

## *Art of the City: Postmodern to Post-Katrina,* presented by The Helis Foundation

Teacher's guide: grade levels 5–9

Number of lesson plans: 5



 The Historic  
New Orleans  
Collection

MUSEUM • RESEARCH CENTER • PUBLISHER

## Louisiana Student Standards for the Arts (Grade Level 5–8)

**VA-CE-M3:** Use the elements and principles of design and art vocabulary to visually express and describe individual ideas.

**VA-AP-M1:** Use elements and principles of design and expanded art vocabulary for responding to the aesthetic qualities of various works.

**VA-AP-M5:** Discuss the question “What is art?” and express intuitive reactions and personal responses to various works.

**VA-AP-M6:** Describe the use and value of the visual arts in daily life, the workplace, and the community.

**VA-HP-M2:** Understand how works of art cross geographical, political, and historical boundaries.

**VA-CA-M2:** Analyze and interpret art images for their symbolic meaning, purpose, and value in place and time.

The Historic New Orleans Collection, 533 Royal Street, New Orleans, LA 70130

### Contact

Rachel Gaudry, Education Coordinator, (504) 556-7669, [rachelg@hnoc.org](mailto:rachelg@hnoc.org)

### Cover Image

*Burning Orchid Nightclub*; 1984; oil on linen by Douglas Bourgeois; *THNOC*, gift of Dr. Jerah Johnson, 2012.0299

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Overview	3
Modern, Postmodern, and Contemporary	3
Vocabulary of Visual Art	4
Elements of Visual Art	5
Lesson 1: Visual Thinking Strategies	6
Lesson 2: Art and the Environment	9
Lesson 3: What Portraits Reveal	14
Lesson 4: Abstraction	18
Lesson 5: Street Art Transforms	24

## INTRODUCTION

### **About *Art of the City: Postmodern to Post-Katrina*, presented by The Helis Foundation**

April 6–October 6, 2019

Like the city's iconic food, music, and architecture, art in New Orleans reflects the cultural, historical, and social currents that move everyday life. A unique gathering of works, *Art of the City: Postmodern to Post-Katrina*, presented by The Helis Foundation, eschews structure for spontaneity, weaving points of view through a display that relishes making the known seem new or unfamiliar. Curated by artist and educator Jan Gilbert, this exhibition features the diverse perspectives of over 60 artists reacting during three decades of strife and progress in the layered city that fueled their inspiration. With this exhibition, educators can engage students with artistic methods, environmental issues, and the complex dynamics of the city.

### **About The Historic New Orleans Collection**

The Historic New Orleans Collection (THNOC) is a museum, research center, and publisher dedicated to preserving the history and culture of New Orleans and the Gulf South.

## OVERVIEW

Over the course of five lessons, students will explore vibrant artwork inspired by the city of New Orleans primarily dating from 1984 to the present. By analyzing artwork and major themes from *Art of the City*, students will deepen their knowledge about visual art and how it can be used to address questions of identity and community.

## MODERN, POSTMODERN, AND CONTEMPORARY

Art history is composed of artistic movements. Within each movement or timeframe, artists are creating work in response to the cultural, political, and economic climate of their world. To clarify and give context to the term “postmodern,” which is featured in the title of this exhibition, it is necessary to define modern, postmodern, and contemporary art.

### **What is modern art?**

Art that is considered modern was created roughly between the 1860s and the 1970s. Although those years encompass movements as varied as impressionism, cubism, and surrealism, the common connecting thread is the breaking from traditions of the past. This broad time frame is marked by a spirit of experimentation and innovation, with artists seeking simplicity and clarity in their work. Notable modern artists include Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí, Henri Matisse, and Vincent Van Gogh.

### **What is postmodern art?**

At its core, the art associated with postmodernism refused to recognize the authority of any particular style or definition of what art should be. By breaking the established rules about style, it ushered in a new era for artists where contradictory layers of meaning could comment on everyday life. At times confrontational or controversial, postmodern art does not shy away from challenging boundaries and the authority of the past. In *Art of the City*, artists Krista Jurisich, George Febres, Robert Gordy, Elizabeth Shannon, and others are considered postmodern artists.

### **What is contemporary art?**

Contemporary art, simply put, is art created by artists working today, or in the recent past. It is often challenging in nature as it explores questions of the past and visions for the future. By combining and mixing materials, subjects, and methods, contemporary art defies an easy categorization. The majority of the artists featured in *Art of the City* would be considered contemporary as they continue to create new work.

