Andy Warhol, *Presidential Seal* (1968)

For centuries, artists have challenged how people think about art by injecting elements of popular culture. In the 1950’s and 60’s, the Pop Art Movement appropriated mass-produced visual commodities, such as images from comic books and commercial advertising in their imagery, and then asked us to consider them from new perspectives.

Andy Warhol (1928-1987), a central figure in Pop Art, was born to Slovak immigrant parents. Raised in a working-class suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Warhol became very interested in photography and drawing while suffering from a severe childhood illness. Spending much of his time drawing in bed, Warhol listened to the radio and surrounded himself with pictures of celebrities.

As a young adult, Warhol attended the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) to study pictorial design. Moving to New York, he went on to have a successful career in commercial art, particularly in magazine illustration and advertising. In the 1960s, Warhol became a major figure in the New York art world, an internationally-recognized celebrity who was eternally fascinated with fame, violence, materialism, and Americana. Everything within his visual field was fair game for his art, including money, movie stars, brand name products, and violent pictures from newspaper articles. By minimizing the hand of the artist and producing art as “a machine,” Warhol championed a democratization of art objects, subjects, and processes and prefigured the attitude of Post-Modern aesthetics.

In addition to elevating the images of everyday life to the level of fine art, Warhol wanted to make fine art itself trivial, trite, and everyday. In the “Factory,” mass-produced images were turned into art, and his art was turned into mass-produced objects. Many of Warhol’s most celebrated works are prints of pop culture created via silkscreen processes used in mass production.

*Presidential Seal* is one of eleven silkscreens from the “Flash – November 22, 1963” series, which reflected on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Here, Warhol prints in shades of silver different views of President Kennedy, a gun advertisement, and a bullet-ridden seal.
Questions to Consider

1. Can you read all the words on the Presidential Seals?
2. Which shapes has Warhol repeated in this image?
3. Why do you think Warhol used silver as the primary color here?
4. Look closely at the different parts that comprise this composition. What parts has Warhol chosen to include in this image? How has Warhol arranged them? What else might he added to this composition to explain or further comment on the assassination of President Kennedy?

Connections

Political: Assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Camelot, presidential symbols.
Art: Pop Art, Minimalism, popular culture, Modern Art, memorials, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Roy Lichtenstein, American symbols, screen printing.

Further Reading

Teachers’ Extensions

Work: Presidential Seal (1968)
Artist: Andy Warhol
Location of work: Indiana University Art Museum (IUAM)

Works on Paper

Vocabulary/Key Concept(s):

John F. Kennedy [assassination]: November 22, 1963
35th President of the United States

Symbolism The practice of representing things by means of symbols or of attributing symbolic meanings or significance to objects, events, or relationships.

Seal of the President of the United States is the official arms of the U.S. Presidency and is based on the Great Seal of the United States.

Art Connection(s):

Pop Art Painting, sculpture, and graphics that use the imagery of popular or mass culture such as newspapers, comics, advertising, and consumer goods. A witty and ironic art, it emerged in New York in the 1960s after beginning in London during the 1950’s.

Minimalism Spare in appearance and restrained in mood, minimalist art emerged in the 1960’s. The term can refer to the extreme simplicity of a work of art or to the suppression of detail and gesture in favor of a rational, at times machine-made quality.

Printmaking refers to the art of making prints on paper. It is a general term covering engraving, etching, and woodcuts.

Silk Screen Printing (or screen printing) as it is more commonly called) is a printing process in which an image is transferred onto a material (e.g. paper, cardboard, wood, glass, etc) by forcing ink through a fine mesh screen (formerly made of silk but now of synthetic materials, such as nylon) onto the material surface.

Geography Connection(s):
Dallas, Texas (USA)

Time Line Connection:
President John F. Kennedy [assassination]: November 22, 1963
Presidential Seal from “Flash – November 22, 1963” (silk screen) series
Resources:
National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Picturing America website: 
http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/

Connect to web links below by clicking on individual address or access through the NEH site for Additional Resources at:
http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/about.php?subPage=about_ad_res

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=641
National Endowment for the Humanities, EDSITEment, Horse of a Different Color: An Introduction to Color in the Visual Arts has two lesson plans on color; the first: In-Depth with the Full Spectrum, for Grade 9-12, introduces students to color basics, the color wheel, and how artists manipulate color to draw attention to the aspects of their work.

http://www.getty.edu/education/for_teachers/building_lessons/
Getty Museum Education department Web site, Teachers’ Programs and Resources, is designed for K-12 teachers who wish to introduce art and art history into their classrooms. The site uses works form the museum’s collection along with pages A Grade-by-Grade Guide, The Elements of Art (teaching the formal components of art such as line and color) and a PDF file, Lesson Template.

http://www.nga.gov/education/american/figure.htm
National Gallery of Art Web site, Themes in American Art, covers topics such as abstraction, historical subjects, narrative art, and portraiture; illustrated by works in the collection. Includes a glossary.

