

Teacher's Packet

A Teacher's Packet has been prepared by Blaffer Gallery for students of all ages. The five components of this packet provide discussion starters, a slide list, activities, and related reference information that would be useful for further exploration of Chuck Close, and his processes, in a learning environment.

Talking About Art

Discussion starters to help build base knowledge of portraits, prints, and Chuck Close.

Viewing Prints

Chuck Close prints and related discussion questions for elementary and secondary levels.

Thinking About Art

Elementary and secondary level questions on aesthetic considerations.

Making Art

Instructions for creating prints based on processes and techniques used by Chuck Close.

Print Making Processes

The eleven primary print making processes defined.

Teacher Glossary

Definitions to underlined words through out Teacher's Packet.

Talking About Art

Before beginning the Chuck Close lesson and activities, talking about the following areas provides a foundation for students to build their knowledge of art and Chuck Close.

- Printmaking

Ask the class if they know about printmaking, and if they can think of different types. Describe some of the various methods of printmaking and ask the students to think about why an artist might choose to use this medium, as opposed to drawing, painting or photography. Discuss some ways that non-artists have used printmaking in the past and present, (books, newspapers, currency, photocopy machines, newspaper printing, computer printing, fingerprinting in law enforcement, etc.) and the difference between printmaking as a fine art and as a commercial medium.

- Portraiture

Talk about portraits. Why would someone choose to paint a portrait of someone, or even a portrait of themselves (a self-portrait)? Have students think about what an artist might want to include in a portrait, and if and when an artist might have to make the choice between faithful representation of a subject, or a more flattering representation (omitting certain things, emphasizing others, etc.)

- Chuck Close

Chuck Close was born 1940 in Washington State and is renowned as one of America's foremost artists. He has been exploring the art of printmaking as a part of his artistic inquiry for over 30 years. Chuck uses a grid to transfer his subject from a photograph to a painting or print. By breaking the larger image down into its smaller component parts, he is able to make decisions about the nature and properties of the various colors that he uses in his works. In his earlier works, Close was careful to hide the grid upon completion, but in his later pieces, the grid has become a visual element of the work itself, and is no longer simply for planning.

Viewing Prints: Keith, Mezzotint, 1972

Mezzotint (51 x 41 ½")

This was the first print that Close made as an established artist, and it is now considered to be a major work in American printmaking. The technique that he chose to use, mezzotint, is a very time-consuming medium that was most popular during the 18th century portraiture. In mezzotint, the final products were on average small, 3 x 4 inches.



Questions:

Elementary/Secondary

- 1) Why do you think that he decided to make his mezzotint so big, when they were historically so small?
- 2) Why do you think that he decided to allow the grid to be seen, when previously he had kept it hidden?

Secondary

- 1) How does the grid contribute to the success of the artwork, if at all?

Viewing Prints: Leslie, Fingerprint, 1986

Direct gravure (54½ x 40½)

This work is one of many that Close created by using fingerprints. Close always makes portraits of people he knows, like this portrait of his wife, Leslie.



Questions:

Elementary

- 1) Why do you think he chose to use his fingerprint as the tool for art making?
- 2) What are fingerprints usually used for?
- 3) If you made a portrait of someone you know, who would it be and why?

Secondary

- 1) This picture is more like a mug-shot than a portrait. Why do you think Close chose to make this picture of his wife so impersonal?

Viewing Prints: Phil, Fingerprint, 1981

Lithograph (58 x 38")

Lithography is a process in which the prints are made using a limestone. The image is drawn on the stone using a greasy material, then the stone is dampened, and ink is rolled over the surface. The ink stays on the greasy areas while it is repelled from the other areas. Paper is applied to the stone and the image is printed. For this work, Close applied the greasy material with his fingers, leaving the impression of his fingerprint behind.



Questions:

Elementary

1) Would you want this print in your house? Why or why not?

Elementary/Secondary

1) Close makes portraits of just faces. What are other ways to make a portrait? Does a portrait have to include a face? Why or why not?

2) What do you think about his use of the grid in these works?

Viewing Prints: Alex, Reduction Block, 1993

Silkscreen from reduction linoleum cut (79 3/8 x 60 3/8")

This work was created in an unexpected way. Due to unforeseen events, the printers could not use good linoleum for carving, or find the right kind of paper to print. Because of this, the master printer was unable to make a good edition of the image. Instead, the team decided to use a silkscreen process.



Questions:

Elementary

1) Have you ever had something that you were working on not turn out the way you wanted it to? What did you do

Secondary

1) Close does not take commissions for portraits. How do you think these portraits would be different, if at all, if they were commissioned?

