

LESSON PLAN



IDENTITY THEFT

DESCRIPTION

This lesson will explore how culture influences personal identity, focusing on consumerism, stereotypes, symbolic references, and historical biases.

STUDENT AGE/GRADE LEVEL

9th-12th grades

OBJECTIVE

Students will create a self portrait that reveals something about their personal identity, whether it is influenced by culture or defies it.

RELATED ARTISTS

Yayoi Kusama, James Gobel, Lorna Simpson, Danny Lyon, Mickalene Thomas



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RELATED WORKS



Yayoi Kusama

Arm Chair, 1963

Acrylic on chair, shoes and sewn and stuffed cloth pouches. 38 in. x 38 in. x 50 in. (96.52 cm x 96.52 cm x 127 cm). Gift of Mr. Gordon Locksley and Mr. George Shea. 1970.54

NOTES: This sculpture is from Kusama's first body of work, which the artist described as "accumulations." She covered utilitarian objects with masses of stuffed and sewn cloth pouches, like phallic protrusions, and painted them either a single color or with polka dots. Symbols of traditional female roles – domestic objects and the activity of sewing – are joined with male forms. Consumer culture merges with biology in a surreal world softened by humor but dominated by obsession.

DISCUSSION PROMPT:

Consumerism is a large part of our lives and our culture. Kusama comments on gender identity- how is gender identity marketed to consumers? What tools do companies use to get us to buy what they're selling? What other forms of identity besides genders are affected by consumerism?

WRITING PROMPT:

Create an advertisement for an object you now own or once owned. What does the object cost and what is its function? Consider gender roles and think about design and packaging decisions that share something about the object.



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James Gobel
***I'll Be Your Friend, I'll Be Your Love, I'll Be Everything You Need*, 2009.**

Felt, yarn, acrylic and rhinestones on canvas.
72 in. x 56 in. (182.88 cm x 142.24 cm).
Purchased with funds from the Gay Community Endowment Fund of Akron Community Foundation, Steven P. Schmidt and Richard J. Krochka, and Museum Acquisition Fund.
2010.43

NOTES: James Gobel's men make visible the relatively unseen "bear" subculture of the gay community through pattern and material. James Gobel's scenes of hairy, bearded, large-bellied men dressed in working-class clothing challenge the notion that homosexuality conflicts with masculinity by countering the stereotypical image of the fit, smooth-shaven, highly styled gay man. In 'I'll Be Your Friend', Gobel affects a push and pull between ideals of gay and straight masculinity. Is the heavy-set performer a heavy metal rocker or a Liberace-esque lounge singer? Gobel illustrates the pitfalls of attempting to categorize people by literally layering contrasting stereotyped identities. The title of this work plays on the lyrics to the 1986 song "Disenchanted" by British pop duo The Communards.

DISCUSSION PROMPT: Who decides stereotypes? People throughout history have faced them. How do people respond to dealing with them- both the stereotyped and those who do it? What famous people have used stereotypes to their advantage? Who has been hurt by them? Did they do something to stop or encourage the stereotyping, or was it going to happen no matter what?

WRITING PROMPT: Think of a stereotype that is significant to you. Write a song about a stereotype in an appropriate style to match. Some things to consider while writing: How did you (or someone close to you) acquire it? How do you respond to it? Is it a friend, or an enemy? When have you stereotyped someone? How did it affect them? What do you want the world to know about you that your stereotype is hiding?

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Lorna Simpson

Wigs (portfolio), 1994.

waterless lithograph on felt. 72 in. x 162 in. (182.88 cm x 411.48 cm). Museum Acquisition Fund in honor of the 25th anniversary of Dr. Barbara L. Tannenbaum's tenure as curator at the Akron Art Museum.

NOTES: "I wanted to eliminate the figure—or eliminate its presence—from the work," said Lorna Simpson of *Wigs*, "but I still wanted to talk about that presence. So the wigs act as a surrogate for the body or the presence of a person. The wearer of the wigs can either become someone else or become closer to the person one aspires to be, either embracing or cutting across a particular stereotype or blurring the lines between masculinity and femininity." The text panels between the wigs allude to historical situations in which personal appearance was critical to the way people were treated. The combinations of image and language hint at stories but leave gaps for viewers to complete.

