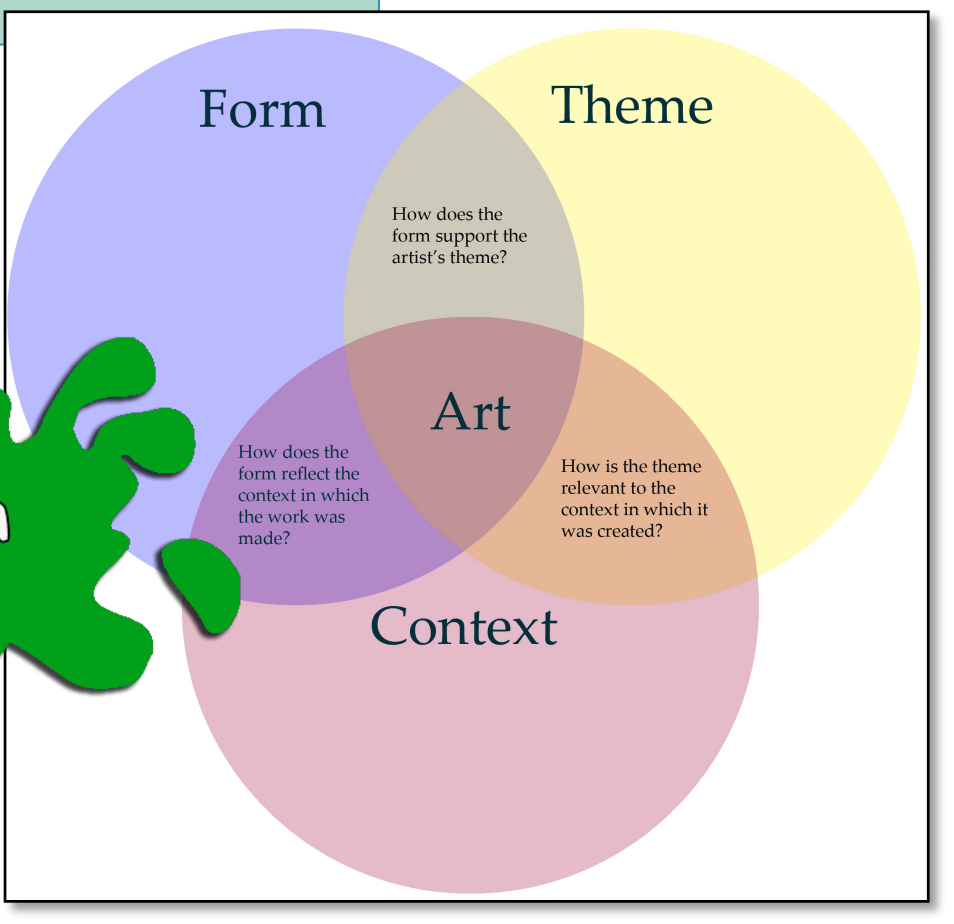
Decoding Art

Where is the meaning in art?

Grade level:	6 - 8
Topic/Media:	Analyzing Art
Duration:	1 class period + HW
Studio Habits:	Understand Art World
Anchor Standards:	AS9

Effectively analyzing works of art takes a strategy. In this mini- lesson, students learn about how the integration of Form, Theme and Context help form the meaning in works of art. They will learn how to recognize these elements by looking at the work of three artists, Elizabeth Murray, Adrian van Utrecht, and Kerry James Marshall, in the video "*Kracking the Kode – where is the meaning in art?*" Students then complete a written assignment to practice using these concepts..



This mini-lesson includes Essential Questions, Objectives, Learning Targets, Suggested Timeline, Electronic Student Handouts and Online Supporting Resources.

Instructional Components

Enduring Understanding
Art can be anything, but anything is not always art

Essential Questions
How do we decide if something is art or not?

Objectives
To learn how to effectively analyze a work of art

Learning Targets
Students can demonstrate the application of the concepts Form, Theme and Context in analyzing works of art

Unit Outline and Suggested Timeline

Unit Component	Component Introduction	Sequence & Duration
EUs/EQs/UOs	A student handout that explains the unit's Enduring Understandings, Essential Questions and Unit Objectives	5-minute intro on day 1 of unit
Front Loading Information and Hook	Discussion prompt: "How do we know if something is art or not?" Show the YouTube video *Kracking the Kode* – where is meaning in art (or have student watch on their own). The video explains how using Form, Theme and Context can help decode works of art.	30 - 60 minutes (20 minutes for video)
Art History and Art Analysis assignment	Based on the FTC model developed by Dr. Renee Sandell this assignment asks students to analyze artworks according to Form, Theme and Context. This mini-lesson can be done in class or assigned for homework.	Time frame flexible - either a homework assignment (usually extends over 1 night) or 1 class session

Front Loading Hook

The YouTube video *Kracking the Kode*? Explains how investigating Form, Theme and Context can be an effective strategy for analyzing works of art.

