

VISIONARY ARTISTS

The creator of Philadelphia's Magic Gardens, Isaiah Zagar, often pays homage to other artists that have built visionary environments or fantasylands. Displayed throughout PMG are the names of people who have transformed their space by building large spiral structures of steel, filling the landscape with sculptures, or decorating their homes with crushed glass or mosaic. Zagar wants PMG visitors to know that transforming one's space is a universal human desire, and that people from Wisconsin to India have all acted upon this impulse.

In this lesson, students will be given a brief overview of visionary environments from around the world and will then team up to research the life and work of a particular visionary artist to present to the class.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will be able to describe visionary environments and their creators.
- Students will be able to describe the work of Philadelphian artist Isaiah Zagar.
- Students will collaborate to research and write a biography of a visionary artist.
- Students will develop and deliver an oral presentation about their researched artist.
- Students will think creatively to develop their own visionary environment, thereby connecting to the artist being researched.

MATERIALS

- Computers and Internet access
- Projector and screen
- Slide show of Isaiah's work and other visionary artists (<http://flic.kr/s/aHsjvZAsnE>)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How are visionary art environments different from other traditional art forms like painting or sculpture?
2. What do the artists have in common? How are they all different?
3. If you were going to create your own visionary environment, what would it look like? What type of place would you transform? What kinds of materials would you use?

KEY VOCABULARY

Visionary - having or marked by foresight and imagination

Environment – surroundings or space

Visionary Environment – an extensive/large-scale artistic installation (buildings, sculpture parks, etc) intended to capture intense personal experiences

Transform- to change in form, appearance, or composition

ACTIVITY

1. Play the slideshow of visionary art environments and the works of Isaiah Zagar. The slideshow available on our Flickr site: <http://flic.kr/s/aHsjvZAsnE>
2. Break students into pairs and assign, or let students select, an artist to research.
3. Ask students to compile a presentation featuring the artist's biography and images of the artist and art environment. Students should answer the following questions within their presentation:
 - a. Where is their artist from?
 - b. When were they born? Are they still alive?
 - c. What was their upbringing like? Did they have families? Were they wealthy?
 - d. Did they have another job?
 - e. What inspired them to create their visionary environment?
 - f. How did they acquire the property they transformed?
 - g. Did other people appreciate their environment while they were alive? Is it celebrated today?

ADAPTATIONS

Younger students can view the slideshow and research basic facts about their artist such as when they were born and where they are from. They can then draw their own fantasyland or visionary environment. Older students could do more in-depth research using secondary resources to write a paper on their artist in addition to giving their presentation.

PA ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Reading Writing Speaking & Listening:

Types of Writing 1.4 A

Types of Writing 1.4 B

Arts & Humanities:

Historical and Cultural Context 9.2 H

Historical and Cultural Context 9.2 K

RESOURCES

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visionary_environments

<http://ucmmuseum.com/folkartworlds.htm>

Beardsley, John, Gardens of Revelation: Environments by Visionary Artists, Abbeville Press, 1995.

Maizels, John, Schaewen, Deidi von, Taschen, Angelika, Fantasy Worlds, Taschen Books, 1999.

Manley, Roger, Self-made Worlds: Visionary Folk Art Environments, Aperture, 1997.