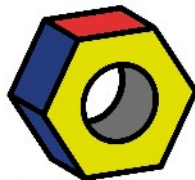
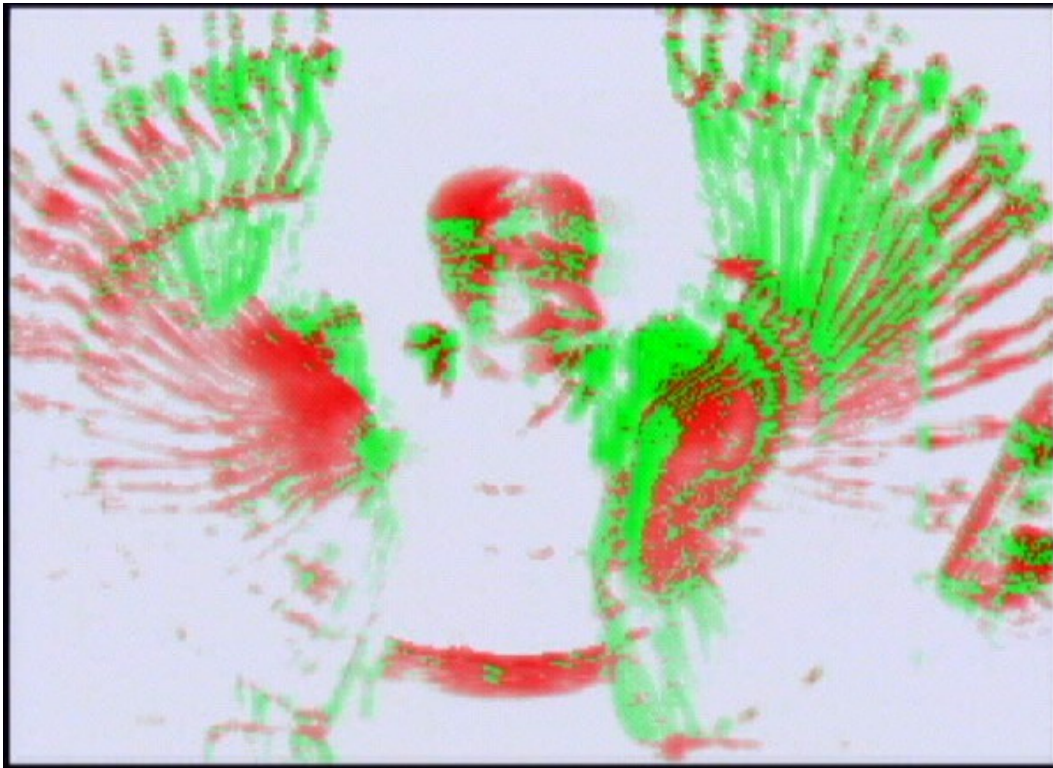


Engaging Space

Interactive Video Works

by Camille Utterback

Teacher Curriculum Guide



Kidspace

at MASS MoCA

Spring 2002

Engaging Space

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Introduction and Exhibition Themes

Engaging Space, the spring 2002 exhibition in Kidspace at MASS MoCA, features four interactive video works by Camille Utterback, a pioneering artist and programmer in the field of interactive video art installation. Utterback received her B.A. from Williams College in 1992 and her Master's degree from the Interactive Telecommunications program at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. She lives in New York City and, in addition to her work as an artist and commercial designer of interactive installations, is an adjunct professor at NYU and the Parsons School of Design.

Artists have been using the medium of video since the mid-1960s, when the Sony "Portapak" video camera became readily available for private use. While many artists who have used video cite TV as an influence, video artworks are by and large distinct, in both content and form, from the programs we see on TV. In the first lesson included in this curriculum guide, *Critical Comparisons*, students will consider the similarities and differences between familiar media (such as TV, film and the Internet) on the one hand, and video art on the other.

Interactive video art is a field that has grown rapidly during the last 10-15 years as artists, like Utterback, have accessed and developed increasingly complex technologies for use in their work. Interactive artworks vary greatly in both materials and presentation, but all works of this kind allow viewers the possibility of participating in the creation or transformation of the works themselves in some way. In Camille Utterback's installations, she projects images that she has made using computer programs on screens or walls. Simply by moving or gesturing in the space in front of these images, participants can change them, altering their colors, patterns, shapes, and, in one work, even fragmenting time by activating a stored video clip. This link between viewer and image is realized not by touch, but by a video camera, which picks up the viewer's movement and feeds these signals to a computer, where the software programs written by Utterback take effect and change the images.

Importantly, in Utterback's installations, the computers, video projectors, and video cameras are separate from the space of the image and, thus, out of the participant's view. As it is with other art forms like painting or sculpture, our interaction with Utterback's work is directly with the *image*, rather than with the apparatuses that make the images appear. This straightforward means of engagement creates a fluid and intuitive mode of interaction; as our bodies move physically before the images, our minds are free to consider the properties of the images themselves, including color, composition, and subject matter. *Color Discovery*, *Points of View/Composition and Collage*, and *Text as Image* are lessons included in this guide that are inspired by Utterback's works. In *Pixel Studies*, students will learn that video images are made out of pixels and will also discuss other kinds of images that are composed of distinct blocks of color.

Tying Kidspace Projects to Your Curriculum

Each of the lessons in this guide provides an opportunity for your students to develop critical thinking skills, use their imaginations, and express their ideas through artwork and class discussions. Moreover, these lessons are intended to build upon the work you do already with your students. To this end, the curriculum is informed by the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks – please see “Massachusetts Learning Standards Addressed through the Project,” pages 1-14 through 1-16.

In addition, the Kidspace program aims to promote arts-based, interdisciplinary learning in the classroom. Camille Utterback’s artwork provides a rich basis for exploring not only the visual arts, but language arts, science, and technology, as well. We look forward to hearing about the interdisciplinary connections you make in your teaching this semester, using both the lessons and the “Extensions and Connections” section in this curriculum as a point of departure.

