

How can I use these *Discussion Topics* in my classroom?

The goal of the following pages is to engage your students in an open-ended dialogue about works of art, leading to learning in several disciplines. This material may be used verbatim by teachers of students in grades 7-12, though the questions are broad enough to be modified easily for grades K-6 with the substitution of less advanced vocabulary. Use the presented comparisons and *Inquiry* as bases for discussion of the images with your students. You need not follow these questions as a script, though you may. You may also choose to have students respond to questions in written form.

How will using these *Discussion Topics* benefit my students?

Through inquiry-based learning, students build skills across the curriculum, including those valuable to literacy such as the ability to:

- think critically
- use descriptive language
- provide justification for opinions
- observe closely
- form hypotheses^{1 2}

Beyond enhancing these abilities, the present lines of inquiry are meant to serve as entry points to learning more deeply about Japanese art and culture, as well as artistic techniques, aesthetics, and art historical concepts.

When students view and discuss works of art, and are introduced to selected related information, it fosters an engaging, contextualized learning environment. Through open-ended inquiry, students are encouraged to formulate educated opinions based on their own experiences, associations and observations. An additional benefit of this process is that the teacher acts as a facilitator, rather than an expert on a particular subject-matter, modeling the processes of posing provocative questions and seeking answers.

What are some ways that I can create an optimal environment for an open-ended discussion?

- Ask questions that have a broad range of possible answers. Avoid yes/no questions.
- Repeat comments and link similar or differing ideas to spur debate and to encourage students to justify their opinions.
- Accept comments neutrally and without judgment.
- If a comment seems off-topic to you, redirect the respondent to the visual: "What do you see that makes you think that?" or "How does the artist show you that?"
- If you do not know the answer to a particular factual question posed by a student, say so. Then ask how one might investigate or do research to find the answer. Encourage students to do so.

Works of art presented on these pages are part of the exhibition *Making A Home: Japanese Contemporary Artists in New York*, on view at Japan Society Gallery from October 5, 2007 through January 13, 2008.

¹ Museum of Fine Arts Boston, *Thinking through Art Pilot Program Study*, 1996-97.

² Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, *Teaching Literacy Through Art*, Year One: 2004-05 Study.

(1) A Remade Environment

Katsuhiro Saiki

Study for Metropolis #2

2006

C-print, paper board, watercolor

40 x 23 X x 4 W" (12.1 x 60 x 11.1 cm)

Collection of Fujiwara Fumiko and Tatsuo, Tokyo

Photo: Katsuhiro Saiki

Inquiry

- What is photography?
- Why do you take photographs? Why do artists take photographs? Are these reasons similar to or different from one another?

Introduce Information:

This work is part of a series by a New York City-based artist in which he photographs buildings in the city close-up and then cuts, joins and folds the images into 3-dimensional forms.

- Imagine that instead of photographing buildings in New York City, he instead photographed people or natural objects, and then reformed them. How might his finished piece be different? How might it be the same?
- Using only this work of art as evidence, describe how you think the artist feels about the buildings that he photographs. Why do you think so?

Information for Educators

Born in Tokyo, Japan, 1969; lives and works in Queens; moved to New York in 2002.

The artist Katsuhiro Saiki began his career as a painter, but was soon fascinated by the transient possibilities of the medium of photography. Turning away from the concept that photography is necessarily a realistic mode of expression; Saiki explores the conceptual and illusory potential of photographic images without the use of technological photo manipulation.³

In many of his recent works, Saiki retains the realistic integrity of his photographic images, while manually reforming them by cutting and merging portions of each picture. The works in the exhibition *Making a Home* are part of a series the artist is currently working on, *Study for Metropolis*, in which he photographically documents **Modernist** architecture in New York City. Saiki then physically constructs these photographs into 3-dimensional, geometric, sculptural forms. In this way, the artist also repurposes the camera from a device used to capture verisimilitude to a device used to alter reality.

³ Shiner, Eric C. & Tomii, Reiko. *Making a Home: Japanese Contemporary Artists in New York*. New York: Japan Society, 2007, p.134.

(1) A Remade Environment

Junko Yoda

The Hudson (Detail)

2006

Acrylic, Japanese paper, and charcoal on wood panel (diptych)

96 x 144" (243.8 x 365.8 cm)

Collection of the artist; courtesy Zabriskie Gallery, New York

Photo: Jacques DeMelo

Inquiry

- What patterns can you identify in this painting?
- What do you think is the focal point of this painting? Why do you say that?

Introduce Information:

The artist who created this work, Junko Yoda, moved to New York City from Japan around 1966, when she was in her early 20s. She painted this painting of an aerial view of the Hudson River much later (last year) in response to flying over Ithica & the Finger Lakes.⁴

- Based on this painting, what do you think were the artist's impressions of this area?
- What comes to mind when you think about the Hudson River? (Even if you've never been there). What comes to mind when you think about New York City? Make a T-chart of your associations with these two places.

