

EDUCATOR GUIDE

Story Theme: Elevating the Everyday
Subject: Laurel True
Discipline: Visual Art

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Mosaic artist Laurel True at work on a wall mosaic in San Francisco. Still image from SPARK, 2005.

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

EPISODE THEME

Elevating the Everyday

SUBJECT

Laurel True

GRADE RANGES

K-12 & Post-secondary

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Visual Arts & Language Arts

OBJECTIVE

To introduce students to mosaic art through the work and process of Laurel True, including the creation and use of mosaics in history

STORY SYNOPSIS

For nearly 15 years, artist Laurel True has been making mosaics, a practice that has taken her around the world. Spark checks in on True's latest mural, which decorates a building much closer to home -- the rough industrial space that sits right across the street from her Oakland studio.

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 help students understand the development of personal works of art and their relationship to broader social themes and ideas, abstract concepts, and the history of art.
To enable students to develop visual, written, listening and speaking skills through looking at, creating and talking about visual artworks using an expressive visual arts vocabulary
To foster students' media literacy skills

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

TV & VCR with SPARK story "Elevating the Everyday" about Laurel True
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

SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

CONTENT OVERVIEW

For nearly 15 years, artist Laurel True has been making mosaics, a practice that has taken her around the world. But True's latest mural decorates a building much closer to home -- the rough industrial space that sits right across the street from her Oakland studio. In "Elevating the Everyday," SPARK visits True on site as she creates this piece of public art.



Laurel True laying out tiles during her work on the [Free Wood](#) mosaic in Oakland, CA. Still image from SPARK, 2005.

After years of looking out her studio at the tree trimming business across the road, True decided to replace its makeshift "free wood" sign with an elaborate mural covering a large section of the building's façade. Using handmade tiles and glass, along with commercial tiles, broken dishes, and pieces of mirror, True and her team created an arbor-themed diptych featuring fantastical trees that surround the words "free wood." The mural is representative of True's work, which regularly employs fluid, sinuous lines and organic forms, executed in a colorful array of tiles and glass. True especially enjoys incorporating mirrored surfaces which reflect light, movement, and the mural's viewer.

Laurel True studied art and design in schools in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Dakar, Senegal, and Ravenna, Italy. She produces murals and other works with her studio, True Mosaics, which she founded in 1991. Her architectural, sculptural mosaics adorn

parks, hospitals, schools, restaurants, shops and private residences across the United States. One of True's projects took her to West Africa, where she designed and facilitated a community mosaic mural project in a fishing village in Ghana.

THE BIG PICTURE

Mosaic is one of the oldest art forms in the world with a history that extends at least four thousand years. All mosaics are made by embedding small stones, tiles, glass, or other material into an adhesive background. The earliest mosaics were made using colored clay cones pushed into earthen floors and walls. These early decorations were followed by pebble mosaics, an innovation of the 8th century BCE.

The Hellenistic Greeks (343 – 146 BCE) used the pebble method of making mosaics to create exacting geometric patterns, portraits, and elaborate landscapes that covered the interiors of domestic and sacred spaces. Detailed works such as the pebble mosaics at Olynthos¹ helped to move mosaics from unstructured designs to painstaking reproductions of historical events and carefully worked out patterning.



Restored pebble floor mosaic with scenes of Dionysius from the city of Olynthos 432-348 BCE.

www.angelfire.com/tn3/papazacharias/mosaic13.html

¹ Olynthos was founded in the 7th century BC by the Bottiaioi in the Chalkidike Province in Macedonia (now Greece). During the Classical period it was the largest and most important political centre in the province. The city was destroyed in 479 BCE by the Persians. In 432 BCE the King of Macedonia Perdikkas II convinced city residents to succeed, and then city was completely destroyed again in 348 BCE in a war with the armies of King Philip II. During its heyday, the prosperous city had wide streets and large homes with mosaic floors and plastered walls.

In the 3rd century BCE, the Greeks began fabricating *tesserae*, small tiles made of colored glass or clear glass with colored foils on the bottom to use to create mosaics. Artists used these small pieces, usually less than an inch long, to make mosaics that rivaled painting in their precision. Works such as the sea life mosaic preserved at Pompeii demonstrate an astonishing level of detail and incorporate lush materials such as marble.

