



Dino Dreams: Exploring Jean-Michel Basquiat's Visual Poetry

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OVERVIEW

Project Description

Students will use art to share their thoughts, feelings, and identity through words and symbols while exploring the bold expressive style and unique visual language of Neo-Expressionist Jean-Michel Basquiat.

Learning Objectives

1. Students will learn about Basquiat's contributions to art history and contemporary art.
2. Students will gain hands-on experience with layering, mixed media, and symbolism, building their technical and creative skills.
3. Students will learn to take creative risks and trust their artistic instincts.
4. Students will learn to use art to share their thoughts, feelings, and identity through words and symbols.



Project Samples: 10th grade, 6th grade, 3rd grade, and kindergarten

Supplies

Per Student:

- Mixed Media Paper (9x12, 98 lb)
- Acrylic Paint (3: blue, white, and black)
- Ballpoint pen (black or blue)
- Pencil
- Flat brush ($\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, or 1 inch)
- Medium flat or round brush (#2, #4, or #6)
- AAYF label



Shared:

- Oil Pastels (5: white, red, yellow, black, blue)
- Crayons (3: any shades of red, blue, yellow)
- Reference pages: Basquiat Symbols & Directed Drawing

KEY CONCEPTS

Snapshot –
All about personal expression!
Mixed Media
Symbols and texts
Layered Composition
Raw and Evocative



Art Vocabulary

Symbolism: The use of symbols to represent ideas or themes.

Mixed Media: Combining various materials and techniques in one artwork.

Layering: Building up textures, colors, or patterns in artwork.

Expressive Art: Art that conveys emotion or personal ideas.

Dry Brush Technique: A painting method using a small amount of paint on a dry brush to create texture and rough, scratchy strokes.

Color Tint: A lighter version of a color created by adding white to it.

Neo-Expressionism Art: A modern art movement characterized by bold colors, dramatic brushstrokes, and raw, expressive imagery, often conveying intense emotions or social messages.

Social Commentary Art: Art that critiques or raises awareness about societal issues, often addressing politics, culture, or injustice.

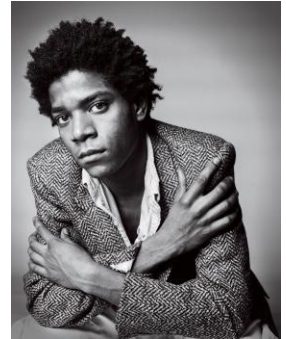
Acrylic Paint: A fast-drying, water-based paint that can be used in layers and mixed with different mediums to create various textures and finishes.

Oil Pastels vs. Crayons: Oil pastels have a soft, creamy texture that blends smoothly, while crayons are wax-based and create harder, more defined lines with less blending capability.

Historical & Cultural Context – About Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988)

Standing Out

- Jean-Michel Basquiat was a pioneering American artist known for his bold, expressive style and unique visual language.
- Born in Brooklyn, New York, to a Haitian immigrant father and Puerto Rican mother, his diverse cultural background deeply influenced his work.
- Basquiat rose to success during the 1980s as part of the Neo-expressionism movement. His legacy remains profound, as his work continues to inspire generations to explore identity, social justice, and self-expression through art.

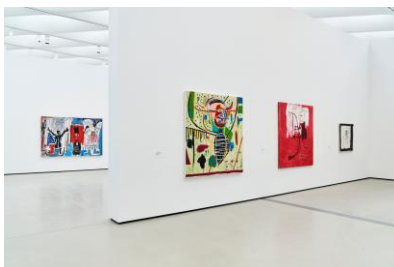


Heritage, Culture, and Social Critique

- Across his body of work, Basquiat drew on his own Afro-Latinx heritage, as well as a convergence of African American, African, and Aztec cultural histories, classical themes, and pop cultural figures, including athletes, and musicians.
- One of Basquiat's most recognizable motifs, the crown, symbolized empowerment, and he often placed it over Black historical figures, elevating them to a royal status.
- His painting *Pez Dispenser*, featuring a crowned dinosaur, exemplifies his ability to merge childlike imagery with profound commentary, blending themes of consumerism and power.

