

# Golden Road Arts

Yayoi Kusama – Japanese - American Visual Artist

## 1. Overview

In this lesson we take you through the exciting imagery of Yayoi Kusama, a Japanese artist who came to prominence in the United States in a variety of styles. As a child, Yayoi started to paint using polka dots and nets as motifs at around age ten, and created fantastic paintings in watercolors, pastels and oils.

She arrived in the United States in 1957, where she showed large paintings, soft sculptures, and environmental sculptures using mirrors and electric lights. In the latter 1960s, staged many happenings such as body painting festivals, fashion shows and anti-war demonstrations. Launched media-related activities such as film production and newspaper publication. In 1968, a film about her appeared and she held exhibitions and staged happenings in various countries in Europe.

While Kusama returned to Japan in 1973, she has continued to produce and show art works worldwide and also has issued a number of novels and anthologies. She began to create open-air sculptures in 1994. She is known for her Infinity Rooms, where her designs are reflected upon themselves using various materials, lighting sources, angles and mirrors. She has Infinity Rooms installed in the United States in various museums, including the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and the Broad Museum in Los Angeles.

- a. Grade level: Kindergarten-5th Grade
- b. Vocabulary
  - i. Painting
  - ii. Watercolors, Pastels and Oils
  - iii. Sculpture
  - iv. Film
  - v. Performance
  - vi. Infinity Rooms
  - vii. LED Lights
  - viii. Experience-based Art

- b. Art Medium
  - i. Wood
  - ii. Metal
  - iii. Glass Mirrors
  - iv. Plastic
  - v. Acrylic panel
  - vi. Rubber
  - vii. LED lighting
  - viii. Acrylic balls
  - ix. Water

### 3. Fun Facts

- a. Yayoi Kusama, who was born in Japan in 1929, was raised in a society where girls were expected to be alike and to conform. Yayoi was interested in art from an early age, and she used art to escape from the control of her parents and her society.
- b. Kusama was raised in Matsumoto, and trained at the Kyoto City University of Arts in a traditional Japanese painting style called nihonga. She was inspired by American Abstract impressionism.
- c. Yayoi Kusama was able to come to the United States in 1957 under the sponsorship of the artist Georgia O'Keeffe, who introduced her to important people in the artworld. She moved to New York in 1958.
- d. Her first solo art exhibit was in Seattle, Washington in 1957.
- e. At the time Kusama entered the US art market, she felt her ideas were taken by others who took her designs and used them freely within their art.
- f. Kusama organized happenings in the 1960s and early 1970s, where Polka dots, the trademark of "Kusama Happening" covered her designs and clothing. "Red, green and yellow polka dots can be the circles representing the earth, the sun, or the moon. Their shapes and what they signify do not really matter."
- g. Kusama said, "I paint polka dots on the bodies of people, and with those polka dots, the people will self-obliterate (disappear) and return to the nature of the universe." She felt her art was a conduit to release people from their reality.
- h. Kusama has been very open about her issues dealing with society, and has chosen to live under medical/professional supervision since 1977. For years she has worked in her studio during the days, and at night returned to a hospital like setting.
- i. Yayoi Kusama is an original artist and human who has found ways to grow, adapt, escape and to be successful through art. She is not typical, but she has learned to use her art to impact and influence others, and to self-medicate herself.

#### 4. Lesson Plan

##### a. Elements of Art

- i. Recognizable Shapes
- ii. Extended Forms
- iii. Using Vivid Color
- iv. Identifiable Composition Elements
- v. Defining and Reimagining Physical Space
- vi. Creating and Managing Perspective
- vii. Repeating Images
- viii. Creating Illusion

##### b. Principles of Art

- i. Repetition
- ii. Balance
- iii. Composition
- iv. Proportion
- v. Consistency
- vi. Movement
- vii. Imagination
- viii. Complementary Colors

##### c. Visualization

- i. How has Yayoi Kusama's art made you feel or consider art differently
- ii. Would you like to use geometric shapes (circles, triangles, boxes or recognizable elements) in your artwork?
- iii. Do you like the bright colors, bold shapes and repeating detail in Yayoi Kusama's art?
- iv. Do you see how someone can accept their differences from other artists (and perhaps the world) and still find a place to be successful?
- v. Do you see how an artist can control or create space to communicate her vision of reality?
- vi. What did you see, feel or experience about the art you created in the style of Kusama?

