Creative arts Stage 3 learning sequence – connotation, imagery and symbol in the arts

Learning sequence description

In Lesson 1 students explore the symbolic role of images in communicating understandings about Australian and global environments and cultures. In Lesson 2 they investigate selected visual artworks and musical compositions to examine the imagery and hidden meanings within. Students will then identify and interpret these hidden meanings across the creative arts, particularly through connecting music and visual arts.

## Syllabus outcomes and content

**VAS3.1** – investigates subject matter in an attempt to represent likenesses of things in the world.

* uses different artistic concepts (such as colour, tone, light, scale, abstract), and explores how symbols may be used in their interpretation of selected subject matter.

**VAS3.2** – makes artworks for different audiences, assembling materials in a variety of ways.

* examines a range of concepts and their relationships to selected forms and experiments with such things as the expressive use of colour in painting or drawing, the abstract and/or monumental qualities of sculpture, the sequencing of events in a video, digital work or cartoon, the use of found objects and other objects in an installation or sculptural work.

**VAS3.3** – acknowledges that audiences respond in different ways to artworks and that there are different opinions about the values of artworks.

* recognises how an audience has an influence on the kinds of works they make, and seeks to clarify the purpose of their works, and suggests alternatives about how they may proceed.

**VAS3.4** – communicates about the ways in which subject matter is represented in artworks.

* discusses the artist’s intention and/or the use of styles and techniques in selected works and considers the possible meanings of these works.

**MUS3.1** - sings, plays and moves to a range of music, individually and in groups, demonstrating a knowledge of musical concepts.

* moves to music, individually and in groups, to gain understanding of musical concepts and as a form of self-expression.

**MUS3.2** – improvises, experiments, selects, combines and orders sound using musical concepts.

* improvises and explores musical ideas based on rhythmic or melodic patterns and incorporates these into own compositions and as variations on others’ compositions.
* organises musical ideas into compositions demonstrating compositional intentions, such as by improvising, creating, exploring and selecting and combining materials and varying others’ musical materials.

###### **MUS3.4** – identifies the use of musical concepts and symbols in a range of musical styles.

* listens to repertoire of various styles and discusses features of the music and the differences between different repertoire, such as classical, rock or folk.

[Creative Arts K-6 Syllabus](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/creative-arts/creative-arts-k-6-syllabus) © (2006) NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales.

## Lesson 1 – How do artists help us to understand their works through images and hidden meanings?

Students are learning to:

* explore the use of symbols within artworks to communicate meaning and expression of self
* think about different techniques and forms that artists use to tell their story and share their thoughts
* make and explain their own use of symbols in artworks
* create artworks for different purposes.

