

EDUCATOR GUIDE

Subject: Lawrence Ferlinghetti
Discipline: Visual Art (Painting)

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Still image from SPARK story, 2007

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

SUBJECT

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

GRADE RANGES

9-12 & 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 observational drawing and/or painting skills.
- Develop visual, written, listening and speaking skills through looking at, creating and talking about visual artworks.
- Develop an expressive visual vocabulary with which to address personal and/or social themes and ideas.

STORY SYNOPSIS

Spark visits Ferlinghetti in his studio to catch a glimpse of another side of his artistic practice as he prepares a series of works for a show at San Francisco's George Krevsky Gallery.

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 the work of Lawrence Ferlinghetti
- To provide context for the understanding of the Beat poetry movement
- To inspire students to write creatively and develop critical thinking skills in reading poetry

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

- TV & VCR with SPARK story about Lawrence Ferlinghetti
- 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

Over the past six decades Lawrence Ferlinghetti has established himself as one of the most renowned poets and publishers in the world. The founder of City Lights Books and noted Beat writer is commonly considered one of the greatest literary figures of the twentieth century. But Ferlinghetti has also been painting for almost as long as he has been writing. Spark visits Ferlinghetti in his studio to catch a glimpse of another side of his artistic practice as he prepares a series of works for a show at San Francisco’s George Krevsky Gallery.

Ferlinghetti first took up painting in 1948 while living in Paris on the G.I. Bill, at a time when French artists were heavily influenced by the work of Picasso and Spanish Surrealism. Like many American painters at the time, Ferlinghetti interpreted these influences to produce Abstract Expressionist works. But the artist quickly became dissatisfied with non-objective painting, abandoning it in favor of works that incorporated figuration as well as the written word.

Now in his late 80s, Ferlinghetti still paints fervently, and most mornings he can be found working in the Hunter’s Point Shipyard studio that he has kept since 1979. All the paintings that he is preparing for his show at George Krevsky combine provocative, sometimes mystical imagery with written words: some of his own, others from canonical wordsmiths such as Blake and Eliot.

Though he began painting early in his career, Ferlinghetti only began exhibiting his works in the 1980s after Krevsky approached the poet after a reading. After paying Ferlinghetti a great compliment on his writing, the artist responded that the gallery owner should see his paintings. Krevsky’s visit to Ferlinghetti’s studio began a relationship that has lasted more than twenty years.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti was born in Yonkers, New York in 1919. He graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill before serving as an officer in the US Navy during the Second World War. Returning to New York, Ferlinghetti received his master’s degree from Columbia University followed by a doctorate degree from the Sorbonne in Paris. While living in France, Ferlinghetti met the influential poet Kenneth Rexroth, who encouraged him to move to San Francisco, where he eventually came to be known as one of the founder of the Beat movement. In 1953, Ferlinghetti founded the City Lights bookstore with Peter D. Martin, and the publishing house in 1955. Ferlinghetti has since published more than 25 books of poetry and has won numerous literary awards

THE BIG PICTURE

Lawrence Ferlinghetti is one of the best-known figures associated with the Beat Generation, an American literary and artistic movement that emerged in the 1950s. Along with Allan Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, Gregory Corso, William S. Burroughs, and others, Ferlinghetti helped revitalize American prose and poetry. Beat writing introduced a looser, stream of consciousness style of writing largely inspired by the improvisations of bebop musicians like Charlie “Bird” Parker, Thelonious Monk, and Charles Mingus.

It is believed that Kerouac first coined the term “Beat Generation” in a 1948 conversation with John Clellon Holmes, a novelist associated with the movement. In one sense the word “beat” suggested exhaustion and defeat, a generation of counter-cultural youth thrashed by an American culture in the midst of the cold war, dead set on conformity. But Kerouac also understood the term as suggesting other, more optimistic meanings, as in upbeat, beatific, as well as the musical sense of being on the beat.

In fact, the most salient examples of Beat writing, such as Ginsberg's epic *Howl*, exemplify all these senses of the word. Ginsberg begins his poem proclaiming "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by/madness" but the predicament that he describes is peppered throughout with bursts of joyfulness, mystical revelation, and an ecstatic sense of freedom.

