

HIGH

HIGH MUSEUM OF ART ATLANTA



Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors

Teacher Resource

“Our earth is only one polka dot among a million stars in the cosmos.”

– Yayoi Kusama

Exhibition Summary

Guided by her unique vision and boundless creativity, Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama (born 1929) has been breaking new ground in visual art for more than 70 years. From her immersive Infinity Mirror Rooms to her mesmerizing paintings and playful sculptures, Kusama's work invites us to participate in her explorations of time and space. She inspires us to think differently about our connections with the world and universe around us.

Kusama grew up near her family's plant nursery in Matsumoto, Japan. As a young artist, she began experimenting with abstraction, but it was not until she arrived in the United States, in 1957, that her career took off. Living in New York from 1958 to 1973, Kusama honed her signature dot and net motifs, developing soft sculpture, creating installation-based works, and staging Happenings (performance-based events).

This is the first major exhibition to focus on Kusama's iconic Infinity Mirror Rooms. With these kaleidoscopic environments, which range from peep show-like chambers to multimedia installations, Kusama offers us the chance to experience the illusion of infinite space as she explores the question of what it means to be human, celebrates life and imagines its aftermath.

The exhibition is also an opportunity to grasp the significance of Kusama's work in the context of our world's keen interest in the possibilities of virtual space.

About Kusama

Born in 1929, Kusama grew up near her family's plant nursery in Matsumoto, Japan. Sometime around the age of eight, she began to paint every day. Her parents were opposed to her art-making, but eventually sent her to art school.

Kusama's work first received attention in the United States in 1957, when she held a solo exhibition at Zoë Dusanne Gallery in Seattle.

"Self-obliteration" became Kusama's call to action in the 1960s: she led groups of performers in body-painting activities on the streets of New York. For Kusama, it was all about giving up identity, abolishing individuality and becoming one with the universe.

In 2002, Kusama said, "I have been painting, sculpting, and writing for as long as I can remember. But to tell the truth, to this day I do not feel that I have 'made it' as an artist. All of my works are steps on my journey, a struggle for truth that I have waged with pen, canvas, and materials."

Now 89 years old, Yayoi Kusama still makes art daily at her Tokyo studio. She rarely travels but is aware of the worldwide sensation her artwork has become.

“A polka-dot has the form of the sun, which is a symbol of the energy of the whole world and our living life, and also the form of the moon, which is calm. Round, soft, colorful, senseless and unknowing. Polka-dots can't stay alone; like the communicative life of people, two or three polka-dots become movement... Polka-dots are a way to infinity.”

– Yayoi Kusama



Yayoi Kusama. *Infinity*, 1952. Ink on paper, 23.2×30.3 cm. Collection of the artist. © Yayoi Kusama.

Activities and Discussion Questions

K-2

All Sorts of Shapes

Look at the ink drawing, *Infinity*, from 1953. What shapes do you see?

Yayoi Kusama loved making patterns with circles, called polka-dots. She has said, “A polka-dot has the form of the sun ... and also the form of the moon.”

What other things does a polka-dot remind you of? (e.g. a face, a plate, a lollipop, bubbles, etc.)

Do you have a favorite shape? What is it? How do you make it – with your hands, with crayons, with objects? What does your favorite shape remind you of?

Create your own drawing by repeating your favorite shape over and over again, like Kusama did in her drawing, *Infinity*.

Feel free to experiment with different materials: pencils, pens, paint, stamps, pre-cut paper collage, etc.

Mirror, Mirror

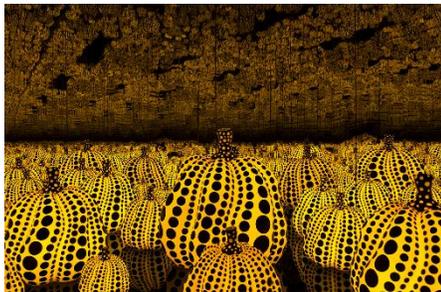
Look at one of the Infinity Mirror Rooms images. What’s going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find? How do you think the artist made this artwork?

Set up two mirrors facing each other and let each student stand between them to see themselves reflected again and again.

Create a miniature mirror room with tiny mirrors and a shoebox.

Can you count how many times you see yourself? What’s happening to your reflection?

Let students experiment with holding different objects up like toys, lights, fabrics, etc. to see these objects reflected in the mirrors.



3-5

Pattern Play

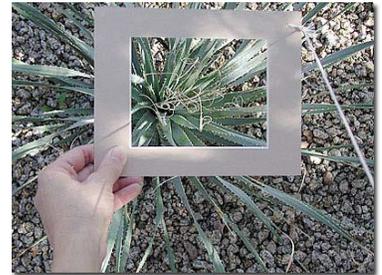
Choose an image or images from the Powerpoint and investigate the works with your students.