The Art Detective - K&U Assignment

Form

Remember, "Form" are the elements that physically make up the artwork.

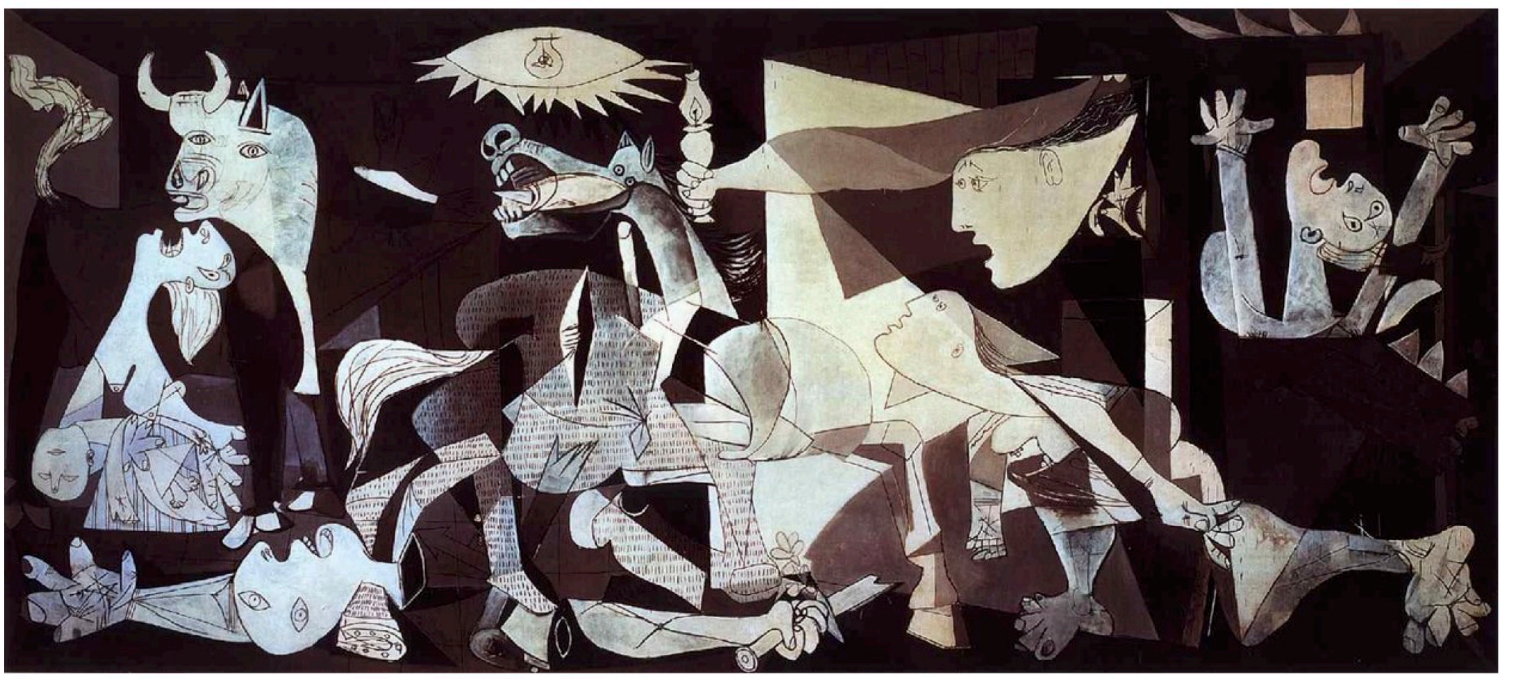
What type of emotion does Elizabeth Murray's painting make you feel? Use the table below to check the Elements of Art which help establish this feeling. Briefly describe how.

The "feeling" I get from Murray's painting is	
Describe how Murray uses the Elements of Art below to create this "Feeling."	
Line	
Color	
Shape	

Knowledge & Understanding Assignment, pg. 2

Theme

Remember, "Theme" is the "big idea" the artist wants to communicate in an artwork.



The "big idea" in Pablo Picasso's Guernica (1937) is the horror of war. How does he use the Principles of Design in the table below to help him express his theme?

Principle of Design	How Picasso uses it in this painting
Emphasis	
Contrast	
Unity & Variety	

Knowledge & Understanding Assignment, pg.3

Context

Remember, "Context" is the circumstances of time and place of when the artist lived and made the artwork.

Andy Warhol grew up in a very prosperous time in America. The 1950s was the first decade where the average family could afford things like cars, televisions, and telephones (not even smart phones!). It was a time when factories mass -produced many things for Americans to buy. The American housewife was bombarded with advertising for products to save time and make her life easier. How does Warhol's work above reflect those times?

smack dab art

Thematic Projects for Middle School Visual Arts

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Brian Reverman has taught high school art since 2004, including the IBO DP Visual Arts Course, at the Casablanca American School, the American School of Bombay, and currently at the International School of Beijing. He is also the creator of the ISB Art History Channel on YouTube

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