



TEXT, IMAGE & LANGUAGE

A lesson plan to be adapted and extended for primary and secondary students centred upon an investigation of Jon Campbell's practice and the creation of an artwork inspired by his text, image and language artworks, as seen in the exhibition *Painting. More Painting*. This activity is modelled to correspond to the Victorian Curriculum and to be adaptable to students of all year levels.

THE ARTIST

Jon Campbell's works audaciously elevate Australian slang to the status of art, while simultaneously exclaiming their inherent banality. Campbell manipulates figure and ground to conceal and reveal the text, creating a vacillation between abstraction and objectivity. His work in ACCA's exhibition *Painting. More Painting* crosses the disparate realms of high Modernism (featuring motifs reminiscent of Matisse's cut-outs) and Australian vernacular to create a work drenched in wit. Campbell determines the basic principles, like size and colour, in his tightly designed paintings through initial drawings, photocopies and layers. He uses words or sayings to reflect on how we live and the language we use. Using stylised, often playful text and utilising negative space, he investigates how these words can be used and their effects on the viewer.

Image: Jon Campbell, *Dream Team* 2012, Ian Potter Museum, University of Melbourne.

ACTIVITY OUTLINE

Language has historically been an important tool for many artists, and bold text-based artworks can demand the viewer's attention through use of language and visual conventions. In response to the artwork and practice of Jon Campbell, this activity allows students to explore everyday themes combined through both visual and written language, while investigating typographic styles through problem-solving designs with size and colour constraints.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Make artworks inspired by methods and ideas explored in Jon Campbell's practice.
- Use a range of research strategies to explore the artwork of Jon Campbell's text-based works.
- View a videos and images to understand the process Jon Campbell undertakes when creating an artwork.
- Reflect upon everyday common language to construct an original text-based composition.
- Explore the potential of written and visual language to communicate and emphasise a mood or message to the audience.
- Learn to work with a combination of pencils, acrylic paints and upscaled, projected designs.
- Learn how art historical references and artists can influence or inspire contemporary artists.

ACTIVITY TIMELINE

This is an adaptive unit that could be completed over either two single or double sessions, or alternatively extended over several weeks through elaboration with the incorporation extension suggestions.

MATERIALS & EQUIPMENT:

- A4 paper
- A3 paper
- HB Pencils
- A4 transparent acetate
- Coloured pencils – range of 3 colours only
- Permanent markers – fine tip
- Acrylic paints – two colours and shade
- Paint palettes
- Blutac
- Projector and white wall

ACTIVITY PROCESS

Stage 1

1. Introduce students to Jon Campbell's art practice, including his work in *Painting. More Painting.*

Note - language warning on Campbell's work and links below. For younger students it is suggested key artworks from his practice are selected.

Artist website:

<http://www.joncampbell.info/>

Darren Knight Gallery:

<http://www.darrenknightgallery.com/artists/campbell/>

Videos:

<https://vimeo.com/75364499>

<http://stationgallery.com.au/news/jon-campbell-studio-visit-art-guide-australia>

Stage 2

1. Students are to choose a word, phrase or saying from their everyday life. They can consider words used around the schoolyard, Australian vernacular and slang. It must be between 1-4 words maximum.
2. Students are to experiment with typography and hand-drawn designs by fitting their word or saying into a tight, determined A4 frame using greylead pencil. They can begin this process by researching typographic styles and how type can communicate a mood or be used to emphasise hierarchy of information. They are to focus on arranging their word or saying by working with shapes around the lettering. This stage can also begin with collage for those students struggling with initial ideas.
3. Once designed and a final composition is selected, students can begin making colour choices and selections using coloured pencils. Their design must be restricted to a maximum 3 colour palette, and they are to pay close attention to utilising positive and negative space.

Stage 3

1. Students are to transfer the outline of their design to a larger sheet using the overhead projector.
2. They are to finish their artwork by filling in their composition using acrylic paints.



Image: Jon Campbell, *Fuck yeah (Matisse)* 2015. Courtesy the artist and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

These suggestions aim to extend the activity through elaboration and deepening of focus upon areas such as: how artists engage audiences, cultural symbols, incorporating ICT in making processes, experimenting with mixed media, art for public spaces. Specific extension ideas for the discussion, analysis and presentation of student artworks have been explored.

