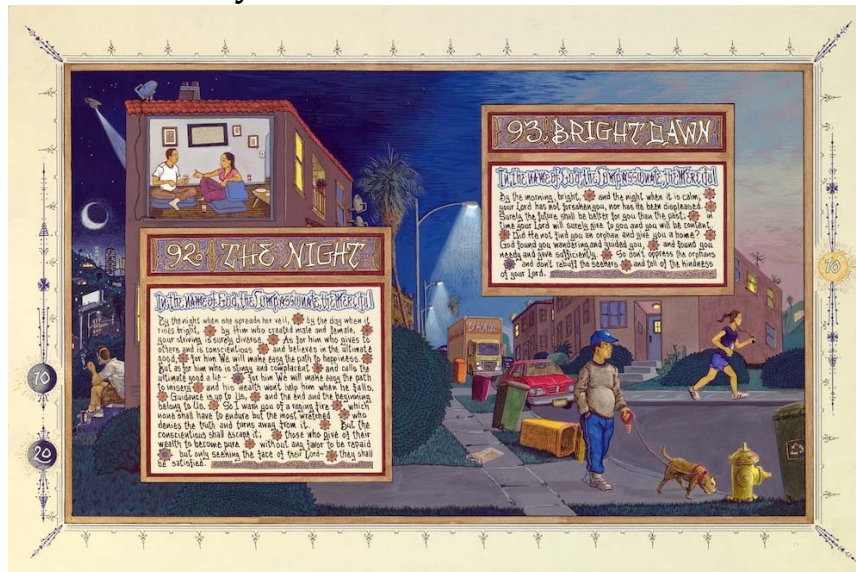


## In the Gallery with Sandow Birk: Educator Guide



American Qur'an Image courtesy Sandow Birk, sandowbirk.com

**Subject Visual Art: Painting**

**Grades 6 - 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 Gallery with Sandow Birk.

### ➤ Illustrate the Bill of Rights

As a group, view Sandow Birk's 2007 ink drawing, *Monument to the Constitution of the United States*. Images can be seen on Birk's website <http://www.sandowbirk.com/>. Notice that the drawing contains the entire text of the U.S. Constitution as well as the Amendments, with additional space left to allow for amendments in the future. The central section contains the Bill of Rights (the first ten amendments). The monument itself, which contains the written text, is intended to be a building where Americans live and work. Additionally, Birk uses illustrations of current events and scenes from daily life which relate to the written text.

Distribute a copy of the Bill of Rights to each student. Discuss and explain with students as a group. Talk about how the Bill of Rights relate to their daily life. Give examples of current events such as the Occupy Movement, airport security and gun control, and how these issues relate to the Bill of Rights. Also discuss how these topics might affect their daily life. Encourage discussion about what new amendments might be essential in the future.

Next, ask students to illustrate the Bill of Rights. Illustrations should relate to their everyday lives and reflect what is important to them. Ask students to create and illustrate a building to contain their drawings. Buildings can be their home, a store, school, church or a special city, state or federal monument. Depending on the age of the students, illustrations can relate to current political or social events, classroom or school events, or personal family circumstances. Ask students to also write and illustrate one or two amendments that they feel might be important for the future. Encourage students to lightly sketch their illustrations with pencil. When the pencil drawings are complete, go over the with a black, fine point ink pen. Erase any pencil marks that show. Point out the precision and detail of Birk's pen and ink drawing.

When illustrations are complete, display in a prominent location and encourage students to share and discuss their illustrations with the class. Ask students to choose one amendment that they feel is the most important to them and why.

## ➤ Found Object Sculpture

In 2009, Sandow Birk created two sculptures in collaboration with artist Elyse Pignolet, titled *California Dreaming #1* and *#2*. The sculptures, made entirely from debris found on the beaches of Southern California, represent large oil platforms. Images of the both sculptures can be viewed at <http://www.sandowbirk.com/sculpturalworks/lets-add-another/>. Both artists, residents of Southern California, collected the debris over a period of time. The pieces not only comment on the pollution that is washing up on the Pacific coastline, but also on the threatening and looming presence of the oil industry. Ask students to gather and collect found items over a period of time with the intention of creating a sculpture. Items can be collected from trail hiking, beach combing, park strolling or walking down a city street or sidewalk. Recycled items can also be collected. Encourage students to collect items that will create a fit between form, function and content. Explain how form (the collected items found on the beach), relate to function (the building of the oil platform), and finally relate to content (a sarcastic statement on coastline pollution, oil drilling, etc.)

Divide students into small groups of 4 to 5 students. Encourage them to brainstorm ideas about what type of sculpture to create and what message they will be communicating with their sculpture. Begin the sculpture process and build with glue, tape and string. When building, remind students that the foundations of their sculpture need to be stable and strong enough to hold the height and weight of the piece. As a reference, view *California #1* and *#2*. Point out the height of the structure and the strength of the base to hold the height and weight. When the sculptures are complete, paint can be added to finish the projects.

Display the sculptures when completed and discuss the process of collecting, the collaborative effort of the building process and the content of the completed pieces. Discuss any challenges the students had and how that affected the outcome.

