

## Jasper Johns: Symbolism, Modern Art, Collage, American Flag, Personal Flag

How do artists use elements of art to create symbolism?  
What kind of effects can collage create?

### LESSON OVERVIEW/OBJECTIVES

Students will work with various art supplies to create symbolism with objects and words. Students will explore the technique of collage and how it can impact their work with symbolism. Additionally students will learn about Jasper Johns whose work is known for symbolism, pop art, cross hatching and collage. Students will study the American Flag and then create their own personal flag and define what their personal flag symbolizes about them.

### KEY IDEAS THAT CONNECT TO VISUAL ARTS CORE CURRICULUM:

Based on Utah State Visual Arts Core Curriculum Requirements (3rd Grade)

**Standard 1: The student will explore and refine the application of media, techniques, and artistic processes.**

**Objective 1: Explore a variety of art materials while learning new techniques and processes.**

- a. Practice using skills for beginning drawings.
- d. Make one color dominant in a painting.

**Objective 2: Use a broad range of art materials in supporting the visual arts needs at school.**

- a. Use as many art materials as possible to help decorate the room.

**Objective 3: Handle art materials in a safe and responsible manner.**

- a. Ventilate the room to avoid inhaling fumes from art materials.
- b. Dispose and/or recycle waste art materials properly.
- c. Clean and put back to order art making areas after projects.
- d. Respect other students' artworks as well as one's own.

**Standard 2 : The student will analyze, reflect on, and apply the structures of art.**

**Objective 1: Analyze and reflect on works of art by their elements and principles**

- a. Determine how artists create dominance in their work; e.g., size, repetition, and contrast.
- b. Examine significant works of art and point out how the artists have created illusion or feeling of depth.

**Objective 2: Create works of art using the elements and principles.**

- a. Identify dominant elements

**Standard 3: The student will choose and evaluate artistic subject matter, themes, symbols, ideas, meanings, and purposes.**

**Objective 1: Explore possible content and purposes in significant works of art**

- a. Explain possible meanings or interpretations of some significant works of art.

**Objective 2: Discuss, evaluate, and choose symbols, ideas, subject matter, meanings, and purposes for their own artworks.**

- a. Group significant works of art according to theme or subject matter
- b. Judge which works of art most clearly communicate through the use of symbols.
- c. Create symbols in art that express individual or group interests.
- d. Create a work of art that uses a similar subject matter, symbol, idea, and/or meaning found in a significant work of art.

## **INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:**

Students will:

- Understand that the elements of art are the building blocks for creating works of art.
- Recognize qualities of symbolism and be able to create symbolic art and write about it.
- Experiment with various media and tools to communicate ideas and emotions.
- Learn about the artist Jasper Johns and his work.
- Learn about composition, symbols, and collage.
- Utilize the topic of the American Flag to learn about symbolism both in art and in writing.

## **FOR THE TEACHER**

### **Looking and Seeing**

First show the students pictures of the American Flag and have them discuss its composition, color, texture etc. Count the number of stars and stripes. Ask the students to talk about what the flag means to them? If they were to create their own flag, what would it look like?

Some things to notice when looking at Jasper John's artwork:

- Johns uses thick paint and an encaustic method of adding texture, depth and dimension (look at flag images).
- Johns repeats images such as flags to offer different renderings and interpretations of the American Flag. He does this with color, texture, collage and multiple images in one painting.
- Johns shows the advent of Pop Art with his stacked flags, target and numbers. Observe what is unique about these paintings comparing and contrasting composition, color, texture, objects, symbolism.
- Look closely at the detailed image of John's flag to see the collage work underneath the paint. How does that affect the painting and the viewer's response to the art?

