

Self-taught American Artists

This curriculum packet shines a light on four important self-taught American artists in the special exhibition *Outliers and American Vanguard Art*, on view until March 17, 2019. We hope that you and your students will be inspired by the artists' work as well as their life stories, which provide excellent starting points for exploring perspectives within twentieth-century American art, history, and culture that have not typically received significant attention.

Janet Sobel, a Ukrainian-Jewish immigrant who came to New York via Ellis Island around 1908, developed a drip painting technique that expands our understanding of how abstract painting progressed in the United States and the ways that marginalized artists influenced their more well-connected peers. Joseph Yoakum was born in the same era as Janet Sobel but in the Midwest, where opportunities and challenges were quite different for a person of Cherokee and African American heritage. Yoakum spent years traveling the country and only began making the highly imaginative, dynamic landscape drawings for which he is now known in his seventies. His drawings are exciting contributions to the genre of landscape art.

Rosie Lee Tompkins and Judith Scott were born in the 1930s and 1940s, respectively. Both artists worked primarily with textiles and fibers. Historically, the art establishment largely disregarded textile and fiber art because they were traditionally practiced by women and were associated with domestic crafts. Tompkins, who was African American and grew up in rural Arkansas, and Scott, who had Down syndrome and was physically isolated for many years, created magnificent bodies of work that defy the societal limitations placed on each artist due to sexism, racism, and ableism.

In 1972 art historian Roger Cardinal introduced the term "outsider art" to describe artists working outside the parameters of the mainstream art world.

He argued that these artists could be characterized by social alienation, lack of art historical knowledge or influence, disability, and/or an intense focus on creating visionary, private worlds. While the term "outsider art" is still used in some circles, it has also been rightly criticized for stigmatizing and tokenizing artists who hold marginalized (and often intersecting) identities, including artists who are disabled, LGBTQIA, people of color, poor, and/or living outside of major metropolitan centers, where the arts are better funded.

Today, many people are working to forge more inclusive art histories and contemporary art landscapes that broaden our understanding of where great art is being created, how it is being created, and who is creating it. This includes artists like the four featured in this packet, all of whom are considered self-taught because they charted their own unique paths to creative expression and did not attend art school. We hope that by bringing the art of Janet Sobel, Joseph Yoakum, Rosie Lee Tompkins, and Judith Scott into your classroom, you will inspire appreciation, critical discussion, affirmation of each other's differences, and free creative expression among your students.

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The Burning Bush, 1944
Janet Sobel***Milky Way, 1945***
Janet Sobel

Janet Sobel had been making art for about five years when she painted *The Burning Bush* and *Milky Way*. During that time she invented her own unique technique that involved pouring and dripping paint onto the surface of the canvas, then tipping the canvas and blowing the wet paint to create lines and shapes. The paintings shown here—one made with oil paint and the other with enamel paint—show how Sobel was able to create different effects with her drip technique.

Both paintings feature energetic lines and confident splashes of color. Neither one has a distinct focal point, thus inviting viewers to let their eyes wander over every inch of the two canvases. Overall, the paintings are abstract, meaning that their subject matter consists of formal elements such as shape, color, and line. However, small faces appear scattered throughout *The Burning Bush*, and each painting's title offers a clear reference point.

Born Jennie Lechovsky in Ukraine in 1894, Sobel immigrated to the United States after her father was killed in an anti-Jewish pogrom. She and her family landed at Ellis Island around 1908 and established new roots in New York. When Sobel first began making art in the late 1930s, she often drew on the motifs and style of Ukrainian folk art, which include all-over floral patterns in vibrant colors and bold, gestural brushstrokes. From letters and interviews we know that the stories, foods, languages, and art of Ukraine and its large Jewish community were very important to Sobel throughout her life.

The Burning Bush provides insights into Sobel's Ukrainian-Jewish identity. The burning bush is an important story from Shemot (the book of Exodus) for both Jews and Christians. In the story, the Israelite Moses encounters God in the guise of a

bush that was on fire but could not be consumed by the flames. The story is often interpreted as a sign of God's promise to deliver the Jewish people from their enslavement under the Egyptians. Sobel's painting could reflect the artist's childhood experience of migration as well as a larger message of faith.

Milky Way demonstrates the vastly different effects that the artist was able to achieve with her drip technique. Looking at the painting, which is named after the galaxy that contains our solar system, we can imagine that Sobel may have planned certain things and improvised others when building up the painting's semi-translucent layers in a prismatic array of colors.

Some historians have compared Sobel and her process to the Surrealists, many of whom used automatic techniques to create their art.¹ Others have pointed to similarities between Sobel and Jackson Pollock (today it is widely acknowledged that Sobel had a direct influence on Pollock), who is associated with Abstract Expressionism and became famous for his drip painting technique in the late 1940s.²

Sobel became known within the New York art scene when her son Sol showed her paintings to his art teachers and colleagues. But even though she was included in a number of prominent exhibitions, her career failed to take off the way other artists' did.

¹ See "Surrealism," *MoMALearning*, accessed October 1, 2018. https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/themes/surrealism/tapping-the-subconscious-automatism-and-dreams.

² See "Abstract Expressionism," *MoMALearning*, accessed October 1, 2018. https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/themes/abstract-expressionism

Today, it is important to accord Sobel and her work the respect they deserve. Her unique perspective, innovative approach, and intersecting identities as a woman, an immigrant, an artist, and a housewife significantly enrich our understanding of important artistic developments in the 1930s and 40s.

Discussion Prompts

1. Read or listen to a version of the story of the burning bush. Then, look closely at Janet Sobel's *The Burning Bush* with a partner and describe what you see. Can you find connections in the painting to the story? How is the story represented differently in each medium (written/oral narrative versus painting)?

