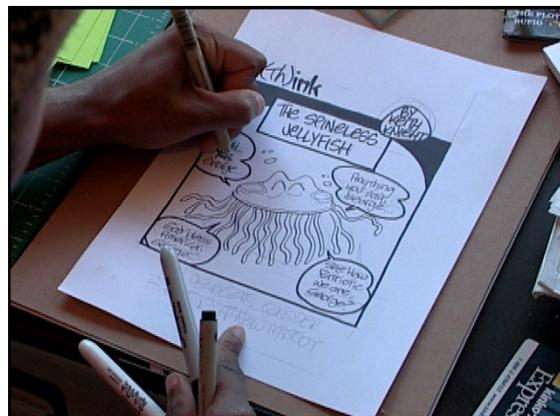


EDUCATOR GUIDE

Story Theme: Art Meets Pop Culture
Subject: Keith Knight
Discipline: Visual Arts (Comic Art)

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Comic artist Keith Knight at work on *(Th)ink*, his one-panel comic strip. Still image from SPARK story, July 2003.

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

EPISODE THEME

Art Meets Pop Culture

SUBJECT

Keith Knight

GRADE RANGES

K-12 & Post-secondary

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Visual Arts & Language Arts

OBJECTIVE

To introduce educators to comic art as a form of personal, political, and social commentary through the work of Keith Knight

STORY SYNOPSIS

Cartoon artist and rap musician Keith Knight draws upon his own life for his comic strip – the *K Chronicles* – a poignant combination of urban politics, race, love of family, and offbeat humor. We follow Knight as he peddles his wares at a massive comic convention in San Diego.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

- To introduce the idea of comic art as artistic expression
- To illustrate the presence and role of cartoon artists
- To explore comic art as forms of personal, social, and political commentary
- To innovate with comic art as a tool communication and expression for students

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- Individual and group research
- Individual and group exercises
- Written research materials
- Group discussions

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

- SPARK story “The World According to Keith Knight” about comic artist Keith Knight on DVD or VHS and related equipment
- Computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sounds card, printer

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers, and a variety of newspapers and comic art books
- Different examples of traditional and alternative comic art (see Resource section)
- Basic drawing supplies, including pencils, paper, black markers, colored markers, and rulers

INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

- Intrapersonal - awareness of one’s own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations
- Visual-Spatial - the ability to manipulate and create mental images to solve problems
- Bodily-Kinesthetic - the ability to use one’s mind to control one’s bodily movements
- Logical-Mathematical - the ability to detect patterns, reason deductively, think logically
- Linguistic Intelligence –the ability to effectively manipulate language to express oneself



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

SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

CONTENT OVERVIEW

In the SPARK episode “Art Meets Pop Culture,” artist Keith Knight talks about what it takes to be a cartoonist and to create weekly comic strips. Knight is the creator of the *K Chronicles*--a weekly semi-autobiographical comic strip that appears in numerous weekly papers and on the Internet--and *(th)ink*--a new one frame comic featured at www.africana.com.

Born in the greater Boston area, Keith now lives and works in San Francisco, where he develops his cartoons and performs with his swinging hip-hop band “The Marginal Prophets.” Knight’s weekly *K Chronicles* comic strip ran in the San Francisco Examiner for 5 years. The strip is often an irreverent combination of politics, race, family, and humor, highlighting fleeting happy events, “aha!” moments, or “what?” questions we share as people struggling to make sense of and meaning in our complex, contemporary urban society.

As an African-American cartoonist, Knight is a rarity, and since he crafts his comics from his own life, they regularly address issues related to his experience and observation of racism. As the primary source of material for the *K Chronicles*, Knight raises issues of race with the same poignant combination of witty insinuations and gravity he uses to handle sensitive political topics and personal epiphanies. His strips deftly balance humor and insight without compromising the veracity of his subject matter.

Knight has received praise from cartoonist Garry Trudeau (*Doonesbury*), filmmaker Spike Lee, and author Maya Angelou, among others. Knight’s work has appeared in a number of magazines, including *MH-18*, *Cracked*, *Futures*, *Fabula* and *Pulse!* He has published three books of the “K-Chronicles” with Manic D Press, the most recent of which - “What a Long Strange Strip Its Been” - came out in July 2003.