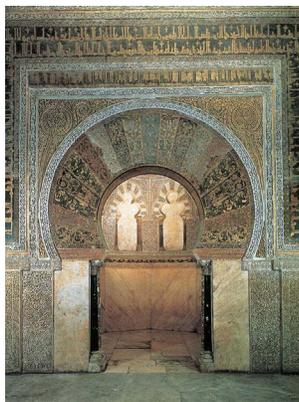


Wall mosaic depicting a rooster fight in a private home in the ancient city of Pompeii in Italy, 3rd century BCE.

Photo by John Hauser.

<http://www.jhauser.us/pictures/history/Romans/Pompeii/muralsAndMosaics.html>

During the rise of the Byzantine Empire in the 5th century BCE, mosaics began to represent Christian themes through the use of *smalti*, small pieces of colored glass containing bubbles and sometimes backed with gold or silver leaf. These sparkling representations primarily decorated walls and ceilings in churches and royal palaces.



Mosaic covered doorway from the Cordoba Mosque, Spain, 10th century. Photo: Columbia University, Department of Art History & Archaeology.

http://www.mcah.columbia.edu/dlcourse/s/murray/large/madji_cordoba_mosaic_figg11.jpg

Great advances were made in mosaics art with the spread of Islam in the 8th century. The Islamic emphasis on the written word combined with great strides made by Arabic mathematicians spawned a style of mosaic called *zillij* that is characterized by staggering complexity. Islamic mosaics often cover

every inch of interior and exterior spaces of mosques and other sacred spaces.

Artists continued to create mosaics in the Modern and contemporary periods. Spanish artist Antoni Gaudí (1852 - 1926) incorporated mosaics into his buildings and parks throughout his homeland, most notably at Parc Guell in downtown Barcelona. Gaudí used mosaic tiles on fountains, walls and other architectural elements in the park, following the sculptural forms to uniting modern architecture with whimsical shapes and colors.



Antoni Gaudí, Fountain, Parc Guell, Barcelona, Spain (1900-1914). Photo credit: The Joy of Shards.

<http://www.thejoyofshards.co.uk/www/barcelona/index.shtml>

SECTION III – RESOURCES

RESOURCES – TEXTS

Baird, Helen. Mosaics by Design. Lorenz Books, 2004.

Biggs, Emma. Encyclopedia of Mosaic Techniques. Philadelphia: Running Press Books, 1999.

Fassett, Kaffe and Candace Bahouth. Mosaics: Inspiration and Original Projects for Interiors and Exteriors. New York: Taunton Press, 2001.

Locktov, JoAnn. Mosaic Art and Style: Designs for Living Environments. Quarry Books, 2005.

Mastandrea, Doreen. Mosaics: Inside and Out. Rockport Publishers, 2001.

Mills, Theresa. The Mosaic Artist's Bible: Over 300 Traditional and Contemporary Designs. London: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 2005.

Wates, Rosalind. The Mosaic Idea Book. Cincinnati: North Light Books, 2000.

RESOURCES – WEB SITES

TrueMosaicsStudio - Laurel True's mosaic company - <http://www.truemosaics.com>

SFMosaic.com - A guide to public mosaics in San Francisco, including the work of Laurel True - <http://www.sfmosaic.com>

Classical Mosaics – A site that features images and information on many classical mosaics from a variety of periods and locations - http://www.classicalmosaics.com/photo_album.htm

The Joy of Shards, a mosaic-making resource - <http://www.thejoyofshards.co.uk/index.shtml>

Mosaic Matters – Online magazine for all things mosaic - <http://www.mosaicmatters.co.uk>

Salaam – Web site with pages full of useful information on the history of Islamic mosaics - http://www.salaam.co.uk/themeofthemonth/march02_index.php?l=3

Institute of Mosaic Art
<http://www.instituteofmosaicart.com>

Nikki de Saint Phalle – Modernist artist who also worked in mosaics - <http://nikidesaintphalle.com>

Mosaic Studio Supply
<http://www.mosaicstudiosupply.com>

Mosaic Works - <http://www.mosaicworks.com>

SAMA - Society of American Mosaic Artists - <http://www.americanmosaics.org>

BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS

True Mosaics
3001 Chapman St.
Oakland, CA 94601
510/437.9899
<http://www.truemosaics.com>

Institute of Mosaic Art
Oakland, California
510/437.9899
<http://www.instituteofmosaicart.com>

SF Mosaic
Take a tour of mosaics in San Francisco with SF Mosaic, including “Fractured and Fabulous! Mosaics, Murals and Vintage Tile of the Castro,” “Mambo

Italiano: The Mosaics and Moxie of North Beach," as well as a customized tours -

<http://www.sfmosaic.com/tours/index.php>.

