

Art & Activities / Flashbulb Memories - Jackie paintings



Overview:

This lesson explores the phenomena of flashbulb memory and the ability of powerful images to bring back personal memories. Students are introduced to the historical context behind Warhol's portraits of Jacqueline Kennedy and are able to make comparisons and to write about their own memories of events.

Grades: 6-12

Subjects: History, Social Studies, English, Creative Writing, Art

Pennsylvania State Standards:

Arts and Humanities:

9.1.5 E Know and demonstrate how arts can communicate experiences, stories or emotions through the production of works in the arts.

Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening:

1.6.8 F Use media for learning purposes.

History:

8.1.9 B Analyze and interpret historical sources. Visual data presented in historical evidence

Objectives:

- Students will infer emotions from visual clues
- Students will differentiate between Flashbulb Memory and Collective Memory
- Students will discuss and share responses
- Students will examine cause and effect
- Students will analyze the cause and effect of images upon memory

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Art & Activities / Flashbulb Memories - Jackie paintings



Andy Warhol
Jackie - Inauguration (Profile Facing Right), 1964
acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas
20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.6 cm.)
The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh Founding Collection,
Contribution The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.

About the Art:

The early 1960s was a time of tumultuous change for America, from the civil rights movement to space exploration. John F. Kennedy's short presidency from 1961 until his death on November 22, 1963, helped set the tone for the remainder of the decade. The youngest president ever elected in the United States, JFK and his wife Jackie quickly became American icons, not just for JFK's policies, but also for their youth, glamour, and style.

Deeply affected by JFK's assassination, Warhol began a large portrait series of his widow, Jacqueline Kennedy. Based on images from magazines and newspapers, these portraits were shown individually and in groupings. Warhol's isolation and repetition of Jackie's image suggest both the solitary and collective experience of widow and witnessing nation. Commentators have remarked that television became a unifying force during this time as people obsessively watched the events unfold in Dallas and at the funeral throughout the following week. Warhol's multiple images offer the viewer an obsessive reenactment of this central event in United States history. Even later in his life Warhol was amazed at the power Jackie's image held as a reminder of this event: "As we walked through the galleries every person recognized Jackie. They didn't come too close. They stopped for a minute, looked, and whispered. You could hear her name in the air: 'Jackie. Jackie.' It's a very strange feeling. There is so much awe and respect for her. Being with her is like walking with a saint." (From Andy Warhol's *Exposures*, p. 82)

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Points of View:

“When President Kennedy was shot that fall, I heard the news over the radio while I was alone painting in my studio... I’d been thrilled having Kennedy as president; he was handsome, young, smart – but it didn’t bother me that much that he was dead. What bothered me was the way the television and radios were programming everybody to feel so sad... It seemed like no matter how hard you tried, you couldn’t get away from the thing.”

Andy Warhol, POPism: The Warhol ‘60s, by Andy Warhol & Pat Hackett, Harcourt, Brace, Janovich (New York, 1980) p. 60

Well, Kennedy was sort of this savior, this prince, and they called his administration Camelot. And when he died it seemed that he took the dreams – I was thirteen – the dreams of the future generations were shattered when he was killed... I’ve never looked at government and politics in quite the same way after that. I no longer think that our elected officials are competent.

Interview with New York woman, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*, Columbia University Press (New York, 1998)

Her face is as familiar to me as that of my mother. As a small child I even associated Jacqueline Kennedy with Mom: poised and elegant, with the same thick dark hair, tailored suits, pillbox hats and white gloves. But here, Jackie seems less a maternal object than a religious icon. The thirty-two jewel-colored squares look like a wall of stained glass. Do the images reveal the gracious First Lady or the stunned widow? The photos seem to tell both stories. Do the multiple images enable us to empathize with Jackie, or do they destroy her uniqueness by making her a commodity? If she has become a brand-name product, like Warhol’s Campbell’s Soup Cans and Marilyns, can we ever recover the “real” Jackie? And what are we, as insatiable consumers of gossip about her and the Kennedy family?

Paula Kane, Department of Religious Studies, University of Pittsburgh, quotation from Point of View Labeling Project, The Andy Warhol Museum, 2001.

Warhol rendered Jackie—celebrity/victim—in his standard grid, repeating images as if they were mug shots, frames of documentary film footage, or a fan’s clippings. Repetition implies mourning: the Dallas scene is a trauma, and mourning takes the form of recycling and recall, a process that unsettles chronology . . . Repetition implies commodification: Jackie no longer has control over her own image . . . Repetition implies obsession: the Jackie photos are cropped—narrowing the focus onto Jackie alone, myopically isolating her from context . . . A narrative emerges, and it is not the story of Jackie’s life or the growth of Jackie’s soul—but the narrative of the image and of our relation to the image.