Knight is committed to sharing his voice beyond his cartoons, and is also public speaker, offering inspirational messages on issues such as alliance building, media, cartooning, racism, and the visual arts to schools, communities, and other communal venues through [Speakout: The Institute for Democratic Education and Culture](http://Speakout:TheInstituteforDemocraticEducationandCulture.com).



A panel of *(th)ink* (2003) by Keith Knight. Reprinted with permission from the artist.

THE BIG PICTURE

An extensive history of comic art (from which some of this overview is adapted) is available at Derek Santos's page at ComicsResearch: <http://www.comicsresearch.org>.

The history of the comic really began when someone first combined pictures and words together in a form of graphic narrative. The first formal comic as we know it today however, first appeared in the Sunday supplements of newspapers at the end of the 19th century. The first of these was a strip called *The Yellow Kid* by Richard Felton Outcault, which appeared in the Hearst Family's *New York American* in early 1896.

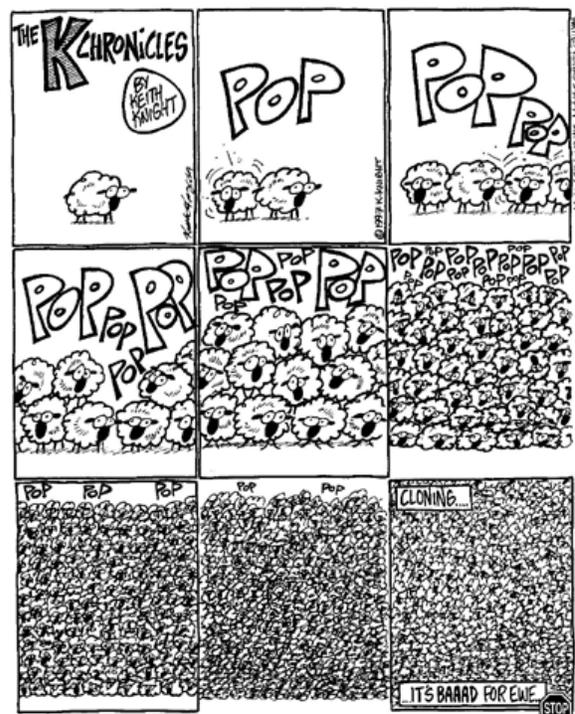
In 1933, after seeing the *Ledger* syndicate publication of a small number of their Sunday comics, two employees of Eastern Color Printing Company in New York, Harry L. Wildenberg and Max. C. Gaines figured out that they could fit 2 plates of comics on one page of newspaper, which could then be folded in half to make a small book. Wildenberg and Gaines assembled 32 pages of comics, (including *Mutt and Jeff*, *Joe Palooka*, and *Reg'lar Fellas*) to create the Funnies on Parade, the first comic book. Wildenberg and Gaines printed 10,000 copies of Funnies on Parade, which they sold to Proctor & Gamble as incentives for people to purchase their products.

On the heels of this success, Wildenberg and Gaines got the Eastern Color Printing Co. to print their next two comic books, Famous Funnies: A Carnival of Comics and Century of Comics, both of which contained reprinted comics from the Sunday newspaper. They sold their first two books to companies in quantities of 100,000 to 250,000, inspiring them to see if they could sell the books to individuals. So, Wildenberg and Gaines printed 35,000 copies of the Famous Funnies in July of 1934, which was an immediate success. Selling for 10 cents each, Famous Funnies became the first monthly comic magazine sold in the US.

From early on, comics featured superheroes, animal characters, and caricatures. In the 1940s, a period considered by many to be the Golden Age of comics, many classic superheroes were born including Batman, The Green Latern, and The Sandman. During the American involvement in Second World

War, war comics were most popular, as well as openly "patriotic" comics, such as the Justice League of America, Captain America, and Wonder Woman.