Information for Educators

Born in Miyoshi-gun, Tokushima Prefecture, Japan, 1943; lives and works in Manhattan; moved to New York in the late 1960s.

For Junko Yoda, both the finished product and the process of creation are significant. Yoda moved to New York City from Japan in response to an exhibition of **Abstract Expressionist** artwork that she viewed in Tokyo. In the artists' own words, responding to a question of why she was prompted to leave Japan:

In 1966, there was a great exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. It was called *Two Decades of American Painting*. It was an important exhibition that introduced American paintings to Japanese people for the first time. The show included works by Pollock, De Kooning, Morris Louis, Newman, Johns, Rauschenberg, Warhol, and many other artists. I saw the paintings of all the artists for the first time. It was shocking enough for me to decide to go to New York.⁵

Today, Yoda typically works in a style that is emotional and abstract, while simultaneously incorporating elements of craft and devoting meticulous attention to each work. As an example, her painting *The Hudson* (shown here) was created through the painstaking layering of small bits of Japanese paper applied with dripped paint to panel.

⁴ Shiner, Eric C. & Tomii, Reiko. *Making a Home: Japanese Contemporary Artists in New York*. New York: Japan Society, 2007, p.187.

⁵ Ibid.

(1) A Remade Environment

Comparison Questions

- In what ways do both of these works of art represent a “remaking” of the artist’s environment?
- Which is a more “accurate” representation of the original subject; the sculpted photograph of a skyscraper’s surface, or the painting of an aerial view of the Hudson River? Why do you think so?
- Which piece would you say is more abstract? Why?

Introduce Information:

In looking at these two works of art, notice that one artist is using a very urban and corporate environment as his subject; while the other is using a natural landscape as her subject.

- Taking this into consideration, which piece, in your opinion, is a better representation of “New York?”

(2) Community Identity?

Kunie Sugiura

The Boxing Papers (Shinohara B)

1999

Unique gelatin silver prints (4 panels), framed

80 x 60" (203.2 x 152.4 cm)

Collection of Robinson and Nancy Grover, West Hartford, Conn.; courtesy Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, New York

Photo: Jeff Sturges, New York

Inquiry

- Describe the person that you see in this image. What are this individual's physical characteristics? How would you describe this individual's personality based on what you see? Why?

Introduce Information:

This is a type of **photogram**; an image of objects' shadows created by exposing photographic paper directly to light (without using a camera) and then developing the image. In this photogram, the white areas (shadows) are places where the light was blocked from the paper by an object.

- How does this technique for capturing an image differ from a photograph?
- What does this image say about the person pictured that a photograph might not be able to communicate? On the other hand, what might be left out?

Information for Educators

Born in Nagoya, Japan; lives and works in Manhattan; moved to New York in the 1960s.

Kunie Sugiura's signature works are life-sized photograms, images created by exposing photographic paper to a light source and then developing with chemicals, as a regular photograph, revealing the subject's shadow. For Sugiura, this process produces an image that not only records a moment, but also expresses something about the intangible qualities of the objects that she captures.

For her series *The Artist Papers*, Sugiura has chosen as her subjects visual artists in various media who are current or former residents of New York City. These portraits capture images of these artists, often with an iconic, identifying element. The subject of the particular work shown here is artist Ushio Shinohara (who is profiled in the following section of these curricular materials). Like Sugiura, Shinohara is another artist who was born in Japan, but has lived and worked in New York City for many years.

(2) Community Identity?

Ushio Shinohara

Scene from *Boxing Painting*

2006

Performance on Jay Street, New York for *Action Painting Street Battle! Ushio Shinohara vs. Ryôga Katsuma*

Courtesy of Ethan Cohen Fine Arts, New York

Photo: Arvin Fang/ECFA

Inquiry

- What do you see going on in this photograph? Be as specific as possible. What is happening in the foreground? What is happening in the background?

Introduce Information:

This is a photograph of a performance by artist Ushio Shinohara, which took place in New York City in 2006. During part of this performance, the artist created a painting in a style he invented called "Boxing Painting." In this method of applying color to a surface, the artist wears boxing gloves, dips them in ink or paint and then punches paper or a canvas to create the painting.

- What words can you use to describe the process of Boxing Painting, or product of this method?
- How is the action of holding and using a paintbrush different from wearing and using boxing gloves?
- Besides brushes, what are some other ways that an artist can apply paint to paper or canvas?

Information for Educators

Born in Tokyo, Japan, 1932; lives and works in Brooklyn; moved to New York 1969.

