

BUFFALO AKG ART MUSEUM

Lesson: Artful Posters



Artists: Inspired by the special exhibition *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965–85* (February 17–May 27, 2018)

Grade Level: 9–12

Enduring Understanding:

Visual imagery influences understanding of and responses to the world.

Essential Questions:

Where and how do we encounter images in the world?

How do images influence our views of the world?

Jan van Raay (American, born 1942). *Faith Ringgold (right) and Michele Wallace (middle) at Art Workers Coalition Protest, Whitney Museum, 1971*. Courtesy of Jan van Raay, Portland, OR, 305-37. © Jan van Raay

LESSON

Conceptual Basis

Silkscreen printing has a long history of being used to create art, but recently has also been used to create posters and commercial designs. In the special exhibition *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965–85*, posters that were used in protests and for special events are displayed to provide a context for what Black women artists were experiencing during this time period. Students will learn about a particular protest in 1971, and then conduct research regarding a topic for which they have a passion. They will create their own poster using a silkscreen printing technique.

Objectives: *Explore silkscreen printing techniques and their use for reproduction*

- Learn about Black women artists during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and what they did to build and create space for Black women in a field often dominated by white male artists, focusing on a protest that took place in 1971 outside the Whitney Museum of Art
- Create an opportunity to express oneself through a poster using a printmaking process
- Organize a space for display of the posters

Activity: *Background Information for Teachers*

In 1970, the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee of the Art Workers' Coalition, Women Artists in Revolution, and Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation protested outside the Whitney Museum during its Annual Exhibition (which became the Whitney Biennial in 1973). They were protesting the Whitney's failure to include women artists, especially those of color.

In this photograph, Faith Ringgold (right) and her daughter, Michele Wallace (middle), are pictured here outside of the Whitney's Breuer building on the Upper East Side. To view more of Jay van Raay's photography, please visit her website.

As an efficient and inexpensive method for widely disseminating information, printmaking has long been associated with protest and freedom of expression. Many artists in the 1960s explored printmaking as a primary means for making art, prioritizing utility and accessibility over preciousness or market value. Their posters, prints, announcements, and other forms of printed ephemera were relatively easy to produce in bulk and distribute, allowing artists to circumvent and undermine an increasingly commercialized art world.

For artists of the Black Arts Movement, screen prints and posters became a primary medium for creative experimentation and sharing political ideas. Barbara Jones-Hogu was a painter, printmaker, filmmaker, and educator from Chicago. In 1968, with four other artists, she co-founded AFRICOBRA, the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists. Her work has appeared in exhibitions in Chicago and around the United States, and has been collected by many major institutions.

Discussion

Begin by showing your students Jan van Raay's Faith Ringgold (right) and Michele Wallace (middle) at Art Workers Coalition Protest. Explain that the people are protesting, including the artist, Faith Ringgold, and her daughter, author Michele Wallace. They were protesting at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City because the previous year's annual exhibition only included eight women out of 151 artists, and there were almost no Black women artists.

Ask your students how they would feel in this situation. What would they do if they were in the same position as the Black women artists during this time? Compare to what is happening in today's art world. What has changed? What has not changed?

Next, show Barbara Jones-Hogu's print *Unite*. Explain how artists were using printmaking not only as a way to make art, but to create posters, prints, and announcements in order spread their message in bulk. Explain the process of silkscreen printing, which is how this poster was made. Ask if they think this method is effective. Why or why not?

Artmaking Prep

At this time, the students are to pick a topic that they are passionate about. Ask them to conduct online research to find a contemporary article, video, or research paper discussing their topic. Encourage them to look at reliable websites (such as sites by museums, universities, trusted news outlets, Ted Talks, etc.). Next, ask the students to find photographs of posters, flyers, and signs that connect with their topic. You can use this time to talk about composition, contrast, and other principles that are depicted.

Artmaking Activity

1. Ask the students to take their research into consideration for a protest or announcement poster. Have them draw out the design.
2. Depending on the printing process available to you, make photocopies, cut out the stencils, or draw with a pencil directly onto the fabric.
3. Prep the screen in the method that works best for your materials. Have the students choose their color(s) for the prints. The inks can be mixed to create custom colors.
4. Apply a thick line of printing ink (or acrylic paint) at the top of the design, slightly wider than the image. Using a squeegee, pull the ink down over the screen to the bottom. (Take care to not move the screen.)
5. Pull the screen slowly away from the paper to reveal the image. If using multiple colors, either use separate screens for each color, or clean the screen in between uses.

Lesson Reflections and Wrap-Up

1. Do you like this type of printmaking process? Why or why not?
2. When you were conducting online research, did anything you find surprise you? Why?
3. Do you feel differently about your topic now that you have created an art piece about that particular subject?

Create a space for the students to display their posters. They can organize how the posters are displayed, deciding which ones should be near each other, and how they will be understood in context next to each other.

Vocabulary:

silkscreen print: a print created by a technique in which a mesh cloth is stretched over a heavy wooden frame and the design, blocked or painted onto the screen, is printed by having a squeegee force color through the pores of the material in the areas not blocked out

composition: the placement or arrangement of visual elements in a work of art

contrast: the arrangement of opposite elements in an artwork to create visual interest, excitement, and/or a dramatic effect

Materials:

- Drawing materials and paper (to sketch the initial design)
- Silk screens or embroidery hoops with a type of fabric (muslin, mesh, screen fabric, etc.)
- Squeegees
- Printing ink or acrylic paint
- Paper on which to print
- A way for blocking, such as stencils, Mod Podge, drawing filler and screen fluid, etc.

Standards:

The New York State Visual Arts Standards for High School Students are divided into 3 categories, Proficient, Accomplished, and Advanced rather than by grade level. Please feel free to choose the standard that best applies to the needs of your students and class curriculum.

Grade Level 9-12	Code	Standard
Proficient	VA:Re7.2.HSI	Analyze the reciprocal relationship between understanding the world and experiencing imagery.
Accomplished	VA:Cr1.2.HSII	Identify commonalities within a group of artists or visual images attributed to a particular type of art, time frame, or culture.
Advanced	VA:Re7.2.HSIII	Evaluate the effectiveness of images to influence ideas, feelings, and behaviors of specific audiences.

AKG: