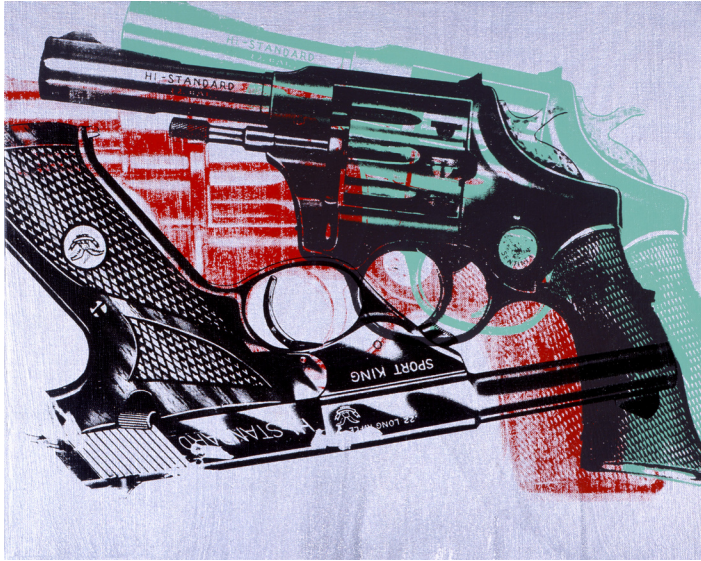


Art & Activities / Diversity of Voice: Views on Guns in the United States



Overview:

This lesson uses the artworks of Andy Warhol as a spring-board for discussing diverse points of view about gun ownership, gun use, and gun imagery in contemporary culture. Students read texts ranging from personal view-points to the Bill of Rights in order to debate cultural values.

Grades: 8 to 12

Subjects: Social Studies, Civics, Art, Language Arts

Pennsylvania State Standards:

Arts and Humanities:

9.3.12 G. Analyze works in the arts by referencing the judgments advanced by arts critics as well as one's own analysis and critique.

Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening:

1.4.8 D Write persuasive pieces

Civics and Government:

5.1.9 J Explain how law protects individual rights and the common good

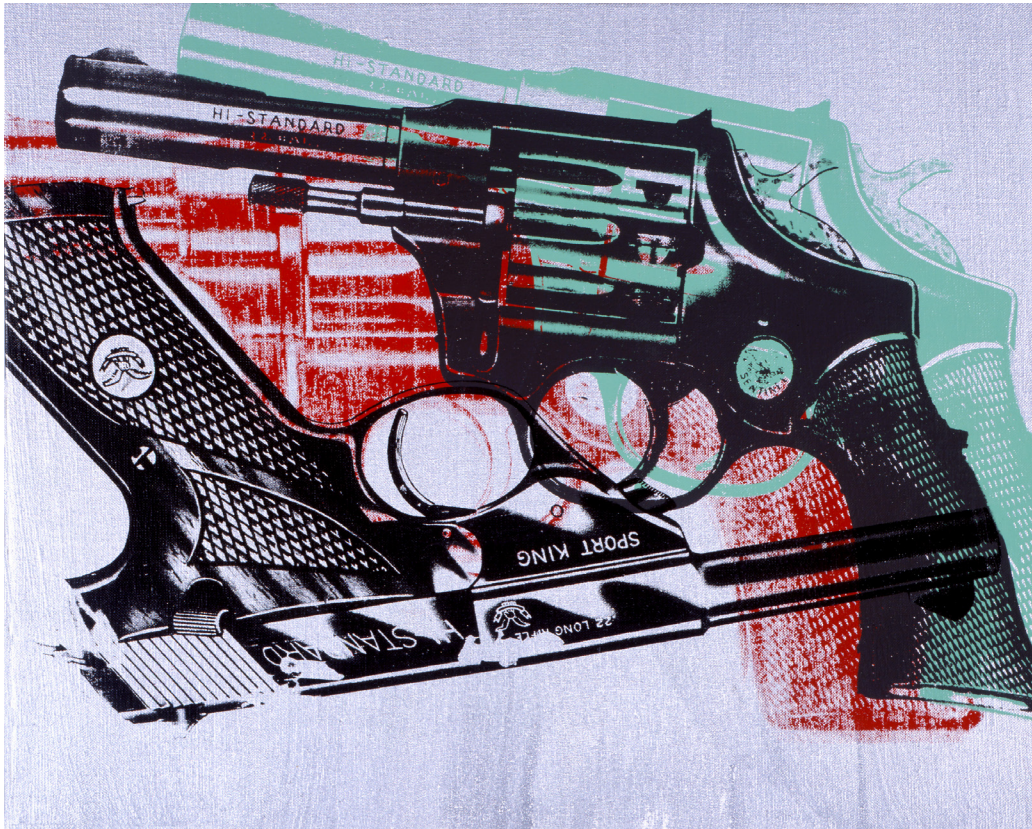
Objectives:

