

# ART CENTER LESSON PLAN

IDEAS + ACTIVITIES

## PATTERN + KUSAMA

### VIEW



**Let us begin with careful looking.** Using our eyes, let's spend one whole minute silently seeing what we notice. Scan the image. What stands out? What are you drawn to? Look for colors, shapes, and lines. Can you see shadows? What can you identify? What appears mysterious? Is there anything you notice after looking for one minute that you did not see at first glance?

**Yayoi Kusama** (Japanese, born 1929)  
*Pumpkin (L)*, 2014, fabricated 2018  
Bronze  
Overall: 94 7/8 × 92 1/2 × 92 1/2 in., 3306.9 lb.  
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;  
Purchased with funds from John and Mary Pappajohn, 2018.6

Photo Credit: Rich Sanders, Des Moines

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## DIG

Let's go back to the sculpture on page one and try another slow looking practice. You will spend one whole minute looking and writing a list of ten things that you notice. These can be any words; nouns, adjectives, or verbs that you see, feel, or sense from the sculpture. When the one minute is up, and you have listed everything you can, do it again! Spend just one more minute looking at the artwork and really dig to find ten more words inspired by your looking.

First Minute – Ten Words

Second Minute – Ten Words


Was listing these words easy or challenging?

Did anything surprise you after your second time looking?

Did you see anything you had not noticed before?

What happens when you spend more time looking at one piece of artwork?

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### DISCUSS

You may have learned about the elements of art and principals of design in art class. Let's use those characteristics to analyze *Pumpkin (L)* by Yayoi Kusama. What do you notice about the line, color, shape, and pattern of the sculpture?

A huge, bronze pumpkin covered in polka dots — it's odd, but it is the sort of thing you might see in dreams. Imagine this sculpture without the dots. How would the experience change? Artists can use patterns to create energy. Describe the pattern on *Pumpkin (L)*. Are the dots random or predictable? Soothing or energetic? Do you sense your eyes moving about the piece with the dots?

Looking at an artwork might make you want to know more about the artist. Based on your observations of *Pumpkin (L)* and your imagination, what kind of person do you think created it? What thoughts do you have about growth, patterns, or pumpkins that you may have learned from storytelling, literature, or movies that might help you understand this artist? What things do you think might be important to them?

Yayoi Kusama was born in 1929. She spent her childhood in Matsumoto, Japan where her family was involved in a plant nursery. Kusama began drawing pictures around the age of 10. At the same time, she began experiencing hallucinations in the fields of kabocha pumpkins outside her home. She described her visions as seemingly surrounding her with an infinite pattern of spots stretching from the ground to the sky. Infinity and obsessive repetition of pattern have continued to be themes of her art. In what ways can you see Yayoi Kusama's life represented in the sculpture *Pumpkin (L)*?

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## MATERIALS

Paper  
Pencil  
Optional: Crayons,  
Markers, Colored  
Pencils, or Paint and  
Paint Brush

## CREATE

### ASSIGNMENT #1

Patterned Produce | Visual Arts

Think about things that you love and create your own image inspired by the art of Yayoi Kusama.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Yayoi Kusama loves pumpkins and polka-dots, and these reoccurring images make her artwork immediately identifiable. For this project, pick one form of produce that you love. Produce is another name for fruits, vegetables, and growing food. It can be something you enjoy eating, something you like to look at, or something you have a fond memory of, like Kusama and her family's pumpkin patch.

Draw the outline of your produce on your paper. Make sure that you draw it big, taking up space on the page. Do not fill it in yet, just draw the outline. You can draw it from memory or look at a photograph to help you. You can draw it in pencil, marker, crayon, or paint. How does this fruit or vegetable make you feel when you see it? Do you think other people feel the same way when they see it?

Now that you have your produce drawn, think of a pattern that you love. It could be a pattern that you're attracted to, a pattern you enjoy drawing, or a pattern that makes you happy to see. A pattern can be any kind of repeating shape or line. Some examples are stripes, dots, floral, plaid, hearts, squares, lines – pattern options are endless!

Using your pencil, fill your fruit or veggie image with your favorite pattern. You can start from the top and work down, you can start from the left and work right, right to left, start in the center and work out toward the edges. It helps when drawing patterns to have a plan of how you will fill it in. Once you have your pencil drawing, you can fill it in, or outline it with marker, crayon, or paint.

Once your piece of produce is filled in with pattern, consider the background. In what environment would you like your fruit or vegetable to be? You can draw an outdoor or indoor space, you can fill the background in with a solid color to help your drawing stand out, or maybe you want to fill the background in with another pattern so that your work is very detailed and your drawing is hidden in the patterns.

Does your work remind you of Yayoi Kusama's work? How is it different?

## MATERIALS

Paper  
Red, Yellow, Blue  
Markers or Crayons

### ASSIGNMENT #2

ABCs of Pattern Making | Math and Design

Practice making patterns using letters.

### INSTRUCTIONS

A pattern is something that repeats over and over. A pattern can be made of anything: numbers, shapes, colors, words, music, sounds – really anything can be used to make a pattern. In this project, you will use the letters ABC to help create different patterns of colored shapes.

Start by writing A B C on your paper. Under each letter, use your three colors to make a shape that each letter will represent. You could make a yellow heart for A, a blue square for B, and a red circle for C. Now that you have a symbol for each letter. Draw the following patterns of twelve on your paper.

A B C A B C A B C A B C

B B A B B C B B A B B C

A B A B C A B A B C A B

C A A C B C A A C B C A

Try your own patterns using your shapes and the letters A B C. You do not have to use all three letters and could make patterns just using two. How many different patterns of twelve can you come up with just using ABC? For what could you use these patterns? Did you learn anything about pattern making in this exercise?

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### RELATE

Yayoi Kusama has been making art for a long time and makes all kinds of artwork. Look at the [artwork](#) made by Kusama in the collection at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. What do these pieces have in common? In what ways are the artworks different? These artworks are listed in order of oldest to newest. How do you think that Kusama has changed as an artist as she gained experience?

Some of Kusama's newest and most famous forms of artwork are spaces that she designs called "Infinity Mirror Rooms". Based on the name "Infinity Mirror Room," what do you think these spaces look like? Considering the kinds of art that Kusama makes, what elements or themes do you think she includes in these infinity rooms? See them for yourself [here](#).

Learn about Yayoi's life in the story [From Here to Infinity](#) by Sarah Suzuki. What about Kusama's life do you think affected her artwork? Do you see any memories of her childhood represented in her work? In what ways did Kusama have to change her life so that she could be an artist? The book says that for Kusama, dots were a "way of thinking about infinity". What do you think this might mean? Can you see this idea in Kusama's dot covered *Pumpkin (L)* sculpture? What about in other artwork of hers?

Pumpkins and dots have been important to Kusama since she was a little girl. Do you have anything from when you were younger that feels important to you in that way? Would you ever want to make art about it? Why or why not?

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### RELATE

Now that you have spent time viewing and thinking about Yayoi Kusama's sculpture *Pumpkin (L)* what do you still wonder about this work? If you could ask the artist or the sculpture anything, what would you want to know most? Use the question starters below to write three questions.

Why is...	I am curious about...	What part....	Are we...
Who is...	How did you...	What if...	Is she...
Where...	Did you know...	Suppose that...	Do you...

My questions about Yayoi Kusama's *Pumpkin (L)*:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.