Though the Beat Generation is most commonly associated with literary achievements, the term actually describes the counter-culture of the 1950s more generally, including music and the visual arts. Perhaps the best visual analogue to Beat literature is Abstract Expressionism, a form of painting that like Beat writing is associated with improvisation and expressive means not tethered to convention. But while Abstract Expressionism was a form of painting most closely associated with critical and artistic circles around New York City, those involved with the Beat movement had centers all over the country and their work reflected local as well as national trends.

One of the more remarkable works of art associated with Beat culture is by Bay Area artist Jay DeFeo. DeFeo spent the better part of eight years working on a mammoth work of art called *The Rose*. A kind of hybrid painting/sculpture, *The Rose* is over ten feet tall and over seven and a half feet wide. DeFeo built up the surface of the canvas with gesso, plaster, and paint, before carving into the painting to create a kind of starburst design. When the piece was finally finished, it was so enormous that DeFeo had to widen the door to her studio to remove the work. Fellow Bay area Beat artist Bruce Connor documented the complicated process in his 1967 film *The White Rose*.



Jay DeFeo working on *The Rose*, 1958-66.

<http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/events/bancroftiana/112/images/defeo2.jpg>

Another artist closely associated with the Beat Generation is Wallace Berman, whose collages, publications, and gallery installations shared with Beat writing its obsessions with mysticism, sexuality, and ecstatic experience albeit usually drug induced. While many artists of the period created one-of-a-kind works of art such as paintings, Berman's pieces, such as *Silence Series #4* of 1967 were created using a mass reproduction technique called Verifax. This means of making images allowed Berman to create serial, reproducible images similar to those pioneered by Andy Warhol.



Wallace Berman, *Silence Series #4*, 1967.

<http://www.linternaute.com/sortir/sorties/exposition/los-angeles/diaporama/images/13.jpg>

SECTION III - RESOURCES

TEXTS

Cherkovski, Neeli. *Ferlinghetti: A Biography*.
Doubleday, 1979.

Ferlinghetti, Lawrence. *A Coney Island of the Mind*.
New Directions, 1968.

Phillips, Lisa, ed. *Beat Culture and the New America, 1950-1965*. Whitney Museum of America Art, 1995.

Silesky, Barry. *Ferlinghetti: The Artist in His Time*.
Warner Books, 1990.

Skau, Michael. *Constantly Risking Absurdity: The Writings of Lawrence Ferlinghetti*. Whitson, 1989.

Smith, Larry R. *Lawrence Ferlinghetti: Poet-at-Large*.
Southern Illinois University Press, 1983.

RESOURCES – WEB SITES

Ferlinghetti site including biography and
Bibliography
http://project1.caryacademy.org/echoes/poet_Lawrence_Ferlinghetti/DefaultFerlinghetti.htm

Ferlinghetti article from Wikipedia.org:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lawrence_Ferlinghetti

Beat Generation article from Wikipedia.org:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beat_generation

Abstract Expressionism article from Wikipedia.org:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abstract_expressionism

Audio interview with Ferlinghetti from 1988:
<http://wiredforbooks.org/lawrenceferlinghetti/>

City Lights Bookstore:
<http://www.citylights.com/>

George Krevsky Gallery:
<http://www.georgekrevskygallery.com/>

BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS

City Lights Bookstore:
261 Columbus Avenue at Broadway (North Beach)
San Francisco, California 94133
415.362.8193
Open daily from 10 A.M. to Midnight.

George Krevsy Gallery:
77 Geary St. 2nd Floor
San Francisco, CA 94108
(415) 397-9748
Tuesday - Saturday
11 am - 5:30 pm

The Beat Museum
540 Broadway (at Columbus)
San Francisco, CA 94133
1-800-537-6822
Tuesday – Sunday
10am – 10pm

SECTION IV – VOCABULARY

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

Avant-garde

Ahead of its time, modern, advanced, progressive
Often refers to a group of innovative artists, musicians, writers etc

Beat Poets

A radical/progressive circle of American poets and writers who were important in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They were part of a flourishing counterculture which challenged the values of the Establishment through their work, which articulated a deep-seated social and personal malaise as well as powerful humanitarian values. Writers such as Jack Kerouac's (*On the Road*, 1957), Allen Ginsberg (*Howl*, 1956), and William S. Burroughs (*Naked Lunch*, 1959) were founding members and the circle also included Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Neal Cassady, Gregory Corso, and Peter Orlovsky.

