destructive style, activism, vandalism, “tags”, mural vs. Graffiti art

**Pointers**:

* Encourage kids to be thoughtful with every line placed. There is a fine line between thoughtful placement of lines and scribbles, especially with 4th and fifth.

Terms are used in the graffiti world for the style of strokes and letters made. These can be researched and added for the upper grades.

* **Preview** the specific artworks to be shown to kids. Some may have inappropriate “symbols” or words for the classroom. If working in teams, keep teams small (3-4).

**TEACH:**

LINK: Four artists I feature during “black History Month” are; Basquiait, Jacob Lawrence, Faith Ringgold, and Alma Thomas If introducing this lesson during “Black History Month”, (Basquiat being a Black Artist) *Homeschool Pop/Black History Month for Kids* is a great video for elementary age. It’s narrated by Brad Meltzer (“DeCoded” TV Series).

**EXPLORE AND EXAMINE:**

**INTRODUCE** Graffiti and Street Art –discuss differences- Is it art or vandalism?

That’s been the question for thousands of years and it still is as controversial. Graffiti has been around for 1000’s of years. We know graffiti was drawn or scratched on walls in such ancient cities like Rome,

Pompeii or in Mayan culture and wasn’t considered vandalism. It was used as a form of advertisement or message billboard. Later during the French Revolution when beautiful works of art were being

defaced, the term “vandalism” had been coined. This term came about due to a barbaric tribe called the “Vandals”. It was after the 5th century that Graffiti became vandalism and hence many artist working in the shadows and using coded names, not to be caught

1800 - Later in the late 1800’s when trains were making their way across the country we begin to hear of Graffiti artists taking to the side of railway cars. One well known is; “Boz Texino”. You can find more info about this early rail worker on the internet.

**3.**

1939-45 – During WWII a common symbol could be found by USA soldiers throughout the battlegrounds letting people know they were there… “KILROY WAS HERE”. When visiting the Great WWII memorial in Washington D.C. be sure to look for this hidden treasure on the monument. That’s a p retty important piece of American Pop Culture if it was embedded on one of our National monuments!

1967 – Graffiti artist known as “CornBread” (Daryl McCray) of Philadelphia is considered by most the 1st modern Graffiti artist.

Some of the well-known Modern Graffiti Artists are names like, Jean Michel Basquait, Taki 183, Dondi, Phase 2, Zephyr, Seen, Lee Quinones and only one female, Lady Pink.

1970’s brought the Graffiti Unions which brought more acceptance to the art form and ushered the artists’ works into the museum world.

Defining Graffiti - The term *“Graffiti”* actually comes from the Italian word *Grafiatto* to scratch or to etch onto a surface.

Graffiti is considered the act of writing (with spray paint cans) or perhaps scribbling, on public property and is considered illegal unless sanctioned by the owner. Much (not all) graffiti is considered an eyesore to the public. Some artists like, *Keith Haring* has been willing to be arrested to defend what he feels is his right to make a statement on a public building. He and many other Graffiti artist challenge the boundaries of public property and the destructive messages they often show being rooted in social issues. To create on the walls, without permission, is still illegal.

Within the Arts District of Baltimore Maryland a safe place for graffiti has been created for artists to make their statements on the walls without repercussion. It is called, “*Graffiti Alley*”. Graffiti Alley is owned by the Graffiti Warehouse building that surrounds the alley. Visitors to Baltimore and even schools visit the urban alley and can always see something new since it is often repainted for a for the next creator on the walls. It can remind us all “graffiti may be seen still, as an act of vandalism, but it is an art filled with heart and soul whose lives are shaped around it” (Lew Blank).

**FOCUS IN:**

Master Artist: Jean Michel Basquiat –

Born in 1960 into a multi-cultural household in Brooklyn, NY, Basquiat set the art world on fire within his short life span. As a young boy he was always interested in art and encouraged by his mother. Jean Michel spent time recovering at age seven from being hit by a car. During this time he was influenced by a book his mother gave to him, *Gray’s Anatomy*. We see later in his artwork the influence that book had on his paintings. He always seemed to be a troubled young man as a teenager and had to go to an alternative high school. He always used his art as an outlet for difficult times.

