SUBJECT
Visual Art (Painting)

GRADE RANGES
K-12 & Post-secondary

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS
Visual Arts & Language Arts

OBJECTIVE
- 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.
- Develop observational and representational skills by looking at and reproducing images of people, places and things accurately and thoughtfully.

STORY SYNOPSIS
Spark visits with acclaimed Chicago-based artist Kerry James Marshall as he prepares Visible Means of Support, two specially-commissioned murals for SFMOMA’s Haas Atrium.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES
- To introduce students to the work of Kerry James Marshall.
- To provide context for the understanding of “Revised History Painting.”
- To inspire students to think critically about how history is represented and about how Kerry James Marshall addresses social issues through his art practice.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED
Spark story about Kerry James Marshall on VHS or DVD, or a computer with Internet access, streaming capability, navigation software, video projector, speakers and a sound card.

MATERIALS NEEDED
- Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers
- Pencils, pens, and paper
- Drawing materials – colored pencils, markers, etc.

INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED
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.
CONTENT OVERVIEW
Chicago-based artist Kerry James Marshall’s large-scale artworks participate in the tradition of history painting – larger than life depictions of historical events. But where traditionally history paintings have often relayed official accounts of nationhood, Marshall uses his work to bring untold and counternarratives to light. His work might be considered as revised or re-imagined history painting. Spark visits with Marshall as he works with San Francisco’s Precita Eyes Muralists as they prepare Visible Means of Support, two specially commissioned murals for SFMOMA’s Haas Atrium.

Marshall’s sense of social responsibility guides his depictions of African-American figures often absent in art institutions. His museum pieces place African-Americans front and center in an array of situations that range from idyllic romantic scenarios to scenes of leaders from key historical events, like the Civil Rights Movement. The idea is to present African-Americans in the full range of human experience.

Often emphatically depicted in deep shades of black, Marshall’s figures stand in stark contrast to their surroundings. These renderings have been controversial for some, but for Marshall, the decision to portray his figures in this manner is both aesthetic and political. Their absolute blackness lends a pictorial power that demands that the viewer pay attention to them.

In this sense, the two murals at SFMOMA are a departure from Marshall’s usual style. The two enormous panels, each measuring 27 by 32 feet, represent what on the surface appear to be standard depictions of American history: Mount Vernon and Monticello, the estates of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, respectively. But while Marshall’s usual strategy is to dramatically announce his African-American figures, upon first glance these scenes appear to be entirely absent of figures, aside from the large anamorphic renderings of Washington and Jefferson. Upon closer examination, it becomes clear that Marshall has employed visual trickery to embed a series of figures in the scene – images of the African-American slaves that supported these plantations. They aren’t apparent immediately, but as one looks closer, they emerge everywhere: in the trees, the sky, the flowers, the field, the water, in the field, and even in more subtle, hidden places: in one section, Marshall has included connect-the-dots images that form African-American figures, but even the dots themselves are small icons of African-American heads.

Kerry James Marshall, Visible Means of Support, 2009

To accomplish this optical trickery, Marshall has borrowed a visual language from pre-school activity books — at once universally recognized and entirely unusual for history painting. The flat, un-modulated colors and heavy outlines suggest children’s coloring books, as do the connect-the-dots figures and hidden imagery that populate the murals. It’s an invitation with a simple message: engage with this history, it’s open, it’s not difficult, and can even be fun.

Kerry James Marshall was educated at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles, where he received his BFA, and later, an honorary doctorate in 1999. Marshall has shown his work at several international venues including the 2007 and 1997 editions of Documenta, the 2003 Venice Biennale, the 1999/2000 Carnegie International, and the 1997 Whitney Biennial. Among
the many honors he has received are a MacArthur Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts Visual Arts Fellowship, a Wexner Center Residency Award, a Skowhegan Medal for Painting. Marshall’s work is represented in major private and museum collections throughout the world including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

THE BIG PICTURE

History painting was originally a European form of painting that depicts scenes from history, mythology or religion. Though scenes like these had been made for centuries, the term was only introduced in the 18th century, by theoretician and official court historian to Louis XIV, André Félibien. Félibien devised a hierarchy of painting subjects that was quickly accepted by the French Royal Academy, placing history painting at the top, followed by genre painting (scenes of everyday life), portraits, landscapes, and finally still-lifes. History painting was considered the most noble of these subjects for art because it combined all the other subject matter and mobilized them in order to communicate a narrative.

The function of history painting was not only to represent historical, mythological, or religious accounts, but to offer allegories of modern life, in order to artfully convey a moral or intellectual lesson. An example of this is Jacques-Louis David’s 1784 canvas The Oath of the Horatii.

