

Public Park, Public Art

A. Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about public art and the decisions that artists and museums must consider when creating and presenting artworks that are accessible to the general public. Students will become familiar with the layout of the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden and will be introduced to several of the sculptures in the Garden.

If you are coming to the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden for a field trip, we recommend facilitating this lesson within a week or two of your visit.

B. Objectives

Students will...

- Identify the reasons for creating and displaying public art.
- Weigh the different considerations that must be made when selecting public artwork as they work collaboratively to choose a work of public art for their school.

LESSON MATERIALS

- Pencils (one per student)
- Paper (3–4 sheets per student)
- Smart Board or projector with internet connection
- PowerPoint presentation that accompanies this lesson



HOW TO USE THIS LESSON

This is a lesson plan for the classroom. If you are bringing your students to the Walker, we highly recommend the Walker Art Center Field Trip Preparation Lesson as well.

The accompanying PowerPoint presentation includes simple instructions for this lesson in the presenter notes.

Teachers know their own classrooms best, so please adapt the activities to fit your students' ages, needs, and interests.

Public Park, Public Art

Classroom Lesson

Standards Connected to this Lesson

Grade Level

3

Social Studies

3.3.1.1.1 Use maps and concepts of location (relative location words and cardinal and intermediate directions) to describe places in one's community, the state of Minnesota, the United States, or the world.

3.3.1.1.2 Create and interpret simple maps of places around the world, local to global; incorporate the "TODALS" map basics, as well as points, lines, and colored areas to display spatial information.

4

4.3.4.9.1 Explain how humans adapt to and/or modify the physical environment and how they are in turn affected by these adaptations and modifications.

5

5.1.1.1.1 Simulate a historic event to show how civic engagement (voting, civil discourse about controversial issues, and civic action) improves and sustains a democratic society, supports the general welfare, and protects the rights of individuals.

5.4.1.2.2 Explain a historical event from multiple perspectives.

Visual Arts

5.3.3.5.1 Evaluate the functionality of different spaces for exhibiting art.

5.3.3.6.1 Explain the purpose of a portfolio or collection

5.3.4.8.2 Evaluate an artwork based on a variety of established criteria, including artistic foundations.

5.4.3.5.1 Identify considerations for presenting art in various locations.

5.4.3.6.2 Identify how an exhibition in a museum or other venue presents ideas and provides information about a specific concept or topic.

5.4.4.8.2 Apply one set of criteria to evaluate more than one work of art.

5.5.3.5.1 Compare and contrast methods for preparing and presenting art.

5.5.3.6.1 Identify and describe the choices an artist makes when assembling a presentation or a portfolio

ELA

3.8.1.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

4.8.1.1 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.

5.8.1.1 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.

Public Park, Public Art Classroom Lesson

1

A Public Park for Public Art (10–15 minutes)

View the map of the Garden provided in the Slides presentation and discuss with students. ([Slide 2](#))

- The Garden is 19 square acres, which is about the same size as 14 football fields!
- There are over 50 sculptures in the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden.

Layout

Continue looking at [Slide 2](#). Ask the class:

- Where are the entrances/exits to the Garden?
- Where are the walking paths?
- What else do you notice?

Why Do People Visit Parks?

Move to [Slide 3](#). As a class, or in small groups of 3–4, have students discuss why people visit parks, and come up with a list of 4–5 reasons.

- Ask groups to share their answers with the rest of the class.
- Then, discuss as a class why an art museum like the Walker might want to have an outdoor place to show artwork.

Public Art

Explain to students that one of the most special things about the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden is that the sculptures are outside in the open, and because it is free to visit the sculpture garden it means that anyone can visit and see the art!

Art that is out in the open and free to visit is called “public art.” Ask students the following questions and discuss as a class:

- What are some examples of public art that you have seen before?

↳ Some examples might include wall murals, a statue in front of a government building, or larger sculptures like Mt. Rushmore or the Statue of Liberty).

Move to [Slide 4](#) to show some specific examples of public art.

Ask:

- What different purposes do these public artworks serve? (Are they made for appearance? To remember an event or person? To send a message?)
- Is there any public art in or around our school?
- Why might an artist want to make public art?

Public Park, Public Art

Classroom Lesson

2

Choosing Public Art (15–20 minutes)

Move to [Slide 5](#). Explain that because the art in the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden is seen by so many different people every year, the Walker must be very careful about the artwork they choose to put in the Garden!

Many people are involved in choosing sculptures for the Garden. Now students will learn more about this process as they work together to choose an artwork for their school.

Instructions

Pretend that your school is going to borrow a sculpture from the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden (sometimes the Walker does lend its sculptures to other places—for instance, some of its sculptures are in Gold Medal Park in downtown Minneapolis).

Students will look at four different sculptures and will vote on which sculpture they would most like to bring to their school.

Show students [Slides 6–9](#) in the slide presentation and have them discuss their thoughts about each sculpture. Ask them the following questions for each:

- Could this sculpture be a good fit for our school? Why or why not?
- Where would you install this sculpture at school?

If students have questions about any of the sculptures, use the information here to answer as best you can.

