

EDUCATOR GUIDE

Story Theme: By Hand
Subject: Gary Stevens
Discipline: Visual Arts (Sculpture)

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Artist Gary Stevens uses an electric chisel to hollow a deep interior space of a wood sculpture.
Still image from SPARK story, April 2004.

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

EPISODE THEME

By Hand

SUBJECT

Gary Stevens

GRADE RANGES

K-12 & Post-secondary

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Visual Arts & Language Arts

OBJECTIVE

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

Develop basic art making skills

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

STORY SYNOPSIS

Spark follows sculptor Gary Stevens through his creative process, from harvesting unusual pieces of wood from ancient redwood forests through the painstaking work that produces his uniquely beautiful wood vessels.

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

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

To introduce students to woodworking and the idea of found forms

To help students understand the impact of natural found forms on fabricated shapes (sculptures)

To inspire students to find shapes and forms in the natural world and to work with them to develop works of art

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

TV & VCR with SPARK story "Hunting for Burls" about wood artist Gary Stevens

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](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education) at www.kqed.org/spark/education.

SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

CONTENT OVERVIEW

For more than thirty years, Gary Stevens has been working with wood. Since his days sitting at the lathe in his high school's wood shop, Stevens has endeavored to create works of art that are themselves as moving and ruggedly striking as the wood from which they are made. In the Spark story "Hunting for Burls," Stevens takes viewers through his creative process, beginning with harvesting unusual pieces of wood from ancient redwood forests at continuing through the painstaking work that produces his uniquely beautiful wood vessels.

Stevens's wood art begins with a careful selection of material carried out no farther away than the towering redwood forests that surround his studio in Soquel, California. As an artist who is sensitive to environmental issues, Stevens looks for fallen wood and tree stumps left by loggers. Mostly, Stevens searches out rare and unusual knotted and twisted burls often found at the base of trees. Many of these are more than a thousand years old, and their sinewy grain display a patina that can only be produced by centuries of exposure to the elements. Removing these stumps, which can weigh well over a ton, is no small task. Stevens uses chainsaws, tractors, and industrial cranes to get these rare pieces of wood to his studio, where he then faces the daunting task of hoisting them and mounting them onto lathes.

The forms of the "found" pieces of wood suggest to Stevens the forms of the finished work. Many woodworkers look for even, flawless material for their pieces, crafting works that boast smooth, regular forms. By contrast, Stevens values the eccentricities of his material, developing his designs out of its unique imperfections and growth patterns. Turning his pieces on the lathe and using chainsaws as well as finer planing and sanding tools, Stevens accentuates his material's idiosyncrasies to produce challenging and hauntingly beautiful forms.

Stevens got his professional start in carpentry, and even though he has enjoyed a great deal of commercial success as an artist, he has never been tempted to quit his day job. Spark follows Stevens to a construction site in Alabama, where he has been called in to install some very rare antique white oak beams. In maintaining a career as a carpenter, Stevens has never had to rely on his art for his income, which has in turn afforded him a great deal of artistic freedom. Liberated from concerns about public taste and commercial viability, Stevens has been free to create challenging works that are helping to shape the future of wood art.



Artist Gary Stevens scouts for burls for his artworks among Redwood tree stumps in Northern California (top).



Stevens begins a piece by shaping a tree burl on a lathe (middle).



Stevens gives shape to the wood using a chain saw (bottom).

Still images from SPARK story, April 2004.

THE BIG PICTURE

Gary Stevens' wood vessels are part of a long history of woodworking in both the fine and decorative arts. As works uniquely and expertly fashioned while still aligned with the folk traditions of woodworking, Stevens' pieces bridge the gap between fine art (traditionally called high art) and craft (traditionally called low art). This practice is Western European in origin.

Wood was a very common sculptural medium in the middle ages in Europe, when it was used to make religious icons and other sacred objects. With the Renaissance, however, wood came to be regarded as a secondary, impoverished material. Artists interested in reviving the grand traditions of antiquity, turned to marble as a preferred medium, emulating the classical statuary of Greece and Rome. In some areas of Europe, however, such as Spain, artists continued working with wood, producing evocative and hyper-realistic renderings of Christian martyrs used in ceremonial processions and altarpieces.



Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo (1851 – 1942), Mahogany chair, designed for the Century Guild, circa 1883. Reprinted with permission by the William Morris Gallery, London.

In the modern era, wood became popular again in both the fine arts and crafts. William Morris' Arts & Crafts Movement in the late-19th century used wood to produce elegant designs based on organic forms and natural motifs found in nature and in English folk art. The artisans associated with the movement valued wood for its natural grain, which offered a deep, rich beauty absent from the newer materials of steel and glass.

The more progressive modern movements of the early 20th century such as the German Werkbund and the Bauhaus used wood in a new way, choosing it for the beauty of its natural grain, but shaping it into clean modernist forms intended to clearly and beautifully express function and construction.

Many artists of the Bauhaus movement also were concerned with marrying form and function, such as Marcel Breuer, whose classic Bauhaus furniture is made from sheets of laminated plywood that have been cut and bent (using steam) into shapes such as tables and chairs. The continuous pieces of wood have no joints or hardware; the legs appear to grow down from the tops, giving the works the appearance of being "natural" forms. This type of approach to furniture-making demonstrates the deep respect and understanding these artists held for materials, leading them to create forms that highlighted the unique attributes of their materials, including form related to function.

The late 20th century also witnessed the return of wood as a sculptural material, as seen in the work of American artist Louise Nevelson. Nevelson's elaborate wood assemblages and sculptural reliefs, usually painted matte black or white, combine geometric and architectural forms to create visual panoplies of light, and shadow. Luminous Zag from 1971 shows this extraordinary complexity as well as the dynamism of the wholly crafted material.

Louise Nevelson, Luminous Zag: Night, 1971. Painted wood (105 boxes). 120 x 193 x 10 ¾ inches overall. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Gift, Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Singer, 1977. Reprinted with permission.

RESOURCES – TEXTS

Cooke, Edward S. Jr., and Glenn Adamson. Wood Turning in North America Since 1930. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.

Fike, Bonita. The Fine Art of Wood. New York: Abbeville Press, 2000.

Lacer, Alan. "Collectors of Wood Art." American Woodturner (Winter 1998).

Leier, Ray. "New Artists in Turned Wood." Woodworker West (July/August 2000).

Liebenson, Bess. "Taking Wood to New Places." The New York Times (July 30, 2000).

Meilach, Dona Z. Wood Art Today: Furniture, Vessels, Sculpture. Surrey, UK: Schiffer Publishing, 2003.

Monroe, Michael and Suzanne Ramljak. Turning Wood into Art: The Jane and Arthur Mason Collection. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000.

Tibbetts, Malcolm. The Art of Segmented Wood Turning: A Step-by-Step Guide. Fresno, CA: Linden Publishing, 2004.

Turner, Tran. "Wood Art Collectors' Conference." Craft Arts International. No. 45 (Spring 1999).

RESOURCES – WEB SITES

<http://tiger.towson.edu/users/ctomar1/art.html>
Web site on the history, design features and key artists in the Bauhaus School

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/shaker/shakerstyle.htm> - Web site offering a wealth of information on the Shakers, with essays about their philosophy, furniture design, architecture and handicrafts

<http://www.sfgate.com/getoutside/1996/apr/rwecology.html> - History and ecology of the redwood forests looking at three different species of the tree and the redwoods of Muir Woods

<http://www.artbowl.com> – Gary Stevens' Web site with photos, information about his work and gallery links

<http://www.got.net/~burly/stevens.html> - Additional Web pages dedicated to Gary Stevens, including photos of work, some information about the artist, and links to gallery exhibitions

http://www.californiaheartland.org/archive/hl_604/tr ee.htm - An article on Gary Stevens in California Heartland

<http://www.internetwoodworking.com> – A Web site devoted to woodworking with pages on wood turning and other techniques used by Gary Stevens

<http://www.craftcouncil.org> – Web site for the American Craft Council, an organization dedicated to promoting understanding and appreciation of contemporary American craft

<http://bayareawoodturners.org> – Web site for the Bay Area Woodturners Association

<http://westbaywoodturner.com> – Web site for the West Bay Area Woodturner's Association

<http://www.califpeople.com/norcalturners/>-- Northern California Woodturner's Association.