By the 1950s comics turned quite conservative, although this was contrasted by the emergence of horror comics, such as *The Vault of Horror*, *The Crypt of Terror*, and *The Haunt of Fear*. These comics provided ample cannon fodder for conservatives who already believed that comics were detrimental to young children. This sentiment culminated in the publication of The Seduction of the Innocent by Dr. Frederick Wertham, a psychiatrist and chief psychiatric consultant to the Chief Censor of the US Treasury Department. Dr. Wertham's accusations (including that Batman and Robin were a homosexual couple) eventually led the US Senate to pass The Standards of the Comics Code Authority, more commonly known as the Comics Code.



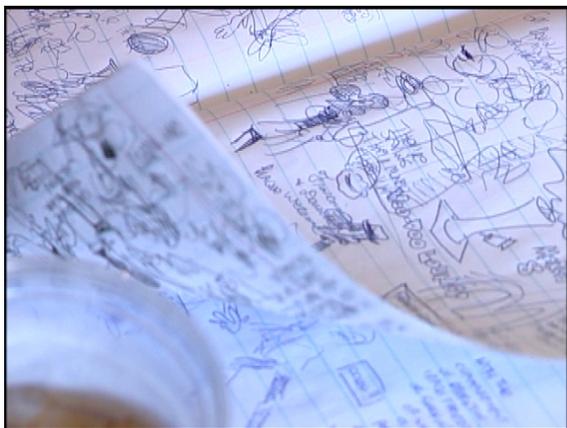
The *K-Chronicles* (1997) by Keith Knight.
Reprinted with permission from the artist.

THE BIG PICTURE (continued)

The Comics Code required drastic changes from comic producers to avoid serious restrictions and penalties, including the near elimination of horror and crime comics, and great reductions in gunfights, sexuality, and violence in the comics. Those comic companies that did not go out of business turned to a steady diet of superheroes, which dominated the comic world throughout the 1960s with comic characters such as Supergirl, Aquaman, a newly reinvigorated Wonder Woman, the Brave and the Bold, X-Men, Daredevil, the Avengers, and the Fantastic Four. It was not until the early 1970s that the dominion of superhero comics began to fade with the wild success of Archie Comics, and fantasy comic heroes such as Conan the Barbarian and Kull.

In the 1970s two important innovations led to changes that would open up the comic world and lay the groundwork for what we know today as contemporary comics -- the advent of the Comic convention, and the loosening of the restrictions imposed by the Comics Code. Many superheroes began to take on roles as social outcasts in 1980s while comic artwork became more expressive. Together, these significant changes resulted in the development of a wider range of comics, comic artists, and sellers with access to a wider audience, thanks to alternative papers, alternative comics, and the comic convention.

Today, there are many different types of comic artists and publishers who publish a wide variety of comics, such as caricature (including political), crime, horror, science fiction, superheroes, underground (alternative), war, western, and silent (wordless comics).



A page of Keith Knight's workbook with notes and drawings.
Still image from SPARK story, July 2003.

SECTION III – RESOURCES

TEXTS

Cartooning for Suffrage. Alice Sheppard and Elisabeth Israels Perry (Designer). University of New Mexico Press, 1994. – A compendium of the cartoons about suffrage from 1910 onwards.

Cartooning for the Beginner. Christopher Hart. Watson-Guption Publications, 2001.

Chemical Chaos. Nick Arnold and Tony De Saulles (Illustrator). Scholastic, 1998. – A cartoon book history of scientific development that teaches basic chemistry.

Dances with Sheep: A K Chronicles Compendium. Keith Knight. Manic D Press, 1997.

Downtown Doonesbury. Garry B. Trudeau. Henry Holt, 1987.

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Cartooning but Were Afraid to Draw. Christopher Hart. Watson-Guption Publications, 1994.

Fear of a Black Marker: Another "K Chronicles" Compendium. Keith Knight. Manic D Press, 2000.

The Birth of the Earth (Cartoon History of the Earth, 1). Jacqui Bailey and Matthew Lilly (Illustrator). Kids Can Press, 2001.

The Cartoon History of the Universe II: From the Springtime of China to the Fall of Rome/Volumes 8-13. Larry Gonick. Main Street Books, 1994.