Unique Approach to Art

- A self-taught artist, Basquiat's creativity was nurtured by his mother, who took him to museums and encouraged his love of drawing.
- In high school, he and his friend Al Diaz created a cartoon series for their school newspaper, using humor and satire to comment on social issues.
- After high school, he worked various jobs during the day and painted on whatever surfaces he could find (doors, windows, and discarded materials) while incorporating words and symbols that became his signature.
- Basquiat used crayons to connect with his childhood and create with spontaneity and energy. He valued their raw, unrefined quality, aligning with his expressive style and desire to challenge traditional fine art.



Basquiat in Venice, CA

Basquiat spent about a year and a half living in Venice, CA for extended periods between 1982 and 1984, during which he produced approximately 100 paintings. "L.A. was a place for him to be by the ocean and just paint," says his sister Lisane Basquiat. "He loved L.A. I think it calmed him."

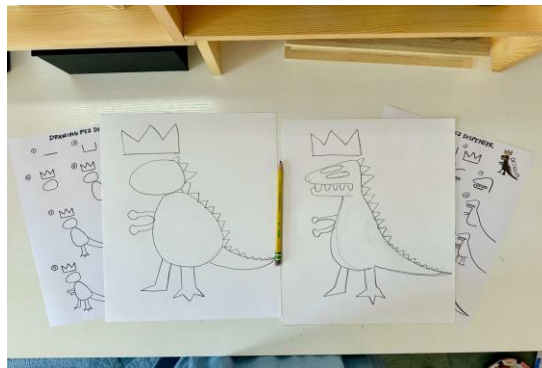
Basquiat at the Broad Museum in LA

The Broad Museum in Los Angeles houses an extensive collection of Jean-Michel Basquiat's works, including notable pieces like *Untitled* (1981) and *Beef Ribs Longhorn* (1982). These artworks showcase Basquiat's distinctive style, characterized by expressive imagery and complex symbolism, reflecting themes of identity, power, and the Afro-Latinx, Black American experience.

THE PROJECT

Project Prep:

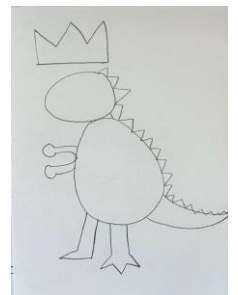
1. Before the lesson, choose if you want to teach the **simple drawing** (more basic shapes) or the **detailed drawing** (Basquiat style).
2. **For TK & K:** Allow the students a few minutes to think about **key ideas that represent them** and their lives. They can think about some of their favorite things (e.g. places to visit, food, hobbies, people, characters, affirmations). Remind them that they will be adding these as words and symbols later (see "Writing in Oil Pastels" section).



Project Procedure:

A. Directed Drawing: Simple Dino for Younger Students (Reference the Directed Drawing Guides for step-by-step visual instruction)

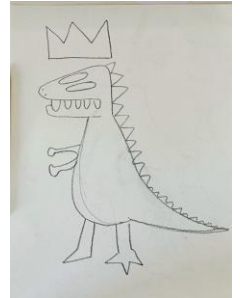
1. **Find the middle of the paper.** Now, go up halfway so you are $\frac{1}{4}$ from the top. Make a light mark to remember this spot.
2. Draw a **straight line to the left** of this mark, which represents the base of the crown.
3. Draw the **sides of the crown and a W** for the top.
4. Younger students: Below the crown, make an **egg-shaped oval** for the dinosaur's head.
5. Under the head, make a **larger egg-shaped oval** for the body. Make sure there is enough space behind it for a tail. **Connect the two ovals** with a line to make the back of the neck.
6. Create a **curved line** for the top of the tail and another curved line for the bottom of the tail.
7. The hands are in a U shape, and when you complete the top and bottom hands, the ends are just knobs.
8. The front leg is lower than the back, so **make the front line longer** than the back line.
9. **Complete the front foot** and then the back foot.
10. Finally, **make the spikes** on the back of the dinosaur.