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| Item | Learning experience | Differentiation strategies and/or adjustments | Resources |
| 1.1 | Begin with a discussion of Aboriginal culture in Australia and the importance of reflecting on the original owners of the land in your community. Highlight that Aboriginal peoples have looked after this land for a long time and we all have the responsibility to continue this practice.  Use this video as a guide to the [process of a form of symbolic abstract painting](https://vimeo.com/user98607695/review/342180410/86dfdeb6c3?sort=lastUserActionEventDate&direction=desc). Go outside to a special place within your school or local environment. Where possible take a plastic surface, some cardboard, a paver or alternatively find some concrete or into a tiled or paved area. Take some water in a container and a paintbrush for each student.  Ask the students to look around at their immediate environment in silence. Ask them to identify something that they perceive as important about their environment – either natural or man-made.  Ask the students to create artworks to reflect a symbol of something in this environment that is important to them. Once it has vanished, repeat with another symbolic image. Discuss that artworks do not always need to be permanent but that they do represent a meaning to the artist, and when permanent can be used to keep that meaning for audiences to consider.  Artwork on paver with water Paintbrush painting artwork with water on a paver | Where equipment is unavailable, draw symbolic images on paper or in the air.  If sculpting equipment is unavailable for symbolic sculptures, consider other alternatives such as drawing or painting.  Consider creating sculptures inspired by Timbery’s work. | Student workbook including Demonstration video ‘P[rocess of a form of symbolic abstract painting](https://vimeo.com/user98607695/review/342180410/86dfdeb6c3?sort=lastUserActionEventDate&direction=desc)'  Paintbrush  Container of water  Paver, plastic lid or cardboard  Demonstration video: ‘P[rocess of creating a symbolic sculpture](https://vimeo.com/user98607695/review/342181953/4cb1e14b05?sort=lastUserActionEventDate&direction=desc)'  Paper clay, airdrying clay, playdough, dough or blutak  Paints of different colours |
| 1.2 | Examine how ‘pop art’ represents likenesses of things in the world, often the mundane. Artists then represent subject matter in pop artworks by transforming these common objects, images or ideas often through colour or combining media in unusual ways. Discuss with the students how artists represent ideas and meanings of their world through their works.  Explain that people have different views about artworks and their meanings that are informed by their understanding of such things as the circumstances of the work, the artist’s intentions and skill, and what the work is about.  The following works are strong examples of pop art and should be examined and discussed. It is important that students are able to explore the meanings of the artworks and to express their personal interpretations of the works.  ‘[Dylaby’](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/education/exhibition-kits/pop-to-popism/future-is-now/) – Robert Rauschenberg: collage and sculpture are used to incorporate everyday materials into the work. Ask the students to consider (or make) what their ‘The future is now’ sculpture would include given that Rauschenberg used familiar objects or objects that represent their every-day life.  ‘[The first real target’](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/education/childrens-trails/pop-popism/first-real-target/) – Peter Blake: target symbols often appear in pop art. In this work, Blake purchased an archery target from a story and stuck it to a canvas. What does a target mean? What could this mean for our interpretation of the work? Ask students to think about what they could stick to a canvas and what is the meaning of this object of image?  ‘[Football players](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/education/childrens-trails/pop-popism/football-players/)’ – Konrad Lueg: flat, bright colours are used in this work in the style of a graphic advertisement. There is a lack of detail in players’ faces, what does this mean? Ask students to think about or even design their own uniform to give meaning to something they are representing through the outfit. For example, a symbol for their school crest, their family or their Scout group and so on.  ‘[Triple fronted](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/education/childrens-trails/pop-popism/triple-fronted/)’ – Howard Arkley: uses bold, bright colours and thick outlines to draw normal Australian street houses. Ask students to consider or to draw their own house and then to transform this through unusual colours or textures..  [Marcel Duchamp](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/essential-duchamp/) - used everyday objects such as toilet bowls, bicycle wheels and furniture to make sculptures. Ask students to consider why Duchamp would have chosen these sorts of objects? What was he trying to make the audience think about? Ask the students to consider an everyday object they could transform, but most importantly what would be the meaning behind the transformation? What would their intention be as an artist?  Ask the students to complete the table included in their workbooks to indicate their understanding and interpretation of the meaning of the selected works. This table is also included below with some sample answers. Remove any works you do not wish to use and supply the students with any answers you think will guide them. | There are multiple alternatives of artwork with imagery and symbolism. Explore others if desired.  If written tasks are not ideal, discuss artworks rather than completing written tasks. | Student workbooks with some of the images below included where possible (you will need to include these yourself):  ['Dylaby’](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/education/exhibition-kits/pop-to-popism/future-is-now/) – Robert Rauschenberg  '[The first real target’](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/education/childrens-trails/pop-popism/first-real-target/) – Peter Blake  '[Football players](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/education/childrens-trails/pop-popism/football-players/)’ – Konrad Lueg  [Triple fronted](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/education/childrens-trails/pop-popism/triple-fronted/)’ – Howard Arkley |
| 1.3 | **Opportunity for monitoring student learning**  **Student created temporary symbolic art - teacher observation**  Students draw a symbol of something important to them about their environment using water, a paver or equivalent and a paintbrush.  **What to look for:**  Is the student able to represent an aspect of their life through an artwork?  Is the student able to discuss the meaning of their work?  Was the student able to engage in this technique and able to accept its temporary nature?  Is the student able to discuss how different people may have different points of view about their artworks or how different people may react to their artworks?  **Student art appreciation activity – collection of student work**  Students complete some aspects of a table to gain their understanding of the way artists can make meaning through their works.  **What to look for:**   * Is the student able to identify or discuss the features of an artwork? * Is the student able to communicate the artist’s possible intentions? * Does the student accurately identify techniques used by the artist to create meaning? * Is the student able to explain what the artist is trying to represent through their artwork? * Is the student able to communicate their ideas about the artist’s selection of ideas, materials, tools and techniques, and methods of working? |  | Student workbook  Artwork presented as appropriate. |