William Blake (1757-1827)

English poet, visionary, painter, and printmaker
Highly regarded in the history of poetry and the visual arts, although during his lifetime he was considered to be eccentric and his creativity went unrecognized.



Blake's "Newton" (1795).

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Blake#Dante.27s_Inferno

City Lights Booksellers and Publishers

City Lights was very much connected with the Beat Generation in the 60s and 70s and has been a center of activity for writers, intellectuals and artists since that era.

Robert Frost (1874 – 1963)

Successful and celebrated American poet who was born in San Francisco and associated with New England. His work expressed a rural sensibility inspired by New England and addressed social and philosophical themes and issues.

GI Bill

Signed by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to support war veterans in the United States, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, is commonly known as the GI Bill of Rights. Between 1944 and 1956, 7.8 million World War II veterans had been through an education or training program and 2.4 million veterans had been allocated home loans. The original GI Bill evolved into what is now known as the Montgomery GI Bill

Allen Ginsberg

Ginsberg was a leading figure in the American counter-culture movement during the second half of the 20th century and was considered to be a founding father of the Beat Generation. He was known for poems such as *Howl* and *Kaddish*. Among the avant-garde he used his poetry to express his plea for humanity, tolerance, and enlightenment.

New York Abstract Expressionism

Abstract Expressionism was an art movement that came to prominence after World War II in America and was the first American art movement to achieve international acclaim. The term was applied to American art in 1946 by the art critic Robert Coates, and referred to all types of non-geometric abstraction. There were two distinct groups within the movement: Color Field artists (Rothko, Newman, Still) who worked with blocks of color; and gestural painters like Pollock and De Kooning, who drew on Surrealism.

Obfuscates

Confuse or bewilder

Outsider art

Work that is generally created outside of the mainstream art world i.e. galleries or art schools. It refers to “raw” or untrained artists and was a term originally used by art critic Roger Cardinal in 1972 as an English version of Art Brut (translated as "Raw Art" or "Rough Art").

Provocateur

Agitator, campaigner

Surrealists

The Surrealist movement of visual art and literature emerged in Europe between World Wars I and II and grew out of the earlier Dada movement. Surrealists emphasized the world of the unconscious mind, drawing on the writings of Sigmund Freud, and they also celebrated self expression in reaction to the focus on "rationalism" that had guided European culture and politics in the past. The poet and critic André Breton was a major exponent of the movement, publishing "The Surrealist Manifesto" in 1924. Surrealism was a means of reuniting conscious and unconscious experiences so that the world of dream and fantasy would be joined to the everyday, rational world in "an absolute reality, a surreality." (Breton)

SECTION V – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

Beat Poetry

The Beat poets challenged the modernist literary conventions of the 1950s which were influenced by T. S. Eliot's formalist and objective approach to poetry. In contrast they celebrated a personal, lyrical, and strongly expressive style. See the following link for further background:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beat_Generation#History

Search your local library or the internet to find one of the Beat writers' poems and select one to share with students. Be mindful of the fact that some of the poems may contain words or phrases that are inappropriate for students. Distribute copies of the poems, then introduce the brief history of the Beat poets to the group.

Invite a volunteer to read the poem to the class. Ask students to jot down their responses to the poem in terms of:

- dominant mood or tone
- key ideas
- social reflections or comment
- controversial or challenging content

Ask students to discuss their responses in small groups before sharing thoughts with the group as a whole.

As an extension to this activity, arrange for the group to listen to one of the poets on a CD, DVD, or on the Internet. This time ask students to respond to the emotive or affective language used by the poet – those words around which the emotional content or message pivots. Challenge students to identify the techniques that the artists use to communicate their message(s), such as figurative language, words and concepts that evoke emotions, and/or elliptical language that place the listener in a certain position (invoking guilt, patriotism, empathy, etc.).