Viewing Prints: Self-Portrait, Spitbite, 1988

Spitbite aquatint (20 1/2 x 15 5/8")

This piece was Close's first spitbite aquatint. Usually in aquatint prints, the entire plate is dipped in an acid bath. In spitbite aquatint, the artist mixes the acid with either soap, gum Arabic or spit, and brushes it onto select areas of the plate. This gives the lines of the print a more soft, irregular and watery appearance.



Questions:

Elementary

- 1) What do you think about the fact that Close decided to use spit as a part of making this print?
- 2) Is spit something that you usually think about artists using when they make art?

Elementary/Secondary

- 1) In many of these prints, Close uses lots of bright colors. How would these works be different if they were all in black and white? How do the bright colors affect the interpretation of the artwork?

Secondary

- 1) By adding his saliva, or the saliva of the printmaker, has the artist or printmaker succeeded in further inserting himself into the artistic process?

Viewing Prints: Emma, Woodcut, 2002

113-color woodblock ukiyo-e print (43 by 35")

Close created this work by using a traditional Japanese printmaking technique called Ukiyo-e. Part of this process, and many other printmaking processes as well, includes collaborating with a master printer.



Questions:

Elementary

- 1) When have you worked with someone else to complete a project? What was it like? What problems did you encounter?
- 2) What is the difference between a photograph and these portraits? Which do you like better? Why?

Secondary

- 1) How does this collaboration change the idea of the artist as the single creator of a work of art?
- 2) How is a collaboration with a master printer different from collaborating with studio apprentices? Why do you think that in printmaking, the master-printer is usually listed (and therefore credited) as well, while a studio assistant or apprentice is usually not?

Thinking About Art

This section on classroom activities related to Chuck Close prints includes discussion questions regarding aesthetic considerations.

Elementary

1. Why would someone want to make a portrait of someone using printmaking instead of just taking a photograph? What's the difference between a print made from a camera and a print made with one of these printmaking processes?
2. Close makes these portraits so close-up and large, that the head is the only thing in the print. If you could change these portraits to include other things, what would you add? What would you take out? Why would you make these changes?
3. Close's work is larger than life. How would they be different if they were very small? What size do you like better? Why?

Upper Elementary/Secondary

1. Discuss the process of printmaking and how it is possible to make many copies of the same image. Does the value of an artwork lessen with each print that is made? Is the first print as valuable as the last? What is the value of the plate? Compare the value of a print to an original oil painting or sculpture. Discuss the difference.
2. Discuss the use of a master printer in the studio. Does it matter if the artist makes the prints? Is the value of the artwork the same if a master printer does the printing instead of the artist, even if the artist has created the plate?
3. Close refers to these portraits as "heads". What artistic decisions cause Close's heads to become impersonal and imposing? Why do you think Close decided to make them in this manner? Consider the titles, size, and the information included in each print.

Making Art

This section includes ideas and instructions on hands-on classroom activities related to Chuck Close prints.

Activities for Elementary Level

1. Monochromatic Foam Prints. Have students draw on paper either a self-portrait or a portrait of a classmate. Lay the Paper on top of a piece of foam (such as recycled produce trays with their edges removed to create a flat surface). Place the drawing side up and trace over the drawing pressing hard enough to leave an impression on the foam. The foam becomes the printing plate. Using a brayer, Have students apply a thin layer of acrylic paint or acrylic printing ink onto the plate and then lay a piece of paper onto the plate. Remove and allow to dry. Have students print more than one copy from the same plate. Discuss the idea of editions.

Extensions: Have students print on different types of materials, such as newspaper, wall paper, fabric, etc. and/or Have students create multicolor prints by painting ink or paint directly onto their plate with a brush, and printing the resulting image. They will need to work quickly in this method, so that the ink or paint does not dry on the plate.

2. Multicolor Mono-prints. –First discuss composition, balance (asymmetry and symmetry), and color schemes. Either supply pre-cut abstract shapes made from foam or cardboard, or have the students make them. Each student will make a non-objective mono-print using the shapes cut from foam or cardboard. Place several colors of paint in shallow trays. Each student will choose five shaped pieces and five colors of acrylic paint. Place a shape into a color and then drop it onto a piece of paper. Remove it from the paper to make a print of the shape. Repeat with other shapes. Overlap printed shapes to mix colors. Think about composition, balance, and color schemes.

Extension: Using abstract shapes make a mono-print of a recognizable object.

Activities for Secondary Level

1. Fingerprint portraits.- Have students create a self portrait using only stamp pad ink and their fingerprints. Follow this with a discussion of the difficulties that they encountered and any possible connections between fingerprint as identity and image as identity.