Your Feedback

Please let us know which projects you do with your students and which work the best in your classroom by **filling out a form included on page 1-4 of this guide**. The form will be collected during the May Teacher Workshop. We hope to visit your classrooms as often as possible to see and photograph your students’ work, and we’d like to hear about any other projects that you develop on your own in conjunction with the Utterback exhibition as well. You may also send any digital photographs, scanned work, or project ideas and feedback to Kidspace via E-mail, molly@massmoca.org.

Critical Comparisons

Grades pre-K through 8

What?

As a class, students will discuss six different genres (animation, comedy/drama, documentary, internet games, music videos, and sports broadcasts) of media and make a chart that details their findings. Students will also discuss the genres of video art and interactive video art and view video works by Bill Viola and Camille Utterback.

Why?

This activity is designed to develop students' ability to think critically about the nature of a variety of media, including video – a medium that is the basis of TV and home movies, and that many artists have been using since the mid-1960s to make artworks. As part of this process, students will compare and contrast a) how they view works on TV, in movie theaters, and on computer screens, b) what messages these works communicate, and c) how these works are made and transmitted to us.

Part 1: Thinking carefully about familiar media

Complete steps 1-3 in advance.

1. Divide poster board or chalk board into eight columns and three large rows, with room to the left of the first column to list questions (see step 3.).
2. At the top of each column, list the following categories, one per space, including only those that are appropriate for the age level you teach.

animation	music video
comedy/drama	sports broadcasts
documentary (news)	video art
internet games	interactive video art

When to do this activity

Before your visit to Kidspace

Time needed

45-60 minutes

Materials

(art videos and Teacher Information sheets provided by Kidspace)

excerpt from a video artwork by Bill Viola

documentation of an interactive video work, *Text Rain*, by Camille Utterback

Teacher Information sheets

large piece of poster board, drawing board, or chalk board

markers or chalk

Teacher preparation

Complete steps 1-3 in Part 1.

Read Teacher Information sheets.

Set up TV and VCR for students to view videos provided by Kidspace.

Key terms

computer program

3. To the left of the columns on your chart list the following questions, and add any others that you think of. Underline key terms, printed here in bold-faced type. Modify according to age level.

A: How We View These Works

- Do you view works of this kind alone, with family, friends, a big crowd, and/or strangers?
- Do you sit/stand still to view works of this kind, and/or do you move near it or in order to operate it?
- Are works of this kind **interactive**; are you supposed to change the work with your touch or movement?
- Does the work direct you, or do you direct it?

B: Content & Meaning

- What are these works presenting? (Answers: a story (**narrative**), a live event, a game? On a deeper level: analysis of a real event, a message encouraging us to listen to something like a new music album/song, themes or issues raised by the creator)
- Do commercials appear before, after, or during these kinds of works?
- Are these works usually **fiction, nonfiction, historical fiction, and/or fantasy**?

C: Materials & Process

- How do you receive the information/images in these works? (Answer: TV, video projector, VCR, movie camera, and/or computer)
- How did the artists/creators make these works? What **medium/media** did they use? (Answer: drawing, film, music, the internet, video, computer programs, and/or acting)
- Is there sound in this kind of work?
- Is light necessary to transmitting images of this kind? (Answer: yes for all categories)
- Are the images broadcast live, or are they taped in advanced?

Class Discussion

4. Explain to students that in the first part of this activity, they are going to think carefully about different kinds of works that they come into contact with frequently on TV, at the movies, and on computers.
5. As a class, fill in the chart with responses to the questions listed *for all categories except video art and interactive video art* (you will complete this section in Part 2, after you have watched the video clips provided by

- Kidspace). Explain key terms (in bold/underlined) as you use them, and encourage students to use these terms as they formulate their ideas.
6. As you compare the categories on the chart, discuss the similarities and differences that students find interesting.
 7. Keep the chart up in the classroom so that students may add additional categories and questions and complete Part 2 of this lesson.

Part 2: Thinking carefully about video art and interactive video art

1. After you have completed Part 1, as a class watch the six-minute excerpt from a **video artwork** by Bill Viola and the three-minute documentation of an **interactive video artwork** by Camille Utterback. You might want to watch each a few times. (Videos provided by Kidspace; see Teacher Information sheets for background information and questions about the works.)
2. Explain to your students that these are artworks made by artists using the **medium** of video, and, in the case of *Text Rain*, Utterback has also written **computer programs** to produce her work. Video artworks are often called **new media** since the materials used in the production of these works have only been used by artists for around 40 years, unlike traditional art materials like paint, pencils, or sculptural materials that have been used for centuries.
3. Now, discuss the questions on the chart as they pertain to the Viola and Utterback videos. Encourage students to consider and express their ideas about how these video works are similar to and different from shows that they on TV, films, and the Internet.
4. Following are additional questions for discussion specific to the art videos. (Refer to the Teacher Information for introductory questions about these works.)
 - What is visually exciting about these art videos?
 - Do these works resemble paintings in any way? How? Think about size, image, color, and shape. Could either of these videos be described as **portraiture** or **landscape**?
 - How are both of these works different from painting? (Think about time, light, and sound.)
 - Ask students further about sound. What do they hear in the videos, especially in the Viola video? Point out that there is no dialogue or voiceover describing the images in Viola's work, but there are sounds. Ask the students what they think the sounds represent. What feeling do the sounds create? Does the Viola video remind students of a

nature show they might see on the Discovery Channel? But how is Viola's work different from nature programs on TV?

- Does the way that participants interact with *Text Rain* remind students of other kinds of experiences with various kinds of media – interactive computer games, virtual reality, or IMAX movies? But how is Utterback's work different from these other forms? Does one move one's body in the same way when engaging with these other kinds of media as one does when engaging with *Text Rain*?

Part 3: Reflection

Keep the chart up in your classroom for as long as you like. Encourage students to continue thinking about the nature of different kinds of media and add other categories, not already listed, to the chart. As they do so, record any other questions, comments, or ideas your students have about these works in a separate row or rows on the chart. Students may want to keep a record of the class's observations in their own journal or notebook as well.