David depicts here an obscure scene from classical antiquity that tells of the Horatii triplets who are called upon to fight against the Curatii triplets in order to settle a dispute between Rome and Alba. The two families are related through marriage, but this does not deter the brothers on the left side of the canvas who salute the Roman Republic and stoically accept the swords presented to them by their father at the center of the composition. The women to the right visibly grieve not only for their brothers who go off to face death, but for their Curatii husbands and fiancés as well, who the Horatii will be fighting. The account relates that once the Horatii returned victorious to find their sister weeping for her lost beloved, they killed her too, considering her a traitor to Rome.

The painting operates at a number of levels. It depicts the apocryphal historical event of brothers called upon to sacrifice their lives in order to avoid a full-scale war with another nation. At an allegorical level, it stresses the value of nation over all else, including bonds of kinship and even life itself. At another level, it entrenches gender roles, depicting the Horatii men as the noble, unflinching recipients of the republic’s call to them, and the women as emotionally driven, and therefore unable to recognize the apparently greater good that the men serve. But at another level, David’s painting came to be understood as a very modern allegory, appearing as it did in the years leading up to the French Revolution. The bare, linear neo-classical style in which it was rendered came to be seen as a rejection of the excesses of the French monarchy, whose official style was ornately Baroque. The call to arms represented in the Horatii then takes on another significance — a rallying cry in support of the emerging French Republic.

In recent years, history painting has gone through a renewal, as artists like Kerry James Marshall reinvestigate its forms to represent perspectives often omitted from the historical record. The German artist Anselm Kiefer, for example, reexamines history painting in his work, creating enormous canvases that broach thorny topics from German history, especially the Holocaust. Many of his representations borrow from the imagery of the Third Reich, while employing a neo-expressionist style that conveys the horror of the period. His 1981 canvas Innenraum shows the interior of Nazi architect Albert Speer’s chancellery. The vastness of the canvas, the stark
handling of light and dark, and the thick buildup of the surface help make the image appear as a nightmare, not only of the Third Reich itself but the weight of that history on German society.

An example of more recent work concerned with historical narrative is that of Kara Walker. Merging the folklore and imagery associated with the pre-Civil War American South with an almost surreal sensibility, Walker’s elaborate cutout black silhouettes recount the horror of slavery. Often borrowing images from historical textbooks, Walker uncovers stereotypical images of African-American slaves, with a special attention to images of women. Her murals mobilize this racist and misogynist imagery into horrific accounts of violence, degradation, and brutality.

RESOURCES – TEXTS


RESOURCES – WEB SITES

Art:21 video clips: http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/marshall/clip2.html

Art:21 web video extras on YouTube:
On Museums http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5mIklSZl5s
“Black Romantic” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyAZKE95xe8
Being an Artist http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwcldfbTVs

Kerry James Marshall speaking at the Traveling the Spaceways symposium:
Part 1: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZg3AYtjKog
Part 2: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eTwGlJnQ74h8&feature=related
Resources – Web sites (Continued)

Kerry James Marshall lecturing at Otis College:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXzYrkFteMY

Interview with Kerry James Marshall:
http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug01/westkaemper/callalo/marshall.html

Two article about the work of Kerry James Marshall from Frieze Magazine:
http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/project_america/
http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/kerry_james_marshall/

Article about Kerry James Marshall’s solo show at the Miami Art Museum from Resource Library Magazine:
http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/4aa/4aa279.htm

SFMOMA interactive page featuring Kerry James Marshall’s murals:
http://www.sfmoma.org/multimedia/interactive_features/79

SFMOMA article about Visible Means of Support:

Definition of History Painting from the Tate Glossary of art terms:
http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=134

Encyclopedia Britannica entry on Kerry James Marshall:

Interview with Kerry James Marshall from Bad At Sports:

Article by the artist about his Rythm Mastr comic series:
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_10_38/ai_65071272

VIDEO RESOURCES


BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS

SFMOMA
151 Third Street, San Francisco, CA 94103
415 357 4000
Closed on Wednesdays
http://www.sfmoma.org/pages/visit
**Accumulate**
Collect, amass, build up, accrue

**Civil Rights movement**
In the 1950s and 60s, African American organizations in the United States campaigned and struggled for economic and political rights. They fought against racial discrimination, and for the right to vote and be recognized as equal citizens before the law. By 1966, the Black Power movement grew out of the Civil Rights movement, incorporating a militant wing which demanded social equality, entitlement and dignity, as well as freedom from oppression. Many white individuals and organizations aligned themselves with this struggle. The movement continued well into the 1970s. Prominent figures of the African-American Civil Rights movement include Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rosa Parks.