San Francisco Arts Commission

Civic Art Collection - Catalogues of all publicly commissioned art in San Francisco, including a number of mosaic works. -

<http://www.sfaccivicart.org>

Pippa Murray

The Gathering Place

800-square foot floor mosaic of Bay Area ecology

Bay Area Discovery Museum

East Fort Baker, 557 McReynolds Road

Sausalito, CA 94965-2614

415/339.3900

<http://www.baykidsmuseum.org>

Fran Segel

Watershed I: Mountain Lion and

Watershed II: Great White Egret

Building facade @ Addison & Milvia Streets

Downtown Berkeley

Red Tailed Hawk

Peralta Community Garden, Berkeley

Carla Brooke

Mosaic and tile work

Community garden, Gloria Way

Peninsula Habitat for Humanity housing complex

and Bay Oaks apartments in East Palo Alto

Ruth O'Day

Mosaic art work

Clubhouse Seating Wall, Margaret Hayward

Playground

1016 Laguna Street, San Francisco

San Francisco Ferry Building

Nave mosaic floor – Main Hallway

San Francisco

Ruth Asawa, Paul Lanier and the students of

Alvarado Elementary School

Multiple outdoor ceramic mosaics

Alvarado Elementary School

625 Douglass Street

San Francisco, CA 94114

415) 695-5695

<http://www.alvaradoschool.net>

SECTION IV – VOCABULARY

DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY & CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

Ceramic

Pottery, porcelain or other artwork of baked clay

Dptych

A painting done in two separate panels, each part is a complete work in itself, but when presented together they form a larger fully integrated work

Fluid

Flowing, as in liquid

Industrial

Engaged or connected with industry

Mixed media

The art technique where the artist employs two or more media such as painting, charcoal, collage, etc. and combines them in a single work

Organic

Made up of related parts that work together as a unit

Pique assiette

A style of mosaic that incorporates pieces of broken ceramics - plates, dishes, cups, tiles - and other found objects into the design...

Symbolism

Representing things or ideas by means of symbols, or attributing symbolic meanings or significance to objects or images, events, or relationships

Tactile

Having the sense of touch; tangible

Urban

Of the city or town

SECTION V – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES & DISCUSSION POINTS

Looking at Mosaics

Mosaics comprise one of the oldest art forms in the world, with a history that extends at least four thousand years.

To introduce students to this art, show them a selection of classical mosaics from all over the world – for example from cathedrals and excavation sites at Ravenna, Venice, Rome, Naples, Istanbul etc. See http://www.classicalmosaics.com/photo_album.htm

Using a video projector, click on some examples from this Web site to enlarge the image and offer students a strong sense of the texture, color, and materials used. Ask students:

- What types of materials were used in these mosaics? Can you tell?
- Who or what were the subjects of these pieces? What scenes are depicted? What themes are important?
- Are the subjects representational or abstract?
- Are the surfaces reflective and shiny or rough and flat?
- How decorative are the mosaics? Are the designs simple or elaborate? Are the shapes geometric and mathematical or organic? Are the colors vivid or muted?

Explore these questions together as a whole group to introduce students to the range of material, color and detail in mosaics as well as to the stories and imaginings that they express and the cultures they reflect.

Move on to invite students to research the history of mosaic artwork. Divide the class into research groups and allocate a period in history for them to study. Groups should focus on Roman, Greek and Byzantine and Islamic mosaic art with one group

concentrating on examples of contemporary work.

The web site

<http://www.thejoyofshards.co.uk/history/index.shtml> is a useful resource for this enterprise.

Ask each group to research the period allocated to them and structure their research around the questions above. They should be prepared to present their findings to the group as a whole and include visual illustrations where possible in their presentations.

Finally draw from the presentations and discussion the key differentiating factors between mosaic artwork in the different the historical periods.

Media Matters

Screen the SPARK story on Laurel True and ask students to think about their reactions to her work. Invite students to share responses and support their reactions with specific references to the artwork shown.

Ask the group to consider the way Laurel True's artwork is represented and whether that impacts on how they view the work. Does it make a difference that they are viewing her work on TV rather than seeing it first hand?

Play the story a second time and ask students to think about the following questions. They may want to take brief notes as they watch.

Purpose + effect

- What is the purpose of the segment? (Is it intended to inform, persuade or entertain etc?)
- Does it achieve this purpose? How?
- What do you take away from it in terms of interest, emotional response?
- Does it leave you wanting to know more about Lauren True?