Ushio Shinohara is an important figure in the international development of contemporary art. His paintings, performances and sculptures reflect an interest in communicating intensity, action and chaos. In 1960, he was a co-founder of the Neo Dada movement, which emphasized improvised artistic performance and production, as well as found object assemblages and other avant-garde forms of expression.⁶ In the late 1950s, he created the technique of "Boxing Painting," a performative process of painting which involves the artist donning boxing gloves, dipping them in paint or ink, and "boxing" paper or canvas. For the piece included in the *Making a Home* exhibition at Japan Society Gallery, Shinohara used sumi ink (a type of ink primarily associated with traditional Chinese and Japanese calligraphy and scroll painting) on paper, and then applied the paper to a traditional folding screen.

Shinohara has lived and worked in New York City since 1969. Many of the artist's current works reflect a heightening of the everyday realities of metropolitan life. This includes interpretations of both the outlandish as well as the mundane.

[NOTE: As of 8/2007, several videos of Ushio Shinohara executing boxing paintings were available on YouTube.]

⁶ Shiner, Eric C. & Tomii, Reiko. *Making a Home: Japanese Contemporary Artists in New York*. New York: Japan Society, 2007, p.147.

(2) Community Identity?

Comparison Questions

Introduce Information:

Both of these images depict the artist Ushio Shinohara. One is a photo documenting a performance/painting that he did, while the other is an image of him created by another artist, Kunie Sugiura. Both Shinohara and Sugiura were born in Japan (Sugihara was born in Nagoya; Shinohara was born in Tokyo), but now both live and work in New York City.

- Why might Sugiura have chosen to create a portrait of Sugihara?
- Does the fact that these two artists were both born in Japan but living in New York make them part of a community? Why or why not?
- What does it mean to say that these are two “Japanese contemporary artists?”

(3) Defining “Home”

Mayumi Terada
Rocking Chair and Window
2005
Gelatin silver print
17 x 22 K" (43.2 x 57.1 cm)
Courtesy Robert Miller Gallery, New York
Photo courtesy of the artist

Inquiry

- Describe the place that you see in this photograph. Where do you think this is? Who do you think lives here? What do you see that makes you say that?

Introduce Information:

To create this artwork, the artist, Mayumi Terada, sculpted a small model of a room and then photographed it.

- Describe the mood of this photograph using at least three adjectives. How does the artist communicate this mood?
- Referring to the list of words that you just generated, choose a new mood word that is the opposite of one of the words you just used. How could you change the photograph to communicate this new mood?

Information for Educators

Born in Tokyo, Japan, 1958; lives and works in Manhattan; moved to New York 2001.

The artist Mayumi Terada is simultaneously both a sculptor and a photographer. She creates works like the one here by constructing scale models of scenes and photographing these artificial spaces. By photographing her models, particularly with black and white film, she begins to obscure their truly miniature size and brings them into the reality of our scale. Terada’s scenes contain no human figures, yet evidence of recent human presence is often implied, contributing to the haunting atmosphere of these works.

(3) Defining “Home”

Satoru Eguchi

Untitled

2003

Paper, cut-out photo, glue, variable shadow cast on the wall

14 x 16 K x 4 K" (35.6 x 41.9 x 11.4 cm)

Collection of the artist

Photo: Gô Sugimoto

Inquiry

- What is this? What does it remind you of?
- Write a short scene that involves a person or people interacting in or with this space.

Introduce Information:

This is a model of artist Satoru Eguchi’s studio, which he made himself.

- Describe the physical features of the studio that you see.
- Do you think that this would be an easy or hard space to work in as an artist? Why?
- Describe or design your idea of the ideal artist’s studio.

Information for Educators

Born in Shibata, Niigata Prefecture, Japan, 1973; lives and works in Brooklyn; moved to New York 1998.

Satoru Eguchi is an artist in the early stages of his career who has already achieved critical acclaim.⁷ He often creates sculptures or other works that are somewhere between the second and third dimensions; not quite flat, but not quite completed forms. His processes involve various explorations of the concepts of construction and deconstruction.

The image shown here is a model for *STUDIO*, the work included in the Japan Society Gallery exhibition *Making a Home*. The actual piece is a full-size reconstruction of the artist’s actual studio in Brooklyn, executed in everyday materials such as cardboard and wood, painted to replicate reality. All details of the studio space are included in the final work at Japan Society, including furniture, accessories and tools; all sculpted by the artist.

⁷ Shiner, Eric C. & Tomii, Reiko. *Making a Home: Japanese Contemporary Artists in New York*. New York: Japan Society, 2007, p.78.

(3) Defining “Home”

Comparison Questions

Introduce Information:

Both of these artists have created models of interior spaces. When finished, Terada chose to photograph her model in a theatrical way, while Eguchi lets his sculpture stand on its own.

- Which artwork would you say is more permanent? Which is more “real?”
- How is each artwork an expression of the idea of “home?”
- In what ways do rooms express things about the people who live in or use them? Do rooms tell you everything about a person? Why or why not?