Critical Comparisons: Teacher Information

Bill Viola, b. 1951, Queens, New York

Excerpt from *Hatsu-Yume (First Dream)*, 1981, video

- Bill Viola is one of the most important and well-known figures in the field of **video art**. As a child, Viola became interested in video and its fundamental properties of light, sound, and time; he was even captain of the fifth-grade television club at his school. In college, Viola was a key participant in the Synapse Video Center in Syracuse, one of the first alternative media centers established in New York. Since that time, he has produced a significant body of innovative and award-winning work that has been exhibited throughout the world. His work reflects his interest in music, nature, the philosophies and rituals of non-Western cultures, mysticism, modernism and Romanticism, film, and the television and media of what he describes as his "seven-channel childhood." Viola has said that his video works are like "visual poems."
- In 1980 Viola was an artist-in-residence at the Sony Corporation in Atsugi, Japan. There he made what has been described as a masterpiece, *Hatsu-Yume (First Dream)*. This title is taken from Japanese folklore and the tradition in Japan of attributing great significance to things done on the first day of the New Year.
- Tell students that the excerpt of *Hatsu-Yume* that they will see is only part of a longer, 56-minute video work. Ask students to describe what

happens—a scene shot in a car on an urban street transforms into abstract color and shape that then transforms into water in which carp (a fish important in Japanese culture) finally appear.

- Ask the students if they notice themes in this video that relate to opposites: light/dark, city/country, etc. When asked about this video, Bill Viola said, “I was thinking about light and its relation to water and to life, and also its opposite—darkness, or the night and death. I thought about how we have built entire cities of artificial light as refuge from the dark. Video treats light like water—it becomes a fluid on the video tube. Water supports the fish like light supports man. Land is the death of the fish. Darkness the death of man.”

Ask students how they think these ideas Viola is speaking about were communicated in the video, and ask them to give specific examples. If students are interested in seeing another example of Viola’s work there is an ongoing piece at www.cnca.gob.mx/viola/

Camille Utterback, b. 1970, Bloomington, Indiana

documentation of *Text Rain*, 1999-2000, interactive video installation

Below is a statement about *Text Rain* written by Camille Utterback.

“*Text Rain* is a playful interactive installation that blurs the boundaries between the familiar and the magical. Participants in the *Text Rain* installation use the familiar instruments of their bodies to do what seems magical—to lift and play with falling letters that do not really exist. Like rain or snow, the colored text appears to land on participants’ heads and arms. The text responds to the participants’ motions and can be caught, lifted, and then let fall again. The falling text will land on anything darker than a certain threshold, and ‘fall’ whenever that obstacle is removed. If a participant accumulates enough letters along their outstretched arms, or along the silhouette of any dark object, they can sometimes catch an entire word, or even a phrase. The falling letters are not random, but form lines of a poem about bodies and language.”

Ask students how *Text Rain* plays with our sense of space. How are participants actually part of the artwork itself in *Text Rain*?

Color Discovery

Grades pre-K through 8

What?

In this lesson, students will learn about the basic properties of color in relation to both light and pigment through simple experiments, a color hunt, and by making drawings.

Why?

In developing their understanding of color, students will practice skills of close observation as they discover subtle color variations in the world around them. This knowledge can be applied to creating and understanding artworks made in all media, including paintings, drawings, and video works like those by Camille Utterback.

Part 1: The Properties of Color

A. Light

1. Set up a simple experiment. Darken the room, and shine a flashlight beam through a **prism** to disperse white light into the colors of the **spectrum**. (You can see the colors best on a white surface.) Explain to your students that white light is made up of the colors of the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet.

When to do this activity

Before or after your visit to Kidspace

Time needed

For Part 1 A.: 15 minutes; B.: a day or more to collect materials and 25 minutes to complete activity. For Parts 2 & 3: 20-30 minutes.

Materials

Images of color wheel & chromatic scale (provided by Kidspace)
prism
two or more flashlights
red, green, and blue gels/cellophane
scissors
bins or containers for found materials
glue sticks or glue gun
poster board/ heavy card stock
crayons and colored pencils
drawing paper

Teacher preparation

Bring in prism, flashlights, colored gels/cellophane, and small containers.
Cut a circle out of heavy paper or poster board and divide into six sections.

2. That all colors of light together make white has consequences for how *two* colors of light mix together. To demonstrate this phenomenon, cover a flashlight with a red gel or cellophane, and cover another flashlight with a green gel. Darken the room and cross the beams of the flashlights to create a yellow light on a wall or another surface. Now cross a red and blue light to create magenta and blue and green to create cyan blue.
3. Explain to your students that when mixing two colors of light, you are adding light, so a lighter color is always produced; that is, yellow light is lighter than both red and green light, magenta light is lighter than both red and blue light, etc.

B. Pigment

1. Explain that when mixing **pigments** (for example, paints), however, the color combinations students saw with light do not apply. All pigment colors together make black, not white. This phenomenon has to do with how objects or matter absorb and reflect the three primary colors of light —blue, red, and green. For the purposes of this activity, we will now focus only on color in relation to pigment.
2. Project the image of the **color wheel**. Ask students to observe the six colors on the wheel and where they are in relation to each other.
3. Ask students to identify the **primary colors**, **secondary colors**, and **complementary colors**, or tell students what these colors are. When talking about pigment, yellow, red, and blue are the primary colors and are the colors from which all other colors are derived. Green, violet, and orange are the secondary colors; they are each formed by mixing two primary colors (yellow and blue = green, red and blue = violet, and red and yellow = orange). Complementary colors are directly across from each other on the color wheel (red/green, blue/orange, violet/yellow), and when mixed together they will produce a neutral gray-black color. If you put complementary colors side by side they will make each other brighter and more vivid.
4. Project the image of the **chromatic scale**, constructed by Johannes Itten, a German artist and educator who was a pioneer in the study of color theory. Explain that this scale is divided into **hues**, or different colors, going across, and into different **values** of the same hue going down. The value of a color is how dark or light it is on the scale. (Hues are, from left to right: gray, violet, blue-violet, blue, blue-green, green, yellow-green, yellow, yellow-orange, orange, red-orange, red, and red-violet.)
5. Ask students to find the primary and secondary colors on this diagram, and divide students into six color teams that correspond to these colors (red, yellow, blue, green, orange and violet).

