

## EDUCATOR GUIDE

Story Theme: Trailblazers  
Subject: Paul Kos  
Discipline: Visual Arts

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Conceptual artist Paul Kos demonstrating Guadalupe Bell (1989).  
Still image from SPARK story, February 2004.

## SECTION I - OVERVIEW

### EPISODE THEME

Trailblazers

### SUBJECT

Paul Kos

### GRADE RANGES

K-12 & Post-secondary

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Visual Arts & Language Arts

### OBJECTIVES

Understand the development of personal works of art and their relationship to broader social themes and ideas, abstract concepts, and the history of art

Develop basic conceptual ideation skills

Develop visual, written, listening and speaking skills through looking at, creating and talking about art

### STORY SYNOPSIS

A pioneer of Conceptual Art in the early 1970s, Paul Kos helped define a Bay Area approach to the form that emphasizes the elegant use of materials to explore issues of perception, social relations, and life activities. SPARK gets a first-hand introduction to the artist, his fertile imagination, and his 30-year body of provocative and humorous work on the occasion of the first major retrospective exhibition of his work - "Everything Matters"- at the Berkeley Museum of Art.

### INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

To introduce students to the role of concept in artmaking and other activities

To provide context for the understanding how concept determines form

To inspire students to explore conceptual ideas in art

### INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Group oral discussion, review and analysis, including peer review and aesthetic valuing as a group

Teacher-guided instruction, including demonstration and guidance

Hands-on individual projects in which students work independently

Hands-on group projects in which students assist and support one another

Critical reflection on personal expressions and how they are seen and received by others

### EQUIPMENT NEEDED

TV & VCR with SPARK story "Trailblazers" about conceptual artist Paul Kos.

Computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sounds card, printer

Cassette player, CD player, or computer audio program

### MATERIALS NEEDED

Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers

Pencils, pens, and paper

### INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Bodily-Kinesthetic - control of one's own body, control in handling objects

Interpersonal - awareness of others' feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Intrapersonal - awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Spatial - ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems

Logical-Mathematical - ability to detect patterns, reason deductively, think logically



See more information on  
Multiple Intelligences at  
[www.kqed.org/spark/education](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education).

## SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

### CONTENT OVERVIEW

As a pioneer of Conceptual Art in the early 1970s, Paul Kos helped define a Bay Area approach to the form that emphasizes the elegant use of materials to explore issues of perception, social relations, and the activities of everyday life. SPARK gets a first-hand introduction to the artist, his fertile imagination, and his 30-year body of humorous and provocative work on the occasion of the first major retrospective exhibition of Kos's work, "Everything Matters," at the Berkeley Museum of Art.

Paul Kos moved to San Francisco in 1967 to attend the San Francisco Art Institute, where he received both his BFA and MFA. Kos arrived in the middle of a dynamic period in the history of the Bay Area, characterized by cultural curiosity and exploration as well as marked political activism. Already an important hub for artistic innovation, Kos and his peers experimented with new ideas and media that better enabled them to communicate contemporary ideas about the culture in which they lived. In making Conceptual art, Kos focused on ideas as the driving force behind artistic expression, rather than traditional artistic media such as drawing, painting, and sculpture.

As a genre, Conceptual art is a form of visual work that aims to investigate linguistic and social systems in order to better understand structures that define art. Conceptual artists experiment with different forms, using their work to comment directly upon how we engage with, apprehend, and derive meaning from the world around us. Final products such as Kos's artworks seen in the SPARK story, take many different non-traditional forms, including installations, audio recordings, video recordings, LED displays, assembled groupings of objects, written documentation, research findings, recorded commentary, documentary photographs, websites and webcasts, statistics, and printed data.

In Paul Kos's 1990 installation Tower of Babel, featured in the Berkeley retrospective, a large, spiral-shaped metal armature supports 20 video monitors that simultaneously screen videos of 75 different people speaking in 50 different languages. The person seen on the first monitor relates the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel, which seeks to explain the diversity of languages across the world. The story relates that first there was only one language, but that when people became too ambitious and tried to build a spiraling tower to the heavens, God made people speak different languages so that they would not understand each other. The rest of the monitors feature people speaking in different languages, relating information of their choosing. As a viewer enters into the spiral, he or she encounters layers of different languages, culminating in a cacophony of indecipherable speech.



