**Art of Yayoi Kusama Lesson Guide**

Use these slide by slide notes to follow along with the Yayoi Kusama powerpoint. Learn more about Yayoi Kusama by visiting her website[: http://yayoi-kusama.jp/e/information/](http://yayoi-kusama.jp/e/information/)

**Slide 2**

Yayoi Kusama is an avant-garde contemporary Japanese artist known for work with patterns and polka dots. Kusama has embraced multiple styles including pop-art and abstract impressionism. She began creating artwork from childhood but was not supported by her parents, experiencing a turbulent household and childhood both from internal family and experiencing World War II.

Kusama’s art is a form of therapy. She began experiencing hallucinations at ten years old that often involved patterns and dots-these hallucinations molded her art style. “My art is an expression of my life, particularly my mental disease”-Yayoi Kusama

She has participated in exhibitions at The Drawing Center, Brooklyn Museum, The Studio Museum in Harlem, Contemporary Jewish Museum, Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, The Renaissance Society, Seattle Museum of Art, Museu de Arte de São Paulo, the Menil Collection, as well as the 12th Manifesta Biennial in Palermo, Italy.

Public collections of her artworks are held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; National Portrait Gallery, London; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Art Institute of Chicago; and the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington DC, amongst others.

**Slide 3**

Trailer for the film Kusama Infinity, by Magonila Pictures.

**Slide 4:**

Images of Kusama’s work.

**Slide 5: Sexism in Japan**

Quotes:

“If we increase the number of female board members, we have to make sure their speaking time is restricted somewhat, they have difficulty finishing.”

“We have about seven women on the organizing committee but everyone understands their place.”

“Women talk too much.”

Do you recognize these quotes? Do you know who might have said this?

These are all quotes from the president of the Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee and former Japanese prime minister Yoshiro Mori when asked about increasing gender diversity on the Japanese Olympic Committee board. Since this was released, he has stepped down.

After this incident, Japan’s Liberal Democratic Party proposed allowing FIVE female lawmakers to observe, but NOT SPEAK, during their all male board meetings. The women are only allowed to submit their opinions after the meeting is done.

Women in Japan have been alienated in the workforce for far too long. There is little to no representation in fields such as law, engineering, sports, politics, business, and the medical field--just to name a few.

The issue of sexism runs deep in Japanese culture and society, and it has been for far too long.

**Slide 6: Sexism & Gender Inequality in Japan**

Gender inequality stems from a long-standing patriarchal society where expectations for women are high, but their freedoms remain minimal.

The Confucius idea of being a “good wife and a wise mother” has been the dogma of Japan’s expectations for women. When women were first allowed to attend school, many of them were taught how to become housewives and gaining a higher education was hard to access. The “professional housewife” role limited women from pursuing real careers and deemed them “worthy” or “unworthy” by measuring how good they were at satisfying their husband and children. It stripped not only women, but Japanese society as a whole of confidence, progress, and potential.

Women in Japan were and still are under societal pressure to become mothers and are encouraged to ditch the employment route to basically serve their husband and family. This negatively impacts young women in Japan as they try to navigate gender, sexuality, and their worth as members of society.

It doesn’t get better with age either because older women who surpass the acceptable “marriageable age”, lose worth which further adds to the discrimination against women and the contradictory standards that women must endure.

Yayoi Kusama is a victim of this mentality that Japanese society had. Her parents were unsupportive of her art career and she left Japan because it was “too small, too servile, too feudalistic, and too scornful of women" (Kusama).

More Japanese women are trying to break away from these gender norms by moving to more progressive countries that’ll give them the space and opportunity to flourish and lead the lives that they want.

This type of backwards thinking is the foundation to a lot of other issues regarding the way women are treated in Japan. Womanizing, double standards, hypersexualization, domestic abuse, etc., are all under this umbrella of sexism, gender norms and inequality.

**Slide 7: Gender Gap**

Despite Japan’s economic development, the nation is not making progress towards gender equality. Japan is ranked 121/153 in the World Economic Forum’s 2020 Gender Gap Index. Their ranking declined 11 places compared to their ranking in 2019. Attempts have been made by the government to close this gap. In 2013, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe by promoted the “womenomics strategy” where he pledged to create a space so that 30% of leadership positions will be filled by women in 2020. Currently, only approximately 15% of leadership positions are held by women.

Young women in Japan are now, on average, better educated that young men but are less likely to be employed. According to a 2018 study by Kantar and Women Political Leaders, 24% of people in Japan said they would feel comfortable having a woman as a CEO of a major company, compared to 63% in the US.

Japan is ranked as second amongst the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development nations for having a 24.5% wage gap in 2018. The first was South Korea. A woman’s average income is half of what a man would typically earn.

The reason for such a large wage gap is because women in Japan spend more than four time as much time as men on unpaid domestic work (cooking, cleaning, taking care of children, etc.) This results in a stunt in upward mobility for women due to less time being allocated to building a career and holding a full-time position all year around.

Nowadays, many career oriented Japanese women are opting out of having children to avoid leaving their job and risking a potential promotion. There’s been reports of decline in birthrates in Japan as a result of more women choosing the career route. So, naturally, society is pushing Japanese women to “reclaim” motherhood and encouraging young couples to have children. This brings us back to a full circle.

To make real changes, there needs to be an unlearning process of this backwards thinking. Representation of women in purposefully male dominated fields must be increased, policies and incentives such as targets for wage equity, updated family policies, and positive work environments must be implemented.

**Craft Activity:**

Create a work of art inspired by Yayoi Kusama. Use stickers, bright colored construction paper, and colored markers to make circles and shapes similar to Kusama’s work.

**Recommended Supplies:**

*Bright colored construction paper*

*(Yellow, Red, White, Black)*

*Something to draw a circle*

*Dot Stickers*

*Colored markers (Sharpie)*

***Use the image below as inspiration.***

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Yayoi Kusama, *All the Eternal Love I Have for Pumpkins*, 2018