## ➤ Re-imagine Your City

Sandow Birk, in collaboration with Elyse Pignolet, created two pieces in 2011 titled *A Liberal Map of the World* and *A Conservative Map of the World*. The gouache and ink maps reflect differing political viewpoints of the world, one from a liberal viewpoint, the other from a conservative viewpoint. Pieces can be viewed at <http://www.sandowbirk.com/paintings/recent-works/2/>. Discuss both interpretations of the maps and how they relate to society's viewpoints. Ask students to choose one map that best reflects their viewpoints.

For this project, begin by collecting as many maps of your city as possible, preferably one per student. If this is not possible, find one map would be appropriate to duplicate for all students. Encourage students to reconstruct the map to their own personal interests. Add roads, bike trails, subways, city parks, etc. to re-imagine their city as they want. Label areas that they feel are safe, threatening, polluted, beautiful, etc. Inspire students to be creative; collaging, drawing, building and illustrating what they envision their city to be which reflects their beliefs, ideas and dreams.

When the art making process is complete, display the city maps in a prominent area and allow each artist to speak about their piece. Encourage each student to talk about what is important to them about their city and why they reimagined their city as they did.

### ➤ **Create a Puppet Story**

Sandow Birk created an animated movie with puppets to tell the 14<sup>th</sup>- century epic story, Dante's *Inferno*. View the SPARK story featuring Sandow Birk at

<http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=8047> to see the process in creating this film.

The puppets in the story are hand made and created in the tradition of "Toy Theatre", a European style of 19<sup>th</sup> century puppetry. Birk began this process by writing a script and then creating a cast of puppets to tell the story.

Gather students to discuss a story or poem that can be made into a puppet play. Ask the students to choose between two or three written pieces that are relevant to them, or that they may be reading in an English or literature class. Decide as a class what story or poem to choose for the puppet play. Dividing the class into small groups, assign one group to create a script for the beginning of the story, the middle and the end, keeping all of the characters consistent. When the scripts are complete, read them in sequence and adjust as necessary to ensure that the story line flows from beginning, to middle to end. When the script is complete, ask the groups to create the sets and puppets for the story. Materials for the set and puppets should be simple, using paper, pencils, colored pencils, tape and sticks. Divide the groups up accordingly, offering all students an opportunity to create puppets and sets. This project may take several sessions. When the set and puppet making is complete, finish with a performance. If possible, video tape the play for later viewing and critiquing.

When the project is complete, discuss with the students the process of writing a script from a story and any challenges that they encountered. Discuss the effect of using puppets for the play instead of using actors. What is unique with puppets and did the performance have a dramatic and imaginative effect on the audience that might not have occurred if actors had been used instead of puppets?

## ➤ Free Writing Exercise

Invite students to address one or both of the comments below in the free writing journal exercise. Free writing is a timed exercise (10 and 20 minutes) where students write non-stop without making any corrections. Encourage students to write whatever comes to mind without self-censoring or judging their writing.

- A common theme in Sandow Birk's work is his relationship to his community. Spending much of his life living and working in the Los Angeles area, he identifies his art as a means to communicate his conceptual ideas, which often depict historical styles of painting and deal with contemporary American life. Think about your relationship to your community and how you might communicate ideas about your community through art. Consider other forms of art such as poetry, song writing, dance, etc.
- Birk frequently paints contemporary modern life in the backdrop of historical paintings. Refer to Birk's website for examples: <http://www.sandowbirk.com/paintings/history-paintings/> for examples. Discuss how painting is important in the modern world and how it relates to history.

After the free writing exercise, invite students to share and discuss their responses keeping in mind that journal writing can be kept private.

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

Sandow Birk Web site: <http://www.sandowbirk.com/>

Frequent collaborator, Elyse Pignole Web site: [web.mac.com/epignolet](http://web.mac.com/epignolet)

Catharine Clark Gallery: Sandow Birk  
<http://www.cclarkgallery.com/dynamic/artist.asp?ArtistID=9&Count=0>

PPOW Gallery: Sandow Birk  
<http://www.ppowgallery.com/exhibition.php?id=82>

KCET TV Los Angeles video interview for "One Dollar Project," Sept. 2011  
[kcet.org/socal/departures/community/fulldollar/interviews](http://kcet.org/socal/departures/community/fulldollar/interviews)

**The following KQED Spark documentaries, educator's guides and articles may be used for compare/contrast purposes, and to extend leaning about contemporary art:**

KQED Spark documentary about Sandow Birk  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=8047>

KQED Spark documentary about conceptual artist Paul Kos  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=5425>

KQED Spark documentary about writer and artist Kathy Foley  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=8680>

KQED Spark documentary about puppet artist Liebe Wetzel  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=8044>

KQED Spark documentary about history painter Kerry James Marshall  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=24422>

KQED Spark documentary about puppet artist Basil Twist  
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=8041>

<p>For more information about KQED's Arts Education resources, send an email to <a href="mailto:ArtsEd@KQED.org">ArtsEd@KQED.org</a> or call 800.723.3566.</p>
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