6. Explain to your students that each team will be responsible for finding objects of their color either at school or at home and bringing these objects to class by an assigned date. (Smaller and non-precious objects will work best.) Students should collect as many values of their team's color as possible, bringing in at least seven different values. (For younger students, you may want to assist with the search by bringing in objects and helping them search for their colors in the classroom.)
7. Once students have collected their materials, ask each team to *separate the materials by value* and place them in bins accordingly. Instruct them to arrange the bins, left to right, from the lightest value to the darkest.
8. Each team will then select one material (or more if they like) from each bin. Give each team a piece of card stock or small sheet of poster board, and instruct students to glue these samples on the board from lightest to darkest value to make their own chromatic scales. (If students would like, they can also try to match the value of the object by drawing with a crayon or colored pencil underneath it.)
9. If you have already made a circle and divided it into six sections, show this to students (or make it) now; this will be the class color wheel. Each team should choose a material or materials still in the bin that represent(s) the medium value of their color (the middle bin). As a class, glue these samples on the circle in the order of the color wheel.

Part 2: Using Color

1. In *Luminous Flux*, a video work your students will see when they visit Kidspace, Camille Utterback uses red and green lines, moving horizontally and vertically, respectively, to create a balanced and vibrant, but always changing, composition. Utterback makes her image on a computer, out of **pixels** (see *Pixel Studies* lesson), and then projects it on a wall or screen; by contrast, your students will use crayons or colored pencils to make a drawing on paper that will nonetheless create a similar effect.
2. Divide the class into two groups—A and B. Explain that one group will make a **monochromatic** line drawing in one color (either red, orange, or yellow), and the other group will make a monochromatic drawing in its complement. (Use the class color wheel for reference.)
3. Choose a scene (landscape or still life) that students would like to represent in their drawing. Pass out drawing paper and crayons or colored pencils.
4. Instruct group A to use only horizontal lines to draw what they see. Group B should use only vertical lines in the complementary color of

group A to draw the *same* image. (Students can use a ruler if they would like.)

Part 3: Reflection

Once students have finished their work, as a class, discuss how the two sets of drawings compare. Ask students what feelings or sensations the drawing with horizontal lines creates? What about the vertical line drawing? Do these pieces have a sense of movement? Do the drawings in red, orange, or yellow (the **warm colors**) create a different sensation than the drawings in green, blue, or violet (the **cool colors**)?

As time permits, make more drawings, experimenting with various color combinations or values in a single drawing. Hang the students' drawings in the classroom or around school.

Once your students have seen *Luminous Flux* in Kidspace, discuss this work as a class. How do students think their drawings in pigment are similar to and different from Utterback's work in the light-based medium of video?

Pixel Studies

Grades pre-K through 8

What?

In this activity, students will view and discuss images of several artworks (a mosaic and three paintings) that are composed of distinct blocks or dots of color. As part of their consideration, students will learn that pixels are the building blocks from which images in print media, television, and video art are made. Students will then make their own pictures with blocks of color.

Why?

Pixels are the basis of a number of different kinds of images that are familiar to students, including those projected on television and printed in newspapers and magazines. In Kidspac students will learn about how Camille Utterback uses text characters and symbols to emphasize the role and presence of the pixel in her video work, *Written Forms*; in this activity students will experiment with making this kind of composition themselves, using stamps as pixels.

When to do this activity

Before or after your visit to Kidspac

Time needed

30-60 minutes

Materials

(all images and Teacher Information sheets provided by Kidspac)

Image of *Theodora and her Court*, detail of a mosaic in San Vitale; Ravenna, Italy

Image of *La Grande Jatte* by Georges Seurat

Image of *The Melody Haunts My Reverie* by

Roy Lichtenstein

Image of *April* by Chuck Close

Teacher Information sheets
magnifying glass & newspaper
or magazine

heavy white paper
stamps, or other objects to use as
stamps (suggestions in Part
2, 2.)

Part 1: Looking at images and discussion

1. Project images provided by Kidspac, and discuss each as a class. (Refer to the Teacher Information sheets for sample discussion topics.)

2. Explain to students that the images they see on TV and in **print media** are not actually drawn or painted, but are composed of tiny dots, or **pixels**, filtered through transparent colored screens. Pass out a magnifying glass and newspaper, comic book, or magazine for students to examine how images printed in these media are composed of pixels that blend together in our eye.
3. Explain that Camille Utterback also emphasizes the role and presence of the pixel—the basis of video imagery—in several of her video works, including *Written Forms*, which students will see on exhibit in Kidspace.

Part 2: Making pictures out of “pixels”

1. Students should first think of a picture that they would like to make. It could be a portrait, landscape, or an image from their imagination, but should be kept *very simple*. Explain that they will use only stamps and ink to form **compositions** made of distinct blocks of color that, for the purposes of this activity, they can refer to as “pixels.” Remind students about the works that they looked at earlier, and ask students to consider the various strategies (lighter and darker colors, outlines, etc.) that the artists used in their compositions.
2. Have students select a variety of stamps to use as pixels for their compositions. If you do not have access to traditional stamps, students can simply put ink on any object with a raised or embossed surface, such as magic marker tops, the bottoms of pens, beads, or plastic nail heads.
3. When students are ready to begin, pass out paper and ink pads. Instruct them to use a variety of colors and experiment with placing some pixels closer together to make darker passages, or farther apart to make lighter areas. By putting pixels closer together, students may find that they can create the effect of a shadow, depth, or recession into space, whereas placing the pixels farther apart will show more of the paper and emphasize the surface of the picture.
4. Remind students to attempt to keep their pixels as distinct blocks of color (I.e.: they should not overlap to the point where the individual pixel is no longer evident). Occasionally, students can hold the artwork at an arm’s length or place it on the floor to focus on and assess the overall composition.
5. Hang students work in the classroom and around school.

Part 3: Reflection

Ask students to compare the process of making pictures with “pixels” (stamps) to painting or drawing. Did they find this process challenging?