2. Janet Sobel painted *The Burning Bush* in 1944, approximately one year before the Holocaust and World War II ended. Do you think the painting could reflect this historical context? If so, how?

3. Even though *Milky Way* is abstract, its title references the natural world. In what ways does this painting look similar to other images you have seen of the Milky Way galaxy? In what ways does it look different?



Janet Sobel (Ukraine, active United States, 1894–1968), *The Burning Bush*, 1944, oil on canvas, 35 × 27 × 3 in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, American Art Acquisition Fund (M.2008.77), photo © Museum Associates/LACMA



Janet Sobel (Ukraine, active United States, 1894–1968), *Milky Way*, 1945, enamel on canvas, 44 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 29 $\frac{7}{8}$ in., The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of the artist's family, 1968, digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY

San Jaquan Valley of San-Luis-Obispo County, near San-Luis-Obispo, California, c. 1969
Joseph Yoakum

Briar Head Mtn of National Park Range of Bryce Canyon National Park near Hatch, Utah U.S.A., c. 1969
Joseph Yoakum

"I had it in my mind that I wanted to go different places at different times. Wherever my mind led me, I would go. I've been all over this world four times."

— Joseph Yoakum

In an interview conducted shortly before he passed away, Joseph Yoakum told journalists, "I've been drawing all my life, but didn't know the value of it until recently."¹ Like all of us, Yoakum was innately creative. However, it wasn't until he settled down in a live-work storefront space in Chicago at age seventy-two that he began making the drawings for which he is now known.

Yoakum made his art with inexpensive and widely available materials such as ballpoint pens, colored pencils, watercolors, pastels, and chalk. He had many inspirations and reference points—they include the history and lore of the Wild West, the artist's Cherokee and African American heritage, and printed materials such as travel books and atlases—but the geography of the places he personally visited throughout his life provided the main content for each of his drawings.

Born in the small town of Ash Grove, Missouri, in 1890, Yoakum experienced the golden age of the American railroad and the circus. He got his initial taste of wanderlust at age ten, when he first joined the circus as a horse handler and then worked as a billposter for Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and Ringling Brothers. Later, after serving in World War I, Yoakum traveled all over the United States as well as overseas, finding work as a railroad porter, apple picker, merchant seaman, rock quarrier, and other odd jobs.

Created in 1969, after he had retired from a long life of adventure and travel, the drawings pictured here

capture Yoakum's vibrant memories of places visited, experienced, and appreciated. If you have visited the Central Coast, you may recognize the various landforms and place names depicted in *San Jaquan Valley of San-Luis-Obispo County near San-Luis-Obispo California*. Undulating lines drawn with a ballpoint pen outline the Nine Sisters, a series of volcanic mountains and hills in San Luis Obispo County. Groves of bright green trees arranged in perfect rows punctuate the landscape and a wide, forked road snakes through the center of the composition. Except for the road, Yoakum shaded in the entire drawing with colored pencil, pressing more lightly in some areas and more heavily in others.

The landscape depicted in *Briar Head Mtn of National Park Range of Bryce Canyon National Park near Hatch, Utah U.S.A.* might cause viewers to feel small. The background is dominated by craggy, sweeping mountain peaks that contrast with the calm blue waters and orderly rows of trees in the middle ground and foreground. A few impressive pine trees in the right hand foreground bring us in closer and also show just how distant the mountain peaks are.

Yoakum's work became known within the broader Chicago art community around 1967, when an art instructor at Chicago State College saw some of his drawings hanging in the window of the artist's storefront studio. Since then, Yoakum's art has been exhibited and appreciated widely. Joseph Yoakum brought an exciting, imaginative perspective to the landscape genre; what's more, his art demonstrates that creativity knows no age limit and memory can be one of our richest sources of inspiration.

¹ Jane Allen and Derek Guthrie, "Joseph Yoakum: Portrait of a Luckless Artist," *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, 10 December 1972, 34.

Discussion Prompts

1. Study Joseph Yoakum's drawings closely. What similarities and differences can you find between them? In what ways do the place names at the top of each drawing enhance your understanding of the works?
2. Close your eyes and imagine an outdoor space that you enjoy—it can be a park, a backyard, the beach, mountains, etc. What do you do there? How do you like to experience outdoor spaces best and which of the five senses do you use?
3. Visit your school or neighborhood library and find an atlas. Spend some time studying it. Based on your firsthand observations, what is an atlas? How would you describe it to someone who has never seen one before? How is information organized in an atlas (hint: look at the table of contents)? How can other kinds of sources—postcards, photographs, diaries, oral histories, etc.—add to our understanding of place?



San Jaquan Valley of San Luis Obispo County.
by Joseph E. Yoakum

#3: Santa Margarita

#1. Ascadero

#2. Pasadenales

#4: San Luis Obispo

Joseph Yoakum (United States, 1889-1972), San Jaquan Valley of San Luis Obispo County, near San Luis Obispo, California, c. 1969, ballpoint pen and colored pencil on paper, 12 x 19 in., Gladys Nilsson and Jim Nutt



Briar Head mts of National Park Range
of Bryce Canyon National Park near Hatch Utah U.S.A.
by Joseph Yoakum.