The Cartoon History of the Universe/Volumes 1-7. Larry Gonick. Doubleday, 1977.

The Day of the Dinosaurs: A Cartoon History of the Earth (Bailey, Jacqui. Cartoon History of the Earth, V. 3.) Jacqui Bailey and Matthew Lilly (Illustrator). Kids Can Press, 2001.

TEXTS (continued)

The Gashlycrumb Tinies. Edward Gorey. Harcourt, 1997.

The K Chronicles: What A Long Strange Trip its Been. Keith Knight. Manic D Press, 2002.

The Measly Middle Ages. Terry Deary and Martin C. Brown (Illustrator). Scholastic, 1998. – An accurate and humorous cartoon history of the Middle Ages felt by some teachers to be a great help in teaching Medieval history.

WEB SITES

Cartoon Art Museum

A leading national museum dedicated to the preservation and exhibition of cartoon art in San Francisco. The Web site includes a thorough listing of links to other comic organizations, publishers, conventions, associations, etc. -

<http://www.cartoonart.org>

ComicsResearch.org – Comprehensive resource for locating research on comics, including genres, historical surveys, critical research and publications, as well as collections of comics locatable by artist. -

<http://www.comicsresearch.org>

International Museum of Cartoon Art -

<http://www.cartoon.org>

K Chronicles – Website for Keith Knight's comic strip *The K Chronicles*, a semi-autobiographical comic strip.

<http://www.kchronicles.com>

WEB SITES (continued)

Marginal Prophets – The website for *The Marginal Prophets*, the musical group to which Keith Knight belongs. - <http://www.marginalprophets.com>

Museum of Comic and Cartoon Art –

<http://www.moccany.org>

Ninth Art – An on-line journal about cartooning and comic art, including interviews, essays, editorials, and reviews. - <http://www.ninthart.com>. A complete transcript of the interview with Keith Knight see - <http://www.ninthart.com/display.php?article=582>

Society of Illustrators -

<http://www.societyillustrators.org>

Speak Out: Institute for Democratic Education and Culture – The country's only national not-for-profit organization promoting progressive speakers and artists - <http://www.speakersandartists.org> including Keith Knight

<http://www.speakersandartists.org/People/KeithKnight.html>

Words & Pictures Museum -

<http://www.wordsandpictures.org>

Youth Radio – A program located in Berkeley that trains young people to develop their own journalistic voice by researching, producing, and recording their own stories, news items, and interviews. To read the transcript of Keith Knight's interview with Youth Radio's Victor Vazquez see -

http://www.youthradio.org/books/001122_keef.shtml

COMIC CONVENTIONS

Dragon*Con, Atlanta, Georgia -

<http://www.dragoncon.org>

International Comic-Con, San Diego, California -

<http://www.comic-con.org>

MoCCA Art Festival, New York, New York -

<http://www.moccany.org/events-festival-03.html>

Supercon, Santa Clara, California –

<http://www.super-con.com>

Comic Book Conventions listing Web site -

<http://www.comicbookconventions.com>



Cartoonist Keith Knight selling his books at the International Comic-Con Convention. Still image from SPARK story, 2003.

BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS

The Cartoon Art Museum – 655 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94105. Phone: 415/CAR-TOON, (415/227-8666). - <http://www.cartoonart.org>

San Francisco State University offers courses and classes on the comic novel in history (English Department), animation (Cinema and College of Extended Learning), computer animation design (Design). – <http://www.sfsu.edu>

California College of Arts and Crafts offers courses and classes in cartooning and animation. - <http://www.ccac-art.edu>.

