
Art Masterpiece: *Giant Hamburger*, by Claes Oldenburg

Keywords: Pop-art, public art

Grade(s): 5th & 6th

Activity: Create a pop-art soft sculpture*

Two projects are available – one with markers, one with paints



**Note: Because these sculptures take up a lot of storage space, this lesson is recommended to be the 6th (final) lesson of the year. It also takes longer than one hour (it averages one and a half hours.) This is another good reason to schedule this lesson as the final lesson of the year, after a bulk of the standardized testing is finished, and teachers have more time.*

About the Artist:

- Oldenburg was born in Stockholm, Sweden, on January 28, 1929. He was the son of a Swedish diplomat. As a child he and his family moved to America in 1936, first to New York then, later, to Chicago.
- Oldenburg studied at Yale University from 1946 to 1950, then returned to Chicago where he studied at the Art Institute of Chicago until 1954.
- Oldenburg is a sculptor, best known for his public art installations typically featuring very large versions of everyday objects. Public art is artwork that has been planned and created to be displayed outdoors, where it would be accessible to everyone (not just people who pay to go to a museum or gallery.)

- Oldenburg became part of the pop-art movement in the 1960's. Pop art is an art movement that began in the mid-1950s. Pop art including imagery from popular culture such as advertising, news, etc. It was meant to be a challenge to “traditional” artwork. Pop art employs aspects of mass culture, such as advertising, comic books and ordinary, common, or popular cultural objects.
- Other famous pop-artists are Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, and Roy Lichtenstein.
- In the early sixties, Oldenburg began experimenting with soft sculpture. One of his earliest soft sculptures, *Giant Hamburger*, (1962) was well received. This work won him immediate acclaim in and beyond the art world.
- Oldenburg's experiments with soft sculptures have changed ideas of what sculpture can look like. In working with soft sculpture, he questions both 'sculpture' and 'high art' in subject matter. These sculptures were large in scale, but small enough to fit inside a large room or building. Oldenburg's soft sculptures are most often displayed inside museums.
- He is one of the most internationally known and well respected living artists. He has been honored with retrospectives of his work in major museums all over the globe. In 2000, Oldenburg was awarded the United States Presidential Medal of Arts.

About the Artwork:

Oldenburg began toying with the idea of soft sculpture in 1957, when he completed a free-hanging piece made from a woman's stocking stuffed with newspaper. (The piece was untitled when he made it but is now referred to as *Sausage*.) His first wife, Patty Mucha, sewed many of his early soft sculptures. Oldenburg enjoyed making giant sculptures of foods such as ice cream, hamburgers and French fries.

About *Giant Hamburger*, Oldenburg admits, “I was more concerned with the effect of the piece as I was making it rather than its future conservation,” adding, “We were careful to use high-grade materials, but still the result is a lot of people work in art restoration now because works from that period are starting to need attention.” The 84-year-old artist explains why he decided to use ice-cream

cartons as stuffing. “I started with the foam, but found it was weighing the sculpture down,” he says, “so we used the empty boxes to make it lighter.”

“Many urban legends about [*Giant Hamburger*] circulate at the AGO, including early reports of visitors jumping on it, expecting it to be cushiony like a beanbag chair. There are also tales about the pickle that sits on the burger’s bun. According to one story, the pickle disappeared in the early ’70s, and Oldenburg flew to Toronto with a replacement, claiming it was a travel pillow to get it through customs. “The pickle is made differently from the rest of Floor Burger,” says Phillips. “There’s a different type of paint, so it could have been a later addition or substitution.”

“Oldenburg laughs upon hearing this. “That sounds like it could be true,” he says. “But like a lot of things, I can’t remember for sure. I do recall that the sides of the pickle are covered with a shinier paint than the rest, so it looks wet like a pickle. But that is still a very convincing story. I’ll have to look in my diaries.”