Joseph Yoakum (United States, 1889–1972), *Briar Head Mtn of National Park Range of Bryce Canyon National Park near Hatch, Utah U.S.A.*, c. 1969, ink and graphite on paper, 20 x 24 inches, National Gallery of Art, Washington, gift of the Collectors Committee and the Donald and Nancy de Laski Fund

Untitled, 1996
Rosie Lee Tompkins

Rosie Lee Tompkins' quilt is a dazzling arrangement of colors, patterns, textures, and images. To get an overview of the artwork, we will explore just a few different sections, starting with the intricate patchwork of different-sized triangular pieces clustered on the far left. In this part of the quilt, solid-colored triangles are juxtaposed with patterned ones, creating a quick rhythm. The right side of the quilt helps balance the frenetic energy of the left, its horizontally oriented, stacked rectangles creating a sense of stability and calm.

Some viewers might be drawn to the image of the Christ figure, near the bottom of the quilt, who raises his right hand in blessing against the backdrop of a coastal city. This is the largest individual piece in the quilt with the most clearly defined human figures, but its placement left of center keeps the artwork from appearing too symmetrical. Above this piece, a white and orange square contains two dancing figures, whose hands are joined together.

Segments of an American flag appear throughout the quilt. Two red-and-white striped pieces form an L-shape to the right of center, and the flag's stars are scattered along the quilt's right edge, bottom edge, and left side. It seems that everywhere we look, Tompkins' individual pieces come together in arrangements to form many small quilts within the larger one.

Tompkins' quilts are wholly unique artworks belonging to the African American quilting tradition, which has a long, rich history. Many quilts belonging to this tradition are characterized by bold colors, lush materials and textures, and irregular compositions that do not follow a strict grid. The technical and cultural knowledge associated with quilting have historically been passed down matrilineally—that is, from one generation of women to the next. Tompkins learned quilting from her mother and other women in her native Arkansas, where she was born in 1936.

The artist, who lived in Richmond, California, and protected her privacy for many years (Rosie Lee Tompkins is a pseudonym), said that much of the inspiration for her work comes from her religious faith; she viewed her quilting as a form of spiritual worship. Some historians have drawn connections between Tompkins' work and the textiles of African cultures, highlighting the ways that communities who survive forced migration transmit their culture through artistic traditions. For example, the irregularity and dynamism of Tompkins' quilts have been compared to textiles woven by the Kuba people, who reside in present-day Democratic Republic of Congo.¹

For many years, the mainstream art world did not consider quilting—and especially African American quilting—worthy of close study. But in the 1960s, quilt collector and historian Cuesta Benberry began writing about African American quilts. Her work gained traction over time and in the 1980s, the study of quilts, the history of their makers, and their promotion as an art form were established as the goals of the newly created American Quilt Study Group.² Others have followed in their footsteps and quilts are now more regularly included in discussions of modern and contemporary art.³ The quilts made by generations of women from Gee's Bend, Alabama, for example, are important additions to this dialogue.

¹ For information and images of Kuba textiles, see "Weaving Abstraction: Kuba Textiles and the Woven Art of Central Africa," *The George Washington University Museum*, accessed October 1, 2018. <https://museum.gwu.edu/weaving-abstraction-kuba-textiles-and-woven-art-central-africa>

² See Jenni Sorkin, "Affinities in Abstraction: Textiles, Otherness, and Painting in the 1970s," *Outliers and American Vanguard Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 99.

³ In the *Outliers and American Vanguard Art* exhibition, the work of Rosie Lee Tompkins and other quilters is shown alongside that of formally trained artists who also work with pieced fabric and/or are inspired by African textile traditions, such as Al Loving and Howardena Pindell.

Discussion Prompts

1. Choose a section of Tompkins' quilt and journal about it. What do you see? Do any of the pieces remind you of fabrics you have seen, worn, or have at home?
2. How is Tompkins' quilt similar to other quilts you have seen? How is it different?
3. The art world consists of a broad network of critics, collectors, art schools, galleries, and museums; oftentimes amazing artistic creations are not considered art until someone draws critical attention to them. Why do you think this is? What does this say about how artistic value is measured?



Rosie Lee Tompkins (United States, 1936–2006), *Untitled*, 1996, cotton, cotton flannel, cotton feed sack, linen, rayon, flocked satin, velvet, cotton-synthetic blend, cotton-acrylic jersey, acrylic double-weave, cotton-polyester, polyester doubleknit, acrylic and cotton tapestry, silk batik, polyester velour, rayon or acrylic embroidery on cotton, wool, needlepoint, and shisha-mirror embroidery (quilted by Irene Bankhead in 1996), 88 x 146 in., Eli Leon Trust, photo by Sharon Risedorph

Untitled, 1993
Judith Scott**Untitled, 2004**
Judith Scott

From 1986 until 2005, Judith Scott lived in the Bay Area and created a large body of artwork that inspires viewers to think about yarn, fabric, shape, volume, and color in new ways. The artist's sculptures can sometimes feel like living beings; their highly tactile exteriors, rounded forms, and mysterious, concealed interiors create powerful presences that invite viewers to connect, relate, and imagine.

Scott sometimes placed personal possessions, such as pieces of jewelry, at the cores of her artworks. One work from 2004 suggests the possibility of such an interior: the wrapped form resembles a drum or a box, inviting us to wonder what could be nestled inside. Tight knots line the central shape's edges and vertical strips of yarn in subtle variations of peach, pink, red, and orange extend from top to bottom with taut, controlled energy. Approximately a foot and a half square in size, we might imagine what it would feel like to hold the artwork in our arms.

Another work, from 1993, typifies the sculptures Scott made early in her practice, which usually consisted of bundled sticks wrapped with yarn, fabric, and sometimes beads. Parts of the artwork's underlying armature (the framework around which a sculpture is built) remain visible, such as the bright red and blue painted sticks. At the thicker end, Scott manipulated the yarn in crisscrossing directions and dense layers. She also mixed in white and green yarns with the tan and orange yarns, imbuing the piece with greater contrast and depth.