Pixel Studies: Teacher Information

Theodora and her Court (detail), c. 547, glass mosaic, located in the church of San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy

- **Mosaics** were made as early as 3000 B.C. in Mesopotamia out of clay pegs; ancient Greeks in the third century B.C. made mosaics out of colored stones and pebbles. Ancient Romans refined the art of making mosaics out of tiles, and by the sixth century A.D., the date of *Theodora and her Court*, tile and glass mosaics could be found throughout Europe in churches and in public buildings and spaces. The glass or ceramic tiles that make up mosaics are called **tesserae**.
- While projecting *Theodora and her Court*, explain to your students that tesserae make up a mosaic in a way that can be understood as similar to the way that **pixels** make up images in print media and television. Point out to the students that each individual tessera or cube is a single color but, when seen from a distance as part of the overall composition, each piece blends together in our eye and is integral to the whole picture.
- Ask students how the illusion of depth is created in this mosaic. Notice the folds in Theodora's gown are created by alternating light and dark browns, and outlines are created with black tiles. Instruct students to point out other areas in the image where darker color tiles are used to create shadows and the illusion of depth (under the chins, in the bowl, in the ceiling). Ask them also to point out where the mosaic looks very flat, or where surface pattern is emphasized (the design of the woman's dress to the right of Theodora, Theodora's jewels). How did the artist achieve this effect?

Georges Seurat, 1859-1891, b. Paris, France

A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte, 1884-86, oil on canvas, 81 ¼" x 120 ¼"

- Georges Seurat worked in the late nineteenth century in Paris and is well-known for the method of painting he developed called **pointillism**.

Seurat was very interested in color theory and sought to paint tiny “points” or dots of pure color that would blend together in the eye when seen from a distance.

- *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* is probably the best known example of a pointillist painting. Ask students to describe what they see. How are the dots of paint used in a way that is similar to the way that the tiles of the mosaic are used? Can students see some of the individual dots? But do the colors also blend together in their eye?
- Do students see any lines or just dots of paint? How does Seurat use dots of paint to depict an illusion of depth and volume in the figures, trees, etc. without line? Notice how he makes shadows with darker colors and sets objects and figures apart from each other by contrasting lighter and darker colors.

Roy Lichtenstein, 1923-97, b. New York, New York

The Melody Haunts My Reverie, 1965, color silkscreen, 27" x 23"

- Roy Lichtenstein began his career as a commercial artist, doing graphic design and design for department store windows. Like Andy Warhol, Lichtenstein was one of the first artists to use images from popular culture, including comics and advertisements, as the basis for his artwork – a style now known as Pop Art. Having worked with print media as a graphic designer, Lichtenstein was familiar with the dot structure that makes up images printed in magazines and newspapers; in the early sixties he began actually to depict dots in an exaggerated fashion in his paintings and drawings.

How are the dots in Lichtenstein’s picture different from the tiles in the mosaic and the dots in Seurat’s painting? Notice how the dots in Lichtenstein’s work are more evenly distributed with more space between them than in the mosaic and the Seurat painting. How are the dots on the lips different from the ones on the face (red and white are reversed)? What effect does this have (lips are darker than the skin)?

Ask students if the dots look like they were made by hand. Explain that *The Melody Haunts My Reverie* is a **silkscreen**, not a painting. Though silkscreen is an art form that is printed, works in this medium are not produced in the same way that images in magazines and newspapers are; thus, the dots that they see in Lichtenstein’s image are not actually a dot structure, but are referring (as a kind of pun) to the dot structure of comic book images. Point out that the size of the silkscreen is about two feet high by two feet wide, much bigger than a comic strip picture, and ask students to describe how Lichtenstein’s pun works. (It is as if he has magnified a comic book image to make the dot structure apparent to the naked eye.)

Chuck Close, b. 1940, Monroe, Washington

April, 1990-91, oil on canvas, 100" x 84"

- Chuck Close has been a key figure in the field of contemporary art since 1970. Tragically, in 1988 Close was paralyzed due to a blood clot in his spinal column. Though confined to a wheelchair, he regained partial use of his arms and was able to continue painting. He is most famous for making large-scale portraits of his friends' faces. In these pictures, Close divides the composition into a grid structure and paints brilliantly colored lines, circles, and marks in each square. Each square is like a pixel or tile of a mosaic.
- Have students look closely at the individual squares in this image, focusing on color and value. Notice the lips and how darker colors are used to create a sense that the mouth is slightly open. How does Close create shadow, volume, and depth? Is this use of darker colors for shading and outline similar to the mosaic and the Seurat painting?
- Does this painting resemble a photograph that you would see in a newspaper or magazine? Do the squares of paint remind students of grainy pixels in printed images? Point out that though Close is using oil paint, a medium that artists have used for centuries, his work is inspired by modern technology.

Text as Image

Grades 1 through 8

What?

In this lesson, students will consider the visual, material qualities of written language. Looking at several images provided by Kidspage, students will discuss how words and texts function visually in these artworks to produce meaning. Students will then make their own artworks that incorporate texts as a pictorial component.

Why?

In many artworks, including those by Camille Utterback, text is used as an integral pictorial element of the composition. In some instances it might be used in the same manner that color or line would be used, or in other works the text might be used as *the* image or picture itself. In this lesson, students will develop an awareness of how texts and images may be used together to create a work of art in which neither is the text a caption for the image nor is the picture an illustration for the text.

Part 1: Text as pictorial representation

When to do this activity

Before or after your visit to Kidspage

Time needed

30-60 minutes

Materials

(all images and Teacher Information sheets provided by Kidspage)

Image of *The Mountain* by Ed Ruscha

Image of *Horn Players* by Jean Michel Basquiat

Image of *Red Badge of Courage III* by Tim Rollins & K.O.S.

Video documentation of *Text Rain*, by Camille Utterback

Teacher Information sheets

pens and pencils

colored pencils, markers, & crayons

drawing paper

scissors

magazines

glue sticks

Teacher preparation

Read Teacher Information sheets.