SECTION III – VOCABULARY

DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

Alternative Comics

Comic strips and cartoons that are different from conventional comics, their viewpoint and style of expression may fall outside the established cultural or social system

Anthology

A collection of selected literary pieces or works of art or music, in this case, of a single artist

Autobiographical

A biography of a person narrated by him or herself; *semi-autobiographical*- a story based at least partially on the author's/artist's own life or experience

Cartoon

A drawing intended to satirize, caricature or be humorous

Comic Strip

A group of cartoons usually placed within boxes in a narrative sequence

Comic-Con

The largest comic book convention in the country, held in San Diego

Embedded Cartoonist

A cartoonist placed with soldiers at the front line of battle to record the events first hand, as was done with news reporters during the war in Iraq

Exhibit

A public display of an artist's work, usually in a special venue such as a gallery or museum

Hip-Hop

A subculture of inner city youth incorporating unique styles of music, dance, fashion, and art

Political Cartoon

A cartoon intended to satirize political figures or issues

Recognition

Formal acknowledgement or special notice or attention given to an artist

Satire

A work of art or literature which utilize sarcasm and wit to expose and discredit individuals or ideas with whom the author disagrees or finds foolish

Single Panel Cartoon

A cartoon whose complete idea can be conveyed in one picture, with or without a caption, placed within a single panel or box

Social Commentary

Cartoons that satirize the interactions of people, places, and events of a particular society

Speech Balloon

A balloon or cloud-shaped device containing words that a cartoonist uses to indicate what a character is saying

Syndicate

A group of newspapers under one management or leadership

Syndication

To sell a cartoon to a syndicate or for publication in many newspapers or periodicals at once

Thought Balloon

A balloon or cloud-shaped device containing words or pictures that a cartoonist utilizes to indicate what a character is thinking

Zine (colloquial)

A small, usually self-published periodical of interest to a limited group of readers

SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

Talking about Comics

Play the SPARK episode on Keith Knight and pause the video or DVD on the comic strips. Ask students to describe the comic strip – the style(s), use of language, issues addressed and the types of characters developed

Divide students into small working groups to discuss the following ideas:

- What subjects seem to be important to Keith Knight?
- How are Keith Knight’s ideas different from those of mainstream comics, such as *Peanuts*, *Doonesbury*, *For Better or Worse*, and *Calvin and Hobbes*?
- How would you describe his drawing style? Does it look like other cartoons you have seen, such as Marvel Comics, Anime, or The Simpsons? How is it different?
- How would you define “alternative comics”?
- What are some examples of mainstream comics?
- Keith Knight’s drawings aren’t realistic, but do you think that he gets his point(s) across? What do you like (or not like) about his drawings?

Bring the groups together to discuss the ideas and then ask students to write a 600-word review of Keith Knight’s comics, drawing upon the discussion.

SPARKLER:

* Talk about other types of alternative art? What kinds of music or fashion do students like? How are these similar to alternative comics? What is it about these other types of alternative art that appeals?

Analyzing Cartoons – The Structures of Words and Pictures

Show students examples of single panel and strips, including Keith Knight’s *K Chronicles* and *(th)ink* (see Resources section). Brainstorm the differences between the two styles, listing the characteristics for each one on the board. How are they different?

Consider the images in the cartoons. How are they drawn? How do the compositions in the frames communicate different ideas, independently from the words? To get students to articulate these concepts, ask them to describe the panels visually, naming the objects, people, and places in the frames, as well as the action(s) conveyed.

Following the discussion of the drawings, talk about the speech and thought balloons. When do cartoonists use a thought balloon? When do they use a speech balloon? What are the differences? Looking at cartoons with a variety of speech and thought balloons, ask students to explain why the artist chose one type over the other in a particular panel? How would the meaning of the panel change if a thought balloon became a speech balloon, and vice versa?

SPARKLER:

* Older students can explore the concept of point of view (POV) in comics. Identify Keith Knight’s POV and point out how it is expressed in words and imagery.

RELATED STANDARDS

VISUAL ARTS

Kindergarten

CONNECTIONS, RELATIONS & APPLICATIONS - CAREER & CAREER-RELATED SKILLS

5.4 Discuss the various works of art (e.g., ceramics, paintings, sculpture) that artists create and the media used.

Grade 4

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

Analyze Art Elements and Principles of Design

1.5 Describe and analyze the elements of art (color, shape/form, line, texture, space and value), emphasizing form, as they are used in works of art and found in the environment.

Political Cartoons

Referring to the *K Chronicles* or *(th)ink* cartoons of Keith Knight (see Resources section) invite students to discuss a political issue that Knight has satirized in one of his cartoons. Ask students how a cartoonist might come up with ideas for a political cartoon? Where does s/he get their issues? Television news broadcasts? Newspaper articles? Political discussions with friends?

