

BUFFALO AKG ART MUSEUM

Lesson: Contemporary Portraiture



Grade Level: K-12

Conceptual Basis:

Chuck Close created large-scale portraits in a unique way. Using a grid system, Close created paintings that are composed of many squares. When viewing these paintings up close, one sees an array of squares filled with abstract shapes and colors. Upon further observation, and when viewed from a distance, a portrait appears that is formed by these separate square compositions. Close's mathematical approach to structuring his work, combined with his abstract flair, results in energetic portraits. This lesson—which is inspired by the different elements of Close's portraits—reinforces the elements of shape, color, and value while creating unique self-portraits.

Chuck Close (American, 1940–2021). *Janet*, 1992. 100 x 84 inches (254 x 213.4 cm). Collection Buffalo AKG Art Museum. George B. and Jenny R. Mathews Fund, 1992 (1992:15). © Estate of Chuck Close

Vocabulary:

value: the lightness or darkness of a color

photorealism: an art movement of paintings which resemble photography in their close attention to detail

Objectives:

- Become familiar with the artist Chuck Close, his life, and his grid portrait paintings.
- Use mathematic skills and tools to create a grid.
- Support the understanding of basic art elements and principles.
- Use the grid system to transfer an image onto another paper through drawing skills.
- Create a self-portrait inspired by Chuck Close.

Materials:

Pencils

Rulers

Black permanent markers

Oil pastels (younger grades)

Colored pencils (middle grades)

Paint and brushes (older grades)

Full-page photographs of students

(for older students) **blank paper**

Artmaking Activity:

1. Take and print portrait pictures of each student. The images should be full page.
2. Demonstrate how to use a ruler to create straight lines on paper.
3. Create a grid across the portrait image. Grid size will depend on age level.

Younger Students

1. Each grid box should be one inch by one inch in size, drawn directly on the printed photograph.
2. Demonstrate how to use oil pastels. Emphasize the ability to blend colors using oil pastels.
3. Using one color, trace the pencil grid across the portrait.
4. Following the shapes on the face in the box, trace the key features using the same color oil pastel. Instruct students to color over their faces one box at a time. Encourage students to follow the shapes and angles in the boxes with their pastels. Try using only two to three colors per box. Moving from top to bottom will help reduce smudging.
5. Once students have finished, they will be left with an oil pastel grid portrait.

Older Students

1. LIGHTLY draw a grid on a separate piece of drawing paper with one inch by one-inch-sized boxes. Number each box. Then draw a grid on their photograph and number each square. Working one square at a time, students should focus on re-creating the lines and shapes in each square to create an overall replicated image. With the image duplicated, students can begin filling in their grid portraits with color.
2. Have students focus on the shapes they see in each square of their face. Working one square at a time, create abstract shapes that relate to the images in their portraits.

3. Encourage students to try using a similar color palate throughout their grid to create unity in their overall artwork. Reference Close's paintings to emphasize his use of creating joined squares in the face as well as his ability to achieve unity.
4. When students are finished, they can define their facial features if they choose with black marker. Use a black permanent marker to trace key elements in the portrait, including facial features and shapes, hair lines, and basic clothing outlines. Place the portrait sheet behind the grid drawing paper.

Lesson Tips

- This lesson can be tailored to focus on a variety of themes. Instead of doing portraiture, this lesson can focus on a still life image or a favorite object. Choosing to draw the portrait of someone such as historical figure can add an interdisciplinary twist to the lesson.
- For advanced students, try creating a unique grid. Grids can be created based on different shapes or composed of wavy lines or even a rounded dot pattern. Grids can even be made smaller for added difficulty.
- Showing students close-up images of their grid paintings, in addition to standard images of paintings, can help them focus on small sections of their grid squares.
- Finding video clips of artist Chuck Close in his studio can help students understand and visualize his artistic process and the overall scale of his artwork.

Instead of color, experiment with different values of black and white.

Interdisciplinary Connection

Creating interdisciplinary ties between art and mathematics is achievable in this lesson. The creation of a grid involves measuring and creating ratios to change the scale or size of a grid. The use of rulers as a tool to create a grid, as well as multiplication or division to size up or down a grid, are different elements used in this lesson.

During the introduction to this lesson, while looking at examples of Close and his artwork, you could have a mathematical discussion on the grid created in the painting Janet. While viewing the artwork, you can ask the following questions:

- How many squares are across the top of the grid?
- How many squares are down the side of the grid?
- How many squares are in the whole painting? (Count or multiply to find the answer.)
Can students write an equation to express this?

For younger students who may not have had much experience using rulers, they can measure different objects around the classroom.

Older students can benefit from creating grids with a 1:2 or 2:1 ratio as practice for their artmaking project.

New York State Standards:

| | | |
|---|------------|--|
| 6 | VA:Re7.1.6 | Identify and interpret works of art or design that reveal how people around the world live and what they value. |
| 7 | VA:Re7.1.7 | Explain how a person's artistic choices are influenced by culture and environment, and affect the visual image that one conveys to others. |
| 8 | VA:Re7.1.8 | Explain how the method of display, the location, and the experience of an artwork influence how it's perceived and valued. |

| Grade Level 9-12 | Code | Standard |
|------------------|-----------------|--|
| Proficient | VA:Re7.1.HSI | Recognize and describe aesthetic and empathetic responses to the natural world and constructed environments. |
| Accomplished | VA: Re7.1.HSII | Analyze how responses to art develop over time, based on knowledge of and experiences with art and life. |
| Advanced | VA: Re7.1.HSIII | Hypothesize ways in which art influences perception and understanding of human experiences. |

Teacher Example:

