

AN ARTS CURRICULUM GUIDE: WHAT CAN THE HIGH LINE TEACH US ABOUT THE MACHINE AESTHETIC?

Grades 2 and 3

Materials:

Period 1:

- PowerPoint presentation
- Match sheet

Period 2:

- Heavy paper
- Scissors
- Glue or glue stick
- Machine age collage sheet

LESSON GOALS

Students will:

- Learn that the High Line was built in the 1930s to carry freight along Manhattan's west side
- Learn that the High Line is now open as a public park
- Be introduced to the term Machine Age
- Learn some of the characteristics of the Machine Age aesthetic
 - Repetition
 - Horizontality
 - Simple, "pure" forms
- Learn to identify some of these characteristics on Machine Age objects as well as the High Line
- Make observations about the High Line's design
- Make a collage of Machine Age objects

Duration: 2 periods

Period 1—PowerPoint presentation with exploration of the machine aesthetic; students match Machine Age objects to Machine Age ideas

Period 2—students create a collage of Machine Age design

PERIOD 1:

Ask students, 'What is a machine?' Generate a list of machines that students use. Items may run the gamut from iPods, to computers, to cell phones, television, to cars, to washing machines, to blenders, etc. Ask students if machines have always existed (they have, but were not always powered by electricity or another energy source.) Explain that before electricity and gas, there were machines, but they were powered by other sources of energy. Ask if students can think of other sources of energy. (Elicit the wind, the water, people, or animals such as oxen.) Ask students if they can think of machines

long ago that might have been powered by the wind or water or people or animals. (Answers might include windmills, watermills, sawmills, a pedal-driven sewing machine, etc. Ask students if they know when electricity came into use. (By the 1880s, electricity was coming into common use, although though it was available, there were many households that did not have electricity until the 20th century.) Ask students if they think people's lives changed when electricity came along. (Yes.) How so? (Answers will vary.) Explain that once electricity and oil came along, inventors were able to create all types of machines that helped in daily life, provided entertainment, enabled people to travel greater distances, etc. Brainstorm examples of machines that might have come into being about 100 years ago. Students might mention the telephone, radio, cars, planes, movies, phonographs, etc. Explain that in the first decades of the 20th century, there were so many machines being invented that people began to call that time period the "Machine Age." What does this name mean to students? Does it mean machines were important? Does it mean machines were becoming more and more common? (Yes.)

Explain to students that during the Machine Age, machines began to look a certain way. The designers and builders of the machines wanted people to think of machines as fast and modern. So they designed them in a special way so that they would look fast and modern. Let's see what that means.

Set up PowerPoint presentation.

Slide 1: Pioneer Zephyr train.

What is this? Have students identify the image. (A train engine.) What does the engine do? (It pulls all the cars of the train.) Must it be very strong? (Yes.) But if you were going to travel on a train, would you want people to think that they could get to their destination quickly or slowly? (Quickly.) Explain that speed was very important to the train makers. Is there anything about the shape of the train that makes you think of speed? (Answers will vary.) Tell students that this train was built during the Machine Age

Slide 2: Clock.

Ask students if this clock is tall or short? (It is short.) Remind students that in the Machine Age, everybody wanted everything to be fast. Explain that many Machine Age objects are very short, or *horizontal*. Why do they think so? (Answers might include the idea that something low conveys speed and moving forward.) What other objects do you think might have been made short? (Answers will vary, but you can tell students that many, many things became short during the Machine Age, including many buildings.)

Slide 3: Record player.

Remind students that before the age of iPods and CDs, people listened to music on records. In order to listen to the record, they had to have a record player. This record player would open from the top, and the turntable is inside the cabinet. Ask students if they can see any shapes in the design of this record player? Have them come up to the screen to outline them or identify them. Are these shapes simple or complicated? (They are simple.) This is another part of the Machine Age. Simplicity.

Slide 6: The High Line.

Ask students if they are familiar with the High Line. Some may be, and others may not be. Explain that it is an elevated train line that was built to carry cargo on the west side of Manhattan. What is cargo? Make sure students understand the difference between a train that carries cargo and one that carries people. They stopped using it in the 1980s, about 25 years ago, and now it is now open as a public park. *(It was built in 1934 as part of a program called the West Side Improvement to ameliorate heavy shipping traffic on Manhattan's west side. At that time, the west side of Manhattan was NY's center of freight traffic—ship, train, and truck—and the streets were clogged with all manner of conveyance. Freight trains actually ran at grade along portions of 10th, 11th, and 12th avenues, and were a public nuisance as well as safety hazard. The High Line was built to get the freight trains off of the streets. It begins at 34th Street and runs to Gansevoort Street (a southern portion was previously demolished) between 10th and 11th Avenues. By 1980, the High Line had become defunct, and it sat idle for more than 20 years. In the late 1990s, threatened with demolition, a grass-roots organization, Friends of the High Line [FHL], formed to preserve this important piece of New York's industrial history. FHL was successful in saving the structure and it is now open as a public park. FHL now serves as a conservancy, raising funds and operating the park in a partnership with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation.)*

Tell students that an elevated train line like this is called a viaduct. Have they traveled on any throughout the city? (Some subway lines are elevated in parts of the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, and one small area of Manhattan.) These elevated subway lines are examples of viaducts. Tell students that this viaduct was built during the Machine Age. Do they think it was designed to look like it belonged in the Machine Age? (Answers will vary.) Let's find out.

Slide 7, The High Line railing detail:

What is this? Help students identify the slide, and explain what this part of the High Line does. What shapes do they see? (They may describe diamonds, circles, and rectangles.) Is the design tall or short? Use the word horizontal, and remind students of discussion from before. What else do they see in this railing? Do they see a pattern that repeats? (Yes.) Help students identify that pattern and describe it. Ask again if students think the High Line was designed to look like it fit in to the Machine Age? (It was.) Tell students that they have learned another idea from the Machine Age, repetition. Make sure students understand the meaning of this word.

Slide 8, High Line railing detail:

Ask students to respond to the railing design. What are some describing words that students can use to describe the railing?

Reiterate the principles you have covered of the Machine Age. Horizontality, repetition, and simple shapes. Tell students that they will now work in pairs to match up the Machine Age object and its idea.

Distribute match sheets. Allow students to work in pairs. Afterwards, students share their results. Remind students that some of the pictures match to more than one word. When sharing, students may also talk about what the different objects are.

Machine Age Collage

PERIOD 2:

Print out the Machine Age collage sheet and make copies for each student. Distribute the sheets in addition to heavy construction paper for the base of the collage. Students will cut out images and combine them in a collage that illustrates the design of the Machine Age. Students may share their collages at the end of the period.

MATCH SHEET

Name _____ Date _____

Directions: The Machine Age had certain ideas about how everything should look. Match the picture of the Machine Age object to the idea.



HORIZONTAL



REPETITION



SIMPLE SHAPES

COLLAGE SHEET