Paul Kos standing in front of his work Tower of Babel during his retrospective exhibition Everything Matters, at the Berkeley Art Museum. Still image from SPARK story, June 2003.

## CONTENT OVERVIEW (continued)

One way to interpret Tower of Babel is as an experience of being overwhelmed by language. Because we cannot understand what is being said in all the monitors simultaneously, ultimately the language is meaningless. It is an experience akin to the bombardment of messages that most people face daily--through the television, the internet, the radio, billboards, magazines, and other advertising media. The piece also returns beholders to the myth, whereby language, traditionally thought of as a medium of communication, is rendered into its opposite, a medium that confuses, frustrating and impairing meaningful interaction.

Kos has been a faculty member at the San Francisco Art Institute for the past 25 years. He has exhibited widely on both the West and East coasts, and has received numerous prestigious awards, including five National Endowment for the Arts fellowships and the Rockefeller Foundation fellowship. His work can be found in the collections of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Museum of Modern Art (New York), and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

## THE BIG PICTURE

Conceptual Art is a term that encompasses a broad range of artistic activities sharing a common belief that the idea behind a work of art takes precedence over an art object. For Conceptual Artists, any material artwork is merely the result of the art, not the art itself. This is not to say that Conceptual Artists do not make objects, as is popularly believed. In fact, a single idea may produce many objects, whether in the form of the result of a set of instructions, or in materials related to the planning and documentation of a performance or action. But for Conceptual Artists, these materials are less important than the ideas that produced them.

Though the term "Conceptual Art" wasn't used until the 1960s, the movement began in 1917 with a single work of art by French artist Marcel Duchamp. Already well established in Europe and the United States as a painter and sculptor, Duchamp submitted a work to the annual high profile New York Armory Show.

## THE BIG PICTURE (continued)

Rather than make a work of art through traditional means, Duchamp purchased a mass produced urinal, turned it upside down and called it Fountain (see photo). So as not to be recognized by the exhibition officials, he signed the work "R. Mutt," a comical reference to the then popular "Mutt and Jeff" daily cartoon. The signature, visible on the lower left hand side, is the only modification Duchamp made to the urinal, which is otherwise, an object out of the context in which it is used and placed into a fine art context (an exhibition).



Marcel Duchamp, Fountain, 1917, replica 1964. Porcelain; unconfirmed: 360 x 480 x 610 mm sculpture. Purchased with assistance from the Friends of the Tate Gallery, 1999. Tate Gallery of Art, London.

Duchamp's submission and the ensuing scandal sparked a passionate conversation that still continues today - what makes something art? How can an object be called a work of art? Is it something inherent to the object? Is it when an artist declares it as art? Is art defined by an object's placement in a collection or institution, like a gallery or museum? More than 50 years later, we are still asking these questions. Several artists and critics associated with Conceptual Art have said that at some level, Conceptual Art always questions the nature of art itself.

In the early 1960s, many artists became frustrated with the way that art had become a commodity to be bought and sold. They rejected traditional forms of art like painting and sculpture, and, thinking back to Duchamp's Fountain, produced their own "concept" or "idea art." A group of artists, including George Maciunas, Joseph Beuys, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, and composer John Cage, helped to form the international Conceptual Art collective Fluxus. Drawing on ideas first expressed in the work of Duchamp and others, Fluxus art was sometimes absurd, provocative, temporary and often very funny.

## THE BIG PICTURE (continued)

Fluxus artists worked in a variety of media and modes, including performance, video art, Happenings, and poetry. Yet despite this heterogeneity of means, all the artists associated with Fluxus playfully flouted artistic conventions and traditional expectations.