Monroe County Public Library (MCPL) Bloomington, Indiana University (812) 349-3050 – To Reserve Resource Materials

Assassination of John F. Kennedy

Cornerstone of Freedom: The Assassination of John F. Kennedy by R. Conrad Stein
Call Number: J973.922 St (Children’s Collection)
Includes: Images, time line, additional references and web site links

Call Number: J973.922 Har (Children’s Collection)
Includes: images, glossary, time line, additional reference material

Andy Warhol

Art Around the World: In the Time of Warhol
Call Number: J709.04 Ma (Children’s Collection)
Includes: biographical information, printing process, images of work, additional references

Dropping in on Andy Warhol DVD Video Series
Call Number: J759.13 War (DVD) (Children’s Collection)
Includes: interview with the artist, images of work in progress, images of past works of art, explanation/demonstration of printing processes
Getting to Know: *Andy Warhol* DVD Video Series  
Call Number: J759.13 War (DVD) (Children’s Collection)  
Includes: introduction to Pop Art, images, and biographical information

**Pop Art**

*Make It Pop!: Activities and Adventures in Pop Art* by Joyce Raimondo  
Call Number: J709.04 Rai (Children’s Collection)  
Includes: activities and art lessons in collage and printing, and glossary

Indiana University Art Museum (Works on Paper Collection)  
Printmaking  
Scholastic Voyages of Discovery: *The History of Printmaking*

Web sites:

Seal of the President of the United States

Includes information on symbolism, images, popular culture information, references

Lesson Plan “Flash Series”

[http://edu.warhol.org/ulp_hcc_hm_s5.html](http://edu.warhol.org/ulp_hcc_hm_s5.html)  
A lesson plan integrating a silk screen image from the Warhol Flash Series-1963 (Dallas Book Depository) – background information, discussion questions, activities, images, Language Art and History connections, and additional resources.

Indiana Academic Standards – Visual Arts Grade/Level 5  
RESPONDING TO ART: History  
Standard 1  
*Students understand the significance of visual art in relation to historical, social, political, spiritual, environmental, technological, and economic issues.*  
5.1.1 Identify the relationship between a work of art and the geography and characteristics of the culture, and identify where, when, why, and by whom the work was made (Focus: North America).  
5.1.2 Identify and compare works of art and artifacts with similar functions.  
5.1.3 Identify themes and symbols used in works of art and artifacts throughout history that portray universal ideas and beliefs.  

Standard 2  
*Students recognize significant works of Western and non-Western art and understand the chronological development of art movements.*  
5.2.1 Identify and be familiar with a range of selected works of art identifying artists, culture, style, and period.  
5.2.2 Identify distinguishing characteristics of style in individual artists work and art movements.  
5.2.3 Begin to identify works of art and artifacts from major periods or movements of Western art and place on a chronological time line.
RESPONDING TO ART: Criticism

Standard 3

*Students describe, analyze, and interpret works of art and artifacts.*

5.3.1 Analyze the artist’s use of sensory, formal, technical, and expressive properties in a work of art.

5.3.2 Construct meaning in the work based on personal response, properties found in the work, and background information on the context of the work.

5.3.3 Use appropriate art vocabulary.

Standard 4

*Students identify and apply criteria to make informed judgments about art.*

5.4.1 Listen to multiple critiques of works of art by peers, teachers, people from the art world and identify criteria used.

5.4.2 Apply criteria based on properties found in the work and research from the historical context of the work to make informed judgments.

RESPONDING TO ART: Aesthetics

Standard 5

*Students reflect on and discuss art theories and aesthetic issues concerning the meaning and significance of art.*

5.5.1 Identify problems or puzzles in a work of art or aesthetic issue, construct a hypothesis, and evaluate alternate hypotheses.

5.5.2 Identify and analyze a variety of well reasoned points of view on aesthetic issues (censorship, plagiarism) and develop a personal point of view.

Standard 6

*Students theorize about art and make informed judgments.*

5.6.1 Identify artwork made from the artist’s philosophy that art is at its best when it moves people to act for the betterment of society (instrumentalism).

5.6.2 Understand that personal preference is one of many criteria used in making judgments about art.

INTEGRATED STUDIES

Standard 13

*Students identify and make connections between knowledge and skill in art and all other subject areas such as humanities, sciences, and technology.*

5.13.1 Compare characteristics of a theme, historical period, or event through the multiple perspectives of different disciplines.

5.13.2 Create products or performances (debates, critiques, papers) that communicate in-depth knowledge gained through integrated study of a theme, historical period, or event.

National Academic Standards – Visual Arts – Level 5

Content Standard #3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

Achievement Standard:

Students integrate visual, spatial, and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artworks Students use subjects, themes, and symbols that demonstrate knowledge of contexts, values, and aesthetics that communicate intended meaning in artworks

Content Standard #4: Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

Achievement Standard:

Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures

Students describe and place a variety of art objects in historical and cultural contexts

Students analyze, describe, and demonstrate how factors of time and place (such as climate, resources, ideas, and technology) influence visual characteristics that give meaning and value to a
work of art

**Content Standard #5:** Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

*Achievement Standard:*
Students compare multiple purposes for creating works of art
Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry
Students describe and compare a variety of individual responses to their own artworks and to artworks from various eras and cultures

**Content Standard #6:** Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

*Achievement Standard:*
Students compare the characteristics of works in two or more art forms that share similar subject matter, historical periods, or cultural context
Students describe ways in which the principles and subject matter of other disciplines taught in the school are interrelated with the visual arts