DISCUSSION PROMPT: How does a single article transform identity? Think of examples throughout history where people added an accessory and become something else? Why does society respond so strongly to an article of clothing? How have you responded in the past when other people have made changes to their image?

WRITING PROMPT: Write a poem about an item of clothing or accessory that changes your identity. Some things to consider when writing: How do people respond when you are wearing it, vs. when you are not? What do you hope will change by putting it on? How is it beneficial to someone's identity to make these changes, and how can it be harmful?

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Danny Lyon
Funny Sonny packing with Zipco, Milwaukee, 1966
(printed later).

Gelatin silver print. 8 7/8 in. x 13 1/8 in. (22.54 cm x 33.34 cm). Gift of Dr. Stephen Nicholas. 2009.208

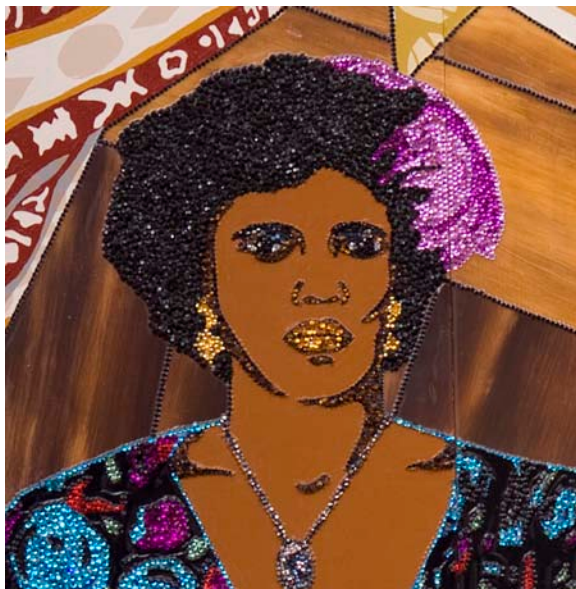
NOTES: Zipco, a Milwaukee Outlaw, is shown traveling with Funny Sonny, who came from California and was hanging with the Chicago club. Lyon has commented on the relative innocence of the scene in the mid 1960s. "It was not self-conscious, and there were no warring clubs, they just loved their bikes," he states. "A Hells Angel sitting on the back of a Sportster with an Outlaw—both wearing their colors. There's no way you'd see that today."

DISCUSSION PROMPT: Think of how history has portrayed bike riders. Does this image come to mind? Make note of their jackets- they are from two different "gangs". Because the artist chose to submerge himself in the lifestyle of this group, he was able to see, from an inside view, the unbiased truths about who people really are. In this case, these are just people who love their bikes. How did his inside perspective help him to see people for who they really are? Do you think people avoid getting close to those who are different than them? What do they miss out on anything from doing so?

WRITING PROMPT: Are there other groups throughout history (or today, even in your school) who may have gained reputations? If you were a photographer, who would you follow? Write a journal article or short story about the group- conduct interviews and record events. How do you obtain that inside perspective? What would you want the world to know about them?

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Mickalene Thomas

Girlfriends and Lovers, 2008.

Acrylic, enamel and rhinestones on panel.
108 in. x 144 in. (274.32 cm x 365.76 cm)
The Mary S. and Louis S. Myers
Endowment Fund for Painting and
Sculpture. 2010.1

NOTES: Thomas addresses exoticized stereotypes of black femininity while also exploring how her women fit into art history. Influenced by her stylish mother (a former fashion model), imagery in *Jet* and *Ebony* magazines, 1970s funk and soul music and trips to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Thomas draws on personal experience, popular culture and art history. Diverse cultural and art historical references abound in *Girlfriends and Lovers*. The repertoire of patterns and textures ranges from Egyptian-style textiles evoking the Africanist sensibilities of the black community in the 1970s to black-and-white tile reminiscent of fifteenth-century Dutch Old Master painting.

DISCUSSION PROMPT: Many artists draw on personal experiences and cultural influences when they make art. How does where we came from shape who we are? Does our past decide our future? What parts of your family, friends and teachers do you see in yourself? What ideas/values will you pass on through your art and to your future children?