2. Shared art.- Discuss how Chuck Close used Master Printers to print his plates for him. Have students draw an image to be printed using the Linocut technique and determine the different color separations. Each student will

then work with a “master printer” who will do the carving. You will need a different block for each color. Don’t forget about registration! Have them discuss the process involved, and any frustrations or surprises that might have resulted.

Helpful Hints: To transfer a drawing to a plate, cover the back of the drawing with graphite. Lay the picture, graphite side down, on top of the plate. Re-trace the picture pressing down hard while drawing. This will leave an impression on the lino-block.

To register prints in multi-colored designs, use a piece of paper that is larger than the plate. Lay the plate or lino-block onto the paper and trace around it, leaving a box the size of the block. With each print, lay the plate within the square.

3. Collaborative Grid Technology Project: - Using a scanner, turn a photograph of a person’s face into a digital file by way of Photoshop. Divide the image into separate grid sections for each student. Save each grid section as a separate file, being careful to maintain consistent image size, canvas size, and dpi. Each student will then manipulate their image section by simplifying the color and shapes of the parts of their grid section. Upon completion of the assignment, students will then print out their individual images, and reassemble them to create a large-scale collaborative technology grid portrait. Engage in a discussion of how the different grid sections were manipulated, how the final image differs from the original image, and if the characteristics of the face are still identifiable.

Print Making Processes

The process in which a work of art, usually on paper, is created from a "plate" that has been transformed to contain areas that will and will not transfer ink to a surface it comes into contact with. Printmaking methods fall into one of four main categories: relief, intaglio, planographic and stencil processes.

Relief Processes

In relief printing processes, the original flat surface to be cut is the printing surface. Parts of the design not to be printed are removed or cut away. The remaining raised image is then inked with a brayer, and then printed onto paper. Because printing presses are not needed, these printing processes are usually considered easier than others, and can require less studio space, and less equipment.

The three Relief processes -

Linocut or Linoleum Cut

Linoleum cut printing is one of the easiest techniques to learn for the beginning printmaker. Both monochrome and multicolor prints can be created. The artist uses metal tools to remove areas from a sheet of linoleum, and due to the uniform nature of the material, cuts in any direction are easy to make. Multicolored design can be created in one of two ways. One way is the reduction method, in which more of the linoleum is removed in stages for the different colors of ink to be applied. The other, perhaps more difficult method involves the carving of separate pieces of linoleum for each color. The alignment of the various layers of color is easier in the reductive method, but the process destroys the previous layers, effectively limiting the number of editions that can be printed of the image.

Woodblock Print

Woodblock prints are made from a plate created by cutting into side grain pieces of wood. Usually the designs take into account the grain of the wood, as it is usually easier to cut with the grain than against it. As in Linocut printing, the areas to remain the color of the paper are removed, and the areas to be printed in a color remain and are inked with a brayer.

Ukiyo-e

Ukiyo-e is a Japanese woodcut technique. It translates to “pictures of the floating world.” It has been around since the Edo period of Japan (1603-1867). Originally, the images were monochromatic, but throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, innovations in technique allowed them to create more complex multicolor prints. Traditionally, one person chooses the color separations, draws onto the blocks, and prints them, while a second person is responsible for all of the carving. In the case of *Emma*, Close contracted the master printer Yasu Shinbata, a master at drawing, painting, and carving, to do all of the printmaking himself, using a painting by Close as a guide.

Intaglio Processes

In intaglio printmaking processes, recesses are created in a metal plate into which ink is spread for printing. Some of the ways these grooves can be created are by cutting away with hand tools or by etching with acid.

The four Intaglio processes -

Etching

Etching is an intaglio method of printmaking. It was first developed during the sixteenth century, when it was discovered that acid could incise, or cut an image into a metal plate. An acid-resistant waxy ground is first applied to the metal plate. After the ground has dried, an etching needle is used to draw images by scratching through the ground and exposing the metal underneath. The plate is then submerged into an acid bath, which eats into the exposed areas, creating a "bite" or incision. The areas of the plate still covered by the acid resistant ground are unaffected by the acid. Once the incisions are deep enough, the plate is removed from the acid bath, and the ground is removed with a solvent. The entire plate is then inked using a dabber to force the ink into the incised lines. Then, the surface of the plate is wiped clean; however, the ink remains in the incised lines. The plate is now placed face up on the bed of what is called an etching press. A piece of dampened paper is placed over the image, and padded with a blanket. The plate is run through the ink, and the paper is forced into the lines, where it picks up the ink. Because the paper is usually larger than the plate, an indentation appears around the edge of the image. This is known as a plate mark.