- Students will describe personal and cultural associations with an artwork
- Students will associate meanings with popular symbols
- Students will explain the meaning of historical and cultural documents and sources
- Students will compare and contrast historical and cultural values
- Students will formulate individual points of view about an artwork in writing
- Students will assess the role of art in communicating cultural values

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Andy Warhol, Guns, 1981-1982

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About the Art:

In the early 1980s Andy Warhol painted a variety of iconic objects, including guns, knives, and crosses. Warhol rejected the idea that his work functioned as social criticism and instead described himself as an American artist who was merely depicting his environment. This description suggests that his paintings of guns be read in the same way as his images of Campbell's Soup, Marilyn Monroe, or Coca-Cola—as simply images of American icons. Yet, as with many of Warhol's statements and works, there is the surface of things and then the multiple meanings below it. Gun ownership in America is hugely popular, in part, because it gives people a sense of security. Hollywood imagery and video games add to the allure of guns. The gun is also, through its widespread use and availability in America, a tool of real and commonplace violence. This particular gun, the .32 snub-nosed pistol, was of the type that Valerie Solanas used in her 1968 assassination attempt on Warhol. In his choice of such richly associative iconic objects, Warhol becomes a truly artful social observer.

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Points of View:

When you hurt another person, you never know how much it pains. Since I was shot, everything is such a dream to me. I don't know what anything is about. Like, I don't know whether I'm alive or whether I died. I wasn't afraid before. And having been dead once, I shouldn't feel fear. But I am afraid. I don't understand why.

Andy Warhol after he was shot and seriously wounded in 1968

What country can preserve its liberties if its rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms.

Thomas Jefferson to William Stephens Smith, 1787

There's a saying in the theater that if a play opens with a gun over the mantle, the gun must go off before the final curtain. Warhol suggests that lethal potential: with no one gripping it, this gun seems to be firing itself, its double image suggesting the "kick" of recoil.

But the viewer stands just to the side of where it's aimed. You can appreciate its lethal allure without being threatened directly by it. And you can understand how the pro-gun and anti-gun lobbies both fetishize the object of their disagreement. The former treat guns as totems to ward off danger or totalitarianisms, the latter regard them as taboo objects whose mere presence invites evil.

Chris Potter, managing editor, The Pittsburgh City Paper,
"Point of View Labeling Project," The Andy Warhol Museum,
1999

I stood up in a social studies class—the teacher wanted a discussion—and said I could never kill anyone or condone anyone who did kill anyone. But that I could on some level, understand these kids in Colorado, the killers [reference to school shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado where 12 students were shot by two classmates]. Because day after day, slight after slight, exclusion after exclusion, you can learn how to hate . . . After class I was called to the principal's office and told that I had to agree to undergo five sessions of counseling or be expelled from school, as I had expressed 'sympathy' with the killers in Colorado and the school had to be able to explain itself if I 'acted out.' In other words, for speaking freely, and to cover their ass, I was not only branded a weird geek, but a potential killer, that will sure help deal with violence in America.

Jay in the Southeast, Slashdot.org

Discussion Questions:

1. What associations do you have when looking at this gun? Make a list of words that come to mind.
2. Who do you usually associate with guns? Do these people impact your daily life?
3. How many times in one week do you think you see guns on television, movies, or in other video imagery? Do these images affect you?
4. Do you think our culture is obsessed with violence? Why or why not?
5. Does this artwork celebrate or critique America's gun culture? Can it do both? Why or why not?

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Activity: Diversity of Voice Discussion

Materials:

Paper
Writing Utensil
Handout (pages 7 and 8 of this PDF)



Activity Procedure:

1. Students should read and discuss each point of view. Attached handout includes the points of view, supplemental information, and possible discussion questions.
2. Students write their own point of view about Andy Warhol's Gun painting.

Extension: discuss or write an essay addressing the following questions:

Should art communicate cultural values or morals? Why or why not?