Scott's artistic process involved initially collecting assorted objects to use as armature. Then, in the studio at Creative Growth Art Center in Oakland, where she made all of her artwork, Scott began the elaborate process of covering one object or a

grouping of objects with yarn, rope, thread, fabric, and other fibers, until she had transformed the entire constellation into a swaddled, cocoon-like bundle. Scott worked on one artwork at a time, sometimes for weeks or months, before signaling to the Creative Growth staff that she was finished.

Scott was born with Down syndrome in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1943. A bout of scarlet fever during infancy caused her to become deaf; however, her deafness was not discovered until many years later. When she was seven, her parents agreed to send her to live in a residential institution, where she resided for thirty-five years. Unfortunately, institutions such as the one where Scott spent her adolescence and much of her adulthood could be very isolating, and often did not provide their residents access to education, family and social life, and creative expression.

Scott's twin sister Joyce facilitated the artist's move to the Bay Area in 1986. Commenting on the years during which her sister was institutionalized, Joyce has said, "that Judy is not haunted, that she has not been destroyed is a testament to the human spirit and most especially to hers."¹ Joyce has written extensively about the sisters' joyful early childhood years together and suggests that Scott's artwork may reflect "the colorful, tactile world of childhood; the memories and feelings of isolation in state institutional care; and above all, her sense of twinning."²

Removing barriers to access so that people of all abilities can live self-affirming lives is a goal of the

¹ Joyce Scott, "Birth and Rebirth," *Judith & Joyce Scott*, accessed October 1, 2018. http://judithandjoycescott.com/article_birth_rebirth.shtml.

² "Judith Scott (1943-2005)," *Judith & Joyce Scott*, accessed October 1, 2018. <http://judithandjoycescott.com/judith.shtml>.

disability rights movement and of progressive art studios like Creative Growth Art Center. By providing Judith Scott with studio space, time, and art materials, Creative Growth supported the artist in an eighteen-year journey of self-discovery and creative expression, the fruits of which we are left to appreciate and ponder.

Discussion Prompts

1. Look closely at Scott's *Untitled* (1993), which is nearly four feet long. What colors and shapes do you see? What textures do you notice? If this artwork could make noise, what would it sound like? If this artwork could move, what kinds of movements would it make?

2. It is difficult to say for certain what kind of object(s) Scott used as armature for *Untitled* (2004), but we can guess. Brainstorm possibilities as a class, then choose a few different objects on the list and work in teams to wrap each of them with yarn. Do they look similar to Scott's piece? How does wrapping the objects change their appearance? How does it change their function?



Judith Scott (United States, 1943–2005), *Untitled*, 1993, fiber and mixed media, 47 x 18 x 6 1/2 in., Courtesy Creative Growth Art Center, Oakland, © Creative Growth Art Center, Oakland, photo by Benjamin Blackwell



Judith Scott (United States, 1943–2005), *Untitled*, 2004, fiber and mixed media, 21 × 16 × 16 in., Courtesy of The Museum of Everything, London, © Creative Growth Art Center

Classroom Activity

Sculpturally Expressive, Expressively Sculptural

Essential Question	How can we create sculptures that express feelings and ideas in new and creative ways with ordinary materials?
Grades	K–6
Time	One class period
Art Concepts	Color, texture, form, wrapping, knotting, sculpture, armature
Materials	Recycled and found objects to use as armature (sticks, styrofoam, forks, chopsticks, paper cups, etc.), yarn in various thicknesses, fabric scraps, felt scraps, beads, ribbon, plastic-coated wire, pipe cleaners, scissors, colored masking tape
Talking About Art	<p>Artist Judith Scott created sculptures using a variety of everyday materials (sticks, yarn, fabric, etc.) in innovative ways. From 1986 to 2005, she created a large body of artwork at the Creative Growth Art Center in Oakland, CA, a progressive art studio that provides resources and studio space for people of all abilities to fulfill their creative lives.</p> <p>Look closely at <i>Untitled</i> (1993). This artwork is almost four feet long! Teachers, compare the size to something familiar or visible in the classroom. Looking at the sculpture, what colors do you see? Can you find more colors if you look again? What materials do you see? Does the artwork’s shape remind you of anything? What do you think makes up the armature, the sculpture’s frame underneath? How would you describe this artwork with words? How would you describe it with a gesture or action? How would you describe it with a sound? If it were a food, what do you think it might taste like? How do you think the artwork would feel if you could hold it in your arms? Would it be heavy or light? Soft or hard?</p> <p>Then, look closely at <i>Untitled</i> (2004) and go through the same process of investigative, imaginative inquiry. Compare this sculpture to the first one we looked at. How is it different? How is it similar?</p>
Making Art	<p>Before you choose materials for your sculpture’s armature and outer layers, close your eyes for at least thirty seconds and check in with yourself. How are you feeling right now? Can you describe the feelings with words, actions/gestures, sounds, colors, tastes, textures, or by comparing it to objects or to a place? Do whatever you need to do to hold this feeling and your associations with it in place, then select your armature (the sculpture’s frame). Once you have your armature, choose the materials that will embellish it. If you need help, share your ideas with a classmate or teacher.</p> <p>Then, think about how you will use the materials you selected. Will you wrap them? Tie knots? Weave them? Tape them on? Will you leave parts of the armature exposed or will you cover it up completely?</p> <p>Teachers, if your students would rather dive right into experimenting with the materials than plan out how they will use them, you can move the questions listed above to the reflection section at the end of the lesson. You might also want to spend a few minutes demonstrating to your students different ways to manipulate the yarn and fabric (knots, twists, braids, etc.).</p>

Reflection

Come up with a title for your artwork using words, sounds, or actions. Then, display your artwork and share your title with your classmates. Alternatively, work in small groups to view each other's artworks and come up with titles for them together.

