

Post-visit Project 2: Sign Language

Objective:

To make students' own lexicon or vocabulary of images.

“I am intrigued with the shapes people choose as their symbols to create a language... There is within all forms a basic structure, an indication of the entire object with a minimum of lines that becomes a symbol. This is common to all languages, all people, all times.”

-Keith Haring, journal entry, 1979

Sign: An object, word, or picture which has a particular meaning to a person or group of people.

“The way it began, was to draw my tag—tag, meaning signature or what graffiti artists called their name. So my tag was an animal, which started to look more and more like a dog. Then I drew a little person crawling on all fours, and the more I drew it, the more it became The Baby. So on the streets I'd do various configurations of the dog and the baby. Sometimes, it would be a row of babies, and the dog behind them. I was using these images, always bearing in mind the Burroughs/Gysin cut-up ideas. And I juxtaposed these different tags or signatures or image, which would convey a different meaning depending on how you combined them.”

-Keith Haring, John Gruen, *Keith Haring, The Authorized Biography*, p. 65 (see Bibliography)

Suggested Discussion with Students:

How do you sign your name?

Do you have a tag?

What does it look like as a visual sign?

How does it represent you?

Do people know it is yours? How?

Which culture(s) used a pictorial system of writing in the past?

Which languages or modes of communication incorporate a pictorial sign system today?

Suggested Project:

Invent Your Own Sign Language in Pictures

Invent a way to sign your name as a tag or a picture-sign. Choose an image that represents you—a figure, animal, or object. Think of the simplest way you can make a line drawing of the image. Practice drawing your tag or picture-signature until you can draw it quickly and easily.

Continue inventing your own set of visual symbols, or sign language. Think about three or more things that are important to you and design a sign that represents them. Practice line drawings of these images.

Draw 1-4 squares like a comic strip, or Xerox and use the squares provided.

Use your invented sign language to expand on your TV message from Pre-visit Project 2, or create a new message or story about an issue that is important to you.

How will you suggest movement, power, energy, or mood?

Supplies: pencils, paper, markers.

Suggested Project:

Found Object/Sign Language Sculpture

Found Object/Sign Language Sculpture

Find a used object or container, such as: an empty chalk box, shoe box, cereal box, an empty soda can, plastic bottle, a used envelope, subway map, magazine, newspaper, or candy wrapper.

Use your sign language to make drawings on your found object. Use your imagination to tell a story.

Supplies: Found object, Sharpies or permanent markers.