**Contemplative**
Thoughtful, reflective, pensive, deep in thought

**Dialogue**
Discussion or conversation, exchange of ideas

**Embed**
To make something an integral part, to implant

**Foreground**
To position at the forefront, in full view, make of central importance.

**Freedom fighters**
This term is used in relation to people who are fighting peacefully or through armed struggle, to win their freedom or gain freedom or liberation for others. It can be a controversial term since opponents often characterize freedom fighters as terrorists, if they oppose the cause. Note the phrase "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter".

**Installation**
The combining of elements into a singular artwork that is only located specifically in one place; an 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.

**Mural**
A wall painting or fresco

**Rhetorical**
Grandiose or flamboyant language used for effect. In relation to artwork, it suggests images that are not intended to be literal, but employed as metaphor, allegory or symbol.

**Romantic**
Loving, tender, amorous

**Template**
A model pattern or stencil, cut-out

**Urban**
Of the city or town
Finding and Seeking – A Visual Arts Game

Kerry James Marshall has collaborated with Precita Eyes Mural Arts Center to create two murals in the Atrium at SFMOMA. He is the first artist to create works specifically intended for this public space. The murals depict Monticello and Mount Vernon, the homes of American presidents, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington.

Play the SPARK video and pause on the final frames which depict the two landscapes – Visible Means of Support: Monticello and Visible Means of Support: Mount Vernon. You may also visit the SFMOMA website at http://www.sfmoma.org/multimedia/interactive_features/79# and launch the interactive feature to view a digital image of the first landscape. Project the image onto a screen in the classroom for the whole class to view.

Ask students to look carefully at the work and elicit initial responses to these representations of celebrated sites in American history. Guide students through the visual game of finding and seeking that the artist challenges us to play.

Delve, as far as visibility allows, into the images embedded in the landscapes and ask students to note their answers to the following points:

- What they see clearly in the landscapes.
- What they see in the shadows.
- What they see in the water behind Mount Vernon.
- What happens when they connect the dots in the paintings?
- Why the presidential figures are compressed and elongated?
- What impact does this optical device have on the viewer? Why is the perspective distorted?
- How would they characterize the style of the paintings?

- Having analyzed the elements that make up the visual organization in the paintings, as well the less obvious devices that are hidden in the shadows, discuss the artist’s intentions and the meaning of each piece. What is the artist telling or suggesting to his audience?

Ensure students address issues about visibility and history, i.e. the way history represents the powerful but omits others from the narrative, such as the black populations who were rendered invisible in representations of American history.

"...What I set out to do was to develop a figure or a form that would represent that condition of invisibility, where you had an incredible presence, but there was a way in which you could sometimes be seen and not seen at the same time.”

Kerry James Marshall, Visible Means of Support: Mount Vernon, 2009; acrylic on wall; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; © Kerry James Marshall; photo: Henrik Kam, courtesy SFMOMA
Conclude by asking students to post a comment responding to the work of Kerry James Marshall on the PBS ART: 21 discussion forum at http://discussions.pbs.org/viewforum.php?f=229&sid=4bfa1d1ac1c3b558949614b74a6970a or create a class web page which hosts resources and comments about the artist on Google Sites at http://www.google.com/sites/overview.html

SPARKLERS (More activities to extend learning):
* Encourage students to visit SFMOMA to view the murals in person. Consider arranging the visit through SFMOMA’s Education Department, which offers educational materials and interactive features that supplement the Art in the Atrium program.
* Research educational programs offered by the Precita Eyes Mural Center and share the program with students who may enjoy these classes. Information at http://www.precitaeyes.org/classes.html

History and Identity
“You can’t be born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1955 and grow up in South Central (Los Angeles) near the Black Panthers’ headquarters, and not feel like you’ve got some kind of social responsibility.”

Marshall’s work is infused with history – the history of African Americans in the United States and their struggle against discrimination at every level in society. His work is about racial identity, civil rights and honoring those who fought for visibility, recognition and political rights for African Americans.

Ask students to look carefully at the artwork shown in the SPARK video and, working in pairs, respond to the following questions.

- How does Kerry James Marshall represent African American identity in his art?
- How does he represent “blackness” i.e. being black, in his work?
- How would you describe his style? What words come to mind as descriptors?
- What is his view of the representation of the romantic experiences of black people?
- How does his work incorporate a critical edge? Reference examples from the SPARK episode. What is he challenging?

- Is his work important? Why?