WRITING PROMPT: Construct a family tree that goes back a few generations. With each person you add to the tree, write a word or two to describe who they were/what they stood for. As you connect them to the younger generations, write what they passed down. Note how some values keep going strong while others are quickly phased out. This tree should reach all the way down to you.

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MATERIALS

- One very long piece of string or rope, rolled up on a spool.
- Two large mat boards per student.
- Acrylic paint, watercolor paint, paint brushes, water cups, paint dishes
- Colored pencils, oil pastels, ink, markers, pens, pencils, chalk pastels, etc.
- Scissors, glue, sponges (square kitchen kind)
- Colored paper, vellum scraps, old magazines and newspapers
- Camera and photo printer

PROCEDURE

DISCUSSION: Pass out an identical piece of paper to each student and have students write an “I AM” sentence that tells a little known fact about them. Fold all the papers in half and place them into a large basket. Shuffle them up and have each student draw a slip, not revealing what they’ve drawn. Once everybody has a slip, they are to pin the slips to their shirt, allowing the words to face outward like a name tag. Give one student the spool of string. Have everyone walk around, trying to find the person who wrote the sentence on their shirt. Talking should be encouraged. As they find the owners, the student with the string should pass the spool to the person who matches his/her tag, holding onto the loose end, allowing it to unravel. The next student does this with his/her match, and so on and so on. By the end of the session, there should be a tangled web attaching everyone.

After the activity, present the featured work of Yayoi Kusama, James Gobel, Lorna Simpson, and Danny Lyon. Students will respond to the discussion questions or creative writing prompts to explore identity and cultural roles in the artworks.

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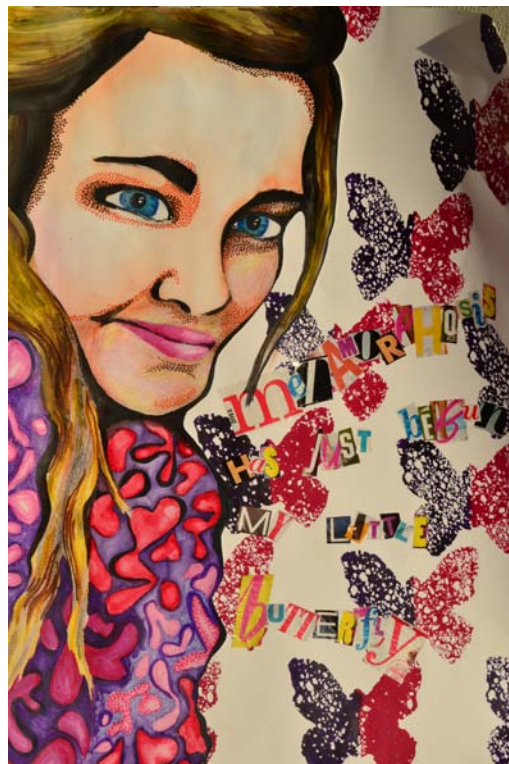
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STUDIO: Students will create a self portrait that combines symbols and text.

Preliminary steps: Students will brainstorm a message they want to express to the world about themselves and write it down, e.g. their “I AM” statements. Students will create 2-3 symbols that represent that statement. Students can use the camera to photograph each other in a pose or facial expression that matches their statement, for a visual reference.

Students will cut sponges to make stamps of their 2-3 symbols. Students will use the sponges and acrylic to design a background for their portrait on the first piece of mat board. Then, students will sketch themselves (largely) onto the second mat board, referring to their photos. Once the sketches have been rendered, students should use mixed media to fill it in. Demonstrate multiple techniques for students to try and encourage using elaborate colors. Once the entire sketch has been filled, students should cut out the image and position it onto the background. When it is in the desired position, students should glue it down, keeping weights on it until it is completely dry.

MODEL STUDIO PROJECT



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ODE VISUAL ARTS STANDARDS

	Perceiving/Knowing	Producing/Performing	Responding/Reflecting
High School Intermediate	1PE, 3PE	3PR, 6PR	2RE, 3RE
High School Accelerated	3PE, 4PE	1PR, 2PR	3RE, 6RE
High School Advanced	1PE, 4 PE	1PR, 6PR	4RE, 5RE

For more teacher resources or to schedule a tour,
www.AkronArtMuseum.org/educators/

For additional information on artworks in the collection,
www.AkronArtMuseum.org/collection/