Curriculum Connections

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.K.1 Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

National Core Arts Standards (NCAS)

VA:Cr1.1.Ka Engage in exploration and imaginative play with materials.

VA:Cr1.2.1a Use observation and investigation in preparation for making a work of art.

VA:Cr1.2.6a Formulate an artistic investigation of personally relevant content for creating art.

VA:Cr2.1.3a Create personally satisfying artwork using a variety of artistic processes and materials.

Classroom Activity

Quilts, Symmetry, and Patterns

Essential Questions What is a quilt? How can the history and design of quilts support your understanding of symmetry and patterns?

Grades 3–5

Time Two class periods

Art Concepts Balance, geometry, symmetry, pattern, repetition, contrast, fiber art, quilt

Materials Colored markers, colored construction paper, scissors, glue sticks, rulers, pencils, 12" × 12" cardboard squares, blank quilt square templates (3" × 3" squares and 4" × 4" squares), quilt pattern coloring handouts (can be found on the web)

Talking About Art Quilting is a type of fiber art. A quilt is like a cloth sandwich, with a top, which is usually the decorated part, a back, and a filler or padding in the middle. The individual pieces of the top are sewn together, as are the quilt's three layers. Quilts are usually used as bed covers but they often have other meanings too. Quilts can preserve memories of special events or family stories; they can be cherished as examples of sewing skills and techniques; they can also be special because of the specific fabrics used in their designs. There is a long history of quilt making in the United States. European settlers brought the art of quilting with them in the seventeenth century. White settlers, American Indians, and enslaved Africans all engaged in quilting and helped it progress by infusing it with their own cultural meanings and creating new quilting traditions.

Quilts are usually made up of squares (called blocks) that contain more shapes inside of them, such as rectangles, squares, and triangles. We see some of these shapes in Emily Synder's *Memorial Quilt* (see <https://collections.lacma.org/node/170328>). What shapes do you recognize? Can you point to them? What shapes do you see inside this quilt's square blocks? Can you find any repeating shapes or colors? What is it called when something repeats? **Pattern!** Do you see one color that is more dominant than the others? Why do you think the artist made this/these color choices? For example, the yellow squares on either side of the quilt stand out and also create symmetry. **Bilateral symmetry** means that something is the same on both sides (right and left). There are many examples of bilateral symmetry in nature, such as butterflies, dragonflies, and leaves.

Some, but not all, quilt makers use pattern and symmetry in their designs. Why do you think that is? Additionally, quilt design often depends on the use of contrasting colors. **Contrast** is when a color is darker or lighter than a color next to it. Yellow and white contrast well with darker colors. Notice how the red in Snyder's quilt contrasts against the yellow and white. Why do you think quilt makers use contrast? What effect does it have?

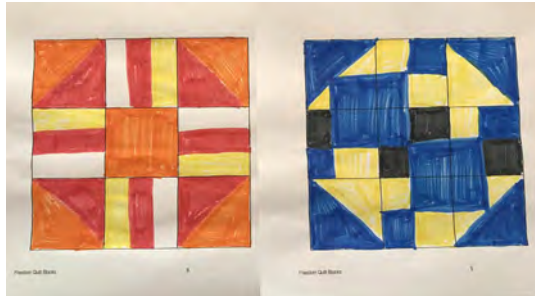
Making Art Today you will create two quilt blocks. Instead of sewing fabric, we will use markers on paper to create our designs. Take a look at the first worksheet; it shows a quilt block of nine squares (3" × 3"). In each square you will add color and pattern. You can use triangles, squares, diamonds, and rectangles only. Teachers, you can also use a sixteen-square (4" × 4") handout to increase the difficulty, or ask students to create their own using a ruler and pencil. Teachers, this is also a good place to

Making Art (cont.)

introduce vocabulary words like geometric, repetition, and balance.

Using a pencil first, create a design in your quilt block. Then, select three or four markers (the white of the paper can be one color) to color in your design. Your block should have a pattern as well as contrast and symmetry.

Examples:



The next quilt we are going to look at, *Untitled* from 1996, was made by the artist Rosie Lee Tompkins, who is a contemporary quilt maker. What do you notice about this quilt? Can you find areas of pattern, symmetry, and contrast? Compare it to *Memorial Quilt*, which we studied earlier. What similarities and differences can you find between the two quilts?

We are now going to create another quilt block with a partner, but this time we want to mix it up a bit, like Tompkins did with her quilt. Instead of creating a block that has a pattern, symmetry, AND contrast, choose just one or two of these to explore. This means you can intentionally make your block asymmetrical, or create a pattern that isn't quite a perfect pattern (teachers, show examples of asymmetry and check for understanding). When we are finished, we will work together to put all of the blocks together to create one large quilt.

Then, create your quilt block by cutting up construction paper (four different colors per pair of students) and gluing the pieces to a 12" x 12" cardboard base. Try folding your paper once or twice so that you can cut multiples of the same shape, in order to create a pattern or symmetry with them. Teachers, you can increase the difficulty by asking students to use rulers and pencils to measure and cut shapes.



Reflection

Lay out all of the quilt blocks and work together as a class to arrange them, creating a large paper and cardboard quilt.

Discuss the first set of quilt blocks made by the class. Are any of the patterns similar? How are they different? Are any of them reflections? Is there contrast? Symmetry? Point to specifics.

