

In the Studio with Sirron Norris: Educator Guide



Subject Visual Art: Painting, Drawing, Cartooning

Grades 3 - 12

Standards Addressed Artistic Perception, Creative Expression, Aesthetic Valuing

Teaching with KQED Media

Using video in the classroom can breathe life and meaning into any lesson. In the arts, video can be particularly effective for introducing large concepts, aspects of the creative process, and key arts-related vocabulary to introduce students to discipline-based and concept-based study. Using media in the classroom helps connect students with artists and promotes critical viewing skills and media awareness. For more information about using media in the classroom download KQED's [Media Tips](#) teaching tool (a direct link is provided in the resource section of this guide). Using KQED media in the classroom allows student to virtually visit a local artist, while listening to firsthand information about the artist's practice. In order to present KQED media to your entire class, you will need a projector and computer with the capacity to stream video. Alternatively, assign students to watch the video on their own or in groups. After soliciting student responses to the video, continue the lesson by implementing hands-on or discussion activities to deepen the impact of the media – ideas are provided in this guide.

Making the Most of Media

The following activity ideas may be used in the classroom after viewing the KQED video [In the Studio with Sirron Norris](#).

✚ Create a Cartoon Character

Provide examples of cartoons by collecting newspapers, magazines and comic books. When several examples have been collected, invite students to read, browse and discuss. Encourage a discussion with the following talking points:

- Do cartoons look real?
- Are characters inspired by real people or places?
- Are cartoons narrative?
- Are cartoons always funny?
- Do cartoons tell a story?

Discuss the storytelling nature of cartoons and how a cartoonist creates a character to tell a story. Invite students to create their own cartoon character and narratives. Begin by developing the personality of the character. The following list of questions will help students with this process:

- Is this character someone you know in the real world?
- What makes your character happy?
- What scares him?
- Does your character have children? Is your character a child?
- Does your character play sports, play an instrument, draw or knit?
Remember, your character can do anything!
- What type of build does your character have? For example is your character muscular, heavy, small, skinny?
- Does your character have a favorite color?
- What style of clothes does your character wear?
- Does your character have a partner?
- Is your character a hero?

Continue with this process until the students feel as though they know their character and can place them in any situation. For example, ask students what their character would look like walking to school, waking up in the morning, or taking a test? How would their character act if confronted with an emergency? Next, guide students through the sketching process by illustrating faces, eyes, nose and mouth shapes, highlighting the importance of showing emotion in their characters face. As a reference, show the cartooning demo videos:

Happy/Sad/Mad Cartoon Faces demo by Sirron Norris:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPp1xgR-njg>, and

Perspective Cartoon Faces demo by Sirron Norris:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7r0ut2gce_o

Next, invite students to create their own comic strip. Begin with a simple statement like “When I got out of bed this morning, I felt...” Encourage students to create a narrative that completes the story. Work with a pencil, eraser and drawing paper to create a four-panel comic strip. Remind students that written words need to be printed with legible, clear lettering. When the pencil drawings are completed, trace over the pencil with a black marker, erasing any pencil that is showing. Add color with colored pencils or markers. When the comics are complete, display, discuss and enjoy the work.

🚩 Talking About Political Cartoons

Sirron Norris’s mural, *Victorion: El Defensor de la Mission*, in San Francisco’s Mission District Balmy Alley, addresses the subject of gentrification. Images of the mural can be seen on Norris’s website at <http://www.sirronnorris.com/murals/victorion-defender-of-the-mission/>.



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After viewing the mural, ask students to describe the painting. Discuss the characters, Norris’s drawing style and political issues addressed in the mural.

Dividing students into smaller groups, discuss the following topics:

- The subject of gentrification and its relevance to Balmy Alley and the Mission District community.
- The use of cartooning to communicate a political issue or opinion.

- What subjects might be important to Sirron Norris and how does he communicate this in his mural, *Victorion: El Defensor de la Mission*?
- How might a cartoonist come up with an idea for a political cartoon?

Bring students together to share their thought and ideas. As students are discussing, write down ideas on a chalk or wipe off board for students to view. Invite students to write a review of the mural, drawing on ideas from the discussion.