Explore the political issues that are important to the students. How might they show how they feel about these issues with words combined with pictures? Ask them to think about how they might express an idea(s) humorously while still conveying passion and conviction?

Have students draw a single panel or comic strip political cartoon pertaining to an issue that is important to them. Brainstorm locations or situations that are close to their daily experience, such as the food in the school cafeteria, the teacher's homework policy, or any recent social event? Invite them each to develop a political cartoon about this experience.

Display the cartoons around the classroom for students to enjoy.

Teaching and Learning through Comics

Using the resources provided in this Guide, and other comics found in newspapers, newsstands, or on the Internet, consider a few examples of comics published about a single issue (such as women's suffrage, the Civil War, or slavery), historical events or scientific concepts. As a group, talk about how to "read" a comic, identifying the attitudes and beliefs of the artist and the audience at the time. Consider exaggerated features, language, and vocabulary.

Ask students to compare a comic and a textbook description about a particular topic or idea (such as oxidation, the Big Bang Theory). Discuss how comics tell stories (narratives). How do the different sources convey information? Ask students which form they prefer and why?

Challenge students, especially 9-12th grades, to write an extended essay or research project about a particular comic artist or a historical issue related through comics.

RELATED STANDARDS

LANGUAGE ARTS

Grade 5

READING

Vocabulary and Concept Development

1.2 Identify and interpret figurative language and words with multiple meanings.

Narrative Analysis of Grade-Level-Appropriate Text

3.4 Define how tone or meaning is conveyed in poetry through word choice, figurative language, sentence structure, line length, punctuation, rhythm, repetition, and rhyme.

3.5 Identify the speaker and recognize the difference between first- and third-person narration (e.g., autobiography compared with biography).

3.7 Explain the effects of common literary devices (e.g., symbolism, imagery, metaphor) in a variety of fictional and non-fictional texts.

Grade 8

READING

Vocabulary and Concept Development

1.1 Analyze idioms, analogies, metaphors, and similes to infer the literal and figurative meanings of phrases.

WRITING

2.1 Write biographies, autobiographies, short stories, or narratives:

a. Relate a clear, coherent incident, event, or situation by using well-chosen details.

RELATED STANDARDS

VISUAL ARTS

Grade 7

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.1 Describe the environment and selected works of art, using the elements of art and the principles of design.

Grade 9-12 Proficient

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION -

1.3 Research and analyze the work of an artist and write about the artist's distinctive style and its contribution to the meaning of the work.

Grades 9-12 – Advanced

HISTORICAL & CULTURAL CONTEXTS

3.2 Identify contemporary artists worldwide who have achieved regional, national, or international recognition and discuss ways in which their work reflects, plays a role in, and influences present-day culture.

Autobiography

Ask students to draw a simple cartoon self-portrait. Point out that it doesn't have to look like them in a realistic way, but like cartoonist Keith Knight's drawings of himself, they can have a humorous, exaggerated resemblance to themselves. If students have difficulty with the idea of drawing themselves they can instead create an original character that represents them, (similar to creating an actor to play them in their movie).

Next ask students to create a comic strip using this character to detail a personal experience to which they feel others may relate. Remind them how important it is to maintain a comprehensible sequence, and to supply enough narration or dialogue for their cartoon so it can be understood by a complete stranger reading it for the first time.

Starting points for students who might have difficulty coming up with ideas might include drawing cartoons about: The best day of your life? When were you really happy, mad, or embarrassed? If you had one wish, what would it be? How do you see yourself in 20 years? What are your favorite things in the universe?

It may be useful to point out that cartoon artists such as Keith Knight, as well as comedians and other humorists often find humor in moments that seem negative or "bad." Challenge students to make a list of a few funny ideas. If they find this difficult, suggest a few things that they have complained about of late.

SPARKLER:

* Why do we often find unpleasant things to be so humorous? What is funny about the classic slapstick of someone slipping on a banana peel or Keith Knight's cartoon about the government's handling of September 11th?

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 California Department of Education Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/>