What patterns can you find? Describe them. Are the patterns regular or irregular? What makes you say that? Can you create your own artwork using shapes and patterns?

Kusama often found patterns and shapes that inspired her in the natural world. Her Infinity Nets paintings were inspired by the patterns on the water in the Pacific Ocean.

Can you find interesting patterns in your classroom? Outside? Use a viewfinder (either made of cardboard or using your hands) to zoom in on details in your surroundings.

Once you've found an interesting pattern, can you use it to inspire your own unique work of art? How is your artwork like Kusama's? How is it different?

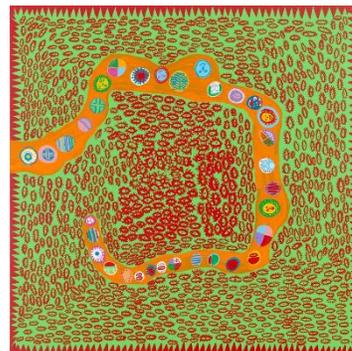


Rhythm and Movement

Choose two of Kusama's drawings or paintings to compare, like *Searching for Love* and *The Hill, 1953 A (No. 30)*.

We usually think about rhythm in terms of music, but visual art has rhythm, too!

How do you think each of these pictures might move? Encourage students to demonstrate with their bodies. Even choreograph a dance to pair with each picture!



If you had to create a rhythm or beat to match each of these pictures, what would it sound like?

Encourage students to consider what colors might have different sounds. What shapes? What kinds of lines? What makes you say that? Have each student or group present their rhythms or sound patterns to the class.

Alternatively, play different kinds of music and have students use repeated shapes and patterns to create an artwork to match the rhythm and sound of the music.

6-12

Search for a Symbol, Make a Motif

Kusama remembers visiting a farm with her family as a young child. On one of these trips, she noticed an especially “winsome, head-shaped” gourd. This gourd became a recurring motif in her artwork.

Discuss: Why might this gourd shape have been so important to Kusama? What might it symbolize? What makes you say that?

Journal: Are there any objects or images from childhood or recent memories that stand out to you? What do you think makes these objects or images important to you?

Sketch: Use your object or image as a starting point. Experiment with its shape, color, patterns, abstracting it by simplifying or altering its components. Create a symbol that you can repeat easily.

Make: Use your symbol as a motif in a new artwork. Experiment with any medium you like.

Share: What do you notice when you repeat your symbol over and over again? Does it change in meaning? How so?

Poetic License

Yayoi Kusama often chooses elegant, mysterious, and poetic titles for her artworks. Choose any of the artworks from the Key Images Powerpoint. Before revealing the titles, encourage students to create their own titles.

Start with a discussion of the work: What’s going on in this piece? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find?

If you had to title this piece, what would you call it? What makes you say that? After revealing the title: does anything change for you about this piece, now that you know the title? Why might the artist have chosen that title?

Kusama also writes poems, songs, and literature. Check out this poem and discuss.

Kusama reading her poem, *On Pumpkins*:

<https://www.victoria-miro.com/video/7/>



Additional Resources

Kusama's website: <http://yayoi-kusama.jp>

What is infinity? <https://www.mathsisfun.com/numbers/infinity.html>

The Tate Modern: Who is Yayoi Kusama for Kids: <https://www.tate.org.uk/kids/explore/who-is/who-yayoi-kusama>

Explore the work of Kusama: <http://explorationinart.blogspot.com/2012/03/kg-exploring-work-of-yayoi-kusama.html>

Hyperallergic: Kusama Grapples with Conventions: <https://hyperallergic.com/458734/to-infinity-and-beyond-yayoi-kusama-grapples-with-conventions/>

Additional Art Activity Idea: <http://dolvinartknight.blogspot.com/2016/10/pumpkin-paintings-inspired-by-yayoi.html>

Follow the Hashtag: #InfiniteKusama:
<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/infinitekusama/?hl=en>

Art Gallery of Ontario Exhibition Overview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A79cxuAIP30>

ARTiculations Video - Art Historical Context (Contains brief nudity at 4:20):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iT360Glhb9o>

Georgia State Standards

Kindergarten

Visual Arts

VAK.CR.1 Engage in the creative process to generate and visualize ideas by using subject matter and symbols to communicate meaning

VAK.CR.2 Create works of art based on selected themes.

VAK.CR.3 Understand and apply media, techniques, and processes of two-dimensional art.

VAK.RE.1 Discuss personal works of art and the artwork of others to enhance visual literacy.

VAK.CN.1 Investigate and discover the personal relationships of artists to community, culture, and the world through making and studying art.

VAK.CN.2 Integrate information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production of works of art.

VAK.CN.3 Develop life skills through the study and production of art (e.g. collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, communication).

English/Language Arts

ELAGSEKSL1 Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

ELAGSEKSL3 Ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.