Discuss your second quilt block with another group. Does your quilt block have

Reflection
(cont.)

symmetry? If so, can you describe which elements create the symmetry? Does your quilt block have any repeating areas of pattern and color? If so, can you describe those areas? How does everyone's quilt block fit together? Are there any areas of symmetry, pattern, or contrast in the quilt as a whole?

**Curriculum
Connections**

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for Mathematical Practice
CCSS:math.content.3GA.2 Partition shapes into parts with equal areas. Express the area of each part as a unit fraction of the whole.
CCSS: math.content.4GA.3 Recognize a line for a two-dimensional figure such that the figure can be folded along the line into matching parts. Identify line-symmetric figures and draw lines of symmetry.

National Core Arts Standards (NCAS)

VA:Cr1.1.4 Brainstorm multiple approaches to a creative art or design problem.

VA:Cr1.1.5 Combine ideas to generate an innovative idea for art-making.

VA:Re9.1.3 Evaluate an artwork based on given criteria.

VA:Re9.1.4 Apply one set of criteria to evaluate more than one work of art.

Classroom Activity

Map Memoria

Essential Question	How can we use our memories of places we have been as inspiration for creating art?
Grades	4–12
Time	One class period
Art Concepts	Landscape, abstraction, perspective, foreground, middleground, background, composition, pattern, memory, place, sensory experience
Materials	Pencils, erasers, pens, colored pencils, colored markers, Sharpies, wax pastels, white cardstock or white mixed media paper
Talking About Art	<p>Artist Joseph Yoakum was born in the small town of Ash Grove, Missouri in 1890. He went on to spend many years of his life traveling the country and performing odd jobs, before settling down in Chicago and creating the drawings for which he is now known, which are largely based on his memories of the places he visited throughout his life.</p> <p>Spend at least one minute quietly observing <i>San Jaquan Valley of San-Luis-Obispo County, near San-Luis-Obispo, California</i> and <i>Briar Head Mtn of National Park Range of Bryce Canyon National Park near Hatch, Utah U.S.A.</i> Both drawings represent places Yoakum had visited many years earlier. What do you notice about Yoakum's drawings? What interests you about them? Do they remind you of any places you have been before? Why do you think artists might choose to draw places from memory, rather than from direct observation? How did he use text in his artworks?</p> <p>Look closely at the materials Yoakum used (pens and pencils) and at the elements that reveal his style (outlining natural forms in dark colors, using repeating patterns). Can you describe some of the patterns you see in each of his drawings? Can you describe the colors he used as well as how he used them?</p>
Making Art	<p>Begin by thinking of a place that has a specific, powerful, positive effect on you. Maybe close your eyes and spend a minute or two breathing evenly and focusing on that place. Try to explore this place with your emotions and your five senses: what does it sound, smell, look, taste, and feel like? On the back of a sheet of white paper, use a pencil to write down the details that come to mind most clearly (time of day, people, natural elements and features, landmarks, colors, sounds, tastes, smells, etc.).</p> <p>Next, break out into groups of 3–6 and share your places with each other. Try to paint a picture with your words. Ask the other group members plenty of questions about their places to help them identify more details and create a fuller picture. Then, work on your own to sketch the outline of the place you are remembering. Try drawing the contours of the landscape shapes first, as Yoakum did. Make sure you have a clear background, middleground, and foreground. Think about your entire composition and don't worry about perspective drawing. Feel free to incorporate abstract elements and sensory details: draw a smell, draw a taste, draw a sound!</p> <p>Once you are happy with the composition and general outlines of your picture, add</p>

Making Art
(cont.)

in textures and patterns. You can use patterns similar to those in Yoakum's drawings if you like. You can also go on a walk around your classroom or school to search for interesting patterns. Practice drawing your pattern elements on scratch paper first. Then, experiment with adding textures and patterns to your drawing using a range of materials (markers, pencils, pastels, etc.). Select three or four colors to fill in most of your drawing. You can add one or two more colors to create pops of interesting detail here and there. Finally, you can add relevant words to your drawing that help to label it (place names, memory details, times, names, etc.).

Reflection

Arrange a display of your drawings around the classroom. Pair up and walk around, discussing each artist's use of outlines, colors, and patterns to represent different places.

Questions for individual reflection: what did you enjoy most about this process of creating artwork? What is different about drawing a place by directly observing it and drawing it from memory? What did you focus on most when making your drawing? Did you include details that came up during the group discussion in your drawing?

Curriculum Connections

National Core Arts Standards (NCAS)

VA:Cr2.1.4a Explore and invent art-making techniques and approaches.

VA:Cr1.2.6a Formulate an artistic investigation of personally relevant content for creating art.

VA:Cr1.1.8a Document early stages of the creative process visually and/or verbally in traditional or new media.

VA:Cr2.1.11a Experiment, plan, and make multiple works of art and design that explore a personally meaningful theme, idea, or concept.