B. Directed Drawing: Detailed Basquiat Dino for Older Students

(Reference the Direct Drawing Guides for step-by-step visual instruction)

1. **Find the middle of the paper.** Now, go up halfway so you are $\frac{1}{4}$ from the top. Make a light mark to remember this spot.
2. Draw a **straight line to the left** of this mark, which represents the base of the crown.
3. Draw the **sides of the crown and a W** for the top. Below the crown, **make a rounded "V"** for the top half of the dinosaur's face.
4. Then, **add five rounded or pointy teeth.**
5. Now, at the bottom half of the face, it ends a bit further back, so the dino looks like it has an overbite. **Add the back of the head**, and you've completed the head.
6. We want to ensure we have enough space to fit a tail, so **make a line** starting at the bottom of the neck and **create a curved tail.**
7. Make a **nice rounded belly** for the front of the dinosaur.
8. The hands are in a U shape, and when you complete the top and bottom hands, the ends are just knobs.
9. The front leg is lower than the back, so **make the front line longer** than the back line.
10. **Complete the front foot** and then the back foot.
11. Make **little ovals** for the eyes.
10. Finally, **make the spikes** on the back of the dinosaur.



C. Acrylic Painting: Black

1. Using the medium round brush, **paint the dinosaur's body** in black acrylic paint. Avoid the area of the eyes and teeth if you want these areas to pop more.
 - 1a. *For younger students, we will paint the entire face black. Facial features (eyes, mouth, teeth) will be created using white and red oil pastels.*
2. Do not paint the crown or spikes!



D. Oil Pastels

1. Flip the paper upside down, as the black paint dries.
2. Using the yellow oil pastel, **color in the crown.**
3. Use the black oil pastel to **outline the crown in black.**
 - 3a. *For older students, you can do this step using black acrylic paint for a more layered look.*
4. Flip the paper back in the right direction and **color the dinosaur's spikes** with yellow oil pastel, then **outline them with red oil pastel.** It's okay if the paint smears a little; it adds to Basquiat's messy, energized style. It's okay for the pencil marks to show through as well.





E. Writing in Pen

1. Use a black or blue ballpoint pen to **PRACTICE writing text and symbols** around the dinosaur. This text will be painted over, so spend only a few minutes on this.
2. Prompts:
 - a. Write your dinosaur's name or your name.
 - b. Write your favorite places (local and abroad).
 - c. Practice drawing your favorite symbols.
 - d. Younger students can write their initials, uppercase and lowercase letters, and/or their favorite symbols from example sheets.

F. Acrylic Tint

1. Mix the white acrylic with a tad of blue acrylic to **make a light blue tint**.
2. Using the flat brush, **paint in the background** using the dry brush method. You do not need to paint the entire background. Leave some areas white, especially the area around the dinosaur and around the edges of the paper. You can also make more than one tint.



G. Dino Details/Oil Pastels

1. Use the white oil pastel to **create the round ovals** for the dinosaur's eyes.
2. Use the white oil pastel **to define the smile and five teeth**.
3. **Add a white highlight** line on the belly and back of the dinosaur, and add claws.
4. With **the red pastel**, add the eye's iris, make the red tongue behind the teeth (optional), and a red egg-shaped oval on the body of the dinosaur.
5. With **the yellow pastel**, add a yellow highlight (or glow) in front of the dinosaur.

H. Writing in Oil Pastels

1. In blue pastel:
 - a. Write where you live or a favorite place, for example, RB, MB, LA, SB, PV, TORR, HB.
 - b. Write dialogue or a sound next to your dinosaur's mouth, e.g. ROAR or Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha.
 - c. Write some of your favorite things (food, hobbies, people, characters, affirmations).
2. In red pastel:
 - a. Circle things to bring attention to them.
 - b. Add more symbols.
3. In yellow pastel:
 - a. Add hashtags/tic-tac-toes and symbols.
 - b. *For younger students, show them the simple symbols, letters, and short affirmation words on the reference sheets and ask them which symbols represent them and their lives.*

I. Final Touches

1. Use crayons to add pops of color or more visual interest to the final piece.
2. Sign your art in black oil pastel, pen, crayon, or paint!

Basquiat used common art supplies, such as crayons, because he believed fine art should be accessible.



Docent Tips

- This project is meant to encourage creativity and self-expression. A raw, gritty, unpolished result is completely appropriate.
- Allow enough time for directed drawing and subsequent sections.

Helping Hands Tips

- Please be ready to help with set up and applying AAYF labels to the backs of their papers.
- During the directed drawing section, wander around the room and help implement instructions to keep the pace moving.
- Encourage students to add text and symbols by offering examples. Ask them about their favorite things or aspects of their lives they want to represent. Try to help them think about things that excite them.