## **VISUALS**



**Jasper Johns' Flags**

**Pop Art three Flags**

**White Flag**

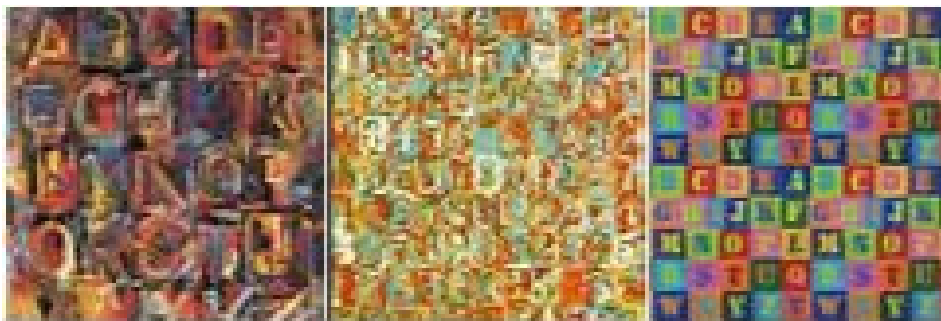


**Flag Detail**



**Pop Art Target**

**Letters**





Map



Student created flag collage

## SUPPLIES

- Images and art samples of Jasper Johns presented in this lesson
- Images of and/or a real American Flag
- Color Wheel Chart - to remain in classroom or accessible for students
- Map of the United States - to remain in classroom or accessible for students
- Art pencils H& B, markers
- Large drawing paper (16" x 20" or 11" x 17" or 8.5" x 11"). One large sheet and several smaller sheets of paper per student
- Acrylic paints
- Different sizes and styles of paint brushes (bristle, foam, sponge, etc.)
- Collage materials such as magazines, newspapers, old stamps, postcards, ribbons etc.
- Scissors
- Glue
- Writing paper and pens/pencils

## VOCABULARY

**Encaustic - Encaustic painting**, also known as **hot wax painting**, involves using heated **beeswax** to which colored **pigments** are added. The liquid or paste is then applied to a surface—usually prepared wood, though **canvas** and other materials are often used.

**Abstract:** Artwork presented in a highly stylized manner that stresses the elements and principles of art. This artwork is based on recognizable objects, but often the objects are so distorted they are almost nonrepresentational.

**Dada** - an early-20th-century international movement in art, literature, music, and film, repudiating and mocking artistic and social conventions and emphasizing the illogical and absurd.

**Pop Art** - Pop Art was a style of modern art in the 1960's that used the imagery of mass-media, mass-production and mass-culture as a critical or ironic comment on traditional fine art values.

**Collage** - is a technique of an art production, primarily used in the **visual arts**, where the artwork is made from an **assemblage** of different forms, thus creating a new whole. A collage may sometimes include **magazine and newspaper clippings**, **ribbons**, **paint**, bits of colored or handmade papers, portions of other artwork or texts, **photographs** and other **found objects**, glued to a piece of paper or canvas.

**Crosshatching** - is drawing two layers of hatching at right-angles in order create a mesh-like pattern. Used in various drawing mediums for textural and tonal effects.

**Symbolism** - is the practice or art of using an object or a word to represent an abstract idea. An action, person, place, word, or object can all have a symbolic meaning.

## INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN

### Quick Writing and/or discussion

Before beginning the lesson, show both the American Flag and Jasper John's paintings of the American Flag. Give them a few minutes to respond to the images. Encourage comparisons and contrasting statements as well as descriptions of what they see. Use any of the following prompts:

- How do you think the artist made this artwork?
- What details do you notice about the paintings?
- If you were to write a title for each of the flags, what would they be?
- How do the paintings of the American Flag make you feel in comparison with the actual American Flag?

### Introduction

Introduce your students to concepts of symbolism, collage, modern art and pop art. These ideas may be new to your students but you have the visual art pieces to help explain the concepts. Explain that artists can use objects (real or imaginary) words and letters to represent an abstract idea such as the American flag. Its how artists represent these objects or words that showcase the style of art and elements of art that were used in the making of the work. Tell students that you will be discussing Jasper Johns and the American Flag. They will be creating their own personal flag using any colors and mediums available to them. They will also be writing what their own Flag symbolizes and means.

### About the Artist

**Jasper Johns** (born 1930, Georgia), American painter and sculptor, helped break the hold of abstract expressionism on modern American art and cleared the way for pop art. Versatile in several different artistic fields, he has given the world sculptures, lithographs, and prints, as well as paintings. His art was influenced by Marcel Duchamp of the Dada movement. Johns attempted to transform common objects into art by placing them in an art context. Johns worked with "encaustic", a method that combines pigments and hot wax before they are applied to the surface of a painting. He embraced the experimental, the accidental and the everyday aesthetic approach that became very influential in contemporary arts. His flags and target images brought forth the pop art movement in the 1950's. Other recurring motifs of Johns are his beautifully delineated numerals, letters and maps of the United States. He is known for attaching literal elements such as rulers and brooms to the canvas, creating unique collage. He is also famous for his abstract crosshatch paintings of the 1970's. In the 1980's he used recurring motifs as symbols to engage the viewer.

### History of the American Flag

***For more than 200 years, the American flag has been the symbol of our nation's strength and unity. It's been a source of pride and inspiration for millions of citizens. And the American Flag has been a prominent icon in our national history. Here are the highlights of its unique past.***

On January 1, 1776, the Continental Army was reorganized in accordance with a Congressional resolution which placed American forces under George Washington's control. On that New Year's Day the Continental Army was laying siege to Boston which had been taken over by the British Army. Washington ordered the Grand Union flag hoisted above his base at Prospect Hill. It had 13 alternate red and white stripes and the British Union Jack in the upper left-hand corner (the canton).

In May of 1776, Betsy Ross reported that she sewed the first American flag.