Key terms

caption

illustration

1. Begin a class discussion about the nature of words and language. Ask students to describe ways in which we communicate with others (orally, through handwriting, sign language, E-mail, etc.). Explain that when we communicate verbally, we often emphasize the meaning of words we are speaking in a *visual* way—through accompanying gestures or facial expressions—that are *seen* by those with whom we are speaking. When we use **text**, or print words or letters, we also engage in a process of visual representation, selecting color, size, density, typeface, etc. that will suit the message we want to communicate.
2. Project the image of *The Mountain* by Ed Ruscha. Discuss as a class how Ruscha uses words in his work. (See Teacher Information sheet for suggested discussion topics.)
3. Now project the image of *Horn Players* by Jean Michel Basquiat, and discuss this image as a class. (See Teacher Information sheet.)
4. Finally, project the image of *Red Badge of Courage* by Tim Rollins and K.O.S., and discuss it as a class. (See Teacher Information sheet.)
5. Once you have discussed each of these images separately, ask your students to compare the use of text in each. How does each of the artists use text in a different way and achieve different effects? How are the words and the way they are written important in different ways to each work of art? What messages do these artists want to communicate, and how does their use of text in the image aid in this respect?
6. Now view video documentation of *Text Rain*, an interactive video work by Camille Utterback. Discuss how she uses text in this work, referring to the Teacher Information sheet for suggested discussion points. If your class has already been to Kidspace, review the role that text plays in *Written Forms* as well.

Part 2: Using Texts in Art

1. With the works of art you have just discussed as inspiration, ask students to think of an artwork they would like to make that incorporates texts and images together in the same **composition**. Remind them *not* to use the text as a **caption** for the picture, or the picture as an **illustration** of the text they write or select. In thinking about text, students should consider size, color, density and style of writing to suit what they wish to communicate in their artwork.
2. Distribute materials and instruct students to draw, paint, or photograph a picture, or choose one from a magazine or newspaper, and select or write a word, poem, phrases, passage from a book, letters, or symbols. (Students can also photocopy words and images if a copier is available.)

Part 3: Reflection

Ask students to present their works to the class and describe what they have represented in their pieces. How did they use text as a pictorial element in the work, and how does the text contribute to the work's meaning?

Text as Image: Teacher Information

Ed Ruscha, b. 1937, Omaha, Nebraska

The Mountain, 1998, acrylic on shaped canvas, 76" x 72"

- Before telling students the title of this painting, ask students to try and guess its title. Why did they guess that?
- Ask students if this picture reminds them of other kinds of images they have seen before—for example, an advertisement in a magazine or on a billboard. (Ed Ruscha began his career as a commercial artist and sign painter after completing art school in California in the early sixties.) But how is this work different from an advertisement?
- Ask students to describe the colors Ruscha uses for both the mountain and the word "The." Does the overall color of the picture give the sensation of coldness or heat? Why is this important to the painting?
- Ask students to remark further on the word "The." They might notice that the letter T in "The" creates a sense of height, mimicking the height of the mountain. How would the effect of the painting be different if the word were smaller, in a different typeface, in a different color, or taken

out altogether? Why else do the students think Ruscha might have included a word in his picture? Is it a **caption** for the picture (an explanation), or is it integral to the work's meaning?

Jean Michel Basquiat, 1960-1988, b. Brooklyn, New York

Horn Players, 1983, acrylic and oil paint stick on canvas, three panels, 96" x 75"

- Jean Michel Basquiat grew up in a middle class neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. His father was from Haiti, and his mother was from Puerto Rico. Basquiat's parents often took him to museums where he saw the works of well-known artists of the 20th century such as Picasso, Dubuffet, Jasper Johns, and Willem de Kooning. Basquiat began his career as a graffiti artist and soon after began painting on canvas. His paintings often reflect his love of the city, his pride in his African, French, and Latin heritage and his appreciation of other artists' works.
- Tell your students the title of this painting, *Horn Players*, and ask them to describe what they see. Ask students to notice how the writing is executed; ask them to focus on the colors and on how words are crossed out, painted over, squeezed together, enclosed and underlined—just as some of the faces are.
- How does the way that the words are painted in this work differ from the way "The" is painted in Ruscha's work? Do Basquiat's words look more "hand-made" than Ruscha's? How does this affect the feeling of both paintings? Would Basquiat's style of presenting words work in Ruscha's painting, or vice versa?
- Does the way that Basquiat paints his words seem inspired by or in keeping with the subject of music? Think about rhythm, jazz, stopping and starting, repeating notes, etc. [**Note:** Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker were jazz musicians who lived in the middle of the twentieth century. Parker's nickname was "the Bird," and the likely reference for the word "ornithology" (the study of birds), which appears in the painting several times.]
- Ask the students how they think the painting would look if the text was removed. Do students think that the words in this work serve the function of **captions** (explanations for the pictures)? Though the words in Basquiat's work might refer to the people depicted, the way that he has incorporated the words in the picture, crossing them out, repeating letters, etc., makes them integral to the feeling created by the painting, which is different from how a caption might be used to clarify or explain a picture.

Red Badge of Courage, 1997, book pages, oil, oil paint stick on linen, 72" x144"

- In 1982 Tim Rollins, a special education teacher at Public School 52 in the South Bronx, established the Art and Knowledge Workshop for students with learning disabilities. This after-school program grew into an art collaborative and study group. Classic works such as Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*, Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, and Flaubert's *Temptation of Saint Anthony* are but a few of the books they have read and used as the basis for artworks that have been exhibited in museums around the world. The students participating in the first workshop choose to call themselves K.O.S.—Kids of Survival.
- In this work the artists have torn pages from a copy of the novel *Red Badge of Courage* and glued them onto a canvas. They then glued images that they had painted on top of the pages.
- Ask if any of your students are familiar with the story. The title refers to the first wound received by the young soldier—a theme with which the artists of K.O.S. identify, as many of these young people have experienced gangs and violence in their neighborhoods. In this light, how do students interpret the images painted in this work? Do these images look like paintings of wounds? These images do not directly **illustrate** scenes in the text, but are inspired by themes brought out in the text with which the artists personally identify.
- Ask students what is the effect of using the pages of a book as background. Do they think that the artists expect us actually to read the text in this painting, as we would if we had a copy of the book? The letters of the words can be perceived as lines on a colored surface (the page) that are part of a large composition in the shape of a grid. Ask students to describe the kinds of lines, shapes, and colors they see.