ELAGSEKSL4 Describe familiar people, places, things, and events and, with prompting and support, provide additional detail.

ELAGSEKSL6 Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.

Math

MGSEK.G.1 Describe objects in the environment using names of shapes, and describe the relative positions of these objects using terms such as above, below, beside, in front of, behind, and next to.

MGSEK.G.2 Correctly name shapes regardless of their orientations or overall size.

MGSEK.G.4 Analyze and compare two- and three-dimensional shapes, in different sizes and orientations, using informal language to describe their similarities, differences, parts (e.g., number of sides and vertices/“corners”) and other attributes (e.g., having sides of equal length).

MGSEK.G.5 Model shapes in the world by building shapes from components (e.g., sticks and clay balls) and drawing shapes.

Grade 1

Visual Arts

VA1.CR.1 Engage in the creative process to generate and visualize ideas by using subject matter and symbols to communicate meaning.

VA1.CR.2 Create works of art based on selected themes.

VA1.CR.3 Understand and apply media, techniques, and processes of two-dimensional art.

VA1.RE.1 Discuss personal works of art and the artwork of others to enhance visual literacy.

VA1.CN.1 Investigate and discover the personal relationships of artists to community, culture, and the world through making and studying art.

VA1.CN.2 Integrate information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production of works of art.

VA1.CN.3 Develop life skills through the study and production of art (e.g. collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, communication).

English/Language Arts

ELAGSE1SL1 Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

ELAGSE1SL2 Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

ELAGSE1SL3 Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to gather additional information or clarify something that is not understood.

ELAGSE1SL4 Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.

ELAGSE1SL5 Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

ELAGSE1SL6 Produce complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation.

Math

MGSE1.G.1 Distinguish between defining attributes (e.g., triangles are closed and three-sided) versus non-defining attributes (e.g., color, orientation, overall size); build and draw shapes to possess defining attributes.

MGSE1.G.2 Compose two-dimensional shapes (rectangles, squares, trapezoids, triangles, half-circles, and quarter-circles) or three-dimensional shapes (cubes, right rectangular prisms, right circular cones, and right circular cylinders) to create a composite shape, and compose new shapes from the composite shape

Grade 2

Visual Arts

VA2.CR.1 Engage in the creative process to generate and visualize ideas by using subject matter and symbols to communicate meaning.

VA2.CR.2 Create works of art based on selected themes.

VA2.CR.3 Understand and apply media, techniques, and processes of two-dimensional art.

VA2.RE.1 Discuss personal works of art and the artwork of others to enhance visual literacy.

VA2.CN.1 Investigate and discover the personal relationships of artists to community, culture, and the world through making and studying art.

VA2.CN.2 Integrate information from other disciplines to engage in the understanding and production of works of art.

VA2.CN.3 Develop life skills through the study and production of art (e.g. collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, communication).

English/Language Arts

ELAGSE2SL1 Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

ELAGSE2SL2 Recount or describe key ideas or details from written texts read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

ELAGSE2SL3 Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.

ELAGSE2SL4 Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences.

ELAGSE2SL5 With guidance and support, create audio recordings of stories or poems; add drawings or other visual displays to stories or recounts of experiences when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts and feelings.

ELAGSE2SL6 Produce complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation in order to provide requested detail or clarification.

Math

MGSE2.G.1 Recognize and draw shapes having specified attributes, such as a given number of angles or a given number of equal faces. 1.1 Identify triangles, quadrilaterals, pentagons, hexagons, and cubes.

Grade 3

Visual Arts

VA3.CR.1 Engage in the creative process to generate and visualize ideas by using subject matter and symbols to communicate meaning

VA3.CR.2 Create works of art based on selected themes.

VA3.CR.3 Understand and apply media, techniques, processes, and concepts of two-dimensional art.

VA3.RE.1 Use a variety of approaches for art criticism and to critique personal works of art and the artwork of others to enhance visual literacy.

VA3.CN.1 Investigate and discover the personal relationships of artists to community, culture, and the world through making and studying art.

VA3.CN.2 Integrate information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production of works of art.

VA3.CN.3 Develop life skills through the study and production of art (e.g. collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, communication).

English/Language Arts

ELAGSE3SL1 Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 3 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

ELAGSE3SL2 Recount or describe key ideas or details from written texts read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

ELAGSE3SL3 Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.

ELAGSE3SL4 Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences.

ELAGSE3SL5 With guidance and support, create audio recordings of stories or poems; add drawings or other visual displays to stories or recounts of experiences when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts and feelings.

ELAGSE3SL6 Produce complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation in order to provide requested detail or clarification.

Grade 4

Visual Arts

VA4.CR.1 Engage in the creative process to generate and visualize ideas by using subject matter and symbols to communicate meaning.

VA4.CR.2 Create works of art based on selected themes.