Wayne Koestenbaum, writer, from *Jackie Under My Skin: Interpreting an Icon* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, (New York, 1995) p. 132.

Discussion Questions:

1. Look at the images; who is this woman? If you do not know who this is, try to guess.
For example, is there any evidence that she is famous?
2. Warhol cropped this image from larger pictures of events. Speculate what is happening in the background.
3. Describe this woman’s emotions. What clues do the paintings give to make you think this?

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Activity: Flashbulb Memory Project

Materials:

Warhol's Jackie paintings as examples
Flashbulb memory handout (page 9 of PDF)
Computers with internet connection and printer
Photocopy machine
Markers
Scissors
Colored paper
Glue or glue sticks
Tape



Activity Procedure:

1. Introduce Flashbulb Memory and Collective Memory

Flashbulb Memory: the recall of very specific images or details surrounding a vivid, rare, or significant personal event.

Vivid and long-lasting, flashbulb memories are extraordinarily complete and durable and often mark the chapters of a life. Sometimes flashbulb memories concern personal events, such as an early morning telephone call that tells of the birth of a baby or the sudden death of a loved one. Others involve news of national importance or significant events such as the assassinations of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., or the Challenger space-shuttle explosion and the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center.

In the 1970s scientists speculated about the nature of this memory phenomenon, hypothesizing that these memories re-sulted from a special physiological mechanism that was triggered by events that were highly consequential and emotional for an individual. The individual's resulting memory was unusually salient and often included such intricate personal details as where they were, what they were doing, and what outfit they were wearing.

Later studies suggest that although there is not such a special memory mechanism, almost everyone experiences ex-tremely vivid memories, and some of these "flashbulb" memories are extraordinarily accurate and virtually permanent.

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Activity: Flashbulb Memory Project continued...

Collective Memory:

"Collective memory has been defined as "an image bequeathed to posterity." It is shared memory, and it is important. Historians may question the accuracy of an individual's memory, but they often rely on collective memory when assessing the meaning of the past. This classification of memory begins as a mixture of both actual experiences and communicated information about experiences. As time goes by the importance of firsthand experience lessens and communicated information becomes dominant."

Conover Hunt, JFK for a New Generation, The Sixth Floor Museum
& Southern Methodist University Press, (Texas, 1996), p.17.

1. Introduce Flashbulb Memory and Collective Memory.
2. Students write about a flashbulb memory of an event or an important moment that had an impact on their life.
3. Students pair with someone and share their responses.
4. Students discuss the following questions: What are some events that have affected everyone's life? What experience have you lived through that you wouldn't want other people to forget? What are your personal memories of that moment? Make a group list of the events. Pick one that seems to have the broadest impact.
5. Students define collective memory as a group using the written responses to support their definition.
6. Collect reproductions from the internet and media representing the news event chosen from step number 4 above. Students work in small groups to crop, copy, enlarge, or reduce the pictures in preparation for a repetitive collage. Using Warhol's Jackies as a guide, collage and repeat the images using different color variations and compositions. Mount the finished project on a large piece of paper or matt board. Each group should prepare a short artist statement.

Extension:

1. Present the following quote:

"In the real world, something is happening and no one knows what is going to happen. In the image-world, it has happened and it will forever happen in that way."

Susan Sontag, On Photography, Doubleday (New York, 1977),
p.168.

Students discuss or write a reflective essay on the quote and Sontag's use of the term "image world".

2. Listen to the collection of recorded memories here:

<https://soundcloud.com/thewarholmuseum/sets/flashbulb-memories-audio-interviews>

Have students compare and contrast these memories with those they collected during the assignment.

Assessment and Wrap-up:

In a class critique students read their artist statements and discuss their finished projects, their decision-making processes, and the effect repetition has in each work. Possible discussion questions: Does repetition strengthen or weaken the emotional value of the work? In what ways does your artwork reflect collective memory?



Andy Warhol

Jackie - Inauguration (Profile Facing Right), 1964

acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas

20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.6 cm.)

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Andy Warhol, Jackie, 1964

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Andy Warhol

Jackie - With Veil (Man's Head to Right), 1964

acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas

20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.6 cm.)

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1. Look at any of these images or insert your own



Select a photograph of an event that had a particularly strong impact on you or about which every detail of the memory seems sharp.

2. What do you remember about this event? Write down your memory including as many details as you can of how you experienced it.

3. How were you impacted then? Does the event still impact your life today? Explain your answer.

4. What do you think younger generations who did not live through this event should remember about it? What is the legacy of this event?