Option 1 ([Slide 6](#)): *Empire* by Eva Rothschild, 2011

Irish, b. 1972

Medium: Steel, paint

Dimensions: 236¼ x 236¼ x 236¼ in. (19' 8 9/32" x 19' 8 9/32" x 19' 8 9/32")

Information for Teachers



Eva Rothschild, *Empire*, 2011

Eva Rothschild often uses geometric forms and industrial materials in her art, creating large-scale works that appear both delicate and strong. She is interested in how people interact with sculpture and has said that “the ideal way to look at art is to be permanently confused.” The mammoth archway of *Empire* meets the ground at 10 different points, encouraging us to not only look at the sculpture from afar but also to experience the space around, beneath, and between its spindly forms, which evoke branches or legs. The title *Empire* and the sculpture’s large footprint and height work together to suggest a great, far-reaching power. This is one of several new works in the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden by a younger generation of artists exploring abstract forms. *Empire* is Rothschild’s first permanent outdoor work in the United States.

Public Park, Public Art Classroom Lesson

Option 2 (Slide 7): *LOVE* by Robert Indiana, 1966–98

American, 1928–2018

Medium: Cor-Ten steel

Dimensions: 96 × 96 × 48 in. (8' × 8' × 4')

Information for Teachers



Robert Indiana, *LOVE*, 1966–1998

In the late 1950s, Robert Indiana began making paintings and sculptures that featured words as the main visual subject. He has long been drawn to single, poetically powerful words, such as “EAT,” “DIE,” and his most famous, “LOVE.” Here, the artist has stacked the letters in a grid, assembling them, as he stated in 1969, “as compactly and economically as possible.” Indiana’s *LOVE*, with its tilted O, has been made in many variations, from a postage stamp to gargantuan versions in brightly painted steel. It is now the artist’s most iconic image, one that has had broad resonance across cultures and generations, from the 1960s to today.

Option 3 (Slide 8): *Untitled* by Jim Hodges, 2011

American, b. 1957

Medium: Granite, stainless steel, lacquer

Dimensions: 75 × 248 × 301 in. overall (6' 3" × 20' 83/64" × 25' 61/64" overall)

Information for Teachers



Jim Hodges, *Untitled*, 2011

Jim Hodges is known for transforming ordinary materials in his work. To make the piece, he selected four boulders—each weighing between 8 and 13 tons and standing more than 6 feet high—from a quarry in Massachusetts. “They’re extraordinarily present, physical things,” says the artist. “They feel like they’re alive.” The stones are faced with polished stainless-steel sheets, a material typically used on motorcycles. The bold colors form a smooth, continuous surface connecting the natural with the artificial. The glossy finish both captures and casts sunlight, creating a light and buoyant effect.

Public Park, Public Art

Classroom Lesson

Option 4 (Slide 9): *Woodrow* by Deborah Butterfield, 1988

American, b. 1949

Medium: Bronze

Dimensions: 99 × 105 × 74 in. without base (8' 3" x 8' 9" x 6' 2 3/4")

Information for Teachers



Deborah Butterfield, *Woodrow*, 1988

Deborah Butterfield has been making art since the 1970s, inspired by the horses on her ranch in Montana. Her works are often constructed with found materials such as wood, scrap metal, or straw. While *Woodrow*, her first outdoor sculpture, appears to be made of branches, Butterfield used metal to better withstand the elements. To create the sculpture, she collected sticks and bark, painstakingly cast each piece in bronze, then reassembled and welded them together to form the horse's body. The sculpture was then given a surface treatment, or patina, to mimic the color of the original sticks. The meticulous result—known as *trompe l'oeil*, or “trick of the eye”—gives *Woodrow* its convincing wood-like appearance.

Move to Slide 10 so that students can see all four sculptures side by side.

Each student will cast a vote for ONE sculpture that they would most like to bring to the school. Prepare a ballot box and provide students with a strip of paper—they will cast their votes by placing their strip of paper in the box.

As you tally the results, ask students to turn to a partner and share which sculpture they chose and why.

Announce the results of the vote and ask:

- Are you surprised by the results?
- Why do you think the winning sculpture was the most popular choice?

Now that the vote is final, students will work together in small groups to answer the following questions about the winning sculpture:

- Where should this sculpture be placed if it came to the school? Remind students that some of these sculptures are really big—it might need a lot of space!
- Who would be able to see this sculpture?
- Why is this sculpture a good addition to our school? Come up with 2–3 reasons.

(I.e., “Our mascot is a horse, so *Woodrow* would represent the school!” or “It is really important for students and teachers to be kind to each other at this school, so the *LOVE* sculpture would remind everyone of that!”)

Public Park, Public Art Classroom Lesson

Additional Activity Ideas



Optional Activities

Reflect and Look Ahead (5 minutes)

Take any final questions, and if your class will be visiting the Walker for a field trip, ask students which sculpture(s) they're most excited to see during their visit.

If time allows, try some of these activities with students.

Design Your Own Public Artwork (15–20 minutes)

Challenge students to design a sculpture for the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden (or another location of your choosing). They should think about the following:

- What is the idea behind my sculpture?
- How large will this sculpture be?
- What materials will it be made from (remember, it will be outside permanently and needs to be able to withstand year-round weather)?
- Who will see this sculpture?

Option to do a gallery walk or a pair-and-share so that students can discuss their ideas with their classmates.

Public Art Walk (30–60 minutes)

If there is public art in your school's neighborhood, take a walk as a class to see it.

If possible, bring a camera to document the different public art pieces. If cameras are not available, bring paper (sketchbooks, preferably) and pencils so that students can sketch some of the public artworks.

Pose the following questions when looking at each of the public art pieces around school:

- What is the subject of this artwork?
- Why do you think this is here?
- How does this artwork contribute to its surroundings?