On June 14, 1777, in order to establish an official flag for the new nation, the Continental Congress passed the first Flag Act: "Resolved, That the flag of the United States be made of thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new Constellation."

Between 1777 and 1960, Congress passed several acts that changed the shape, design and arrangement of the flag and allowed for additional stars and stripes to be added to reflect the admission of each new state.

- Act of January 13, 1794 - provided for 15 stripes and 15 stars after May 1795.
- Act of April 4, 1818 - provided for 13 stripes and one star for each state, to be added to the flag on the 4th of July following the admission of each new state, signed by President Monroe.
- Executive Order of President Taft dated June 24, 1912 - established proportions of the flag and provided for arrangement of the stars in six horizontal rows of eight each, a single point of each star to be upward.
- Executive Order of President Eisenhower dated January 3, 1959 - provided for the arrangement of the stars in seven rows of seven stars each, staggered horizontally and vertically.
- Executive Order of President Eisenhower dated August 21, 1959 - provided for the arrangement of the stars in nine rows of stars staggered horizontally and eleven rows of stars staggered vertically.

**Today the flag consists of thirteen horizontal stripes, seven red alternating with 6 white. The stripes represent the original 13 colonies, the stars represent the 50 states of the Union. The colors of the flag are symbolic as well: Red symbolizes Hardiness and Valor, White symbolizes Purity and Innocence and Blue represents Vigilance, Perseverance and Justice.**

### Observe: Look and Discuss

Ask students to look closely at the American Flag as well as all of John's flag paintings to include images contained in this lesson. Visual Thinking Strategies (vtshome.org) is a highly effective method for facilitating productive conversations about art with your students and introducing new vocabulary in a meaningful way. Following the conclusion of this initial exploration of the work, you may wish to revisit certain concepts in more depth using some of the questions below:

- What do you see in the pictures of the flags?
- Name the colors you see and identify the ones you see the most. What comes to mind when you see those colors?
- What shapes do you see? Do they repeat?
- Do the shapes look flat or dimensional?
- What patterns do you see?
- Describe the texture of the paintings as well as the flag. What is the surface like?

Ask the students to interpret the paintings and the flag. What do they think the images express, represent or symbolize? Make a list of these things on the board. Talk about the history of the American flag and what it symbolizes. Talk about Jasper Johns and his representations of the flag. Ask them to start thinking about their own flag that they will make and what it will symbolize.

### Create: Your own Personal Flag and write about its meaning

1. Review the history of the American Flag. Given the symbolism of the flag, ask each student to think about what would be important to have on their own personal flag. Have them make a list and think about what symbols they could use to represent their ideas. Have them decide what shape their flag will be.
2. On their paper have the students draw the shape of their flag. Once that is done, have them start to draw the symbols they would like to include in their flag.
3. Introduce the idea of collage and how each student can use materials to add collage to their work. Have them pick some things from the supplies to cut out and glue on their paper anywhere that they choose. Tell them they can either be on top of the paint they will use or underneath it like John's work.
4. Have students glue down collage pieces in the manner they choose. Talk about composition and the symbols they are working to create. Once this is done, introduce the paints and markers available to each student to finish creating their flag.
5. Remind students about color and how important their choices are as colors make us feel certain ways when we see them.

6. Once they are complete, give each student a piece of paper and ask them to describe their flag and what it means to them. They can discuss the color, composition, texture, symbolism etc.

7. Allow students the rest of class to work on finishing their pieces. When finished, students should write their name, age, grade, teacher name and school name on the back of the art work from the label provided. Students must assist instructor with proper clean up.

8. Volunteer mounts artwork and collects writings for display and to distribute to American Vets on Veterans Day.

### Reflect

Arrange students' work on tables or desks and give them a few minutes to look at each other's work. As a group, discuss the different art processes and symbols. What do some of the examples bring to mind? What do they think some of the flags represent? If students are comfortable, they can explain their flags to the group.

Have students respond to one of the following prompts•

The best thing about this activity was \_\_\_\_\_.

- It was hard for me when I had to \_\_\_\_\_.
- Next I would like to experiment with \_\_\_\_\_.

### Lesson Extensions

#### Visual Arts and Writing

- Ask students to choose another historical symbol and create their own version of it using the techniques explored in this lesson plan.
- Encourage students to continue working with one of the media techniques on an additional sheet of paper.
- Have students write a poem, lyric, or short piece based on something they created in this lesson.

### History

Have students pick a historical event and write about it and create symbols to represent that event.

### Supplemental Materials

[http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Jasper\\_Johns.aspx](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Jasper_Johns.aspx)  
Crichton, Michael, Jasper Johns, Harry N. Abrams, 1977.

### School/ Teacher Participation

- Identify where you see an American Flag. What does that mean to you?
- How many flags are at your school?
- What do you think it would look like if you replaced them with your flag?
- What would it mean?