##### d. Goals and Objectives

- i. Students will understand the art of arranging colors, textures and elements to create structure
- ii. Children will learn to appreciate shapes, materials and perspective.
- iii. Students will appreciate how shapes and colors can be composed to create interesting patterns
- iv. Students in many cases may be introduced to planning their art projects prior to beginning

- v. Students will appreciate how various shapes, colors and textures can collaborate and interact in recognizable forms to reimagine composition, experience and reality?
- e. Students Critique Questions
  - i. What do you like about your art project?
  - ii. What do you like about your classmates' art projects?
  - iii. How does the art you have created stretch reality in some way?

5. Standards Met

- a. To meet standards, students may be encouraged to listen to or watch the following resources:
  - i. Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors | Arts | NPR  
[https://youtu.be/8VwJMw\\_fLvI](https://youtu.be/8VwJMw_fLvI)
  - ii. Need to escape reality? Step into infinity with Yayoi Kusama  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3k-86WrmHQ>  
(This news report deals briefly with nudity and mental health – aspects of Kusama you may choose to avoid. Most children will not notice these elements.)

## COMPLIANCE WITH EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS (PER GRADE)

### Kindergarten

VA.1.CR1.K #1 & #2, VA.2.CR2.K #1 & #3., VA:CR3.K #1 & #2,  
VA.8.RE2.K #1, VA.9.RE3.K #1., VA.10.CO1.K #1 & # 2, VA.11.CO2.K #1,  
VA:Cr1.1.Ka, VA:Cr1.2.Ka, VA:Cr2.1.Ka, VA:Cr3.1.Ka, VA:Re9.1.Ka

### 1<sup>st</sup> Grade

VA.1.CR1.1 #1, #2, & #3, VA.2.CR2.1 #1., VA.3.CR3.1 #1. & #2.,  
VA.8.RE.2.1 #1., VA.9.RE3.1 #1., VA.10.CO1.1 #2., VA.11.CO2.1 #1. & #2,  
VA:Re8.1.1a, VA:Re9.1.1a, VA.CR1.2.1a,VA.CR2.1.1a, VA.CR3.1.1a

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade

VA.1.CR1.2 #1, #2, & #3., VA.2.CR2.2 #1, VA.3.CR3.2 #1, #2, & #3.,  
VA.8.RE2.2 #1., VA.9.RE3.2 #1., VA.10.CO1.2 #2., VA:Cr1.1.2a, VA:Cr1.2.2a,  
VA:Cr2.1.2a, VA:Cr3.1.2a, VA:Re.7.2.2a, VA:Re8.1.2a, VA:Re9.1.2a

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade

VA.1.CR1.3 #1, #2, & #3., VA.2.CR2.3 #1, VA.3.CR3.3 #2 & #3,  
VA.7.RE1.3 #1 & #2, VA.8.RE2.3 #1 & #2, VA.9.RE3.3 #1, VA:Cr1.1.3a,  
VA:Cr1.2.3a, VA:Cr2.1.3a, VA:Re.7.1.3a, VA:Re8.1.3a, VA:Re9.1.3a,  
VA:Cn11.1.3a

### 4<sup>th</sup> Grade

VA.2.CR2.4 #1, VA.3.CR3.4 #1, #2, & #3, VA.7.RE1.4 #2 & #3, VA.8.RE2.4 #.,  
VA.9.RE3.4 #1 & #2, VA:Cr1.1.4a, VA:Cr1.2.4a, VA:Cr2.1.4a, VA:Cr3.1.4a,  
VA:Re.7.1.4a, VA:Re8.1.4a, VA:Re9.1.4a, VA:Cn11.1.4a

### 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

VA.CR1.5 #1, #2 & #3, VA.2.CR2.5 #1,#3, & #4, VA.3.CR3.5 #1, #2 & #3, VA.7.RE1.5  
#1, #2 & #3, VA.9.RE3.5 #1 & #2, VA:Cr1.1.5a, VA:Cr1.2.5a, VA:Cr2.1.5a,  
VA:Cr3.1.5a, VA:Re.7.1.5a, VA:Re.7.2.5a, VA:Re8.1.5a, VA:Re9.1.5a, VA:Cn10.1.5a,  
VA:Cn11.1.5a