## Lesson 2 – how have the arts helped us make meaning of the things we see and hear?

Students are learning to:

* identify the ways in which artists make us think differently about things we think are ordinary in our society
* identify the role of the ways in which artists connote meaning for an audience
* techniques that artists use to stimulate our interest and thought
* explore and understand a variety of musical concepts through listening to and participating in music
* identify the ways in which the arts such as nursery rhymes have helped us make meaning of our culture throughout history.

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| Item | Learning experience | Differentiation strategies and/or adjustments | Resources |
| 2.1 | Composers often use music to engage their audience and evoke particular feelings. There are several ways that this can be done either through words or through the way the instrument sounds (their ‘tone colour’) and the music they play. Listen to each piece (or a section of it) and complete some aspects of the table below which is also in the student workbook. Remove or add to the table for the pieces you listen to.  Start by watching the music video ‘[Solid rock](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4LaPJMWLxo)’ by Street Warriors. Some of the lyrics in this piece are from ‘Solid Rock’ by Goanna. The original piece is about caring for land. The rap group Street Warriors from Newcastle have adapted the lyrics and their piece is also about making links to the land and custodianship.  Ask students to think about the following:   * What is the narrative of the song? * What does the sound of the music and the lyrics help us to understand about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander connection to the land? * What does the tone colour of the piece remind you of? * How does the piece make you (as the audience) feel? * What does the clothing represent? * How is colour used in the video clip? * How does this piece engage and inform the audience?   Composers use a range of music notation (symbols) to allow other performers to reproduce their music accurately in just the same way that visual artists often use symbols in their work.  Watch a video of the composition [‘Water walk’](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXOIkT1-QWY&t=4s) by John Cage. In this timed piece, Cage creates a piece of music using a piano along with a variety of natural sounds using household items such as pots, pans, lids, a vase and a watering can. Explain that this is a deliberately and carefully composed piece of music.  While students are watching, ask them to think about the purpose of the composition. Reflect on this particularly given Cage’s belief that ‘everything we hear is music’.  Ask the students to consider how the various household objects used in ‘Water walk’ are used to make sound. For example, by hitting, scraping or blowing.  Reflect on how composers produce art to evoke different audience responses. Watch a video of the composition ‘[4:33’](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTEFKFiXSx4) by John Cage. Ask students to think about the elements that were discussed for ‘Water walk’. How are these two pieces the same or different?  The composition ‘[The Typewriter](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2LJ1i7222c)’ is a concert piece for orchestra and solo typewriter by Leroy Anderson and is another good demonstration of challenging traditional notions of what music is and how meaning can be transformed. In this work, much like in pop art, an everyday item is transformed, thus questioning what is music and how is sound created?  Listen to a sample of Australian composer James Ledger’s ‘[Indian Pacific](https://vimeo.com/190670376)’. This piece sounds like the journey of this famous Australian iconic train across the country. Identify through moving to the beat and then discuss how Ledger has achieved this through repetitive rhythms that sound just like a train driving (pushing) along a track with countryside view out the window.  Although there are many other examples of this type of music (called programme music) finally, listen to ‘[Ballet of the chicks in the shells](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8cJSbWtTia4)’ by Mussorgsky. In this movement (or section) the composer uses tone colour, rhythm and pitch to symbolise young chicks as they hatch. Listen carefully for the chicks hatching, trying to fly (0:35) and pecking (0:46).  Based upon these compositions, discuss with the students the different ways in which composers make meaning through their compositions, the ways they explore sound (often unconventionally) and how they display their (their symbol systems). There are a wide variety of these evident in just these works discussed.  Students may then compose their own version of Cage’s ‘Water walk’ by representing sound sources (tone colour) and using other musical concepts, particularly structure and dynamics to assist in their works. They may also choose to use symbol systems to record their compositions so that others are able to perform it in the future. Ask the students to record their compositions using video or a voice memo. Ask them to describe the intention of their work, how and why they chose the sound sources they did and what these choices add to the meaning of their work. | Substitute other pieces or songs as known.  Discuss rather than write responses.  Compose an entire piece such as a soundscape using the sound samples created. Put them together as a class composition or individually. | Student workbooks  Audio samples:  ‘[Solid rock](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4LaPJMWLxo)’ by the Street Warriors  [‘Water walk’](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXOIkT1-QWY&t=4s) by John Cage  ‘[4:33’](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTEFKFiXSx4) by John Cage  A variety of household objects or instruments (if available)  ‘[The Typewriter](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2LJ1i7222c)’ by Leroy Anderson  James Ledger’s ‘[Indian Pacific](https://vimeo.com/190670376)'  ‘[Ballet of the chicks in the shells](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8cJSbWtTia4)’ by Mussorgsky |
