

Title: *Capturing Infinity!***Schedule:** School Year 2018-2019
K-5 Fall/Winter/SpringSet-up/prep = 15 minutes
Presentation & Art activity = 1 hour, 15 minutes**Artist:****Yayoi Kusama** – (Ya-yo-ee) born in Matsumoto, Nagano Prefecture, Japan, 1929-Present.

A Japanese contemporary artist who works primarily in sculpture and installation, but is also active in painting, performance, film, fashion, poetry, fiction, and other arts. She has been acknowledged as one of the most important living artists to come out of Japan.

When she was ten years old, she began to experience vivid hallucinations which she has described as "flashes of light, auras, or dense fields of dots". These hallucinations also included flowers that spoke to Kusama, and patterns in fabric that she stared at coming to life, multiplying, and engulfing or expunging her, a process which she has carried into her artistic career and which she calls "self-obliteration". She was reportedly fascinated by the smooth white stones covering the bed of the river near her family home, which she cites as another of the seminal influences behind her lasting fixation on dots.

Her senior year of school, she studied at Kyoto Municipal School of Arts and Crafts, where she studied Nihonga painting, a rigorous formal style developed during the Meiji period. She hated the rigidities of the master-disciple system where students were supposed to imbibe tradition through the sensei (teacher).

By 1950, she began covering surfaces (walls, floors, canvases, and later, household objects and naked assistants) with the polka dots that would become a trademark of her work. The vast fields of polka dots, or "infinity nets," as she called them, were taken directly from her hallucinations. The earliest recorded work in which she incorporated these dots was a drawing in 1939 at age 10, in which the image of a Japanese woman in a kimono, presumed to be the artist's mother, is covered and obliterated by spots. Her first series of large-scale, sometimes more than 30 ft-long canvas paintings, *Infinity Nets*, were entirely covered in a sequence of nets and dots that alluded to her hallucinatory visions.

She established other habits too, like having herself routinely photographed with new work and regularly appearing in public wearing her signature bobbed wigs and colorful, avant-garde fashions. Since 1963, Kusama has continued her series of Mirror/Infinity rooms. In these complex infinity mirror installations, purpose-built rooms lined with mirrored glass contain scores of neon-colored balls, hanging at various heights above the viewer. Standing inside on a small platform, an observer sees light repeatedly reflected off the mirrored surfaces to create the illusion of a never-ending space. During the following years, Kusama was enormously productive, and by 1966 she was experimenting with room-size, freestanding installations that incorporated mirrors, lights, and piped-in music.

After experiencing psychiatric problems, in 1977 she voluntarily admitted herself to a hospital, where she has spent the rest of her life. From here, she continued to produce artworks in a variety of mediums, as well as launching a literary career by publishing several novels, a poetry collection, and an autobiography.

She experienced great success showing her creations in the Japanese pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1993, a dazzling mirrored room filled with small pumpkin sculptures in which she resided in color-

coordinated magician's attire, Kusama went on to produce a huge, yellow pumpkin sculpture covered with an optical pattern of black spots. The pumpkin came to represent for her a kind of alter-ego or self-portrait. Kusama's later installation *I'm Here, but Nothing* (2000–2008) is a simply furnished room consisting of table and chairs, place settings and bottles, armchairs and rugs, however its walls are tattooed with hundreds of fluorescent polka dots glowing in the UV light. The result is an endless infinite space where the self and everything in the room is obliterated.

In 2017, a 50-year retrospective of her work opened at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, DC. The exhibit featured six Infinity Mirror rooms, and is scheduled to travel to five museums in the US and Canada. The room, which measures 13 square feet and is filled with over 60 pumpkin sculptures, is one of the museum's most popular attractions ever. Allison Peck, a spokeswoman for the Hirshhorn, said in an interview that the museum "has never had a show with that kind of visitor demand".

Description: Students will be introduced to Kusama's famous polkadots and her 3-dimensional *infinity net* rooms in the PowerPoint. Throughout history, many artists have used dots or small rounded marks to create art (George Seurat and other impressionists, Chuck Close, Roy Lichtenstein). We look at Kusama and her use of dots in creating a sense of the universe, of infinity, of never-ending space.

Quotes: "Since my childhood, I have always made works with polka dots. Earth, moon, sun and human beings all represent dots; a single particle among billions." - Yayoi Kusama

"My life is a dot lost among thousands of other dots." - Yayoi Kusama

"...Polka-dots are a way to infinity." - Yayoi Kusama

Materials & Space:

For this lesson: CPL will provide a book titled *Yayoi Kusama – From Here to Infinity* by Sarah Suzuki to be read to the class and a PowerPoint which contains many more visuals than we could have obtained in printboards for the classroom.

For the Art project: CPL will provide:

- 5x5" squares of both black and white construction paper
- rectangle cuts of silver mirror board
- trays containing strips of colored papers
- hole punches
- glue
- scotch tape
- empty trays/baskets for punching holes from paper into
- paper plates
- Q-tips

Big Idea: Capturing Infinity!

