

Viral Imaginations: COVID-19

Viral Imaginations: Engaging with Art History

Level: Grades 7-12

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will engage in art historical conversations and analysis using the [Penn State Viral Imaginations website](#).
- Students will compare and contrast art historical images produced during the Spanish influenza (1918) and Aids epidemic with images produced by artists today.
- Student will produce their artworks, reflecting on their own pandemic experiences.
- Students will participate in the creation in the historical archive of pandemic artwork.

Materials Needed:

- Access to [Viral Imaginations website](#)
- Access to [Edvard Munch, *Self-Portrait after Spanish Influenza*, 1919](#), [Marcel Breur, *Club Chair*, 1925](#) and [Keith Haring, *Ignorance = Fear*, 1989](#), [David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled \(Falling Buffalos\)*, 1988-1989](#)
- Art making materials of your choice

Summary of Tasks/Actions:

- The teacher will introduce students to the following images:
 1. **Edvard Munch, *Self-Portrait after Spanish Influenza*, 1919, oil on canvas**
-Edvard Munch created a series of studies, sketches and painting depicting his illness during the Spanish Flu. Examine Munch's appearance in the image. How does the artist depict his illness through his painting?
 2. **Marcel Breur, *Club Chair*, 1925, chrome-plated tubular steel and canvas**
-The Bauhaus designers used modern aesthetics, incorporating sanitation in the aftermath of the Spanish Flu. What social agendas might emerge from pandemics? How might these revolutionize creative thinking?
 3. **Keith Haring, *Ignorance = Fear* 1989, poster**
- This poster was designed by Keith Haring a year after he was diagnosed with AIDS. By 1991, 100,000 Americans had died from AIDS. Discuss the image of the poster as well as the American government's response to AIDS. Consider the meaning of disinformation. What parallels can you draw between the AIDS epidemic and COVID-19?
 4. **David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled (Falling Buffalos)*, 1988-1989, photomontage, (recommended for advanced students)**
-This photomontage depicts herds of buffalo falling off a cliff. The artist created this image after his HIV-positive diagnosis. This artwork draws a parallel between the AIDS crisis and the mass slaughter of buffalos in America in the 19th century. How might this image help us consider neglect or marginalization?
- The teacher will introduce students to the Viral Imaginations website: <https://viralimagination.psu.edu>
- Ask students consider the following questions:
 - How do artworks tell stories of the COVID-19 pandemic? Locate an image that tells a story. Describe the image.

- How do artworks show emotion or mental state? Locate an image that reveals the artists feelings/mood. Describe the image. Consider how different materials can be used to portray a mood.
- How do artworks serve as a form of activism? Locate an image that makes a strong political or healthcare statement. Describe this image.
- How might global health concerns shift artistic thinking or influence creativity?
- **As a class, discuss what images the students discovered. How do the historical artworks relate to the artworks on the Viral Imaginations website? Ask the students to compare and contrast self-portraits, activism, and images that show emotional state.**
- Artmaking Activity: Ask students to create their own artworks as a reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic. Their images may focus on depicting a mood or illustrate a form of activism, etc.
- Encourage students to upload final images to Viral Imaginations website with the assistance of their parents at <https://viralimagination.psu.edu/>