## VOCABULARY OF VISUAL ART

**Portraits** are artistic representations of a person in which the face and expression are visible. Portraits can display the likeness, personality, and mood of their subjects.

**Landscape** art can depict real or imagined natural scenery, giving the viewer of sense of place.

**Sculptures** are three-dimensional works of art. They can be created in many different ways, but the primary methods are carving, modeling, casting, and constructing.

**Photography** uses a camera to capture an image. This method can be used to express a creative vision, or it can be used to document the world in an accurate way. Photography can be produced on film or in digital format.

**Painting** is the practice of creating an image by applying color to a surface, often with a brush. Types of paint include oil, acrylic, watercolor, and more.

**Drawing** is a technique of creating images on a surface using various instruments including pencils, ink, charcoal, markers, and more.

**Abstract art** does not try to accurately depict reality. Instead, it uses color, shape, form, and gesture to suggest meaning. It is often non-representational and invites the viewer to find their own interpretation.

**Conceptual art** is a form of art in which the idea, or concept, behind the piece is the most important aspect. This art can be made from nearly any material.

**Street art** is visual art created in public places, usually in locations not originally intended to display art. It can be created using spray paint graffiti, stencil graffiti, constructed installations, sculpture and more.

## ELEMENTS OF VISUAL ART

**Line** is a path created by a point moving in space. It can be horizontal, vertical, diagonal, straight, curved, thick, or thin. Lines move your eye across a work of art.

**Color** is the light reflected off of objects. The three main characteristics of color are hue (red, green, blue, etc.), value (how light or dark it is), and intensity (how bright or dull it is). Colors can be described as warm or cool, depending on which end of the spectrum they fall.

**Medium** refers to the materials used to create a work of art. Common mediums are paint, pencil, marble, bronze, and more.

**Shape** is created using the dimensions of height and width. Common shapes include circles, squares, and rectangles.

**Form** is three-dimensional, created using the dimensions of height, width, and depth. Like shapes, forms can be geometric or organic.

**Texture** refers to the surface quality of all objects. In two-dimensional work like a painting, texture gives a visual sense of what the subject would feel like (rough, smooth, soft, etc.). In three-dimensional work, artists create actual textures for objects.

**Value** refers to the lightness and darkness of colors in a work of art.

**Space** refers to the feeling of depth or three-dimensionality. Negative space refers to the area around the primary object in a work of art, while positive space is occupied by primary objects.

## LESSON ONE: VISUAL THINKING STRATEGIES



*Emile Victor Clay Funeral*; 1996; gelatin silver print by Michael P. Smith; © THNOC, 2007.0103.4.570

### Objective

In this lesson, students will participate in an inquiry-based approach to understanding visual art. They will use evidence to make observations and connect their ideas by actively listening to their peers.

### Introduction

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is a nonprofit organization ([vtshome.org](http://vtshome.org)) that trains educators to share artwork with students through an innovative and inquiry-based method. Through teacher facilitation, VTS invites students to contribute their own observations and build connections. It builds confidence as it relies on personal perceptions. There are no right or wrong answers in this process.

The Historic New Orleans Collection  
*Art of the City* Lesson Plan

The VTS method relies on the facilitator/teacher asking three main questions:

1. **“What’s going on in this piece?”**
2. **“What do you see that makes you say that?”**
3. **“What more can we find?”**

## Materials

- A high-quality JPEG of a work of art
- Computer, projector, and screen

## Procedure

1. Project an art image so that all students can see it.
2. Give students 20 seconds to silently look at the image, asking them to carefully observe details.
3. Ask, **“What’s going on in this piece?”** When a student raises their hand to share an observation, rephrase their words. For example,

Student 1: *I see a man jumping up high and he’s happy.*

Teacher: *So you noticed a man jumping in the center. **What do you see that makes you say he’s happy?***

Student 1: *Well, he’s got a big open smile on his face.*

Teacher: *Smiling is absolutely an expression of happiness. **What more can we find?***

Student 2: *I think he’s happy, too.*

Teacher: *Just like Student 1, you also think he’s happy. **What do you see that makes you say that?***

Student 2: *Look at his arms! They’re open wide in the air.*

Teacher: *So you’ve noticed his body language, and to you, it is a happy movement. **What more can we find?***

4. Repeat the VTS process a few times, then introduce information about the artists and the artwork. Let the students know when the piece was made, how the artist created it, and any other relevant details.