VA4.CR.3 Understand and apply media, techniques, processes, and concepts of two-dimensional art.

VA4.RE.1 Use a variety of approaches for art criticism and to critique personal works of art and the artwork of others to enhance visual literacy.

VA4.CN.1 Investigate and discover the personal relationships of artists to community, culture, and the world through making and studying art.

VA4.CN.2 Integrate information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production of works of art.

VA4.CN.3 Develop life skills through the study and production of art (e.g. collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, communication).

English/Language Arts

ELAGSE4RI7 Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.

ELAGSE4RI8 Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text.

ELAGSE4W1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.

ELAGSE4W3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

ELAGSE4SL1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Math

MGSE4.OA.5 Generate a number or shape pattern that follows a given rule. Identify apparent features of the pattern that were not explicit in the rule itself. Explain informally why the pattern will continue to develop in this way.

Grade 5

Visual Arts

VA5.CR.1 Engage in the creative process to generate and visualize ideas by using subject matter and symbols to communicate meaning.

VA5.CR.2 Create works of art based on selected themes.

VA5.CR.3 Understand and apply media, techniques, processes, and concepts of two-dimensional art.

VA5.RE.1 Use a variety of approaches for art criticism and to critique personal works of art and the artwork of others to enhance visual literacy.

VA5CN.1 Investigate and discover the personal relationships of artists to community, culture, and the world through making and studying art.

VA5.CN.2 Integrate information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production of works of art.

VA5.CN.3 Develop life skills through the study and production of art (e.g. collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, communication).

English/Language Arts

ELAGSE5RL7 Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem).

ELAGSE5W1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.

ELAGSE5W3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

ELAGSE5SL1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Grade 6

Visual Arts

VA6.CR.1 Visualize and generate ideas for creating works of art.

VA6.CR.2 Choose from a range of materials and/or methods of traditional and contemporary artistic practices to plan and create works of art.

VA6.RE.1 Reflect on the context of personal works of art in relation to community, culture, and the world.

VA6.RE.2 Critique personal works of art and the artwork of others, individually and collaboratively, using a variety of approaches.

VA6.RE.3 Engage in the process of art criticism to make meaning and increase visual literacy.

VA6.CN.1 Develop personal artistic voice through connecting uses of art within a variety of cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts.

VA6.CN.2 Develop life skills through the study and production of art.

VA6.CN.3 Utilize a variety of resources to understand how artistic learning extends beyond the walls of the classroom.

Grade 7

Visual Arts

VA7.CR.1 Visualize and generate ideas for creating works of art.

VA7.CR.2 Choose from a range of materials and/or methods of traditional and contemporary artistic practices to plan and create works of art.

VA7.RE.1 Reflect on the context of personal works of art in relation to community, culture, and the world.

VA7.RE.2 Critique personal works of art and the artwork of others, individually and collaboratively, using a variety of approaches.

VA7.RE.3 Engage in the process of art criticism to make meaning and increase visual literacy.

VA7.CN.1 Develop personal artistic voice through connecting uses of art within a variety of cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts.

VA7.CN.2 Develop life skills through the study and production of art.

VA7.CN.3 Utilize a variety of resources to understand how artistic learning extends beyond the walls of the classroom.

Grade 8

Visual Arts

VA8.CR.1 Visualize and generate ideas for creating works of art.

VA8.CR.2 Choose from a range of materials and/or methods of traditional and contemporary artistic practices to plan and create works of art.

VA8.RE.1 Reflect on the context of personal works of art in relation to community, culture, and the world.

VA8.RE.2 Critique personal works of art and the artwork of others, individually and collaboratively, using a variety of approaches.

VA8.RE.3 Engage in the process of art criticism to make meaning and increase visual literacy.

VA8.CN.1 Develop personal artistic voice through connecting uses of art within a variety of cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts.

VA8.CN.2 Develop life skills through the study and production of art.

VA8.CN.3: Utilize a variety of resources to understand how artistic learning extends beyond the walls of the classroom.

Grades 9-12

Art History

VAHSAH.CR.1 Create works of art that reinforce understanding of the visual and/or contextual aspects of specific art historical eras.

VAHSAH.RE.1 Identify and describe how artistic expression is conveyed visually through subject matter, media, technique, and design (e.g. composition, color scheme).

VAHSAHRE.2 Discuss aesthetic issues (e.g. why humans create, criteria for defining an object as art, the effect of how content affects value, standards of beauty and beauty's role in defining art, how needs are fulfilled by art in varied societies).

VAHSAH.RE.3 Compare and contrast works of art, artists, cultures, and eras based on visual and contextual evidence.

VAHSAH.CN.2 Develop life skills through the study and production of art.

VAHSAH.CN.3 Utilize a variety of resources to see how artistic learning extends beyond the walls of the classroom.