Aquatint

Aquatint is an etching method that allows you to create both areas of solid tone and gradations of tone from white through a range of grays and black. The process involves coating the plate with resin, and etching the plate with acid. Spit bite aquatint combines spit, glue or gum arabic with the acid, in order to create softer, more watercolor like lines. The big difference between etching and aquatint is that because of the resin, you can create large areas of different tones. In order to achieve the same effect with etching, you would have to do a lot of cross hatching to rough up the plate.

Direct Gravure

Direct gravure is a type of etching. Using light, an image is applied to a photosensitized surface, but instead of developing with photographic chemicals, the surface is bit with acid and then printed. It is called direct gravure because even though a photosensitive surface and light are used to create the plate, no photography is used to make the image.

Mezzotint

Mezzotint (literally "half tone") is a method of printmaking that was popular during the 18th century, especially for portraiture. The prints created are usually very small, and are engravings of tone as opposed to engravings on line. First, a small spiked tool called a rocker is used to make fine dots all over the entire surface of the plate, until it appears in texture like a file, and in appearance like a rich black color. Then, the plate is scraped and burnished to smooth out the surface to create lighter areas. The areas that are left rough contain a greater surface texture, and are able to physically hold onto more ink, therefore printing dark tones of color. The areas that are smoothed out are unable to retain the ink, and print lightly, or remain the color of the printing paper.

Planographic Processes

The primary Planographic process is lithography -

Lithography was invented in 1798, and became popular by the end of the 19th century. The image is drawn using either oil-based lithographic crayons or a greasy material called tusche, onto a polished piece of limestone or a specially prepared zinc or aluminum plate. The surface is then wiped clean with a chemical solution which causes the areas covered by the image to attract the greasy printers' ink, and the blank areas around the image to repel the ink and attract water. The surface is then wiped with a solvent, which dissolves most of the original image except a ghostlike version of the image which remains "fixed", or permanently bonded to the surface of the plate. The entire stone is then wet with water, which is absorbed by the blank areas, and repelled by the greasy "fixed" areas. A roller is then used to apply an oil based printers ink of the surface of the plate, which adheres to the greasy areas of the plate, but is repelled by the wet areas. The inked plate is then placed onto the bed of a lithographic press, and a sheet of dampened paper is laid on top. A board is placed on top of the paper, and the tension plate of the press is lowered, and even pressure is applied as the rollers of the press are turned. If a lithograph is to contain more than one color, then separate stones must be used for each.

Stencil Processes

The primary Stencil process is Silkscreen -

Silkscreen or screen printing is a process by which the print is taken not by the direct impression of one surface upon another, but by printing through an intermediary surface, the mesh screen. Screens are made by using a stencil which seals certain areas of the mesh off, keeping the ink from passing through onto the area to be printed. Ink is then forced through the unprotected areas of the screen, and deposited onto the surface to be printed below. An important thing to remember about silkscreen and other stencil processes is that the final print is not a reverse image from the image on the plate.

An interactive demonstration of various printmaking methods artists use to transfer their original composition to another service through the creation of a print is accessible at the following link:

<http://moma.org/exhibitions/2001/whatisaprint/flash.html>

Teacher Glossary

The following terms are important to know and understand for discussions and activities related to printmaking and the works of Chuck Close.

Printmaking - The process in which a work of art, usually on paper, is created from a "plate" that has been transformed to contain areas that will and will not transfer ink to a surface it comes into contact with. Printmaking methods fall into one of four main categories: relief, intaglio, planographic and stencil processes.

Balance (Symmetrical and Asymmetrical) - The equilibrium of various elements in a work of art. Symmetrical balance contains equal balance on either side of an imaginary middle line. Asymmetrical balance is achieved through unequal distribution on each side of an imaginary middle line.

Brayer - A roller used to apply printing ink to the plate.

Color Schemes -The use of colors of varying hues, tints, shades or tones to create a specific look in an artwork. Some examples include analogous colors, complementary colors, warm colors, cool colors, neutral colors, etc.

Composition - The manner in which the forms, lines, and colors of an artwork are arranged.

Editions - Numbered set of identical prints.

Master Printer - A person who has advanced to the top of the art of printmaking, whom others often entrust the task of creating prints of their images.

Monochrome - Using only one color.

Mono-prints - A unique, one time impression used to obtain a single copy of an image with characteristics different than that of a painting or drawing.

Non-Objective - An art work that has no recognizable images in it.

Plate - The object whose surface is altered to create areas that will and will not transfer ink to the surface to be printed. Some examples of plates are a block of wood, a piece of linoleum, a slab of stone, or a sheet of metal.

Portraits - A work of art whose subject is intended to be a representation of a particular person.

Registration - Marks used to line up the images printed by the different plates used in a multicolor print.

Self-Portrait - A portrait in which the subject is the artist who created the work.