Allow time to discuss students’ responses in the whole group.

“Untitled (Altgeld Gardens)” 1995
Acrylic and collage on canvas, 78 1/2 x 103 inches. Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, KS
Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery, New York
From Art: 21 at http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/marshall/

Move on to the historical context Kerry James Marshall draws on in his work. Ask students to research the following topics and respond to the questions:

- What was the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s?
- Who were some of the leaders or key activists in Civil Rights organizations?
- What did they stand for?
- What were they seeking to achieve?
- What impact did this movement have in America?

For detailed background information, refer students to the timeline at http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/timeline/civil_01.html

Draw out the importance of this history in understanding the work of Kerry James Marshall. Are all artists a product of their history, whether they are conscious of it or not?

Creating a Mural
Inspired by Kerry James Marshall’s Art in the Atrium murals at SFMOMA, fifteen teenagers from three Oakland high schools are designing and producing a collaborative mural in Oakland’s DeFremery Park. They are responding to the themes
in Marshall’s work, focusing on history, community and storytelling.

In the spirit of this project suggest that students choose a theme for a collaborative mural – a theme that resonates with them. Discuss their ideas and explore how they would like these ideas to be represented. Clarify with them the message they want to convey, why they think the message is important, and how the mural will convey the message in form and in content.

Invite students to reflect on and analyze Kerry James Marshall’s aesthetic in his murals, but emphasize that they should develop their own style and use the collaborative process to find this voice.

Assemble materials including sketch paper, such as plain white 8.5” x 11” paper, large mural paper, pencils, erasers, markers, color pencils, oil crayons, pastels, or paint. If possible, provide additional materials for painting a large mural: charcoal, paint and paintbrushes, sign painters’ large carbon paper, and other art supplies (materials will vary according to each class’s mural project).

Follow the process modeled by the Oakland teenagers — encourage students to try out designs on practice sheets, before working on the composite drawing for their mural. All the drawings should be placed on the mural wall mock-up before the mural itself is begun.

The class can now color the mural, using markers, color pencils, oil crayons, pastels, or paint. Ensure that all students participate in and contribute to the process to the best of their ability.

For the painting of an actual mural, a minimum of four hours is necessary for a small mural (up to approximately 8 feet by 4 feet) with an uncomplicated design.

For detailed lesson plans on designing and painting a mural, and collaborating to create a pictorial, collective voice, see, Murals: Heritage on the Walls, developed by Claire Bain at http://uw.kqed.org/edresources/plans/Murals2.pdf

**Coloring Activity**

For younger students, play the SPARK episode and, to focus their viewing, ask them to look carefully at Kerry James Marshall’s use of color, shape, light, and shadow in his work.

Discuss their responses and then project the mural designs, included on the final pages of this guide, onto a screen in the classroom. Print out copies of the two designs and distribute them to students.

Select questions from the Finding and Seeking – A Visual Arts Game activity, especially focusing on: What happens when they connect the dots in the paintings?


Using the printed designs, have students connect the dots, and as the slaves that worked on the plantations become visible, explore Kerry James Marshall’s ideas with the class. This is a playful activity, but it also has symbolic meaning. Guide students to understand what Kerry James Marshall is saying about history and representation here.

Provide color pencils, oil crayons, pastels, or paint and invite students to choose their personal color palettes and color in the mural designs. How does choice of color impact the final effect?

When students have finished the coloring activity, display their work on one wall in the classroom hanging their designs together as a collection. Return to the question: How does choice of color impact the final effect?
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.

Find more KQED & PBS arts educational programs and view our community gallery of student artwork at http://www.KQED.org/ArtsEd.

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/.

RELATED STANDARDS - VISUAL ARTS

Grade 8
4.0 Aesthetic Valuing
1.1 Use artistic terms when describing the intent and content of works of art.
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.
4.4 Develop and apply a set of criteria as individuals or in groups to assess and critique works of art.
4.5 Present a reasoned argument about the artistic value of a work of art and respond to the arguments put forward by others within a classroom setting.

Grades 9-12, Proficient
1.0 Artistic Perception Impact of Media Choice
1.5 Analyze the material used by a given artist and describe how its use influences the meaning of the work.

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.
4.0 Aesthetic Valuing
4.1 Articulate how personal beliefs, cultural traditions, and current social, economic, and political contexts influence the interpretation of the meaning or message in a work of art.

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.
5.2 Compare and contrast works of art, probing beyond the obvious and identifying psychological content found in the symbols and images.
1.0 Artistic Perception
6 Describe the use of the elements of art to express mood in one or more of their works of art.