By 1976, he was spray painting with a friend in the streets of NYC and signing his pieces “SAMO”, short for “same old same old”. He was making a social statement against the art establishment catering to white artists and not acknowledging black artists.

By 1980, he had met artist Andy Warhol (who he became great friends with) and was invited to the “Times Square Art Show”. He was noticed by an Italian Salon owner and invited him to hold a solo show in Italy. He was beginning to be in great demand by 1892 as he lived and painted in California. The NY Times magazine put him on the front cove of their magazine in 1985 which at the time was breaking ground for young black artists. The term Neo-Expressionism was given to his style and numerous other artists who painted with such freedom and freshness. It was a new way of expressing yourself.

**4.**

It took only 10 years for Basquiat to rise to fame. By age 20 he sold lone of his paintings for $20 million dollars! Controversy always surrounds those who are breaking new grounds and some critics thought his work was unworthy. He held strong to his style and created many pieces of art in a short time. Sadly his

troubled life led to his death by over-dosing at the very young age of 27. Thirty five years later in 2017 a 1982 piece of his art was sold at Christie’s Auction House for a whopping, 110 million dollars!

Many other videos of the life of Basquiat and his works can be found on Youtube.

**PRODUCTION - STUDIO TIME**

**EXPLAIN AND MODEL**

Project can be done individually or in small groups of 4-5 students. If doing in small groups, I use large

3’ x 4’ paper. If working individually, I use 12” x 18” – 90 lb white paper. Paper axis can be the choice of the student. Demo each new step in every class. Then I “CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING”. Only having the kids once per week I review the prior lesson quickly.

Explain and Model the following:

**Day 1**- Working as a group (Have groups pre-arranged if necessary) Assign groups

1. On the large paper, draw what will be a “focal point” or ***“center of interest”*** of the piece. Suggestions: person, animal, or one letter, (for middle school grades this could also be several letters- graffiti style). Have each person add to the focal point object.

2. Add a ***crown*** to the piece - (symbol of Basquiat)

3. Add color with paint to the **focal point** (this step may take you into the next class depending on length of classes). Color groups can be dictated for painting or for higher level students have them find complimentary colors and use those within the piece.

4. Assess work (formative) – Were all students contributing as a team? Is a focal point clearly evident?

**Day 2 –** Discuss with students each week, the work done by students, similarities and differences.

1. **Create a brick wall** covering the entire paper using oil pastels behind the central figure. Using a pencil, draw horizontal lines touching each side of the paper. Draw staggered vertical lines. Draw grout lines. Outline in darker oil pastels.

2. Demo use of oil pastels and blending their colors.

3. Color in the bricks using oil pastels. Use blending techniques with the pastels.

For higher level students have them find complimentary colors and use those within the piece.

4. Assess Work (formative) did students follow directions for the brick wall? Does it show blended colors?

**Day 3 – Discuss** with students if works show evidence of collaboration of students with their team.

1. On sketch paper-draw three symbols that could represent you. Write their meaning.
2. For the group piece- pick one of your symbols that represent you. Draw the symbol on a separate paper, add color, cut out and glue onto large paper. Apply color using markers, or oil pastels. Use bold colors so they will be seen. Tip: be sure symbols are drawn large enough.

3. When images are dry, cut out symbols and glue them onto the brick wall of the group piece.

**5.**

4. Assess work- (formative) Were preliminary symbols sketched and dexplored? Did each student place a personal symbol onto the piece?

**Day 4** Review prior learning, briefly.

Discuss the meaning of “social issues”.

Using old magazines, books or calendars (anything with written words) that were going to be discarded, cut out letters or words to **create a phrase**, a **“tag line**” (Nike- “Just do It”) or word that represents YOU. It can be a social issue (higher grades), or a phrase that represents the student. Glue the words or phrases created onto the group piece. For 4th and 5th, I had them create only **one WORD that represented themselves**, due to space on paper and time.