Camille Utterback, b.1970, Bloomington, Indiana

documentation of *Text Rain*, 1999-2000, interactive video installation

- Ask students how the letters and words are used in this video work. Notice how the falling letters are like the marks that a painter might use to depict rain or snow.
- Point out to students that the work is interactive, which means that the viewer is a participant in making the artwork that is being seen. How would this artwork be different without the words or without the viewer; would it exist at all?
- Compare the interactive video work to the other three works. What do they have in common? How are they different?

Extensions and Connections

The following are suggestions for projects that extend from the Utterback curriculum and connect to other subject areas.

Interactivity, general

Make an interactive artwork (interpersonal skills, research & problem solving)
Explore the concept of interactivity further by designing an interactive art work or installation as a class. First, discuss the nature of interactive artworks, using Camille Utteback's interactive video installations as examples and perhaps researching other artists who make interactive works as well. What distinguishes these kinds of works from traditional works of art? Then talk about different ways that students could make an interactive art work in the classroom and topics or themes that the class would like to address in a work of art. Remember, the work should be something that an audience of viewers could participate in creating in some way. Gather the materials, and work together to make it.

Research interactive art (research, art history, language arts)
Research the history of interactive art and other art forms that preceded and led up to it, including performance art. Have students present their findings as an oral or written report.

Visit another interactive exhibition (art history, critical analysis)
Explore the many varieties of interactive art forms by taking your students to an exhibition at another local museum. There are often exhibitions that include interactive artworks at museums like MASS MoCA or the Williams College Museum of Art. After your visit, students can compare and contrast their experiences with the different types of interactive art that they have seen.

A "low-tech" interactive artwork (art history, interpersonal skills)

The Dadaists were a group of artists working in the early twentieth century, who are associated with a drawing game called “Exquisite Corpse.” Students can play this “game” and turn it into an interactive art project. Distribute pieces of paper to students, and instruct them to draw a small picture or abstract design on one end of the paper, and fold the paper over so that their drawing is not visible. They can then display these papers in the classroom or around school and invite others to complete the work by making another drawing on the paper, folding it up, and leaving it behind for the next participant. When the paper is completely folded up, unfold it, and view the work.

Critical Comparisons

Comparing genres of literature (language arts)

Ask students to use the basis of the critical comparisons lesson to formulate questions about different forms of literature and print media, including books, poems, plays, comic books, magazines, newspapers, etc. Have students each compare and contrast each genre.

Writing about art (language arts)

Try out the field of journalism by having your students write reviews of Camille Utterback’s work. Students can interview each other for reactions and quotes regarding the exhibit and incorporate some of the observations they made about the nature of interactive video in the *Critical Comparisons* lesson. Encourage students to use key terms to interpret the work(s).

Color Discovery

Choosing language (language arts)

Have the class make a list of words to describe drawings made in **warm colors**. Then make a list to describe work in **cool colors**. Have each student or teams write poems using these words and analyze the feelings created by each. Encourage students to be creative about the visual presentation of their poems by utilizing different colors, fonts, and sizes for their words.

Language studies (language arts)

Discuss how words can have **values** or degrees of strength of tone. For example, discuss the many ways one can describe rain—pouring, sprinkling, drizzling, or showering. Ask students to scale the words from weakest to strongest and make a mark with a crayon or colored pencil that suits each word.

Observing color and value in nature (art, science)

Students can choose a landscape and draw, paint, or photograph the same scene early in the morning, again at noon, and again at dusk. Ask them to compare the three images, analyzing what colors they were able to see better, or not at all, at each time of day. Find images of works by Claude Monet, an artist who studied the effects of light on landscapes at different times of day.

Color theory research (language arts, science)

Ask students to research and discuss the work of Sir Isaac Newton, the seventeenth-century English physicist and mathematician, and Thomas Young, the nineteenth-century English physicist. Newton studied many different aspects of optics and light, including the dispersion of white light into colors with prisms. He also formulated the first circular color wheel. Young theorized that the primary colors of light (red, green, and blue) were different from the primary colors of pigments (red, yellow, and blue).

Music scales (music)

Ask the music teacher, a musician, or a student who is taking music lessons to demonstrate the musical scales. How do these compare to chromatic scales?

Points of View/Composition and Collage

Researching art (art history, language arts)

Ask students to research and find other images of artworks that emphasize multiple, simultaneous points of view. Suggested artists to research include Romare Bearden, Hannah Höch, and Mike & Doug Starn. Have students write an interpretation of works that interest them.

Photocollages (art, critical thinking)

Have students repeat the drawing exercise, but this time using a disposable camera to photograph the same scene from several different points of view. Develop the photographs and have students cut them up and reassemble them on a separate piece of paper. This project could be done as an entire class or in medium-sized groups to reduce the expenses associated with purchasing cameras and developing film.

General

Research "New Media" (art history, history, science, language arts)

Investigate when the camera, film, computer, and video camera were invented. What other world events were happening at these times? What changes were happening in other art forms, such as music, literature, theatre, and dance? What about in science? How have these new media affected culture, politics, and/or the economy?

Divide students into groups and assign each group one of these areas (politics, economics, culture, etc.) and one form of "new media" (camera, computer, film, video). Ask students to research the relationship between their topics and present their findings to the class visually or orally.

Glossary of Key Terms

caption

an explanation or designation that accompanies a pictorial illustration or photograph

chromatic scale

a progression of perceptible gradations in any given hue from the very lightest to the very darkest

collage

a work of art in which a variety of materials are glued or incorporated into a surface to compose a picture

color wheel

in relation to pigment: a circle of colors that is made up of primary colors (yellow, red, blue) and secondary colors (green, orange, and violet). Each color on the wheel is positioned opposite its complement. Color wheels are often used as a teaching tool.

complementary colors

the pairs of colors that fall opposite one another on the color wheel: red and green, yellow and violet, and blue and orange. When these pairs are mixed together (in pigment), they produce a neutral tone; when placed adjacent to each other, they maximize each other's vividness.

composition

the organization or arrangement of ideas visually, literally or musically. In visual arts, composition is the combination and arrangement of shape, color, line, texture, and space.

computer code

a binary system (a system that uses only 0 and 1) that is used to translate common language and give instructions on the computer. "HTML" is an example of a computer code that is used to place information on the World Wide Web.

computer program

a code that is used to translate commands in a common language into a system that can give instructions to a computer

cool colors

green, blue, and violet are generally referred to as cool colors. These colors are often said to create the feeling of coolness and tranquility.