OFF THE CANVAS

Reflection Questions - Aesthetic Valuing

At the end of the project, make time to have students reflect on their project by asking the following grade level questions. This conversation can be facilitated by docents or classroom teachers.

TK-1

1. How did you feel when you created your drawing? Free? Powerful? Joyful?
2. What words and symbols did you use in your picture and why?

Grades 2-3

1. What is one thing you learned about Basquiat today that you didn't know before?
2. What do you remember most about Basquiat's work? How does his work make you feel?

Grades 4-5

1. How will Basquiat's art inspire the way you create your own artwork?
2. What do you think is more important in art – making it look perfect and polished or showing your feelings? Why?

If time is short, the following questions are appropriate for **all grade levels**:

1. Are you happy with your project? What do you like best about your project? What might you change?
2. What do you like about your peers' artworks? How is it unique?

About the AAYF Artist

Natasha Khan Kazi was born in Bangladesh, raised in Texas, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, and now lives in Southern California, where she writes and illustrates books for young readers, including her debut picture book, *Moon's Ramadan* (a 2023 JLG Gold Standard Selection, SLJ Best Picture Book, Chicago Public Library Best Picture Book, and Bank Street Education Best Picture Book). Her creative work is rooted in empathy, diversity, and childhood joy. Natasha is a 2023 Highlights Foundation Muslim Storyteller Fellow. Her 2025 books include *Lulu In the Spotlight* (Versify/HarperCollins) and *Bela And Lily* (Kokila/Penguin). Learn more about Natasha and her books at www.natashakhankazi.com and follow her adventures @natashakhankaz

Art At Your Fingertips is a Palos Verdes Art Center school-based outreach program that brings visual arts education to elementary school classrooms from transitional kindergarten through fifth grade.

Established in 1976, this program reaches 6,000 students annually on the Palos Verdes Peninsula. Run completely by parent volunteers, AAYF's paramount objective is to make every child feel comfortable using art as a means of expression. We thank the Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District, PTA, PTO, and Booster Club for their support.



DINO DREAMS:

EXPLORE THE BOLD, EXPRESSIVE STYLE AND UNIQUE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF NEO-EXPRESSIONIST JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT.

You can find these materials in one of the Palos Verdes Library District libraries or in our online collection.

Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat

Juvenile Biographies BASQUIAT, J. STEPTOE

Award-winning illustrator Javaka Steptoe's vivid text and bold artwork echoing Basquiat's own style introduces young readers to the powerful message that art doesn't always have to be neat or clean - and definitely not inside the lines - to be beautiful.

Jean-Michel Basquiat

Ebook available on Hoopla

In this book from the critically acclaimed, multimillion-copy best-selling Little People, BIG DREAMS series, discover the life of Jean-Michel Basquiat, the graffiti street art movement pioneer. This moving book features stylish and quirky illustrations and extra facts at the back, including a biographical timeline with historical photos and a detailed profile of the brilliant artist's life.

The Jean-Michel Basquiat Show

Adult Nonfiction 759 BASQUIAT

One of the most complete monographs of the artist to date, this illuminating volume depicts the explosive career of Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988), who is hailed as one of the finest American neo-expressionists of his era.

The Notebooks

Adult Nonfiction 700.4112 BASQUIAT

The notebooks are filled with images and words that recur in Basquiat's paintings and other works. Iconic drawings and pictograms of crowns, teepees, and hatch-marked hearts share space with handwritten texts, including notes, observations, and poems that often touch on culture, race, class, and life in New York. Like his other work, the notebooks vividly demonstrate Basquiat's deep interests in comic, street, and pop art, hip-hop, politics, and the ephemera of urban life. They also provide an intimate look at the working process of one of the most creative forces in contemporary American art.

Basquiat

Adult Nonfiction 92 BASQUIAT VOLOJ

Author Julian Voloj and illustrator Søren Mosdal's graphic biography of the artist Jean-Michel Basquiat is full of crackling energy and a breakneck pace to match the tumultuous life and career of their subject, whose synthesis of punk, pop, hip-hop, and street cultures continues to be influential more than 20 years after his death.

More about Jean-Michel Basquiat and Neo-Expressionism

Basquiat Collection at the Broad Museum

<http://www.palosverdes.com/pvlight/>

Basquiat Collection at the Museum of Modern Art

<https://whitney.org/artists/621>



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