ENVIRONMENTAL SURPLUS: UNDERSTANDING OUR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT AND IDENTITY

LESSON OVERVIEW
In this lesson, students connect the concept of surplus from *Beauty Surplus: Serra Victoria Bothwell Fels*, an exhibition at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, to their community, school, or home to reflect on how their community utilizes or copes with waste surplus.

Students will respond to this synthesis by collecting surplus waste over the course of a week in their classroom or home. While collecting, they will contribute to a collaborative line plot graph that records the kind of waste materials collected.

Then, students create a piece of art with the reusable waste from their classroom collection. This art piece will reflect their environmental analysis of or reflection on surplus.

Students can look at a variety of artist examples as models, such as environment builder Eugene Von Bruenchenhein and contemporary artist Vik Muniz.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS
- How do waste, surplus, and everyday materials reflect what is happening in an environment or community?
- How do we interpret or make decisions about what is and isn’t needed in an environment, community, body, or life?

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW
Artist: Serra Victoria Bothwell Fels
Exhibition Title: *Beauty Surplus*
Exhibition Location: John Michael Kohler Arts Center
Exhibition Dates: June 14, 2019–May 24, 2020

Serra Victoria Bothwell Fels is an artist from Brooklyn, New York. Her exhibition at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, *Beauty Surplus*, imagines how our world might be different if we worked together more, looked for new possibilities, believed in a bit of magic, and were kind to one another. *Beauty Surplus* is site-specific. Serra altered the rooms with artworks specifically designed for the space that are inspired by the natural environment. Cavern-like ceilings, mysterious ceramic growths, walls with holes, and cloud-like structures transform the galleries. Serra wants visitors to look closely and think about what is real and what is imaginary. *Beauty Surplus* is the second year of the Arts Center’s Open House Project, which asks artists to create art in the rooms of the historic John Michael Kohler home.
OTHER ARTIST INSPIRATION: REPURPOSING WASTE INTO ART

EUGENE VON BRUENCHENHEIN: This Wisconsin artist found creative, affordable ways to source materials for his art. For example, he created towers and thrones out of chicken bones and auto paint. He filled his house with these works, creating an artist built environment.


VIK MUNIZ: This Brazilian native makes “photographic delusions” using trash to form sculptures, which he then photographs. These often resemble famous works of art.

http://vikmuniz.net

CYRUS KABIRU: This Kenyan artist repurposes the trash of Nairobi, especially the tech trash, into artistic eyewear, paintings, and sculptures.


OBJECTIVES:
(Organized by National Core Arts Standards Artistic Processes)

National Core Arts Standards
VA:Cn10.1.HSI
Utilize inquiry methods of observation, research, and experimentation to explore unfamiliar subjects through art making.

VA:Cr1.2.HSI
Shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present day life using a contemporary practice of art or design.

Common Core Science Literacy Standard Grades 9-10
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RST.9-10.7
Translate quantitative or technical information expressed in words in a text into a visual form and translate information expressed visually or mathematically into words.

VOCABULARY/KEYWORDS

Site-specific: Artwork that is created just to be displayed in one space, such as a room, or a garden.

Altered: In art, to alter something is to change the way it looks.

Sculpture: A sculpture is a three-dimensional artwork. A sculpture can be carved, cast, hand-built, or assembled from different objects or materials. Sculptures are made out of a variety of materials, such as metal, marble, wood, or ceramics. A ceramic sculpture is made out of clay or porcelain.

Found Object: Objects that are used as non-traditional art making tools or materials. Often, a found object is something that was discarded or no longer usable for its original purpose, or something from nature that can be collected, such as driftwood and rocks. Sometimes a found object is still functional for its original purpose, but is reimagined in an artwork. For example, buttons can become a texture that covers a sculpture.

Environment: The complex physical, chemical, and biotic factors (such as climate, soil, and living things) that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival.

Biodiversity: The numbers of different species of plants and animals in an environment.

Waste: An unwanted product of manufacturing or human/animal habitation. This product could be damaged, defective, superfluous, rejected, worn, or used.

Surplus: The amount that remains when use or need is satisfied.
MATERIALS
Student Process Sheet
Beauty Surplus PowerPoint
Trash Collection
Large Graph and Markers
Adhesives
Paint
Scissors

DISCUSS
Activator Questions: Representation
• What do you know about garbage and recycling? What questions do you have?
• What surplus have you seen or learned about that occur in nature? For example, consider the desert as a place with a surplus of sand.
• What surplus have you seen or learned about that is created by people? For example, consider litter.

Introducing The Artist: Serra Fels
• Review the PowerPoint of key works by Serra Fels and the keywords.
• Discuss: How do you interpret Serra Fels’ depiction of surplus? Does it seem natural, supernatural, beautiful, accidental, problematic, ominous? What stands out to you about her representations?

CREATE
Students will consider the volume and repercussions of waste surplus on their school environment by collecting, recording/graphing, and responding to their trash output. Students will practice graph creation and analysis as well as create an artistic intervention with the reusable pieces.

Step One: Ensure understanding of key works and key words through discussion.

Step Two: Create a class-wide waste collection and recording system for students’ school day waste output. Students can help set up collection areas and label systems such as “paper,” “compost,” and “plastic.” Create a system to record the waste collected each day.

Step Three: Students collaboratively create a line graph—or any type of graph that best suits your class learning—about the types and amounts of waste produced. Individual notes throughout the week will help students independently track their thoughts and observations. Prompts for discussion or observation could include:

• What are our biggest areas of waste? Why is that?
• How can we cut back on landfill-style disposal? For example, how can some items be reused, composted, or recycled more effectively?
• How can I/we improve our environmental impact and identity by using the results of this experiment?
• What else in our lives is surplus that we try to get rid of (fat, pimples, freckles, scars)? How can that surplus be negative or positive? How does society influence that perception of negativity or positivity?

Step Four: Students select items from the recyclable waste collection and use these items to visually express their conclusion by making an artwork, such as a sculpture, illustrated graph, collage, photograph, or print. Before beginning their work, students will develop a labeled sketch.

REFLECT
• After your observation and data analysis, what do you want to know more about in your community’s environment?
• How does your graph and art work together to tell a story?
• What art piece could you make next to continue your studies?
STUDENT PROCESS SHEET: ENVIRONMENTAL SURPLUS
Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis

Brainstorm effective and safe ways to collect reusable and not reusable waste in your classroom:

What kind of waste categories should your class-wide graph have? Add the labels to the chart below. Record your observations qualitatively on the chart throughout the week.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Amount Collected</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monday</td>
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<tr>
<td>(ex. paper)</td>
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RESULTS
Consider what your findings show:
• How could the community reduce waste surplus?

• What kind of story does your collection tell about your community?

VISUAL REPRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS
Select items you’ve collected to create an artistic visual response to the issues/interpretations. Use artist inspiration from Serra Fels, Eugene Von Bruenchenhein, Vik Muniz, and Cyrus Kabiru for ideas. Brainstorm and sketch ideas of what your artwork will look like on a separate sheet of paper.