From www.artnews.com, in an article titled, *Claes Oldenburg: Hold the Pickle?* By Bill Clarke
Posted 04/08/13

Possible Questions:

1. How big do you think *Giant Hamburger* is? (7’ X 4’)
2. Would this sculpture have the same impact if it was the size of a real hamburger? What if it was very small?
3. What does *Giant Hamburger* look like it was made out of? (It’s canvas, which Oldenburg then painted. It’s stuffed with foam and (oddly) cardboard ice cream cartons.)
4. Would *Giant Hamburger* have the same impact if it looked very realistic?

Art Activity: Create a pop-art soft sculpture

Materials Needed:

For felt-tip marker project:

- OR -

For tempera paint project:

- LOTS and LOTS of plastic grocery bags for stuffing*
- Two sheets of white 3’x3’ butcher paper, one set for each student

- LOTS and LOTS of plastic grocery bags for stuffing*
- Two sheets of white 3’x3’ butcher paper, one set for each student

- Felt-tip markers, one set for each student*
- Scissors, one per student
- Staplers, six to share
- A box of staples
- String or yarn
- Pencils (students will have their own pencils)
- Tempera paints, assorted colors
- Water cups
- Paint palettes OR cups for paint
- Paint brushes
- Scissors, one per student
- Staplers, six to share
- A box of staples
- String or yarn
- Pencils (students will have their own pencils)

*For School Coordinators: There is a Parent/Teacher note at the end of this lesson to send out, asking for grocery bag donations. If you are worried that you won't get enough bags, you can ask your local grocery store for donations. Basha's, for example, has a grocery bag recycling program. They are often willing to donate these used grocery bags; all you have to do is ask.

The note also asks for students to use their own markers, if they have them, and/or if parents are willing to buy a set of markers for their student to use.

Process for felt-tip marker project:

1. Ask the students what objects they think a pop artist would choose to represent today. Some ideas might be: a Big Mac, Coke, Mickey Mouse, Pokémon, a cartoon character, a video game character, an iPod, a sports team emblem, a favorite food like ice cream or pizza, Miss Kitty, a sports ball like a football or soccer ball, a pencil, etc.
2. Give the students the two large sheets of butcher paper. One piece will be the back and will be left blank; the other piece will be the front. Have the students sketch their pop-art idea. Encourage them to use as much of their 3'x3' paper as possible, BUT don't draw to the very edges. Students will need an extra ½ inch to 1 inch all around the perimeter of their drawing when they cut it out.
3. If their drawing includes lots of thin bits that stick out from the main body (like spider legs, or the drinking straw in the Polar Pop example below), make sure you tell the students their drawing needs to be at least 3 inches wide in the smallest areas, because when they are stuffing it their hand will

not fit and the butcher paper may tear. Otherwise they can cut around the outside of the skinny parts. (Again, see the Polar Pop drinking straw example below.)

4. Pass out markers (or have the students use their own.) They should color their sculpture - the brighter and bolder the better.
5. When they are done coloring, have them place their colored paper on top of the blank (back) paper. Staple once in each of the four corners so as students cut out their image, the papers won't shift around too much as they are being cut.
6. As they cut around the perimeter of their image, students will need to leave enough space to staple around their drawing. This "seam allowance" should be at least $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch, and not much more than 1 inch. IF they are not sure they can cut outside the drawing, encourage them to trace a line in pencil around the perimeter of their drawing and cut along that line.
7. Next is the stapling and stuffing. Have students staple the front and back pieces together, just a portion, then stuff it (gently) with the plastic grocery sacks. Then staple a bit more, and stuff a bit more, until it is fully enclosed like a pillow. Put the staples no more than an inch apart for best results.
8. The last step is attaching a piece of 12 inch string or yarn to their sculpture. They will need to loop the string in half, tie the ends tightly, and staple it to their art. Sometimes a couple of knots are needed to keep the yarn from pulling out through the staples.
9. Hang your pop art in the hallway where everyone can see it!