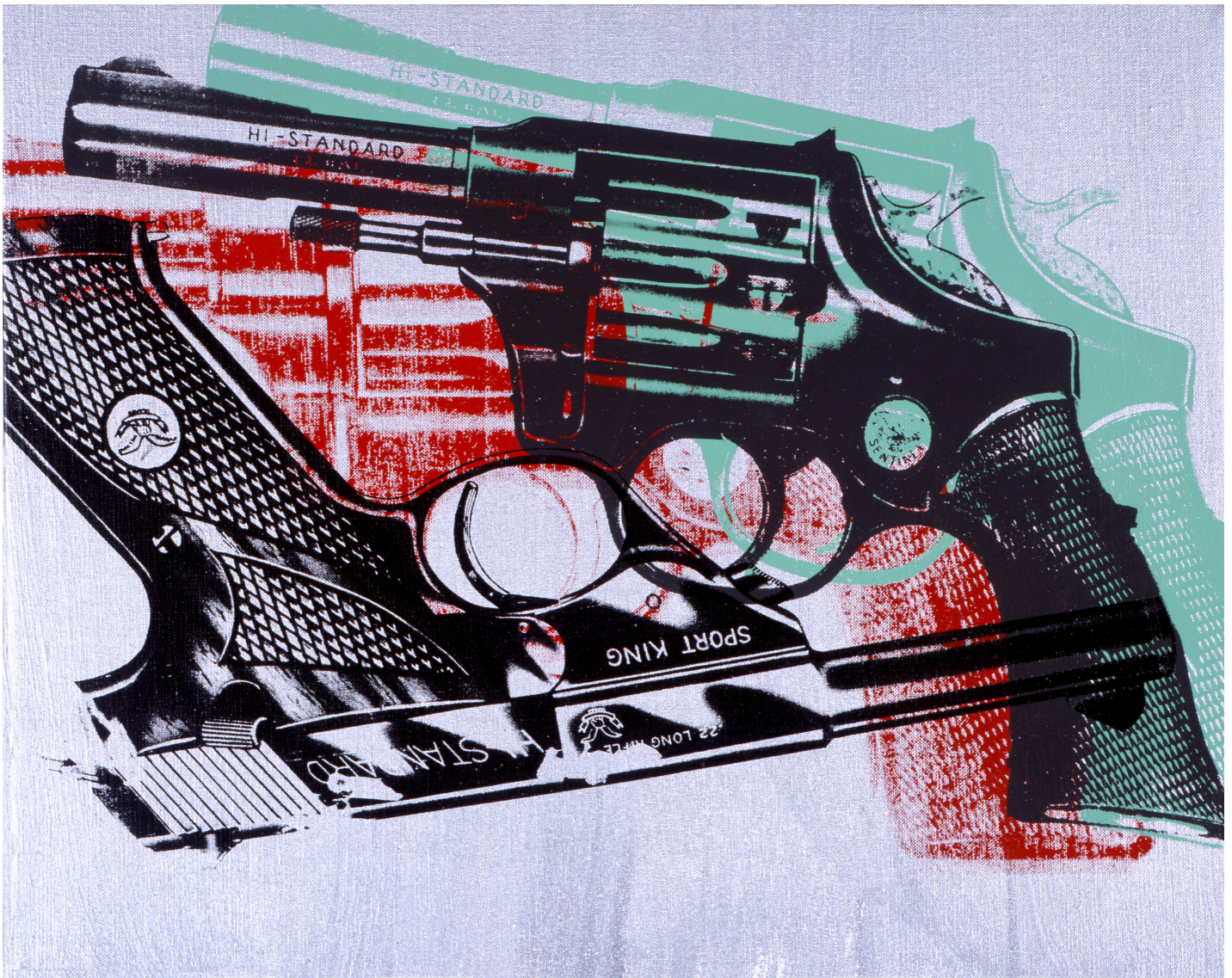
What do you think the role of art is and should be in culture?

Assessment and Wrap up:

In small groups, students should discuss the following questions:

- Should art communicate cultural values and/or morals? Why or why not?
- What do you think the role of art is and should be in culture?

After the small group discussions, each group will present a synopsis of their discussion to the class.