Classroom Activity Pushing Open the Creative Door

Essential Question	How can we use art as a creative avenue to express mathematical understanding of radius, diameter, and circumference?
Grades	6–12
Time	Two or three class periods
Art Concepts	Color, line, texture, rhythm, repetition, variety, layering, composition, abstraction, balance
Math Concepts	Circle, center, radius, diameter, circumference, area, measurement
Materials	Yarn, pencils, rulers, scissors, basic calculators or cell phone calculator, flexible tape measures, worksheets about the parts of a circle, images of paintings by artist Janet Sobel, brown paper grocery bags or large sheets of brown craft paper, plastic bags, plastic squeeze bottles, sponges, big paint brushes, tempera paint (at least four colors), straws, canned air, sporks, cardboard boxes
Talking About Art	<p>Students will begin by reviewing the parts of a circle and learning how to calculate circumference and area. Teachers should make appropriate worksheets for practicing these calculations available. For example, teachers can use a worksheet that instructs students to measure different kinds of circular objects with a flexible tape measure, finding their radius, diameter, and circumference. Questions for math lesson: What do you notice when we divide the circumference of each circle by its diameter? The resulting number is pi. The formula for finding the circumference if you know the diameter is $C=\pi d$. Pi can also be used to find the area of a circle ($A=\pi r^2$).</p> <p>Let's spend a few minutes looking closely at artist Janet Sobel's painting <i>Milky Way</i>. Janet Sobel was born in Ukraine in 1894 and immigrated to the United States when she was still a child because of anti-Jewish prejudice in her home country. Later on, when she had children of her own, she began experimenting with painting. She invented her own unique technique that involved pouring and dripping paint onto the surface of the canvas, then tipping the canvas and blowing the wet paint to create lines and shapes. Although Janet Sobel's paintings might seem out of order and visually noisy, take a closer look to find areas of balance. Many of her works do not follow a horizontal or vertical axis; they do however have repetitive movement and patterns that vibrate and radiate.</p> <p>What do you see when you look at <i>Milky Way</i>? In what ways is it similar to other images you have seen of the Milky Way galaxy? In what ways is it different? Do you see circular shapes anywhere in it? Do you think you could measure them if the painting was in front of you? How did Sobel create an illusion of spatial depth in her painting (i.e. placement, overlapping shapes and colors)? <i>Milky Way</i> is considered an abstract painting. Have you seen abstract art before? What does abstract mean to you? What can you express with abstraction that you maybe couldn't express otherwise?</p>
Making Art	Balancing a composition involves arranging both positive elements and negative space in such a way that no one area of the design overpowers other areas. Everything works together and fits together in a seamless whole. We are going to

Making Art (cont.)

use our math skills to create circular canvases, then we are going to paint on them in a style and technique similar to Janet Sobel in order to make artworks that are balanced, abstract, and exciting to look at. Start with a brown paper grocery bag or large piece of brown craft paper. Using a pencil and a ruler, create a circle on your paper:

- Fold your sheet of paper in half. Then fold it in half again (the other way).
- With the paper still folded, use your ruler to measure 6 inches (or more) from the corner with the central fold to the paper's edge. Make a small mark with your pencil. This is your radius.
- Keeping one end of the ruler at the inner corner, begin sliding the other end up or down, like the hand of a clock. At short intervals, make a dot with your pencil. Make sure the other end of the ruler is lined up with the inner corner of the paper every time you slide the ruler forward to make another dot.
- When you are finished, you should see a curving, dotted line extending from one edge of the paper to the other.
- With your paper still folded, cut along the dotted line with scissors.
- Unfold the paper to discover a (nearly) perfect circle!

Next, choose your paint colors. Pick three main colors and a fourth that will be just for small details and points of interest. If you'd like, you can gesso your paper first. Wait for the gesso to dry before you start painting. Then, choose a paintbrush, a sponge, and items for creating circles (cups, lids, etc.). Experiment with tracing the circles onto your circle-shaped canvas using your brush or sponge. You can also experiment with creating circles by loading your sponge with paint and water, then squeezing it from a short height above the canvas while simultaneously moving your arm in a circle. Other tools you can use to create different effects are a straw or canned air.

Practice thinking out loud as you work on your painting:

- "I want to cover most of my paper, so I think I will use a sponge for this area, and maybe here as well."
- "I like the idea of layering my colors."
- "I want to try the straw and the canned air. I can also tilt my paper."
- "I want repeating curving lines, I am going to need a spork."

If you decide you want to incorporate perfect circles into your artwork by tracing cups, lids, etc., you will need to measure and calculate the radius, diameter, and circumference of each item and document them on a sheet of paper. For example: "I will use this lid, so I will measure the radius, diameter, and circumference first, then incorporate the lid into my art project."

Reflection

How did you feel about incorporating math into your abstract painting? What was the most challenging part? What part did you enjoy the most? Share your painting with your partner or small group, discussing the techniques you experimented with and your reasons for making specific creative decisions. In what ways is your painting similar to Janet Sobel's *Milky Way*? In what ways is it different? What ideas and/or feelings does your painting express? Discuss possible titles for your painting with a partner.

Curriculum Connections

Common Core State Standards for Mathematical Practice
CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.7.G.B.4 Know the formulas for the area and circumference of a circle and use them to solve problems; give an informal derivation of the

**Curriculum
Connections**

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relationship between the circumference and area of a circle.

Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) Content Standards for California Public Schools
Seventh Grade

2.3 Develop skill in using mixed media while guided by a selected principle of design.

4.1 Explain the intent of a personal work of art and draw possible parallels between it and the work of a recognized artist.

4.3 Take an active part in a small-group discussion about the artistic value of specific works of art, with a wide range of the viewpoints of peers being considered.