| 2.2 | Point out to the students that often artworks are inspired by pieces of music. Sometimes musicians get meaning from artworks and other times artists construct works based upon what they hear in a composition. This can be a way that both artists and musicians imply meaning through their works.  In 1911 painter Wassily Kandinsky heard a concert that featured composer Arnold Schoenberg’s ‘[Three Piano Pieces](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrjg3jzP2uI)’. That night he went home and immediately sketched ‘[Impressions III](https://www.google.com/url?q=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.wikiart.org%2Fen%2Fwassily-kandinsky%2Fimpression-iii-concert-1911&sa=D&sntz=1&usg=AFQjCNG5_XLoiWfsf2bnstvNylfWdNDVxg)’.  Kandinsky and Schoenberg were each exploring the same ideas together - moving away from traditional forms of harmony and painting into more abstract sound and colour worlds. Both were very interested in the different ‘sounds’ of different colours. Ask the students to discuss what sounds they imagine different colours to imply. For example, is blue a slow and mournful piece of music or jazzy and vibrant? This will vary depending upon interpretation.  In this painting the large black blob looks like a piano the shapes of the audience are roughly identifiable.  Discuss the following questions:   * Does the music ‘look’ like the art? How? * Does the art ‘sound’ like the music? How? * How does each art example convey the mood, style and tempo (speed) of the music and the sound of the instruments?   Listen to a sample of the [Bach Concerto for oboe and violin, 2nd movement BWV1060R](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5favl2Qtx0) while viewing the accompanying computer animation by Stephen Malinowski. This artwork is a computer animation of a piece by Johann Sebastian (J.S.) Bach, the ‘Concerto for Oboe and Violin’. The artist visualizes the passage of time from left to right. The short notes are represented with diamonds. Lines show longer notes. Vertically, higher notes are higher on the screen and lower notes are lower. Each instrument has its own line and colour. Rests (no sound on the beat) are represented with a faint red line when the violin is not playing at the beginning.  Listen to and discuss ‘[SYN-Phon](https://csismn.com/SYN-Phon)’ by Candas Sisman which demonstrates graphical notation for pitch in a similar way to the Bach work transformed by Malinowski.  Discuss the relationship between the music and art in these examples. How do the symbols relate to the music? How has the artist visualised the music and the other way around?  Ask students to experiment and create their own audio-visual composition using colours, patterns, geometric shapes to explore the direct relationship between symbols and music with the [Chrome music lab](https://musiclab.chromeexperiments.com/Experiments). Encourage the students to think about not only the way their composition ‘looks’, but also how it ‘sounds’.  Encourage students to experiment with the different functions of the website, and especially the Kandinsky filter. In the Kandinsky section students are able to experience the implied meaning that Kandinsky may have used to effect sound. Where possible, discuss the different moods and meaning created by the different colours. Ask the students to save and share their works with the class.  Ask the students to complete an exit slip to complete their learning and as a way of assessing their knowledge and understanding of the work in this unit on connotation, imagery and symbol in the creative arts. | Draw or paint the Music Lab artwork rather than saving it. | Student workbook including a copy of:  Arnold Schoenberg’s ‘[Three Piano Pieces](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrjg3jzP2uI)’  Kandinsky’s ‘[Impressions III](https://www.google.com/url?q=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.wikiart.org%2Fen%2Fwassily-kandinsky%2Fimpression-iii-concert-1911&sa=D&sntz=1&usg=AFQjCNG5_XLoiWfsf2bnstvNylfWdNDVxg)’  [Bach Concerto for oboe and violin, 2nd movement BWV1060R while viewing the computer animation by Stephen Malinowski](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5favl2Qtx0)  [SYN-Phon](https://csismn.com/SYN-Phon)’ by Candas Sisman  [Chrome Music Lab](https://musiclab.chromeexperiments.com/Experiments)  Art paper and paintbrushes of a variety of tip sizes  Watercolour paints, pencils or paints in pastel colours |
| 2.3 | **Opportunity for monitoring student learning**  ‘Solid rock’ performed by the ‘Street Warriors’  **What to look for:**   * describes the intention of the song and how musical concepts are used to evoke the deep meaning within the song * describes how some musical concepts such as tone colour are used to show feelings * describes how visual symbols in the film clip, such as clothing changes, represent culture.   Art inspired music – student discussion and teacher observation  Students analyse musical compositions and examples of art that have a relationship through their meaning, sound, look or use of symbols.  **What to look for:**   * describes how artists and artworks can connect their works and composition practices * describes similarities between an artwork and the music which inspired it or vice versa * discusses the use of symbols in both music and art * identifies commonly used graphic notation in musical compositions and expresses an understanding of what these symbols mean * expresses an opinion about both music and artworks and identifies the role of musical concepts and artmaking practices to inform their thinking. |  | Student workbook  Artworks completed by students |