Andy Warhol, Guns, 1981-1982

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Andy Warhol
Gun, 1981-1982
acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas
70 x 90 x 1 1/4 in. (177.8 x 228.6 x 3.2 cm.)
The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh
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Art & Activities / Diversity of Voice: Focus on Guns in America - Handout

	Point of View	Additional Information & Discussion Questions
I	<p>"What country can preserve its liberties if its rulers are not warned from time to time that their people pre-serve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms."</p> <p>Thomas Jefferson to William Stephens Smith, 1787</p>	<p>In 1787, the 13 new American states sent delegates to create the Constitution for the united nation. At the height of the debate Thomas Jefferson wrote to James Madison emphasizing the need for statements in the Constitution clarifying individual rights. These ideas were popular and the first ten amendments to the Constitution, now known as the Bill of Rights were drafted by 1791. This document placed primary value on the individual rather than on any government in America. This radical idea included the concept that individuals in a free society must be able to overthrow any government if it does not represent them. The second amendment to the United States Constitution Article [II.] reads:</p> <p>A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.</p> <p>Identify and discuss what the second amendment to the Constitution means. What is a militia? A free state?</p> <p>Do all countries give their citizens the right to "keep and bear arms"? Why not?</p>
II	<p>There's a saying in the theater that if a play opens with a gun over the mantle, the gun must go off before the final curtain. Warhol suggests that lethal potential: with no one gripping it, this gun seems to be firing itself, its double image suggesting the "kick" of recoil.</p> <p>But the viewer stands just to the side of where it's aimed. You can appreciate its lethal allure without being threatened directly by it. And you can understand how the pro-gun and anti-gun lobbies both fetishize the object of their disagreement. The former treat guns as totems to ward off danger or totalitarianisms, the latter regard them as taboo objects whose mere presence invites evil.</p> <p>Chris Potter, managing editor, The Pittsburgh City Paper</p>	<p>There is a fierce debate over guns in America. As Chris Potter identifies in his writing, both sides of this debate frame their arguments in both simplistic and extremist ways.</p> <p>Examine the definition of fetish. If a gun can be a fetish object, what are some other examples?</p> <p>Are guns the solution to ward off danger and bad government? Is the presence of guns always an invitation to "evil"? Discuss the arguments for and against gun ownership.</p> <p>Try to identify your own values; clarify when and why people should be able to own and use guns and when and why they should not.</p>

continued

Art & Activities / Diversity of Voice: Focus on Guns in America - Handout

	Point of View	Additional Information & Discussion Questions
III	<p>I stood up in a social studies class – the teacher want-ed a discussion – and said I could never kill anyone or condone anyone who did kill anyone. But that I could on some level, understand these kids in Colorado, the killers [reference to school shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado where 12 students were shot by two classmates]. Because day after day, slight after slight, exclusion after exclusion, you can learn how to hate . . . After class I was called to the principal’s office and told that I had to agree to undergo five sessions of counseling or be expelled from school, as I had expressed ‘sympathy’ with the killers in Colorado and the school had to be able to explain itself if I ‘acted out.’ In other words, for speaking freely, and to cover their ass, I was not only branded a weird geek, but a potential killer, that will sure help deal with vio-lence in America.</p> <p>Jay in the Southeast, Slashdot.org</p>	<p>Jay was cast under suspicion after expressing an understand-ing of the hard social conditions the two Columbine killers may have been enduring. Research some of the stories around this high school shooting in Littleton, Colorado. Not disputing the fact that the two killers had an arsenal of guns available to them, what other factors led to this tragedy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some of the reasons kids get angry? • What are the biggest problems you see in youth culture affecting kids ability to cope with their emotions? • Discuss oppressive social circumstances: teasing, bullying, discrimination, etc. • What is the best way to diminish violence in a culture? • What responsibility do artists (including musicians, writers, movie directors, etc.) and artworks have in such moral issues?
IV	<p>When you hurt another person, you never know how much it pains. Since I was shot, everything is such a dream to me. I don’t know what anything is about. Like, I don’t know whether I’m alive or whether I died. I wasn’t afraid before. And having been dead once, I shouldn’t feel fear. But I am afraid. I don’t understand why.</p> <p>Andy Warhol after he was shot and seriously wounded in 1968.</p>	<p>Andy Warhol claimed not to wear the title of social critic in his paintings, but he simultaneously expressed his fears after being shot with a gun.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you read the artist’s emotions or thoughts in this piece? Why or why not? • Look again at Warhol’s painting in light of all of these points of view. Does his gun painting have a message?What do you think it is?