<http://www.woodturner.org> – Web site for the American Association of Woodturners

<http://www.woodworking.org/>--Woodworking website with lots of tips and a fun woodworking trivia maze!

<http://www.taunton.com/finewoodworking/index.asp> - the online version of Fine Woodworking Magazine

<http://www.woodmagazine.com> – Wood Magazine online, with downloadable articles and plans

<http://www.furnitureociety.org/>--A Web site devoted to the fine art of furniture making, with information about exhibitions, collecting, and resources.

<http://www.popularwoodworking.com/>--Popular Woodworking Magazine, online with links to books and information about woodworking.

<http://www.woodzone.com> – Wood Zone, a Web site designed to help beginners learn the basics of working with wood

BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS

Consult the Bay Area and Northern California Associations for news, exhibitions, and events:

Bay Area Woodturners Association -

<http://bayareawoodturners.org>

West Bay Area Woodturner's Association –

<http://westbaywoodturner.com>

Northern California Woodturner's Association -

<http://www.califpeople.com/norcalturners>

SECTION III – VOCABULARY

Burl

A large rounded outgrowth on the trunk or branch of a tree

Caustic

Capable of burning, corroding, dissolving, or eating away by chemical action

Concave

Curved like the inner surface of a sphere

Exotic

Intriguingly unusual or different; excitingly strange

Flaw

An often concealed imperfection

Flute (Fluting)

A long, usually rounded groove incised as a decorative motif on the shaft of a column, for example

Harmonize

To bring or come into agreement

Havoc

Widespread destruction; devastation

Hazard

A chance; an accident

Lathe

A machine for shaping a piece of material, such as wood or metal, by rotating it rapidly along its axis while pressing against a fixed cutting or abrading tool

Muse

A source of inspiration

Pander

To cater to the lower tastes and desires of others

Parasite

An organism that grows, feeds, and is sheltered on or in a different organism while contributing nothing to the survival of its host

Patina

The sheen on the surface of a material, produced by age and/or use

Symmetry

A relationship of characteristic correspondence, equivalence, or identity among constituents of an entity or between different entities

Tannic acid

A substance that occurs naturally in certain barks and plants used tanning textiles, as a mordant in photography, and to clarify wine and beer

Technique

The way in which the fundamentals, as of an artistic work, are handled

Vessel

A hollow utensil, such as a cup, vase, or pitcher, used as a container, especially for liquids

Vortex

A spiral motion of fluid within a limited area, especially a whirling mass of water or air that sucks everything near it toward its center

Whirlwind

A rapidly rotating, generally vertical column of air, such as a tornado, dust devil, or waterspout

SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

Looking at and Talking About Wood Art

Cue the SPARK story to the segment beginning when the narrator says “Gary Stevens is one of the artists who is actually shaping the future of contemporary wood art.” Freeze the tape or DVD when the camera zooms in on an individual piece of artwork.

Mute the sound and spend time with the first work of art. Then continue on to the next work and pause again. Each time ask students to note the words they would use to describe:

- shape or form of the piece
- texture
- color
- design
- response to the piece - what it evokes, how it makes them feel, etc.

Finding words to describe artwork, especially an unfamiliar art form, can be challenging so allow students time to focus on and think about each piece. Discuss with the group the descriptive terms students have noted and then guide the discussion to review Gary Stevens’ work and the students’ responses.

Play the excerpts again, this time with the audio track. Ask students to listen for the descriptors used in the narration. This will trigger interesting comparisons between the students’ personal responses and the more formal terminology and concepts used in the narration.