Conceptual Art came to be recognized as a coherent movement in the late-1960s primarily through the work of a group of New York-based artists, including Joseph Kosuth, Sol Lewitt, and Lawrence Weiner. Lewitt, for example, began producing instructions for wall drawings that would then be carried out by assistants or volunteers. Lewitt argued that the instructions themselves were the real artwork, while the drawings were only a secondary result of the original creative concept. In his 1967 "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" Lewitt claimed that "in Conceptual Art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. All planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes the machine that makes the art."<sup>1</sup>

On the West Coast, however, Conceptual Art took on other meanings. Art world notions imported from New York and Europe mixed with ideas from Zen and other Eastern philosophies brought to Northern California with local Asian communities, and popularized by the Beat writers and artists of the 1950s and 60s.



Paul Kos and an installer from the Berkeley Museum of Art work on *Tunnel* (1995) before the opening of Kos' retrospective exhibition "Everything Matters." Still image from SPARK story, June 2003.

## PAUL KOS ARTWORKS SEEN ON SPARK

- Equilibre 1V* (1992) broom, coat hanger, candle, and bell, 57 x 40"
- Tower of Babel* (1989) 20-channel video installation, 24 x 18 x 24'
- Just a Matter of Time* (1990) fifteen cuckoo clocks, hammers, and sickles, 7 x 12 x 8'
- Pawn* (1991) 2,500 plastic magnetic chess pieces, steel, and wood, 118 x 88 x 11 ½"
- Tunnel* (1995) wood table, Swiss cheese round, and toy train with track, 38 x 24 x 96"
- Chartres Bleu* (1983-1986) 27-channel color video installation, color video (12 minutes)
- Pilot Butte/Pilot Light* (1974-2002) black and white video with sound (6:37 minutes)
- Guadalupe Bell* (1989) bronze, steel, phosphorescent pigment, strobe lights, 168 x 266 x 108'

<sup>1</sup> Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967), 79-83.

## SECTION III– RESOURCES

### TEXTS

Alberro, Alexander and Blake Stimson, eds. Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999.

Atkins, Robert. ArtSpeak : A Guide to Contemporary Ideas, Movements, and Buzzwords, 1945 to the Present. New York: Abbeville Press, 1997.

Berger, John. Ways of Seeing. New York: Viking Press, 1995. – An excellent text on how to understand and relate to visual art and visual culture (including advertising), written for a “lay” audience with many reproductions.

Brommer, G. F. (ed.). Discovering Art History. Worcester, MA: Davis, 1988.

Corris, Michael, ed. Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Desmarais, Charles. Paul Kos: Everything Matters, A Retrospective. Exhibition catalogue for Berkeley Museum of Art/Pacific Film Archive. D.A.P. Distributed Art Publishers, 2003.

Foley, Suzanne. Space, Time, Sound: Conceptual Art in the San Francisco Bay Area, the 1970s. San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1981.

Godfrey, Tony. Conceptual Art. London: Phaidon Press, 1998.

Halliwell, Sarah. The 20th Century: Post-1945. Raintree/Steck Vaughn, 1998. – For young adults.

Harrison, Charles. Conceptual Art and Painting: Further Essays on Art & Language. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001.

Hopkins, David. After Modern Art: 1945-2000. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Mason, Antony. In the Time of Warhol: The Development of Contemporary Art. Copper Beech Press, 2002. – For young readers ages 4-8.

Meyer, Ursula. Conceptual Art. New York: Dutton, 1972.

Morgan, Robert C. Art into Ideas: Essays on Conceptual Art. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Oliver, Clare and Jackie Gaff. 20th Century Art. Gareth Stevens, 2002. – A 6-volume set of books designed to introduce young readers ages 9-13 to major artists and concepts of the 20th century, including modernism, and pop and Conceptual Art.

On Kawara, London: Phaidon Press, 2002. – Monograph on Japanese Conceptual artist On Kawara.

Osborn, Peter. Conceptual Art: Themes and Movements. London: Phaidon Press, 2002.

Paoletti, John T. From Minimal to Conceptual Art: Works from the Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1994.

Steele, Margaret and Cindy Estes. The Art of Shapes: For Children and Adults. Fotofolio, 1997.