## Reflection and evaluation

These simple questions may help you reflect on your students’ learning and plan for next steps.

What worked well and why?

What didn’t work and why?

What might I do differently next time?

What are the next steps for student learning based on the evidence gathered?

Table for discussing and answering questions about artworks as indicated in Lesson 1.2:

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| Artwork title and artist | What is its hidden meaning? | How does it tell us that? |
| ‘The future is now’ - Robert Raschenberg | Popular culture through everyday objects that represent everyday life. | Everyday objects and materials can be transformed to show more meaning. |
| ‘The first real target’ - Peter Blake | Focusing on popular culture. It is transforming the ordinary and focussing thinking. | A ‘real’ archery target has been pasted to an art canvas. This draws thinking to a focus point. |
| ‘Football players’ - Konrad Lueg | Advertising in sport, the role of uniforms and symbols to relate to that meaning. | Stylistic graphic nature of the artwork using bright, flat colours as well as the lack of detail in the players faces – no team in particular. |
| ‘Triple fronted’ - Howard Arkley | Brightening the view of drab and ordinary everyday architecture. | Bright colours and thick bold lines. Houses are typical suburban style. |

Table for guiding discussion and answers to Lesson 2.1 as above.

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| Title of piece and composer | Musical concepts used and what are the symbolising? |
| ‘Solid rock’ by Street Warriors | Borrowed lyrics from ‘Solid rock’ by Goanna. White shirt - influence of Europeans. Change to black clothing – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander connections. Rap style mixed with rock rhythm – contemporary society. Images of grasslands – connection to Country. |
| ‘Water walk’ by John Cage | Images of ordinary household objects used to make sounds. Juxtaposed with sounds made by a piano. Transformation of ordinary objects and questioning what is music? |
| '4:33’ by John Cage | Performer sets up as if ready to play. Closes piano lid – closing off from expectations. Not playing the piano places emphasis on sounds made by the audience. The performance become that of the audience. Again, questions what music is. |
| ‘The Typewriter’ by Leroy Anderson | Not a musical instrument and does not fit in an orchestra. Rhythmic style and sounds of the typewriter offer a comical interpretation of orchestral rhythms. Audience accepts that the typewriter is a percussion instrument. Questions tone colour and traditional views of instruments and orchestral sounds. |
| ‘Indian Pacific’ by James Ledger | Repetitive rhythms sound just like a train driving (pushing) along a track with countryside view out the window. |
| ‘Ballet of the chicks in the shells’ by Mussorgsky. | In this movement (or section) the composer uses tone colour, rhythm and pitch to symbolise young chicks as they hatch. Instrumental tone colours sound like chickens hatching, eating and flying. High pitches like birds and so on. |

Sample exit slip

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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