As a follow-on activity, encourage students to see Stevens work on exhibition, such as it often is at GUMPS in downtown San Francisco. For students who manage to see the actual art work, invite them to share their responses with the group. Does it make a difference to see the actual art work rather than through the medium of TV?

RELATED STANDARDS

VISUAL ARTS

Kindergarten

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

Develop Perceptual Skills and Visual Arts Vocabulary

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

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

Role and Development of the Visual Arts

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

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.

Grade 8

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

Responding to, Analyzing, and Making Judgments About Works in the Visual Arts

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.

Wood in the Arts in History

Invite students to work in groups to research contemporary movements that have explored innovative ways to fashion furniture from wood. Direct students to the resources listed in this guide for assistance with their research. Groups can work on the same movement, but ensure all of the following are assigned to at least one group.

- Arts & Crafts movement of the late 19th century
- The Bauhaus (a form of Modernism)
- German Werkbund (a modern movement)
- Shakers (community group with a particular woodworking style and techniques - <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/shaker/shakers.tyle.htm>)

Each group should prepare a presentation on the movement researched to include a summary of the guiding principles and key ideas underpinning the design, an analysis of the aesthetic or style, illustrations of the work and a brief reference to the historical context. Presentations should be allocated at least 20 minutes each to allow for questions and discussion.

Conclude the activity with a discussion of how Gary Stevens's work can be placed within this contemporary woodworking tradition, if at all.

SPARKLERS – Other Possible Lines of Inquiry

- * Compare Gary Stevens with other contemporary artists working with wood - http://dmoz.org/Arts/Visual_Arts/Sculpture/Sculptors/Wood/
- * Interview Gary Stevens or another woodworker, wood turner, or artist who works with wood and write a feature for a newspaper or radio show
- * Explore the distinction between fine art and craft in the context of contemporary artwork

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VISUAL ARTS

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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.

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Role and Development of the Visual Arts

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

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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.

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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.

California Redwoods

To clarify understanding, especially for younger students, introduce and discuss some of the key terms used by Gary Stevens in the SPARK story to talk about the Redwood trees in California. Show students samples of Redwood using books, Web sites, slides, or by freezing the frame on a redwood burl shown in the SPARK story. As a group, discuss terms such as grain, burl, patina, coloration, fluting, vortex, etc. using the vocabulary list in this Guide.

Direct students to information on the history of redwoods in California

<http://www.sfgate.com/getoutside/1996/apr/rwecology.html> and discuss with them the location of the redwood forests, their history and ecology. Many of the group may well be familiar with redwood forests and have interesting contributions to make to the discussion.

Suggest that students organize a field trip, a visit or tour to a redwood forest, using the contacts listed on this site if they opt for a tour.

<http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&lr=&ie=UTF-8&q=california+redwood+tours&btnG=Search> or [Redwood Sequoia Tour \\$19](#) to Muir Woods.

Encourage the group to look closely at the redwood trees concentrating on one tree or aspect of a tree that they find inspiring. They should look for examples of the twisted burls, complex texture, growth patterns and grain so central to Gary Stevens' work. They should also touch and smell the tree.

Invite students to write a short descriptive piece about the redwoods, drawing upon the vocabulary introduced at the beginning of the class, but also evoking their personal response. Encourage them to write freely using metaphorical language, poetry or song to articulate their thoughts and feelings. For students who prefer to draw, they should express their responses on paper using crayon, ink, charcoal or any medium they choose.

RELATED STANDARDS

SOCIAL STUDIES

Grade 4

California: A Changing State

1. Identify the state capital and describe the various regions of California, including how their characteristics and physical environments (e.g., water, landforms, vegetation, climate) affect human activity.
2. Identify the locations of the Pacific Ocean, rivers, valleys, and mountain passes and explain their effects on the growth of towns.
3. Use maps, charts, and pictures to describe how communities in California vary in land use, vegetation, wildlife, climate, population density, architecture, services, and transportation.

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/be/st/ss/index.asp>.