I have students write their words on the wall (as well as cut out words from printed text) with ***air marker*** **sprayers.** Students love experimenting with them and will give the look of spray painting without any fumes! They take watercolor markers. These are available at Amazon for $25.00 each and purchased with my Faculty Senate money. I was able to buy several sprayers for my room.

Evaluate final piece over-all. See Criteria Sheet

Display art on walls outside of the art room after each class so progress can be seen by the school.

**DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION:**

**Special Needs:** If you have any students with special needs ie: within a wheel-chair, hang piece on the wall while they are working. If motor control is an issue, assign another student to discuss ideas with them and that student can do drawing or cutting for them. Offer extra time and choice of medium.

**Enrichment**: Advanced students can do more well blended elements. Or can use a magazine to cut out letters to create a phrase, and glue onto the piece. Assign them as captain of that group.

**CLOSE**

**WRAP –UP** with students

. How does your work compare to Basquait’s style? Are they alike in any ways? How are they different? (Art Criticism, compare & contrast) Responses will vary.

. How did each team make their Graffiti art look unified and show good composition? Production, problem solving. Possible answers: (we had to communicate, or we made a sketch first, we had to compromise and listen to each other).

**Post Test**- At this point a written post-test of the same pre-test can be given, or merely ask the questions given for the pre-test assessment.

**REFLECTION**: We all struggle to do this but… A quick painless (to the students) critique could be a **“TAG”** session. Give each student 3 post it notes. Have them put their name on top (or choose not to). Under their name on the first note, place a **“T”**. On the 2nd- write name and place an **“A”** and on the 3rd, name and write a **“G”.**

1. “T”- tell something you like about the piece
2. “A” ask a question about the piece
3. “G” give a suggestion for the piece

**6.**

Have each student go to another piece other than their own and fill in the three post it notes. Then stick it to the wall next to the piece. They can rotate around the room placing one of their notes on a different piece IF time allows. Voila’… easy painless class critique is done.

**ACROSS THE CURRICULUM:**

It’s so easy to connect social studies, and history to this lesson by incorporating the social messages and political statements that graffiti art may be incorporating, (***without getting into*** *any political sides or* *personal opinions*). Discussing the origins of Graffiti art on train cars or as far back into the Roman times and its roots to advertising or part of “telling the story” of a culture’s history. (BACK TO THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION)

**EVALUATION- RUBRIC #1 – GRAFFITI ART**

**Objective:** Evidence Level 4 Level 3 Level 2 Level 1

Understands the unique discuss Offers good descriptions aware of concept no evidence

style of graffiti art and review examples not always clear no descriptions

**Elements and Principles:**

Student creates his style.

Student artwork

shows his style using symbols,

words, line, shape, color

and emphasis

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**Creativity/Originality:**

Student explored several

choices, discussed and tried

several ideas. As a group

contributed, (or alone) and

demonstrated outstanding

problem solving skills.

**Effort/Perseverance:**

Project was continued until it

was complete as the student

could make it; gave effort far

beyond that required; took

pride in going beyond.

**Group Cooperation/Attitude:**

Student worked toward group

goals; performed a variety of roles;

was sensitive to the feelings/abilities

of others; eager to participate in

needed work for project

**Craftsmanship/Skill/Consistency**

The piece was done to a high degree

and patiently done. It was as good

as their hard work could make it

**7.**

**Assessment Evaluation #2**

(Any points can be assigned to suit your scoring system)

**Graffetti- Summative Assessment – 36 pts.**

**Students work:**

4 – shows the student understands the style of artist Basquiat

4 – shows or implies a brick wall and was skillfully done

4 – shows at least one symbol that represents you

4 – shows a well articulated “focal point” as the largest image

4 –has words or a message cut out and glued onto the piece

4 – creativity/originality

4 – effort/ perseverance

4 – craftsmanship of piece

4 – work ethic