Tsujimoto, Karen. The Art of David Ireland: The Way Things Are. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Wood, Paul. Conceptual Art. New York: Delano Greenidge, 2002.

## WEB SITES

Art in Context - Web list of Conceptual artists with links to images of their works -

<http://www.artincontext.org/listings/artist/genre/conceptu.htm>

ArtLex Art Dictionary – Online dictionary of vocabulary specifically related to the visual arts. -

<http://www.artlex.com>

Art Minimal and Conceptual Only - Website, including works by Conceptual artists (no historical or contextual information provided) -

<http://home.sprynet.com/~mindweb/page12.htm>

Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive – Significant Northern Californian museum, and creator of the *Paul Kos: Everything Matters, A Retrospective* exhibition.

<http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu>

California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives -

<http://cemaweb.library.ucsb.edu/performance01.html>

Conceptual artist Eve Andree Laramee's Web site, including images of her work and descriptions -

<http://home.earthlink.net/~wander>

Conceptual artist Mark Bohlen's Web site, including images and descriptions of his projects -

[www.contrib.andrew.cmu.edu/~bohlen/museum.htm](http://www.contrib.andrew.cmu.edu/~bohlen/museum.htm)

Getty Center for the Arts, The - Resource site providing curricula and activities for K-12 educators -

[www.getty.edu/education](http://www.getty.edu/education)

## MEDIA

### VIDEO

"Mel Bochner: Language is Not Transparent" (VHS) 36 minutes. Blackwood Films, 1997. – Retrospective exhibition of the early site-specific installations of artist Mel Bochner toured by the artist, exhibition curator, and an art historian, as they discuss the artist's ideas, specific works, and his contribution to Conceptual Art.

"Make Me Think: Bruce Nauman" (VHS) 55 minutes. Arts Council of England, 1997. – Film about Conceptual Artist Bruce Nauman who uses film, video, neon, sculpture and performance to create works that reflect on love, violence, art, and the art viewer.

*A number of films about Conceptual Artist Christo are available in the collections of the San Francisco, Berkeley, San Mateo, and other Bay Area public libraries. Check your local library.*

"Christo in Paris" (VHS) 58 minutes. Maysles Film, 1990. - Documentary about the planning and wrapping of the Pont Neuf (the oldest bridge in Paris) by Conceptual Artist Christo. (Available through <http://www.amazon.com>.)

"Running Fence" (VHS) 58 minutes. Maysles Films 1990. - A documentary on the creation of the 24½ mile-long, 18-foot high fence of white fabric designed by the artist Christo to stretch across the hills of Northern California.

## BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art – The SFMoMA has a large permanent collection as well as continuing visiting exhibitions featuring works of Conceptual Art. SFMoMA, 151 Third Street (between Harrison and Mission Streets) San Francisco, CA 94103. - <http://www.sfmoma.org>

San Jose Museum of Art - The SJMoMA has a permanent collection as well as continuing visiting exhibitions featuring works of Conceptual Art. San Jose Museum of Art, 110 South Market Street, San Jose, CA 95113, 408/271-6840, 24-hour Recorded Info – 408/294-2787. - <http://www.sjmusart.org>

San Francisco State University – Conceptual/Information Art Program – The Conceptual/Information Art Program at SFSU has speakers and exhibitions on an annual basis, many open to the public. For more information call the Art Dept. at 415/338-2176 or visit the Web site. - <http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~infoarts>

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts – Contemporary art exhibitions, films, and performances. Galleries - 701 Mission Street (at Third St.); Theatre - 700 Howard Street (at Third St.), San Francisco. - <http://www.yerbabuenaarts.org/splash.html>

San Francisco Art Institute – The SFAI’s Walter and McBean Galleries and the McBean Distinguished Lecture Series regularly feature Conceptual Artists and topics and are open to the public. San Francisco Art Institute, 800 Chestnut Street, (between Leavenworth & Jones Streets), San Francisco, CA 94133, 415/771-7020, e-mail: [sfaiinfo@sfa.edu](mailto:sfaiinfo@sfa.edu). More information is also available on the SFAI Web site at - <http://www.sanfranciscoart.edu/database/pubprog.htm>