Student Learning Assessment

Learning Objectives <i>What I want my students to know and be able to do.</i>	Assessment Criteria / Formative Assessment Checkpoints <i>What I will observe in my students – traits that can be seen and/or heard.</i> <i>When can I check-in/observe this?</i>
1. Learn about the life and art of Yayoi Kusama.	1. Students will be able to tell their parents who Yayoi Kusama is, that she is presently the most important artist of our time, and what style of art she is most famous for. <i>Check-in:</i> conversation with students, ask these questions of the class at conclusion of lesson.
2. To understand how Visual Art can be dimensional – one can convey depth into the scene by using positive and negative space, or layering/stacking the shapes or colors. In Kusama's case, her art uses entire rooms: floor, ceiling, walls, contents, with and without mirrors.	2. Students make choices to use positive and negative shapes/space (via the hole punching and the punched circles), and layer/stack the shapes or colors (paper strips and punched circles) in their "infinity room sculptures". <i>Check-in:</i> observe when and how students use the materials in this way throughout the hands-on art project time.
3. To create art with tools not commonly thought of as art mediums. (hole punches and mirror board)	3. Students use only hole punches and strips of paper to craft 3-dimensional sculptures; and mirror reflection to portray extending the sculptures as if to infinity. <i>Check-in:</i> confirm that the students place their paper strips to convey height, width, & depth – NOT flatly glued to the bottom or sides of their "room". Ask students to look into their creation at eye level to see the mirror effects.

<p>4. To be introduced to new vocabulary: Infinity Monochromatic & polychromatic 3-D Obliterate Hallucination</p>	<p>4. Students demonstrate their understanding of the new vocabulary.</p> <p><i>Check-in:</i> As appropriate by grade level, review and/or ask students to use or define these words. In review, K-2 might be told the definition and asked to shout out the new word. 3-5 might be told the new word and asked to give the definition.</p>
<p>5. To recognize the similarities and differences among artists throughout time and culture, globally – remembering artists they have studied previously.</p>	<p>5. Students can</p> <p>a.) name one other artist who used color and circles/dots in their creations, b.) name the country this artist was born in and what influenced her art. c.) discuss how the culture or time the artist grew up in was an influence on their art.</p> <p><i>Check-in:</i> conversation with students, ask these questions of the class at conclusion of lesson.</p>

Vocabulary:

Infinity Nets – Kusama’s name for art that visually appears to be limitless or endless in space. Traditionally, infinity means a very great number, not finished.

Monochromatic - containing or using only one color: mono = single, chromatic = color

Polychromatic - of two or more colors; multicolored: poly = much or many

3-D / 3-dimensional - a measurable extent of some kind, such as length, breadth, depth, or height. A mode of linear extension of which there are **three in space** (3-D) and only **two on a flat surface** (2-D).

Hallucinations - an experience involving the apparent perception of something not present. Seeing something that is not really there.

Obliterate - cause to become invisible or indistinct; blot out, wipe out. Latin from erased + letters.

State Standards:

Creating

1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Performing/Presenting/Producing

4. Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.

Responding

7. Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Connecting

10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Set-up: At a central location/station for later pick-up by each student:

- Stacks of empty 5x8" trays (one per student) to collect their papers and catch the dots/hole punches!
- Separate stacks of black and white construction paper (5x5" squares)
- Basket/trays of various colored paper strips

Prepare to distribute to each **group of 4** students, together in one shared basket:

- one scotch tape dispenser
- 4 single-hole punches
- 4 rectangle cuts of silver mirror board
- 1 paper plate with glue poured out
- 4+ Q-tips

Classroom Presentation: 25 minutes

Presentation Instructions:

5 min:

1. Read to the students Yayoi Kusama – From Here to Infinity by Sarah Suzuk

20 min:

2. Present the power point.

Art Project: 30-35 minutes

Art activity: Capturing Infinity! – making our own Infinity Room sculptures

Directions for project

- 1.) **Prepare the students** with some discussion of using the hole punches OVER the plastic trays to save the dots, AND think about whether to choose monochromatic or polychromatic colors for their paper strips.
- 2.) Distribute the baskets prepared for groups of 4 students.
- 3.) Ask students to write their name AND the artist's name on the back of the mirror board (on the white side). Then fold the "mirror" on half.
 - K-2 can just print "Kusama" under their name.
 - 3-5 might want to write "inspired by Yayoi Kusama" under their name.

- 3.) Ask students to line up in an orderly fashion and come to the central location/station to pick-up their "catch-it" basket, an **empty 5x8" plastic tray**, and collect in it:
 - their **choice of one piece of black OR white square "floor"**
 - **K-2 = 4 strips of paper** – all one color, just two colors, or all different colors.
 - **3-5 = up to 8 strips of paper** - one color, just two colors, or all different.
- 4.) Using tape, secure the back of the "mirror" to **one edge** of the square "floor" paper and turn over. Set it up like a partial "room" and set aside.
- 5.) Use the hole punch to "cut out" polka dots from the strips of colored paper – **do this OVER the catch-it basket!**
- 6.) For 3-5 grades only: Pair up the strips of colored paper two x two. Use the Q-tip to **glue the strips together ONLY at the ends**, no need to glue the entire length of the strips.
- 7.) Now **glue down the ends of the strips** in random shapes, overlapping the strips and interconnecting them in the "mirror room". **TIP:** it helps to crease each end of the strips about a ½ inch. Put glue only on the short fold at one end and hold in place on the "wall" or "floor" for 30 seconds. Then put glue on the fold at the other end of this strip and hold in place where it is to attach for 30 seconds.
- 8.) If there is time, the dots can be glued to the base or walls of the "infinity room".

Clean Up: 10 minutes

1. Students to empty trays of left over dots into the trash.
2. Return the empty trays to stack at the central location.
3. Replace tape dispenser, and 4 hole punches into the shared basket and return to central location.

All Done!!

Review:

Before you leave, ask the students some review questions:

Who is today's artist?

What is this artist famous for?

Ask about vocabulary words.

Can you recall other artists who use dots or bold colors?

If enough time remains, engage students in a walk-around to see each others' work.