Political Cartooning

Referring to the above activity *Talking About Political Cartoons*, invite students to create their own political cartoons. Begin by exploring issues that are important to the students. Take time to develop and explore issues around home, school, community, politics, etc. Write ideas down on a large board for students to view. Ask them how they might express a topic that is important to them through humor. Point out that often cartoonists find humor in moments that may seem negative, confusing or bad. Invite students to draw a single cartoon referring to an issue that is important to them. Ask students to think about locations and situations that they experience daily, such as a classroom, a friend's house, their house, the school cafeteria, etc. Encourage them to create a character that reflects an emotion or feeling, such as love, pride, anger, etc. Refer to the blue bear cartoon character frequently used in Sirron Norris's work, which to him, represents love. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpSXz5MIc0o>.

Display the cartoons in the classroom to discuss and enjoy. If possible, make copies of the cartoons and create a class cartoon book and distribute to other classes in your school.

Cartoon Literalism – Learning Through Cartoons

Sirron Norris often speaks of "Cartoon Literalism" and describes this as using "cartoons as a vehicle to express life." <http://www.sirronnorris.com/bio/>. His blue bear, a popular character in his work, represents love. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpSXz5MIc0o>. Character development can provide us with an opportunity to understand an artist's motivations, attitudes and inspirations. His mural *Victorion: El Defensor de la Mission*, speaks of issues of gentrification and talks about a political issue that is important to Norris. Using these images as a resource, along with other cartoons found in newspapers and magazines, discuss as a class how a cartoon can represent a single event or a time in history. Discuss how an audience might "read" a comic, identifying the attitudes and beliefs of the artist. Consider the cartoon characters expressions, features and language. After viewing and comparing several comics, discuss how comics tell stories. Talk about how they differ from more conventional methods of telling a story, for example, through a textbook, newspaper or magazine article. Ask student which form they prefer and why?

Cartoon Self-Portrait

Invite students to create a simple cartoon character that represents them. Encourage them to think of their features: hair, eyes, nose, etc., and how they can exaggerate, embellish, enlarge or simplify a feature to create a cartoon character. Explain that the character does not necessarily have to look like them in a realistic way. The drawings can be a humorous, exaggerated resemblance of themselves. As a reference, view the cartooning demo videos:

Happy/Sad/Mad Cartoon Faces demo by Sirron Norris:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPp1xgR-njg>, and

Perspective Cartoon Faces demo by Sirron Norris:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7r0ut2gce_o

Students can also create a character that does not resemble them, but represents them.

For instance, they could draw themselves as a flower or as an animal. You might ask, "What would you look like if you were a flower? What color would you be? Would you bloom once a year, once every 5 years? What do you smell like?"

Next, invite students to create a four-panel comic strip using this character to tell a story of a personal experience. Ideas to get started might include: What was the best day of your life? What was the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to you? If you were alone on an island, what one thing would you bring with you? What are you doing 10 years from now and what do you look like? Encourage students to bring humor to the cartoon and remind them that cartoonists often bring humor to situations that might be sad, frustrating or difficult. Display the cartoons in a prominent location to discuss and enjoy. If your school has a newspaper or newsletter, consider "publishing" your comics for the school community to enjoy.

Resources to extend learning about the exhibit, art forms and featured artists

"In the Studio with Sirron Norris" KQED Education Video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpSXz5MIc0o>

KQED drawing demonstration videos with Sirron Norris:

Happy/Sad/Mad Face Demo <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPp1xgR-njg>

Perspective-Drawing Demo http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7r0ut2gce_o.

Sirron Norris Web site: <http://www.sirronnorris.com/>

The following KQED Spark documentaries, educator guides and articles may be used for compare/contrast purposes, and to extend learning about contemporary art and the work of Sirron Norris:

KQED Spark documentary about Mark Fiori

<http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=21820>

KQED Spark documentary about Keith Knight
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=4530>

KQED Spark documentary San Francisco Mural and Street Art Tour
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/tours-murals.jsp>

KQED Spark documentary Mission District Street Art
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=29274>

KQED Spark documentary San Francisco Cartoon Art Tour
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/tours-cartoon.jsp>

KQED Arts: Bob's Burgers: SF Artists + Syndicated Cartoons = Love
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/multimedia/article.jsp?essid=41915>

KQED Visual Arts: Sirron Norris Studio/Gallery
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/visualarts/article.jsp?essid=27913>

For more information about KQED's Arts Education resources and teacher art/media trainings, send an email to ArtsEd@KQED.org or call 800.723.3566.