## Troubleshooting

Sometimes students are hesitant to participate in the VTS process. When this happens, lead the discussion by suggesting an entry point into the artwork. For example, say:

*Let's look at the main figure in the painting. What do you think is going on with them?*

*There seem to be many things happening in the background of this piece. What do you think is going on in the background?*

Other times, a student might dominate the VTS conversation and not let others get a chance to include their observations. When this happens, acknowledge the key things the student has shared and then say:

*Thank you for sharing so many great observations with us. You've really looked at the details of this artwork. Let's see if anyone else has insights. Class, what do you think is going on in the piece?*

## LESSON TWO: ART AND THE ENVIRONMENT

### Objective

By analyzing works of art that explore environmental issues, students will learn how artists use creativity to engage their audiences with pressing ecological issues.

### Introduction

Throughout *Art of the City*, the theme of “environment” connects seemingly unrelated works of art. The devastation of Hurricane Katrina sparked a proliferation of art making, with local artists using their crafts to process the grief of loss and the hope for the future. This is especially true of Rontherin Ratliff’s sculptural work *Things That Float*.

In Elizabeth Shannon’s *Caught II*, visitors encounter a taxidermy alligator mid-climb on a wooden ladder. It’s a playful, unexpected sculpture that avoids answering the question of whether the alligator is escaping or climbing down to our level. Shannon’s piece reflects on the 200-plus years that the Louisiana alligator has been harvested for its skin, how the species was brought to critically endangered status, saved through large-scale protection efforts, and, ultimately, responsibly hunted.

Photographer AnnieLaurie Erickson captures the eerie glow of an oil refinery at night in 29°55’28.56”N, 89°58’48.87”W (*Chalmette*). Burning orange in the distance, the “forbidden city” transforms the look of the Louisiana landscape at night, adding an otherworldly element to the environment.

Through the universal language of art, these artists help us connect with environmental issues in a new way. For students, such art can serve as a catalyst for dialogue and inspire action.

### Materials

- Environmental Spotlight Handouts 1–3 for each student
- Computers with internet access for students to research answers when necessary

The Historic New Orleans Collection  
*Art of the City* Lesson Plan

**Procedure**

1. Distribute copies of Environmental Spotlight Handouts 1–3 to students.
2. Using the art image for reference, students will answer the questions on the handout. Students may also research online to answer questions.
3. In small groups of three to four people, have students share their answers. For the last question on each handout, have the small group select a representative to share their answers with the class. Collect these answers and share a special resource guide for students on ways to take action on environmental concerns.

## Environmental Spotlight Handout No. 1



*Caught II*; 1980; taxidermy alligator, antique cypress ladders by Elizabeth Shannon: *courtesy of the artist*

Describe the materials the artist used to make this piece.

What is happening? Is the artist telling a story? Give specific examples that you see.

Where do alligators live across the globe? Describe their natural habitat.

Have alligators ever been threatened or endangered in Louisiana? If so, why did this happen?

What organizations exist to protect endangered species? How do they accomplish their goals?

What can you do to protect Louisiana's unique ecosystems and species?

## Environmental Spotlight Handout No. 2



*Things That Float*, 2012; wood, metal, plexiglass, and photographs by Rontherin Ratliff;  
*courtesy of the artist*

Describe the materials the artist used to make this piece.

In this piece, Rontherin Ratliff shares his memories of Hurricane Katrina and the grief of loss he felt. How does he show us these feelings? Give specific examples from his artwork to support your answer.

How do forces of nature like hurricanes impact communities? Do they change the physical environment?

Are there any organizations locally, nationally, or globally that assist communities during environmental disasters like hurricanes? How can an individual support these organizations?

### Environmental Spotlight Handout No. 3



29°55'28.56"N, 89°58'48.87"W (*Chalmette*); 2015; archival pigment print from color negative taken with afterimaging camera by AnnieLaurie Erickson; *courtesy of the artist*

In this photograph, AnnieLaurie Erickson captures an oil refinery glowing in the night in the south Louisiana landscape. How would you describe this image? Have you ever seen an oil refinery?

Oil is a fossil fuel, which means it is nonrenewable. What is the difference between renewable and nonrenewable sources of energy? Give two examples of each.

What actions can you take to reduce your use of fossil fuels? List three to five actions.

## LESSON THREE: WHAT PORTRAITS REVEAL

### Objective

Students will look closely at the art of portraiture by analyzing examples from *Art of the City*. They will then experience what it is like to create and be the subject of a portrait.