Berkeley Art Museum – Features exhibitions of Conceptual Art; was the creator of the *Paul Kos: Everything Matters, A Retrospective* exhibition – a major exhibition of another significant Bay Area Conceptual Artist. <http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu>

Brian Gross Fine Art, 49 Geary Street, 5th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94108, 415/788.1050 – Brian Gross Gallery specializes in abstract and reductive painting, provocative exhibitions of sculpture, multi-media installations and Conceptual work. - [gallery@briangrossfineart.com](mailto:gallery@briangrossfineart.com) <http://www.briangrossfineart.com/>

Gallery Paule Anglim. 14 Geary Street, San Francisco, CA 94108, 415.433.2710. This long-time SF institution features contemporary paintings, works on paper, sculpture and Conceptual Art. - <http://www.gallerypauleanglim.com>

Catharine Clark Gallery – 49 Geary Street, 2nd Floor, (Geary @ Market), San Francisco, CA 94108, 415/399.1439. The gallery generally specializes in emerging Bay Area artists, many of whom make Conceptual work. - <http://www.cclarkgallery.com>

## SELECTED CONCEPTUAL ARTISTS

*\* NOTE: Be sure to review each artist's work before sharing it with students. Not all artworks are appropriate for all students. Use discretion when assembling a range of works, and try to include works of different media (materials) and cultural significance by male and female artists from different cultures and backgrounds.*

Ad Reinhardt	Adam Chodzko
Agnes Martin	Alice Aycock
Ameli Tancica	Anna Mendiata
Andy Goldsworthy	Barbara Kruger
Brice Marden	Bruce Nauman
Cy Twombly	Daniel Buren
David Ireland	Dennis Oppenheim
Enrico Castellani	Eric Orr
Eve Andree Laramee	Fred Wilson
Gerald de Jong	Gordon Matta Clark
Guerrilla Girls	Hans Haacke
James Turrell	Jan Dibbets
Jana Sterbak	Jeff Koons
Jenny Holzer	Joseph Beuys
John Cage	Joseph Kosuth
Laurie Simmons	Lawrence Weiner
Lucio Fontana	Felix Gonzalez-Torres
Man Ray	Marcel Duchamp
Maria Lewis	Mark Bohlen
Mel Bochner	On Kawara
Richard Serra	Robert Ryman
Robert Smithson	Rosemarie Trockel
Tatsuo Miyajima	Wolfgang Laib
Yves Klein	

## SECTION IV – VOCABULARY

### DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

**Aesthetic**

Of, or pertaining to, the appreciation of beauty

**Apparition**

The appearance of a ghostlike figure or presence

**Conceptual Art**

Artwork in which the idea is primary rather than the object produced - the best medium is chosen to achieve the desired effect. The term is derived from an art movement beginning in the 1960s and 70s in which artists deliberately avoided using fine art traditional materials and approaches to art making

**Contrive**

To make happen, devise or engineer

**Craft**

Handiwork requiring specific skills; also, an occupation, trade or pursuit requiring manual dexterity and the application of artistic skill

**Hammer and sickle**

A sign or image that became an icon of Soviet history, originally designed to convey the power of the industrial worker (the hammer) and of the rural worker (the sickle – used in farming)

**Installation Art**

Artwork that only exists in the place in which it was/is installed, and is not able to be relocated like a painting or a print

**Integrity**

To be true to oneself and one's principles or beliefs

**Intuitive**

To sense or understand something without resorting to reason, but rather to insight

**Medium**

A particular material or form used to create art

**Mixed media**

Artwork in which more than one type of art material is used

**Multimedia**

Computer programs that involve users in the design and organization of text, graphics, video and sound in one presentation

**Onomatopoeia** A word derived from the sound associated with the thing named, e.g. buzzing derived from and sounding like a bee

**Performance Art**

A form of art in which an event or events are planned and enacted before an audience for aesthetic reasons

**Tower of Babel**

According to the Bible, Genesis 11:1-9 the Tower of Babel was a structure built in Babylon (present day Middle East) symbolizing humanity's unified effort to ascend to heaven. The Tower of Babel story has come to symbolize human sin

**Video art**

Artistic form using video as the medium

**Virgin of Guadalupe**

The most loved and revered of all saints in Mexico (called "santos" in Spanish), the Virgin of Guadalupe is the female saint who reached out to and claimed the native people of Mexico as her own. She is considered by some to be a symbol for Mexican independence and pride.