Researching Beat Poets

Suggest that students research the Beat writers and artists, and explore the era that produced them. They should also collect examples of each writer's work.

Working in groups, students should choose one of the following artists to research:

Lawrence Ferlinghetti
Jack Kerouac
Neal Cassady
Gary Snyder
William Burroughs
Allen Ginsberg

Invite each group to share their findings and to read a sample of the artist's work. Explore the ways in which these writers critique society and express the sentiments of a radical counterculture.

Draw the discussion together by examining some of the key characteristics of the Beat movement and how the work of these artists influenced and reflected the mood of their generation.

Close reading exercise

For students who are interested in taking the previous activity further, introduce them to close reading strategies. Working on the same poems or choosing other examples, invite students to read the poems more closely and critically.

Working in pairs, ask students to read the poem they have chosen carefully and comment on the author's style and literary techniques. They should look for the impact of the following devices: Tone, use of irony, figurative language, allusion, diction, mood, imagery and symbolism, point of view, voice, understatement and overstatement, repetition, time and sequence, and poetic elements, such as sound.

As in the previous activity, the relationship between literature and its historical period is important both in terms of content and social concerns, but also in terms of style. This is especially true of the Beats who were reacting against the formalism and modernist elements prevailing in poetry at the time.

RELATED STANDARDS – LANGUAGE ARTS

Grade 11 & 12 Reading

3.3. Analyze the ways in which irony, tone, mood, the author's style, and the "sound" of language achieve specific rhetorical or aesthetic purposes or both. Analyze ways in which poets use imagery, personification, figures of speech, and sounds to evoke readers' emotions.

2.5 Recite poems, selections from speeches, or dramatic soliloquies with attention to performance details to achieve clarity, force, and aesthetic effect and to demonstrate an understanding of the meaning.

SPARKLERS:

* Ask students to write down 4-5 adjectives that best describe their feelings about society and to use these words as the basis for a short poem or piece (50-75 words) about the world around them, or city in which they live.

Suggest that they construct their poem in the style of a Beat poet and encourage them to choose music to accompany their poem – especially a jazz piece or other music.

Invite students to share their work with the class if they feel comfortable doing so.

City Lights and North Beach

Students can tour City Lights bookstore online at

<http://www.citylights.com/His/CLtour.html>

Alternatively suggest that they visit the store and then follow the walking tour of North Beach to glean a sense of the Beat Generation in San Francisco, the cafés and bars, the homes of Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti, and the clubs and venues of the Beats.

Having explored the elements of Ferlinghetti's neighborhood, ask students to consider the elements of a counter culture.

What is a "counterculture"?

- Is there a similar counterculture that they could identify today?
- What factors make it "a counterculture"?
- Are there cultural, political, religious elements that distinguish this group or circle?
- Are there a range of cultural forms e.g. music, art, literature through which their ideas/values etc are expressed?

Beat Visual Artists

Screen the SPARK segment. In this episode, Lawrence Ferlinghetti talks about having wanted to paint like Abstract Expressionist artists when he began painting in the late 1940s. He then developed his own style, becoming a lyrical, subjective and deeply expressive painter.

Project examples of the work of other Beat artists such as Jay DeFeo, Bruce Connor, and Joan Brown onto a screen in the classroom and invite students to comment on the work. Looking at the artists' work, ask students to respond to the following questions:

- Why they identified as Beat artists?
- What are their concerns?
- Is there a vision of the world in their work?

Beat Museum Poetry Contest

* Encourage students to enter the Beat Museum 2007 Poetry Contest which takes place every month.

<http://www.thebeatmuseum.org/events.htm>

RELATED STANDARDS VISUAL ARTS

Grades 9-12, Advanced

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing

4.2 Identify the intentions of artists creating contemporary works of art and explore the implications of those intentions.

5.0 Connection, Relations & Applications

5.2 Compare and contrast works of art, probing beyond the obvious and identifying psychological content found in the symbols and images.

Grades 9-12, Proficient

1.0 Artistic Perception Impact of Media Choice

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.

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



For more information about California Educational Content Standards, visit the CA Dept. of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp>