

# BUFFALO AKG ART MUSEUM

## Lesson: (Sound) Suit Up!



Nick Cave (American, born 1959). *Speak Louder*, 2011. Mixed media including black mother-of-pearl buttons, embroidery floss, upholstery, armature, and mannequins. 93½ x 199 x 123 inches (237.5 x 505.5 x 312.4 cm) overall. Collection Buffalo AKG Art Museum. Purchased jointly by the Buffalo AKG Art Museum with funds provided by the Charles W. Goodyear Fund, by exchange, Gift of Mrs. George A. Forman, by exchange and Gift of Mrs. Georgia M. G. Forman, by exchange and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago with funds provided by Helen Zell, 2018 (2018:2a-g). © Nick Cave. Photo by James Prinz Photography. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

**Artists:** Nick Cave

**Artwork:** *Speak Louder*, 2011

**Period/Movement:**

Contemporary Installation

**Grade Level:** K-5

**Enduring Understandings:**

Through art making, people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge, and experiences.

**Essential Questions:**

How does creating art and rich people's life? What does making our attuned people to their surroundings?

How does making tribute to awareness understand one's lives, lives of others in the community?

# LESSON

## Conceptual Basis:

Nick Cave (American, born in 1959) is an American fabric sculptor, dancer, and performance artist. Growing up in Fulton, Missouri, Cave's family was large and always supportive of his artistic interests. He claims his upbringing gave him an artistic attentiveness to found objects and assemblages.

Cave creates “Soundsuits”—surreally majestic objects blending fashion and sculpture—that originated as metaphorical suits of armor in response to the Rodney King beatings and have evolved into vehicles for empowerment. The “soundsuits” are ornate, full-body costumes designed to rattle and resonate with the movement of the wearer. He uses materials that range from twigs to crystals to rainbow-colored hair that are visceral and necessary critiques of racial injustice.

He collaborates with local musicians and choreographers in his invigorating performances, where they become ‘shaman-esque,’ to follow ancient rituals of chasing away evil spirits. Cave says his performances are both playful and deadly serious, both insulating and isolating.

*Speak Louder* gathers seven of Nick Cave's signature “soundsuit” sculptures. Cave created his first soundsuit in response to the widely publicized police beating of Rodney King in 1991 and the often-contentious national conversation around issues of racial and economic disparity and police use of force. For Cave, the sculptural garments could act as a kind of “second skin,” concealing potential markers for discrimination like race, gender, and class beneath a dense, visually exuberant armor of vintage masks, beads, plastic flowers, and skeins of synthetic hair, and other found and hand-fabricated elements. Originally, many of these works were designed to be worn in performances, activating the noises that give the works their name. However, in the decades since, Cave has also created “soundsuits”, like those in *Speak Louder*, intended to be presented as sculpture.

For Cave, *Speak Louder* is “a piece about speaking and not being heard,” and a platform to address what he has identified as one of the most pressing issues challenging his current hometown of Chicago: the way the voices of those disproportionately impacted by violence, especially young black men, are often unheard or deliberately silenced in the civic dialogue around this problem. The oversized headpieces topping the “soundsuits” in *Speak Louder* resemble devices for fulfilling the command given by the work's title; they suggest the flared discs of speakers or possibly the bells of a tuba or sousaphone.

By bringing these figures together, Cave underscores the additive power of coming together as a community to make your voices heard and bring about positive changes. “I want to provide [viewers] with transitional experiences,” Cave has said. “It's about providing a moment of silence, and at the same time asking, ‘Come out with me and play.’”

## Artmaking Activity:

This activity encourages young students to use their imaginations inspired by the soundsuits of Nick Cave. For younger students, teachers may wish to send these instructions to parents to follow along. If parents have a printer they can print out the template, or just open it on the screen.

To begin, students should use any drawing/coloring materials available (crayons, colored pencils, markers, etc.) and draw a wild costume. Encourage them to fill in the space around their suit.

Ask: What kinds of lines and shapes do you want to use? Are your lines squiggly, curly, thin, thick, or a zigzag? Remember you can't see the face, hair color, etc., on Cave's soundsuits, so feel free to be creative!

Nick Cave used lots of textural materials. If available, students can add stickers to their soundsuit to give it some texture. Now take a look at your creation. Does it have a name? Would you want to wear what you have drawn?

Cut around your drawn soundsuit and glue/tape it to a stick (craft sticks are awesome, but anything along those lines would work—a ruler, a long pencil, a dowel, etc.). Then, the student could use their new puppet to create a performance—it could be a story, a dance, or whatever creative thing that comes to mind!

### Guided Play Activity:

This activity encourages little ones to use movement and sound to connect to visual art. Students can create their own soundsuit out of any clothes, costumes, or materials they may have access to. Ask: Does it crinkle or swoosh or clank?

Have your student mimic the noises that they hear when moving in their “soundsuit.” If their suit is silent, they can come up with their own sounds. Have them look again at Speak Louder. Do they think any of those sounds would be made with that sculpture? From what parts are the sounds coming from?

Go ahead and dance around in your soundsuit. Play some music! Ask: How does it feel to dance dressed up? What kind of movements do you want to make? Are you moving fast or slow? Are you jumping high or rolling around on the ground?

If you could display your newly created art somewhere, where would it be? What would you call your soundsuit?

Optional: Share a photo or video of your soundsuit on Twitter or Instagram with **#BuffaloAKG** and **#MuseumFromHome!**

Why do you think Nick Cave chooses to make soundsuits for his art? Do you think it's cool? If you could make your dream soundsuit, what would it be made out of? What materials would you use?

### Vocabulary:

**Texture:** physical feel or a touchable sensation on a surface area

**Soundsuits:** decorative, full body costumes designed to rattle and resonate with the movement of the wearer

**Fashion:** a popular trend, especially in styles of dress and accessories

## Materials:

- Drawing paper (or any paper available to you)
- Black marker or pen
- Coloring tools (crayons, markers, colored pencils, etc.)
- Stickers, if available

## Guided Play:

- Clothing, shoes, jewelry, and other accessories that makes noise when you move while wearing them
- A way to play music (through your computer, phone, radio, etc.)
- A space to dance!

## New York State Standards:

**Connecting:** Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.

**Anchor Standard 10:** Relate and synthesize knowledge and personal experiences to inspire and inform artistic work.

**Artistic Process: Connecting**

**Process Component: Synthesize**

## Standards:

Grade	Code	Standard
K	VA:Cn10.1.K	Explore the world using descriptive words and artistic work.
1	VA:Cn10.1.1	Create works of art about events and home, school or community life.
2	VA:Cn10.1.2	Identify times, places, and reasons that students make art outside of school.
3	VA:Cn10.1.3	Create works of art that reflect community cultural traditions.
4	VA:Cn10.1.4	Develop a work of art, based on observations of surroundings.
5	VA:Cn10.1.5	Generate a collection of ideas reflecting current interests and concerns that could be investigated in artistic work.

Interdisciplinary Connections: Dance  
Teacher Example:



Example of finished artwork based on lesson plan.  
Artwork by Manager of School & Teacher Programs Lindsay Kranz.