**Zen**

A branch of Buddhist thought that endorses a simple, meditative way of life. In the context of artwork it refers to artworks that communicate using a simple, spare, or visually pure style.

## SECTION V – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

### STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

#### Engaging with Conceptual Art

Introduce the ideas underpinning the Conceptual Art movement of the 1960s and 70s, such as the premise that art should be mainly about ideas instead of objects, and that artists should focus on what they think, not on how things look. Conceptual artists usually set aside the traditional processes of art like painting or sculpting, and their work can be challenging because it does not fit the conventional definitions of “art.” Usually Conceptual Art is not exhibited in traditional spaces, such as galleries or museums. It can be an attitude toward making art as opposed to a movement defined by a style, and it can be applied to many artists and approaches.

Play the SPARK story on Paul Kos and ask students to focus on one piece. Consider the following as prompts to help students get started:

- Describe the piece and identify the different materials and technologies
- Describe your response to the piece
- What deeper levels of meaning are suggested?
- What is the artist saying? How does he say it?
- Does the work belong in an art gallery?
- Does it sustain your interest? Will it have staying power? Why?
- How does the piece reflect the Conceptual Art attitude?

Invite students to discuss their responses to these questions as a group.

Ask students to choose one artist from the 1960s or 70s to research and introduce to the group. It is helpful if slides are available or Web pages can be projected to illustrate the research presentations. Suggest that students choose well known artists or artists whose work is often exhibited – Paul Kos, Marcel Duchamp, Louise Bourgeois, Ed Ruscha, Gerard Richter, etc. (See the Conceptual Artists List in this Guide for more options.)

As a basis for the presentations, have students write 500 words about their chosen artist including:

- An overview of the artist’s life
- A summary of main works
- An in-depth description of one piece of work that they find particularly interesting
- A personal response that addresses the appeal of the work. For example, do they find the work witty? Challenging? Thought provoking? Evocative? Disturbing?

Allow sufficient time for the presentations so that students have the opportunity to engage with the artist being discussed.

#### RELATED STANDARDS

##### VISUAL ARTS

Grade 6

##### 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

2.1 Use various observational drawing skills to depict a variety of subject matter.

Grade 8

*Develop Perceptual Skills and Visual Arts Vocabulary*

1.1 Use artistic terms when describing the intent and content of works of art.

##### 4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

4.1 Students analyze, assess, and derive meaning from works of art, including their own, according to the elements of art, the principles of design, and aesthetic qualities.

*Derive Meaning*

4.2 Develop a theory about the artist's intent in a series of works of art, using reasoned statements to support personal opinions.

4.3 Construct an interpretation of a work of art based on the form and content of the work.

Grades 9-12 Proficient

##### 3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

*Diversity of the Visual Arts*

3.3 Identify and describe trends in the visual arts and discuss how the issues of time, place, and cultural influence are reflected in selected works of art.

### **Everyday Objects As Art**

Suggest that students bring in an everyday physically tangible object that they find interesting or inspiring. It could be an ornament, a candle, a household object or appliance (such as a vase, or a spoon, or broom). Working in small groups, invite each student to present their object to the group addressing the following questions:

Describe the object in as much detail as you can  
Explain what interests or inspires you about this object?

How does it make you feel?

Do you associate it with other objects or ideas?

Invite students to share their thoughts and ideas and then discuss the similarities and differences of opinion between them.