### Introduction

The portraits featured in *Art of the City* are as varied as the people they represent. Some are produced in paint; others are sculpted and sewn. Regardless of the medium, portraits are powerful for their ability to reveal information and insight into their subject. The choices artists make—regarding color, style, expression, size, and more—reveal personality and allow the viewer to share in their interpretation of a particular person.

### Materials

- Portrait Analysis Handouts 1–2 for each student
- Portrait Questionnaires
- Blank sheets of paper
- Pencils

### Procedure

1. Distribute copies of Portrait Analysis Handouts 1–2 to each student and allow them time to complete them.
2. Organize students into pairs. Each student will receive a Portrait Questionnaire, a blank sheet of paper, and a pencil to draw with.
3. Have the pairs take turns interviewing each other using the Portrait Questionnaire. Students must listen carefully to their partner's replies and record their answers.
4. Give students time to use the information they gathered to design and draw a portrait of their partner on the blank paper.
5. Invite the pairs to present their portraits to the class, describing the uniqueness of their subject.

**Portrait Analysis Handout No. 1**



*Ernie K-Doe*; 1999; oil on canvas by Max Bernardi;  
*THNOC*, gift of Betty Ann Fox McGee, 2014.0296.2.1

Describe what the subject of the painting is doing. What are they wearing?

What is happening in the background?

Describe the mood of the subject. How can you tell that they feel a certain way?

List three words to describe the subject of this portrait.

**Portrait Analysis Handout No. 2**



*Flamingo Cowboy*; 1994; hand-tinted gelatin silver print by Judy Cooper; courtesy of Betty-Carol Sellen

Describe what the subject of the portrait is doing. What are they wearing?

What is happening in the background?

Describe the mood of the subject. How can you tell that they feel a certain way?

Select three words to describe the subject of this portrait.

The Historic New Orleans Collection  
*Art of the City* Lesson Plan

**Portrait Questionnaire**

Ask the following questions to your portrait partner. Listen carefully and record their answers below. Use these answers to develop the content of their portrait.

What makes you happy?

What is your favorite season?

What is your favorite animal?

Tell me something you are proud of.

What are your hobbies?

Do you have any secret talents?

If you could visit any place in the world, where would you go?

What is your dream career?

Tell me three words that describe you.

## LESSON FOUR: ABSTRACTION

### Objective

In this lesson, students will explore the role of abstraction in art and how it communicates meaning. They will analyze the elements of line, color, and shape in abstract artwork. Also, by comparing visual art to music, students will connect the concept of abstraction across art forms.

### Introduction

Abstract art is featured prominently in *Art of the City*. Like the fluid and often enigmatic nature of New Orleans, abstraction invites the viewer to experience color, shape, and movement on their own terms. Without a concrete narrative or subject, it allows students to build their own story and conclusions.

New Orleans artist Regina Scully uses vibrant marks and motion in her painting *Cosmographia* to express fond memories of her grandmother's home. While some small components of the canvas reveal items like a house, the majority is a symphony of color and energy.

Luis Cruz Azaceta is another artist who uses color and abstraction to capture the energy of New Orleans. In *The Big Easy*, he creates a larger-than-life canvas glowing with a pattern of color. His vibrant hues seem at odds with each other, and the composition breaks off at seemingly random points. Like the city he is depicting, this painting is beautiful, overwhelming, and in the end, impossible to ignore among the other pieces.

Louisiana native Robert Gordy used a technique he described as “knitting” to create unique compositions that emphasized shape and color. Considered one of the most creative southern painters of the 20th century, Gordy used nuanced layers of hues and forms that evoke competing senses of calm and tension in *Arcady #4*.

Abstraction does not only belong to painters. In sculptor Jeffrey Cook's work, everyday objects create new narratives and meaning. With *Ancestral Guardian*, he makes connections between the past and present using objects that symbolize individual and community suffering. His construction, though appearing chaotic, is a thoughtful exploration of race and identity.

The Historic New Orleans Collection  
*Art of the City* Lesson Plan

## Materials

- Abstract Analysis handouts 1–4 for each student
- 4 instrumental songs with differing sounds (jazz, classical, drums, etc.)
  - Some suggestions for this lesson include:
    - “Overture from the Marriage of Figaro” by Mozart
    - “Sing, Sing, Sing” by Benny Goodman
    - “Popcorn” by Hot Butter
    - “Chariots of Fire” by Vangelis
- Computer speaker to play 4 songs

## Procedure

1. Give Abstract Analysis handouts 1–4 to each student, allowing them time to complete all four handouts before moving on the next step.
2. Ask students to arrange the handouts on their desks so that each artwork is easily visible.
3. Play the first of the instrumental songs you selected. Ask the students which of the four abstract artworks convey a similar emotion as the song. Repeat this process for all four. Compare and contrast students’ answers, asking them to cite specific colors, forms, and patterns.
4. Lastly, ask the students to suggest titles for the artworks.