KEY LINKS

Art tram:

<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/art-trams-back-on-the-tracks-20130930-2uolb.html>

Design Files interview:

<http://thedesigntfiles.net/2014/10/jon-campbell/>

Publication:

<http://stationgallery.com.au/publications/jon-campbellvisit-art-guide-australia>

Next page images:

Just Sing What You Feel (neon) 2013

Campbell's art tram with *Backyard* design

Yeah Yeah Yeah, (billboard) 2008, as part of the Conversations project, Hobsons Bay City Council

Pure Bewdy 2011, installation view, Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

PRIMARY

Respond & Interpret

- Visiting his website, investigate Jon Campbell's work and identify symbols in his work that reflect on Australian culture.
- Discuss the similarities and differences between Jon Campbell's paintings and his neon artworks. Which do you like more? Justify your response.

Visual Arts Practices

- Campbell searches through different fonts before painting messages with acrylic paints. Collect a range of font clippings from magazines to create a text-based collage.
- Campbell was inspired by the work of Henri Matisse when visiting an exhibition of his work, an artist well known for his cut-out artworks. Create your own cutout collage using basic shapes with coloured and textured papers.

Present & Perform

- As a class combine the cutouts into one larger artwork for classroom display. Evaluate whether the artworks are more effective together or by themselves.



Images: Cut-out artworks by Henri Matisse



SECONDARY

Explore & Express Ideas

- Jon Campbell has been a fixture on the Melbourne art scene since he first began exhibiting paintings of suburban youth culture in the 1980s. Over time his practice has evolved to become one of the more complex examples of Australian pop art. Research Jon Campbell's art practice and identify key influences and the development of his personal style. What visual features are signature to his work? How has his work changed across his career?
- Through his use of humble materials, everyday themes and visual/written language, Campbell's work invites broader, more diverse audiences into his work. As a class discuss how he connects with audiences through visual and written language.
- Campbell has sourced material from often overlooked suburban motifs, using snippets of Australian slang, cultural signifiers and kitsch. In a two minute brainstorm, list a collection of words, phrases, people and objects that you personally associate with Australia.
- Campbell, who is interested in representing "the overlooked and undervalued," has exhibited flags and banners with the words: Hold, Home, Look, Play, Want, and Yeah. To create *Yeah Yeah Yeah (billboard)*, Campbell repeated the same word three times. Choose a work and repeat it on a piece of paper. How does the repetition of this work affect its meaning? How does the artist use language to connect and build relationships with the audience?

Visual Arts Practices

- In groups walk around your school and investigate the variety of public spaces, for example, the basketball court, the corridor to classrooms, the bus stop. Choose one of these spaces to work with. How many people would use this space every day? Is it a meeting place or a liminal space? Create an artwork to go in this space. How will it be presented?
- Campbell is also a musician. He created an exhibition around the theme of 'love', and in the works for this series he found lyrics from songs about love. Create your own class exhibition making artworks around a central theme. You could begin with 'love' and each choose a different song around that theme as a basis for creating an artwork.
- Campbell visited the *Henri Matisse: The Cut-Out* exhibition at MoMA in New York 2015, and was impressed by his hand-painted cutouts fresh and simply made when seeing the works in person. Matisse painted paper and often arranged just two or three pieces together. Cutting directly into coloured papers, create a cut-out piece drawing inspiration from the simplicity of Jon Campbell and Henri Matisse's work. The idea of not planning, but instead 'painting or drawing with scissors' is an important part of the process. Try the same process at a smaller and larger scale.
- Using creative software (like Adobe Photoshop or Illustrator), generate a design for a typographic

artwork that manipulates figure and ground. When designing this work, determine where it will be applied (E.g. stationary, t-shirt, poster). When the design is finalised by hand, try scanning and refining the artwork using digital methods, such as Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator. Practise using the pen tool and clipping masks in this software when generating shape and pattern.

Present & Perform

- Campbell has produced many works for public spaces, including flags suspended from cranes on construction sites, to artworks on public transport. Look at some of his works presented in a gallery space, and compare these works to those presented in a public space. How does his work change depending on the space it is presented? What would an artist need to consider when presenting in a public space?