For older grades, challenge students (as a group) to assemble all the objects selected into a Conceptual artwork with one cohesive piece, and a singular theme or objective. Challenge them to make the objects work together and invite members of the group to describe the rationale for their choices. The same group of objects could be given to 2 groups and their solutions compared at the end.

Alternatively ask the groups to choose a concept (idea) and collect images and found objects to symbolize or represent their concept. They could choose images that symbolize California, cultural identity, race, motherhood, joy, etc. To encourage students to think metaphorically and symbolically, limit them to using only objects and images, avoiding text. Working together, challenge them to assemble a mixed media collage to illustrate their concept using all of the materials they assembled.

### **SPARKLERS:**

\* Compare Conceptual artists, allowing students to choose their pair, or assigning them. One interesting comparative pair would be Marcel Duchamp and Paul Kos, two artists working at in different time periods, and using differing materials and cultural referents.

### **SPARKLERS:**

\* To view work by Conceptual artists, visit a gallery or museum such as the San Francisco and San Jose Museums of Modern Art, New Langton Arts, Capp Street Project, Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific

Film Archive, Sonoma Museum, Luther Burbank Center, and the New Leaf Gallery. Report on the visit.

### **Responding To Art – Taste and Pleasure**

Show slides or pictures of a range of different types of artwork from different time periods, including allegorical painting, landscapes, figurative imagery, religious icons, portraits, still lives, Surrealist art, Pop art, as well as examples of modern/contemporary Conceptual Art. Choose works by well-known artists such as Rosa Bonheur (European landscape), Paul Cezanne (European landscape/portraits), Hieronymous Bosch (Medieval allegories), Pablo Picasso (Modern European figurative painter), Rene Magritte (Conceptual painter), and Frida Khalo (Mexican Surrealist painter).

Then, show works by other Conceptual artists (see Conceptual Artist List in this Guide). One work of each type is sufficient, and work from different historical periods would be helpful.

## Responding To Art – Taste and Pleasure (continued)

Ask students to think about the way they view each work of art. Working in small groups, have students describe each piece in detail and then list the factors that influence the way they view and respond to art. Give students sufficient time to fully engage with this activity and then discuss the factors they have identified. Address personal and social influences as well as factors such as knowledge of artistic conventions and form, familiarity with tradition, cultural context, historical period etc. Ensure the discussion focuses on the elements that inform aesthetic response, using the following prompts.

Is it important to be knowledgeable about the art form to appreciate it?  
Does social background influence the way art is viewed? Explain how.  
Do pre-conceptions about what constitutes “art” shape response?  
How does Conceptual Art fit into this framework?

Conclude by introducing the notion of pleasure and art appreciation. Do students enjoy viewing art and is the idea of aesthetic beauty important? Show a small selection of slides of sculptural pieces from diverse cultures and periods in history. Include, for example, famous pieces from Michelangelo, Rodin, Giacometti, Picasso, and Moore, as well as African and Asian sculptural forms.

### RELATED STANDARDS

#### VISUAL ARTS

##### Kindergarten

##### 1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.1 Recognize and describe simple patterns found in the environment and works of art.

##### 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

2.1 Use lines, shapes/forms, and colors to make patterns

##### Grade 1

##### 5.0 CONNECTIONS, RELATIONS & APPLICATIONS

##### Career and Career-Related Skills

5.4 Describe objects designed by artists (e.g., furniture, appliances, cars) that are used at home and at school.

##### Grade 3

##### 3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

3.2 Identify artists from his or her own community, county, or state and discuss local or regional art traditions.

Invite students to think about these issues that are fundamental to aesthetics and notions of pleasure.

*Should art be aesthetically pleasing? Why?*

*Are there other objectives?*

*What might they be?*

*Is aesthetic pleasure a personal response?*

*Does Conceptual Art depart from traditional ideas of beauty? How?*

*What informs the appreciation of a piece of artwork?*

*Does culture shape the way art is ascribed meaning?*

*Are there accepted notions of beauty in art?*

For more information about SPARK and its educational content, including the Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the Web site at <http://www.kqed.org/spark/education>.



For more information about the California Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the CA Dept. of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/>