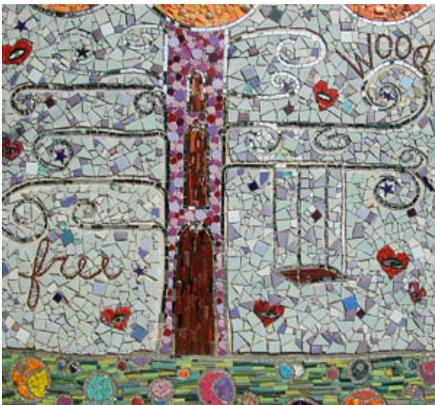
- Could this story be told differently and achieve a different effect? How?

Production: camera + editing

- How does the camera work involve you as the audience?
- How does the camera work contribute to the effect of the piece?
- Could it be shot differently and achieve a different effect?

Invite students to share their ideas and return to the question - does it make a difference that they are viewing her work on TV rather than seeing it first hand? Suggest that students visit her public artwork if they are able and review this question - <http://www.truemosaics.com/gallery.html>

The intention of the activity is for students to develop an understanding of the way choices are made in producing media “messages.” Conclude the exercise by asking them to write a two paragraph summary of the choices made in producing the SPARK piece on Laurel True and the impact this has on way the story is viewed.



Laurel True, *Free Wood*, mosaic. Oakland, California, located across from True Mosaic Studios. <http://www.truemosaics.com/gallery.html>

SPARKLER:

- * Take a tour of mosaics in San Francisco offered by SF Mosaic, including “Fractured and Fabulous! Mosaics, Murals and Vintage Tile of the Castro,” “Mambo Italiano: The Mosaics and Moxie of North Beach,” as well as a customized tours - <http://www.sfmosaic.com/tours/index.php>.

- * Encourage students to look for mosaics in malls, stores, churches, and other public buildings and share their observations with the class.

Making Mosaics

For a detailed step by step guide on making mosaics and a variety of making mosaics activities visit <http://www.thejoyofshards.co.uk/projects/index.shtml>

For notes on materials used in making mosaics, see <http://www.thejoyofshards.co.uk/projects/materials.shtml>

Explain to students that mosaics were used to decorate private homes in ancient Rome. Discuss how mosaic artists created decorative patterns by making different shapes or lines with tesserae - small tiles for use in mosaics.

Assemble material such as scissors, glue sticks, and various colors of construction paper torn into small pieces of uniform size (approximately 1/2" squares, and poster board cut into 8-1/2 x 11 sheets for use as backing. Also assemble materials such as pebbles, small glass colored stones, (available at garden centers and hardware stores) different types of dried beans in contrasting colors. Rice, beans, fish gravel, colored eggshells, or jellybeans are all possible tesserae, but paper chips are easier for younger children to handle.

Have students draw their pattern or template or use a photocopy of a design. Students can experiment with patterns by placing colored paper tesserae on the mosaic template and then glue the tesserae to the template when they are satisfied with the patterns they have created. Foil, ribbon, or fabric remnants can be added to enhance textures and effects.

For 9th -12th grades, show students examples of modern mosaics (see Resources for texts and Web sites). Encourage them to research modern artistic movements such as Art Nouveau, Art Deco or Cubism etc. and attempt to draw a template based on the stylistic of the movement. Alternatively students could choose an image they particularly like and attempt to base a mosaic on a photocopy or free hand drawing replicating the image. For examples of mosaic artwork create by students see <http://www.mosaicsupply.com/projectindex.html>.

Ensure students’ work is displayed and students have an opportunity to share observations about the process of making mosaics.

SPARKLER:

- * Suggest that students choose an everyday item. It could be a mirror, coffee mug, plate, hair brush etc. Encourage them to select interesting decorative materials such as shells, beads, glass or china fragments. Challenge them to transform the item using PVA glue to fix the pieces to their chosen object.

RELATED STANDARDS

VISUAL ARTS

Grade 4

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

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 6

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

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

Grade 8

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

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

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

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

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.

1.5 Analyze the material used by a given artist and describe how its use influences the meaning of the work.

Grades 9-12 – Advanced

1.0 Artistic Perception

1.6 Describe the use of the elements of art to express mood in one or more of their works of art.

2.0 Creative Production

2.4 Demonstrate in their own works of art a personal style and an advanced proficiency in communicating an idea, theme, or emotion.

2.5 Use innovative visual metaphors in creating works of 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/standards/vpa>.