Cubism

a style of art associated with Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in which several points of view of the same object are presented simultaneously; the resulting forms appear fragmented or broken into "cubes."

fantasy

the free play of creative imagination; also, imaginative fiction featuring strange and unusual settings and characters.

fiction

an invented story

historical fiction

a type of fiction in which the setting is based on historical facts, but the plot and the characters may be conceived in the writer's mind

hue

a color, or the attributes of colors that permits them to be classified as red, yellow, green, blue, etc.

illusionism

something that appears to be something other than what it is. In art, an **illusionistic** representation appears to replicate aspects of reality, fooling the eye into believing that the painted or sculpted object is real and not a representation (I.e., that it has volume or exists in three-dimensional space, etc.).

illustration

a picture or diagram that helps explain a concept or text

interactive

in art, a kind of work that a viewer participates in creating (or can change the essence of) in some way. Interactive artworks may incorporate many different media, including, but not limited to, painting, sculpture, sound, the internet, video, and photography.

interactive video artwork

a type of video art that a participant is able to physically and intellectually engage with and/or respond to/change in some way

landscape or cityscape

in art, a picture representing a natural setting like mountains or trees (landscape) or an urban environment with architecture, cars, etc. (cityscape)

medium/media

a mode of expression or communication (painting, sculpture, film, video, etc.) or the actual materials used in making art (watercolors, wood, clay, videotape, etc.). The plural is **media**.

monochromatic

in art, a work consisting of one color or hue

mosaic

a picture or design made by arranging small pieces of colored materials together on a single surface without overlapping these pieces. Traditionally, mosaics are made with tiny bits of colored stone, tile, or glass.

narrative

in art, the representation of a specific event or story

new media

a classification that refers to art that is made using new technology such as video cameras, computer programs, the Internet, etc.

nonfiction

a type of literature or film that purports to be based on factual events rather than on imagination or fantasy

pigment

a powdered substance that is mixed with a liquid and used to impart color to materials such as paints and inks

pixel

any of the small discrete elements that together constitute an image as on a television screen or in print media

pointillism

an artistic technique, associated primarily with Georges Seurat, in which a “point” or small dot of color is applied to a surface. Points of varying colors are placed side by side in such a fashion as to encourage the viewer’s eye to blend the pure colors into gradations of color and value when seen from a distance.

portraiture

in art, a picture representing a person or persons

primary colors

the three pigment colors from which all other colors are derived are yellow, red and blue

print media

a form of communication that is printed, including newspapers, magazines, journals, and books

prism

a transparent body that is bounded in part by two nonparallel planes and can be used to disperse a beam of light into the colors of the spectrum

representational art

art that seeks to portray people, places, and things seen in the visible world (see also **illusion**)

secondary colors

the three colors that result from combining any two of the primary pigment colors: orange, green, and violet. Orange is made by mixing yellow and red, green is made by mixing blue and yellow, and violet is made by mixing red and blue.

silkscreen

a method of printmaking that involves a stencil process in which an image or design is blocked out on a screen made out of polyester, nylon, or stainless steel (silk is no longer used). Ink is

forced through the screen onto the surface (such as paper or cloth) that will be printed, resulting in a reversed image. Because the process is usually done by hand, each print is considered a unique work of art.

spectrum

the array of colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet) formed when a beam of light passes through a prism

still life

in art, a picture that primarily represents inanimate objects like flowers, dishes, food, etc.

tesserae

small pieces of marble, glass or ceramic tile used in making mosaics

text

the visual representation of language in the form of letters, words, and sentences

value

the lightness or darkness of any color (hue), or gradations from black to white, which is commonly known as the gray scale

video artwork

a style of art that uses the apparatus, materials, and processes of video

viewfinder

the part of a camera that one looks through to frame, or compose, a picture

warm colors

yellow, orange, and red are generally referred to as warm colors. These colors are often said to create the sensation of warmth and vibrancy.

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Other Arts-Related Resources

- KinderArt has ideas for a wide variety of art projects at www.kinderart.com. The site includes a section on integrating art with other subjects.
- Learn more about the history of art at www.arthistory.about.com. "Art History 101" offers an overview of movements and developments in art, as well as a glossary and capsule biographies of major artists. An excellent starting point for older students to do research.
- The Getty Museum and Trust has a great selection of lesson plans at www.getty.edu/artsednet. These lessons focus on looking at and talking about art. Although some plans are specific to Los Angeles museums, they can be adapted for use in local museums or in the classroom.
- General lesson plans can be found at www.teachnet.com/lesson. Many of the plans on this site incorporate art into other areas of the curriculum.
- The Museum of Modern Art has a web-based art exploration program for kids at www.moma.org/onlineprojects/artsafari/. "Art Safari" provides images and questions that guide children to think creatively and write about art.
- Virtual tours of exciting art exhibitions, including shows by Bill Viola and other new media artists, can be found at www.artmuseum.net.

- The “Explore and Learn” section of the Metropolitan Museum of Art webpage (www.metmuseum.org/explore) has an informative “Timeline of Art History,” artist’s biographies, a teacher’s guide to adding art to the classroom, and downloadable, printable publications for educators and students.
- The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. has a kid’s page at www.nga.gov/kids that offers virtual exhibitions and in-depth exploration of individual paintings.
- The Museum of Web Art is an entirely virtual museum devoted to the kinds of interactive computer graphics found on web pages. The special kid’s area at www.mowa.org/kids/kids_main.html has images to click on and change and some really fun interactive games. Click on “Eraser” to explore the concepts of pixels and the chromatic scale in greater depth.