

# MATERIAL CULTURE & YOU

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East High School  
50 min Class

## Lesson Summary

To kick off this lesson students create outfits from printed images of shirts, pants, and shoes. The intention of this exercise is to get students thinking about the cultural associations of materials. A short conversation about the different ways materials carry meaning will follow the outfit arrangement exercise. Following that, the teacher will give a presentation that unpacks the terms “culture” and “material culture”. This will be done by looking at the work of the New Zealand artist Michel Tuffery and analyzing the cultural significance of the material choices in his artwork. Students will then have the option to include materials in a sustained investigation to further enhance meaning in their artwork

*Throughout time, materials within a culture have communicated messages that profoundly shaped beliefs and perspectives*

## Rationale

This lesson is designed to get students thinking about how culture can define, shape, enhance, inhibit, or empower their lives. Materials within our culture are not neutral but carry powerful messages that shape perspectives. The activities in this lesson help students to think holistically about items they regularly interact with and how cultural meaning is embedded in those items. Building an understanding of cultural messages can help students gain agency over their perspectives and how they engage with the world.

## Art Standards

VA:Cr2.3.IIIa

Demonstrate in works of art or design how visual and material culture defines, shapes, enhances, inhibits, and/or empowers people’s lives.

## Key Concepts

- Materials are embedded with cultural meaning
- Beliefs and perspectives are shaped by culture

## Essential Questions

- How can material items be included in an artwork to enhance meaning?
- What are the different reasons materials carry meaning?
- How do messages in materials impact our lives?

## Objectives

### Skill

Students will categorize images based on words that describe people in the sorting exercise at the beginning of the lesson.

### Knowledge

Students will describe how cultural messages are used to enhance meaning while analyzing the work of New Zealand artist Michel Tuffery.

### Disposition

Students will improve artworks that are a part of their sustained investigation by enhancing meaning with materials.

## Assessment

### Pre-assessment

- A baseline of students understanding of meaning embedded in materials will be assessed during the sorting exercise.

### Formative assessment

- The teacher will check in with students as they continue with their sustained investigation to assess how well they are improving their artworks by enhancing meaning with materials.

### Summative assessment

- The teacher will gauge whether or not students understand how cultural messages can enhance meaning in artworks while they analyze the work of Michel Tuffery.



Artwork by Michele Tuffery, Corned Beef, 2000

## Supplementary Materials

C U L T U R E

knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings,  
hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations,  
concepts of the universe



M A T E R I A L S



Y O U

knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings,  
hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations,  
concepts of the universe, perspectives

Using the colors in the key, use color pencils to identify elements of material culture in this artwork by Faith Ringgold. Explain your answers in writing.

**KEY**  
Hierarchy, Attitude, Experience  
Meanings, Roles, Beliefs

**ABOUT THIS ARTWORK**

- The image tells a fictional story about a black woman who moves to New York and meets celebrities including Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso
- This character is becoming an artist and business woman
- The artist is drawing on her own struggle as an artist in an art world dominated by western tradition and male artists