The Historic New Orleans Collection  
*Art of the City Lesson Plan*

**Abstract Analysis Handout No.1**



*Cosmographia*; 2015; acrylic paint on canvas by Regina Scully; *courtesy of the New Orleans Museum of Art, gift of Tim L. Fields, Esq., 2016.64*

What feelings do you have when you look at this painting?

Describe the shapes and colors that you see.

What three words would you use to describe this painting to a stranger?

**Abstract Analysis Handout No.2**



*The Big Easy*, 2016; acrylic paint on canvas by Luis Cruz Azaceta; courtesy of the artist and Arthur Roger Gallery

What feelings do you have when you look at this painting?

Describe the shapes and colors that you see.

What three words would you use to describe this painting to a stranger?

The Historic New Orleans Collection  
*Art of the City* Lesson Plan

**Abstract Analysis Handout No.3**



*Ancestral Guardian*; 1998; mixed media by Jeffrey Cook; courtesy of the New Orleans Museum of Art, gift from Seagram's Gin to the New Orleans Museum of Art as part of the national program "Perspectives in African American Art," 98.753

What feelings do you have when you look at this sculpture?

Describe the shapes and colors that you see.

What three words would you use to describe this sculpture to a stranger?

The Historic New Orleans Collection  
*Art of the City Lesson Plan*

**Abstract Analysis Handout No. 4**



*Arcady #4*; 1970; acrylic paint on canvas by Robert Gordy; *The George Febres Collection of Louisiana Art at THNOC*, gift of Dr. Jerah Johnson, 1997.77.2.15

What feelings do you have when you look at this painting?

Describe the shapes and colors that you see.

What three words would you use to describe this painting to a stranger?

## LESSON FIVE: STREET ART TRANSFORMS

### Objective

In this lesson, students will be introduced to the concept of street art and its role in New Orleans's public spaces.

### Introduction

Street art is unique in that it does not exist within a museum or gallery space. Instead, it is found in the landscape, in abandoned properties, on the side of buildings, and many other places within a community. In *Art of the City*, street art serves as an extension of the exhibition. The show brings attention to pieces by artists whose work has transformed unexpected spaces throughout New Orleans.

Artist and activist Brandan “Bmike” Odums uses his art to call attention to abandoned residential structures and the people who once lived in them, as well as to issues of race, human rights, and cultural identity. His vision for the collaborative *Exhibit BE* turned a dilapidated apartment complex into a vibrant place for dialogue.

While *Exhibit BE* was a collaboration among street artists to create dialogue about inequality, community, and the creative power of street art, artist Candy Chang's *Before I Die* was a participatory installation for all community members. On an abandoned building in her neighborhood in 2011, she created a space for individuals to reflect on mortality, connecting their hopes with those of strangers. This installation was so successful that it has been reproduced in over 4,000 locations in over 70 countries.

### Materials

- Computer, projector, internet access
- One poster board or large sheet of paper
- Sticky notes or small pieces of paper that can be taped to the wall
- Pens or pencils
- Tape

The Historic New Orleans Collection  
*Art of the City Lesson Plan*



*Before I Die*; 2011; chalkboard, paint, spray paint, and chalk by Candy Chang; was located at 2235 Burgundy Street

## Procedure

1. Project <http://candychang.com/work/before-i-die-in-nola/> onto a screen and share information and photos from Candy Chang's *Before I Die* with the class.
2. Using *Before I Die* as inspiration, have students agree on one "big" statement. Some examples include:
  - One day I will \_\_\_\_\_.
  - I'm afraid that \_\_\_\_\_.
  - My greatest hope is \_\_\_\_\_.
3. In a public space, such as a hallway or cafeteria, put your class's big statement on the poster board and tape it to the wall. Surround it with small blank pieces of paper so that the school community can respond. Leave a box or cup of pens nearby for people to write with.
4. When the papers are filled, document the project with photos.
5. As a class, analyze the responses. Were there any common answers? Look for connections and explore how the project impacted the students and school.