Process for tempera paint project:

1. Ask the students what objects they think a pop artist would choose to represent today. Some ideas might be: a Big Mac, Coke, Mickey Mouse, Pokémon, a cartoon character, a video game character, an iPod, a sports team emblem, a favorite food like ice cream or pizza, Miss Kitty, a sports ball like a football or soccer ball, a pencil, etc.
2. Give the students the two large sheets of butcher paper. One piece will be the back and will be left blank; the other piece will be the front. Have the students sketch their pop-art idea. Encourage them to use as much of their 3'x3' paper as possible, BUT don't draw to the very edges. Students will

need an extra ½ inch to 1 inch all around the perimeter of their drawing when they cut it out.

3. If their drawing includes lots of thin bits that stick out from the main body (like spider legs, or the drinking straw in the Polar Pop example below), make sure you tell the students their drawing needs to be at least 3 inches wide in the smallest areas, because when they are stuffing it their hand will not fit and the butcher paper may tear. Otherwise they can cut around the outside of the skinny parts. (Again, see the Polar Pop drinking straw example below.)
4. When they are done drawing, have the students place their colored paper on top of the blank (back) paper. Staple once in each of the four corners so as students cut out their image, the papers won't shift around too much as they are being cut.
5. As they cut around the perimeter of their image, students will need to leave enough space to staple around their drawing. This "seam allowance" should be at least ½ an inch, and not much more than 1 inch. IF they are not sure they can cut outside the drawing, encourage them to trace a line in pencil around the perimeter of their drawing and cut along that line.
6. Next is the stapling and stuffing. Have students staple the front and back pieces together, just a portion, then stuff it (gently) with the plastic grocery sacks. Then staple a bit more, and stuff a bit more, until it is fully enclosed like a pillow. Put the staples no more than an inch apart for best results.
7. The next step is attaching a piece of 12 inch string or yarn to their sculpture. They will need to loop the string in half, tie the ends tightly, and staple it to their art. Sometimes a couple of knots are needed to keep the yarn from pulling out through the staples.
8. While students are stapling and stuffing their sculptures, pass out tempera paints, water cups, brushes, etc. Once the sculptures are stuffed, stapled, and the yarn loop is attached, students can paint their drawing. Encourage them to paint their sculpture completely; the brighter and bolder the colors, then better!
9. Once dry, hang your pop art in the hallway where everyone can see it!

Examples:





Chandler Unified School District, **Art Masterpiece Program**, Chandler, Arizona, USA

Art Masterpiece Request

Pop Art Project

Hello Parents and Teachers!

In our next Art Masterpiece lesson, we will be doing a soft sculpture pop-art project. We need LOTS and LOTS of plastic grocery bags to use for stuffing the sculptures. **Can you please send in your used (but clean) plastic grocery sacks?**

Teachers, please keep the bags in the classroom until your scheduled Art Masterpiece lesson.

THANK YOU for your support!

Art Masterpiece Request

Pop Art Project

Hello Parents and Teachers!

In our next Art Masterpiece lesson, we will be doing a soft sculpture pop-art project. Each student will be using colored markers to color a 3' x 3' paper. We do have markers that will be provided for this project however, they do dry out quickly. We want to make sure there are enough colored markers to go around for the grade level so we are encouraging kids to **bring in their own, new set of markers to keep and use for this project.** (If you send in a set of new markers, it is not a donation. The markers you send will only be used by your child, and your child will keep them.) This, of course, is optional, but will help us out tremendously.

THANK YOU for your support!

Parent Note:

Claes Oldenburg (born January 28, 1929) is an American sculptor, best known for his public art installations typically featuring very large replicas of everyday objects. Another theme in his work is soft sculpture versions of everyday objects. Oldenburg lives and works in New York.

Today in Art Masterpiece, students created their own pop-art soft sculpture.



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