



LESSON

4

Jean-Michel Basquiat

Self-Portrait

Verbal Directions

LESSON OVERVIEW

Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988) was a pioneering American artist known for his graffiti-inspired style and use of text and symbolism. Students will learn about his life and create expressive self-portraits using layered materials and strong lines.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

- Learn about Basquiat and his influence.
- Explore graffiti and street art.
- Use mixed media to create expressive artworks.
- Create a self-portrait.

SUPPLIES

- Images of Basquiat's work
- Foam or rubber rollers
- Stamps and ink pads or acrylic paint
- Paint, paint sticks, and markers
- Mirrors
- Canvas or heavy-duty cardstock

JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT



Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988) was born in Brooklyn, New York. He started as a graffiti artist, painting on the streets of New York City. Soon, people noticed his amazing talent. His paintings use bright colors, strong lines, and interesting symbols to share ideas about people, culture, and life. Basquiat mixed street art with bold, emotional painting styles and often included crowns, people, and secret messages in his work. He used many different materials like paint, oil sticks, and even objects he found. Although his career was short, Basquiat became a famous and important artist who changed the art world forever.



LESSON PLAN

1. Day 1: Introduce students to Jean-Michel Basquiat, an influential artist who began his career creating graffiti in New York City and later became known for his bold, expressive paintings. Show examples of his work, pointing out his use of layered textures, vibrant colors, strong lines, and meaningful symbols such as crowns, faces, and words. Ask students to look closely and respond to questions that encourage observation and interpretation:

- What do you see in this artwork? How does it make you feel?
- What kinds of lines and colors do you notice? What makes this artwork different or special?
- Do you see any words or symbols? What do you think they mean? Why might the artist have used them?
- Does the artwork tell a story or make you imagine something?

2. Tell students they'll be creating a self-portrait inspired by Basquiat's unique style. Begin by helping them create a textured background using paint rollers and acrylic paint, encouraging them to explore layering and texture as a base for their art.

3. Day 2: Once dry, guide students in sketching their self-portrait using bold, simple shapes. Start with a large circle or oval for the head, add eyes as big circles or dots, a nose as a simple line or triangle, and a mouth as a curved or zigzag line. Encourage exaggerating features like big eyes, thick eyebrows, or a wide smile to capture personality and emotion, just like Basquiat's expressive figures. Next, introduce stamps with symbols like crowns, stars, or words, and show how to use them with ink or paint to add meaningful details. Students then layer in graffiti-like marks, shapes, and symbols using markers or paint sticks to add depth and character. Encourage playful, spontaneous expression—just like Basquiat—while thinking about how each layer, word, or color reveals something about themselves.

4. Once finished, ask students to observe each other's work and discuss: How did each person express something unique about themselves?

(EVA+): Explore Basquiat's use of mixed media by allowing students to add collage elements or found objects to their portraits. **Pre-K Variation (One Session):** Students use tempera paint to create their own personal symbol. First, they paint a bold background using one color and a roller or wide brush. While it's still wet, they use a second color to paint a large symbol that represents them—like how Basquiat used the crown. They can choose any shape or mark, such as a star, spiral, or squiggle.





KEY IDEAS THAT CONNECT TO STATE CORE ARTS STANDARDS:

**Based on Utah Core Standards Fine Arts Requirements.
(5th Grade).**

Standard 5.V.R.1:

Compare one's own interpretation of a work of art with the interpretation of others, and identify and analyze cultural associations suggested by visual imagery.

Standard 5.V.R.2:

Identify and analyze cultural associations suggested by visual imagery.

Standard 5.V.C.1:

Combine ideas to generate an innovative idea for art-making.

Standard 5.V.C.2:

Experiment with and develop skills in multiple art-making techniques and approaches through practice.



ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Click on links to learn more.

- <https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/Jean-Michel-Basquiat/633700>
- <https://wwwarthistorykids.com/blog/318>
- <https://www.thebroad.org/art/jean-michel-basquiat>
- <https://nmaahc.si.edu/latinx/jean-michel-basquiat>

Brought to you by:



A special thanks to our sponsors:



Cheri and Scott Beck Fund

