

## An Advertisement for Change

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| <b>Essential Question</b> | How can artists combine words and images to create an eye-catching artwork that communicates ideas that are important to them?  |
| <b>Grade</b>              | 4th   |
| <b>Time</b>               | 50 minutes  |
| <b>Art Concepts</b>       | Contrast, composition, layering, media, collage   |
| <b>Materials</b>          | White paper, recycled newspapers and magazines, construction paper (assorted colors), marker pens (assorted colors), glue, scissors   |
| <b>Artworks in Focus</b>  | <a href="#">You Substantiate our Horror, 1985 by Barbara Kruger</a><br><a href="#">Yes We Did, 2008 by Shepard Fairey</a>   |
| <b>Talking about Art</b>  | <p>How can art help us to express ourselves and understand each other better? Let's consider works of art as being like a window and a mirror. Art is a mirror because it can reflect how we feel about a painting or a drawing. We can also express what we think by making our own art and seeing ourselves in our work. Art is also a window into other people's ideas about the world. Looking at art can help us to view the world from someone else's perspective. Let's look at a couple artworks together.</p> <p>What do you notice about the colors, words, and shapes in this artwork by Barbara Kruger? Where else do we see these colors (red, black, white) in the world around us? Do they remind you of anything?</p> |

This artwork is over ten feet high and uses eye-catching, high-**contrasting** colors, bold forms, and large lettering that we often see in signage, advertising, and the **media**. The black-and-white picture could also remind us of an old movie or photograph. Kruger was interested in using colors, images, and lettering that we see around us every day. She went to design school in New York and became head designer at a magazine when she was young. Kruger's graphic design work influences her work as an artist. She has designed billboards, book covers, T-shirts, and posters, which are intended to carry her messages to a large number of people.

Why do you think advertisers often use these colors and lettering? Because it catches our attention. Our eyes automatically notice these colors, which is why road signs use these types of contrasting colors. Media uses these techniques to catch our attention and make us listen to their messages just as Kruger does. But what is media? Media is the dominant, or main, means of mass communication that is seen by the majority of people—for example, the internet, television, and other kinds of broadcasting outlets, magazines, newspapers, and books, as well as social media. These are all media. Most of us are surrounded by the media every day.

Now, let's look a little closer at Kruger's work. What can we tell about how the woman in this picture is feeling by her facial expression? What might the message be in this artwork? Why do you think Kruger chose to put these words with this picture?

The woman holds her hand up to her face, perhaps in an expression of grief or sadness. The monumental scale of the work emphasizes the woman's worn hand and the lines of her face as her brows draw together and her skin tightens with emotion. The enlarged photograph is headlined by the words, "You substantiate

our horror” in large type. Kruger uses the words “You” and “Our” without telling us exactly who is speaking or being spoken to. We are left to wonder how the words relate to the woman in the picture. Kruger combines images and words in ways that ask us to look closer and ask questions about the meaning. She has been influenced by issues surrounding women’s rights and often focuses on how we treat people of different genders unfairly, and unequally, especially in the media. By asking us to question the meaning in her work, perhaps she is also asking us to question what we see every day in the media.

Now let’s look at the work of another artist who uses his art to represent issues or ideas that are important to him. This artwork was made by Shepard Fairey in 2008.

What do you notice in this that is similar to Kruger’s artwork, and what is different? Like Kruger, Fairey uses bold lettering and eye-catching colors, but the colors are different. What do you think of when you see these colors? The reds, different blues, and whites or creams? He said he wanted to create a work that had a patriotic feel, not exactly like the American flag, but similar.

Like Kruger, Fairey has experimented with how art can reach many different people by creating works in many and varied formats, such as on stickers, posters, and clothing. He became famous in the early 1990s when he created stickers related to his Obey Giant campaign, which became an international phenomenon. At first he designed stickers to go on skateboards and out on the street. In the bottom left corner of this picture you can see the symbol that has a stenciled face inside, which is similar to how the original sticker design looked. To create this design, Fairey took a picture he found in the newspaper and used it as the basis for a stencil. He made a sticker and posted it in lots of different locations all over the eastern United States. Because

people are not used to seeing advertisements for which the product or motive is not obvious, frequent encounters with the sticker provoke thought and possible frustration. What is this sticker? Where did it come from? What does it mean? Fairey is asking us to question the symbols, words, and pictures around us.

Let's look closer at the portrait and text in this artwork. Does this picture remind you of anything? Have you seen it somewhere before? Do you recognize the person in this picture? Why might the artist have used the phrase "Yes we did"? Fairey is best known for creating an artwork that looks similar to this one—it is of Barack Obama with the word "HOPE" written under his portrait. Fairey's original iconic *HOPE* poster of President Obama was adopted as the official emblem associated with the presidential campaign and represents a number of recurring concerns in the artist's work, including propaganda, portraiture, and political power. For Fairey, many of the beliefs and ideas that Obama stood for were important to him. This particular print was created as a commemoration piece after Obama won the election and became the first black president of the United States. Obama famously used the phrase, "Yes we can," during his campaign, and Fairey has changed that message to say "Yes we did"!

## **Making Art**

Like Kruger and Fairey, we are going to create an eye-catching artwork that communicates a message that you feel strongly about. It could be something that you think is important in your own life or something that you want to change in the world. Reflect on issues or ideas that you have been learning about in other classes or at home.

1. Look through recycled advertisements, magazines, and newspapers for pictures you could use to communicate your message and cut them out. Think outside the box; you don't have to use the images in the same way they are used in the

magazine you find them in. You could cut them up or add new shapes and colors to change their meanings.

2. Write words to communicate your message on colored construction paper and cut them out. Try writing one word per piece of paper so that later you can choose exactly where your words appear on the page.
3. Use contrasting and complementary colors to make your words stand out. Think about the style of lettering you want to use. For example, big, chunky letters will make your message loud and clear.
4. Arrange the words and pictures on a piece of paper. Think carefully about how your words and images come together. Try out different **compositions** by **layering** your images and words on top of one another in different ways.
5. When you are happy with the composition, glue down your words and pictures.

## Reflection

These questions can be writing or sharing and discussing prompts.

Share your artwork with someone. What message are you trying to communicate? Why is this message important to you?

How did the meaning of the images and the words change when you brought them together?

Look back at Kruger and Fairey's artworks. Why do you think that both of these artists felt it was important to make art in formats or styles that would be accessible to lots of people?

Let's think back to that idea as art as a window, or a mirror. How does your artwork reflect you and your ideas?

If art is also a window into someone else's world, what did you learn about the perspectives and ideas of artists Kruger and Fairey?

**Curriculum Connections** California Arts Standards for Public Schools—Visual Arts

4.VA:Re7.2: Analyze components in visual imagery that convey messages. 4.VA:Cn10: Create works of art that reflect community cultural traditions.

Prepared by Billie Rae Vinson with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art  
(LACMA) Education Department