Eighth Grade

3.3 Identify major works of art created by women and describe the impact of those works on society at that time.

3.4 Discuss the contributions of various immigrant cultures to the art of a particular society.

4.3 Construct an interpretation of a work of art based on the form and content of the work.

Classroom Activity An Experience Quilt

Essential Question	How can an artist layer meaning by mixing texture, color, text and image in an artwork?
Grades	6–12
Time	One class period of 50 minutes
Art Concepts	Quilting, collage, expressive qualities of color, texture and shape, symbols, literal reference, mixed media, 2D composition
Materials	12" × 18" watercolor paper, glue sticks or other quick drying glue, masking tape, scissors, found images from magazines/newspapers/printed materials, variety of fabric pieces/felt, ribbons, construction paper, paper towels, 8.5" × 11" paper, pencils Equipment: large images or hand-outs, or projections of quilts and artwork by Rosie Lee Tompkins Art signs posted: listing concepts, vocabulary, skills, steps, reflection questions
Talking About Art	Show projected images (or hand-outs, or large image) of Rosie Lee Tompkins' <i>Untitled</i> from 1996. Additional images referencing traditional quilts and other artists' interpretation of quilts could also be shown. Discuss the following as a class: how are quilts made? How are they used? What kind of meaning do they have? Rosie Lee Tompkins was an artist who used mixed media to compose artworks that reflect on the traditions of culture and quilting. Her artworks are an organization of many smaller quilt-like forms, messages, and images visually attached to one another. Tompkins created with woven and printed fabric pieces to express her own cultural identity, traditions, and personal messages. She highly amplified these with expressive uses of color, texture, shape, and image, which evoke more meaning. These elements work together to add to the artworks' larger contemporary and universal references. Spend a few minutes studying Tompkins' quilt. How do color, pattern, and shape help connect the individual elements? What can you say about how the artist chose to arrange her composition? Does the quilt's composition feel balanced? Do you see connections between the expressive (i.e. more abstract) elements and literal (i.e. more figurative) images?
Making Art	Consider how Rosie Lee Tompkins shared her own unique perspectives in her artwork. Think about a memorable experience that continues to influence you because you were inspired or challenged. Quickly write a list of single words, not sentences, that come to mind. Don't edit, just quickly capture whatever expressive terms come to mind. Imagine what colors, textures and shapes could express these words. Refer to the list of words to gather materials to compose your artwork. Cut shapes, arrange fabric pieces, and layer images and other materials on your paper canvas (the 12" x 18" watercolor paper). Move the individual pieces around on your picture plane to create a few different compositions. Try to compose the elements so that they express your experience. When you have decided on your final composition, use glue to attach each piece to your paper canvas.

Reflection

Display your work in a way that all can easily see. Example: Mount on walls, or leave on table tops and walk around the table, then hold up each one as it is discussed.

As an individual artwork:

Which areas show variety of expression, where are high energy areas and where are calm areas? How does the composition “read” and give the viewer messages? Describe what elements are giving what kinds of messages.

As a group of works:

Which works show similar expressive colors? Which works show similar themes or messages? Describe some visually unique messages and how they are expressed through colors, shapes, and images.

As an individual artist:

What about this project surprised you? Did you discover something new, a new technique or idea? What challenged you and how did you work with that challenge? Did you find new information about yourself from creating your quilt? What could be a next step to further explore this type of art making for yourself or others?

Curriculum Connections

National Core Arts Standards (NCAS)

VA:Cr1.2.6a Formulate an artistic investigation of personally relevant content for creating art.

VA:Cr1.1.1a Use multiple approaches to begin creative endeavors.

VA:Re.7.1.8a Explain how a person’s aesthetic choices are influenced by culture and environment and impact the visual image that one conveys to others.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Resources

Books for Students and Teachers

Bound and Unbound

Edited by Catherine Morris and Matthew Higgs
This fascinating and generously illustrated book offers an in-depth look at the art and life of Judith Scott, and accompanies the first major exhibition of her artworks in the U.S.

Joseph Yoakum: Traveling the Rainbow

Derrel B. DePasse
The first full-length celebration of self-taught master Joseph Yoakum's landscapes and travels, this book includes fifty color and 145 black-and-white reproductions.

Outliers and American Vanguard Artists

Lynne Cooke
This companion catalogue to the exhibition *Outliers and American Vanguard Art* offers a fantastic opportunity to consider works by schooled and self-taught creators in relation to each other and defined by historical circumstance.

A Splash of Red:

The Life and Art of Horace Pippin

Jen Bryant, illustrated by Melissa Sweet
An inspiring story of a self-taught painter from humble beginnings who, despite many obstacles, was ultimately able to do what he loved and be recognized for who he was: an artist. Grades 1-4

Stitchin' and Pullin': A Gee's Bend Quilt

Patricia C. McKissack, illustrated by Cozbi A. Cabrera
For a hundred years, generations of women from Gee's Bend have quilted together, sharing stories, trading recipes, singing hymns—all the while stitchin' and pullin' thread through cloth. Grades 3 and up

We'll Paint the Octopus Red

Stephanie Stuve-Bodeen, illustrated by Pam Devito
A big-sister-to-be helps her parents recognize that her new baby sibling with Down syndrome will be just as valuable a family member as any other child. Grades K-3

Online Resources

Disparate Minds

Disparate Minds is an interdisciplinary project dedicated to increasing visibility and discussing the work of marginalized self-taught artists in a contemporary context.
<http://www.disparateminds.org/>

Outliers Interactive

High Museum of Art
At the heart of this exhibition's presentation of nearly 90 artists are themes of diversity and convergence that can be explored further through this interactive tool. Tap a thumbnail to learn more about the artist behind each featured work and discover connections between artists using the filters at left.
<https://high.org/sites/outliers/index.html>

Gee's Bend Quiltmakers

Souls Grown Deep Foundation
Souls Grown Deep Foundation is dedicated to documenting, preserving, and promoting the contributions of artists from the African American South, and the cultural traditions in which they are rooted. The women of Gee's Bend—a small, remote, black community in Alabama—have created hundreds of quilt masterpieces dating from the early twentieth century to the present.
<http://www.soulsgrowndeep.org/gees-bend-quiltmakers>

Tierra del Sol Foundation

Tierra del Sol is a dynamic organization in Los Angeles that empowers people with developmental disabilities to achieve excellence. Programs include Workforce Development, College to Career, and Careers in the Arts.
<https://www.tierradelsol.org/>