



PORTLAND ART MUSEUM

## Lesson Ideas and Essential Questions for *Hank Willis Thomas: All Things Being Equal...*

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1. Choose an artwork and use Visual Thinking Strategies with the students.
  1. What's going on in this picture?
  2. What do you see what makes you say that?
  3. What more can we find?
2. Do a compare and contrast with Picasso's *Guernica* and HWT's *Guernica* or Matisse's *The Fall of Icarus* and HWT's *Icarus Falling*.
3. Have students compare and contrast Grant Wood's *American Gothic* (1930), Gordon Parks's *American Gothic* (1942), and Hank Willis Thomas's *American Gothic* (2014). (*Use the essential question bank for various prompts.*)
4. Have students create a collage inspired by Matisse's cut outs and Hank Willis Thomas's artwork. Have them use materials that have special meaning to themselves (e.g. candy wrappers, origami papers, cereal boxes, pokemon cards). Focus on the basic elements of art (i.e. line, shape, color, texture, value, space, and form)
5. Create a lesson on Visual Culture, Literacy, and Advertising.
  - Teach students the difference between a symbol, logo, and icon.
  - Have students work in groups to analyze advertising. (*Use the essential question bank for various prompts*). What kinds of patterns do they notice in the advertising?
  - Have each group share with the class their findings.

- Show some of HWT's from *Branded* and *Unbranded*. Use the following resources and question bank to help students ideate for their own design. Have them create an "advertising" design that addresses a social issue.
  - [Adbusters Website](#)
  - [Adbusters Spoof Ads](#)
- 6. Facilitate a classroom discussion (e.g. Socratic Seminar) on Appropriation. Use essential questions and resources for instructional materials.
- 7. Teach students the difference between *Copyright*, *Fair Use* and *Appropriation*. Have students create a work of art that uses some type of appropriation. Show students examples of Hank Willis Thomas's artwork as examples. Other artists that could be included are Vic Muniz, Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger and Marcel Duchamp.  
["What is appropriation." Khan Academy](#)
- 8. Create a lesson on identity. Have students create a self-portrait. Help students generate imagery by using essential questions provided.
- 9. Develop a unit around civil rights/social justice locally (Portland), the United States and globally. Discuss the role that photography and art has played in the movement, the representation and communication.  
[Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs: The Black History of Portland, Oregon](#)
- 10. Design a project where students work with text, representation, and social justice. Students could create poetry or design a work of art that incorporates text. Use Thomas' work as inspiration and context. (Other artists could include Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems, Barbara Kruger, & Jenny Holzer.)

## Essential Questions for Hank Willis Thomas, *All Things Being Equal*

### Materials & Process

What are some of the uses of photography? Where do you encounter photographs?  
What are the materials used in the artwork?  
How do the materials actively participate in the work's message?  
What techniques does the artist use to actively engage the viewer in looking?  
How does the framing/editing of the artwork influence the interpretation and experience of the viewer?  
What is the purpose and function of art in our culture?  
How does an artist's identity influence the creative process?  
What role do artists have in establishing social, cultural and political equity?  
How can you use art to empower yourself?

### Aesthetics

What imagery is presented in the work? What is some descriptive language for this imagery?  
What is juxtaposition? How is it used in Visual Culture? How does it create meaning in an artwork?  
How do our values, beliefs, and experiences influence our perception?  
How is our understanding of culture and society constructed through images?  
How do images influence the way we think, act, and perceive the world?  
How are images used to manipulate us?  
How can art be powerful?  
How do artists use the resources of aesthetics, historical and social context to impact an audience?  
How does the artist's identity affect the reading of the artwork? How does the viewer's?  
How does visual culture create narratives that shape our notion of society?  
How do adaptations in visual culture change the way we perceive and understand it?  
Where does the meaning of a work of art reside? Within the visual representation, within the artist's intention, within the viewer, or in the transaction that occurs between them?  
How does an individual's point of view affect the way they interpret the artwork?  
How are belief systems represented and reproduced through history, text, art, and music?

### Context

How do we know what we know?  
What role or purpose does art serve in a culture/society?  
How do stereotypes influence how we look at and understand the world?  
What is art and its function in our lives?  
Why is it important for people and cultures to construct narratives about their experience?  
What is the relevance of studying the archive?  
How does art reveal the values of a given culture or time period?  
How does the study of art, the archive, and history help individuals construct their understanding of reality?  
How does art reveal the values of a given culture or time period?  
Why do we bother to study/examine the past, present or future?

How are the concepts of commodification presented in the artwork?  
How does the work connect to the rest of the world?  
How does it connect to other works of art?  
How can art be a vehicle for social change?  
What's the context for an inquiry into aesthetics and social justice?

### Identity

How do we form and shape our identities?  
How are people transformed through their relationships with others?  
How does the media shape our view of the world and ourselves?  
How does art reveal the values of a given culture or time period?  
How does what we know about the world shape the way we view ourselves?  
How do our personal experiences shape our view of others?  
How does the media shape our view of the world and ourselves?  
How does representation shape identity?

### Narrative

How does the work communicate a narrative? What associations does the work evoke?  
In what ways are narratives influenced by bias and perspective?  
What are enduring questions and conflicts that artists (and their cultures) grappled with hundreds of years ago and are still relevant today?  
Why are there universal themes in art—that is, themes that are of interest or concern to all cultures and societies?  
What are the recurrent motifs and in what ways have they changed or remained the same?  
What can we learn from different generations?

### Community & Collaboration

What is meaningful community engagement?  
How does an individual's point of view affect the way they deal with conflict?  
How are people transformed through their relationships with others?  
What are the politics and consequences of war, and how do these vary based on an individual or cultural perspective?  
How do our personal experiences shape our view of others?

### Appropriation

What is the difference between appropriation and plagiarism?  
What are the ethics of appropriation? How have they been altered by Internet culture and Social Media?

### References

["A Giant List Of Really Good Essential Questions", TeachThought, May 13, 2019](#)