

Artists' Books

What is an artist's book?

How do images, words, form, and materials work together to express meaning?

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will explore artists' books and discover similarities between traditional books, sculpture, and artists' books. They will explore how images, text, and the form of the book work together to express meaning. Students will add text and images to the flag books they made in Lesson 6.

LENGTH OF LESSON: Two or three 45-minute sessions

KEY IDEAS THAT CONNECT VISUAL ARTS AND WRITING

Visual Arts

- An artist's book is an art form that uses elements of traditional book structures such as covers, binding, and pages.
- An artist's book is a three-dimensional work of art and is meant to be viewed from multiple sides.
- The shape and format of an artist's book reflects its meaning.
- The materials used to create an artist's book help convey its meaning.
- Most artists' books are meant to be handled by the viewer.

Writing

- The text of an artist's book complements the meaning of the artwork.
- The presentation of the text (its design and placement on the page) reflects the meaning of the words.
- Any style of writing can be included in an artist's book such as single words, poetry, stories, phrases, etc.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

Students will:

Visual Arts and Writing

- Understand that artists' books convey meaning through their use of form, materials, and text
- Understand that artists can use a variety of materials to create artists' books and that artists' books can be almost any size and shape
- Understand that artists' books can include almost any kind of text
- Compare a traditional book form to an artist's book and note similarities and differences
- Add text and images to their flag books

FOR THE TEACHER

Before teaching this lesson it is important to become familiar with many different examples of artists' books and how artists synthesize images, words, materials, and book forms to express and enhance the meaning of the book.

- Visit the [ABC website](#) to look at examples of artists' books made by students and artists and check the [Resources](#) section on the ABC website for links to bookmaking sites.



Some things to notice when looking at Carol Barton's [Tunnel Map](#):

- The round form of the book suggests the shape of the earth.
- The bright colors are similar to colors you often see on a map.
- Each of the seven pages of the book shows a different land form. A look through the tunnel shows a layered world landscape.
- The book is bound on two sides; it has no spine or text block.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Read about [Carol Barton](#) and [Claire Van Vliet](#) on the ABC website.

SUPPLIES

- Student journals
- Students' flag books made in Lesson 6.
- Pens and pencils
- Drawing supplies
- Collage materials, such as various scraps of paper and found materials (optional)
- Glue sticks (optional)

VOCABULARY

An **artist's book** is an art form that uses elements of traditional book forms in combination with the elements of art.

A **book form** is the shape and structure of a book.

The parts of a traditional book include the **binding, spine, covers, pages, and text**.

Elements of art are color, line, shape, form, space, value, and texture. Artists use these tools to create all visual art—representational, abstract, and non-representational. (See Vocabulary list for definitions of individual elements of art.)

INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN: OBSERVE, CREATE, AND REFLECT

Observe: Quick Write

Before beginning the lesson, show Carol Barton's [Tunnel Map](#) to students. Give them a few minutes to respond to the image. Use any of the following prompts:

- What does this artwork make you wonder?
- What clues do you see in the artwork that tell you something about it?
- This artwork could be about _____.

Introduction

Begin by asking students to describe and define books. What is a book? What is the purpose of a book? What are the parts of a book? Use a traditional book to identify the parts of a book with students. Have students compare traditional books with the books they have already made in class. What is similar about them? What is different? How is a book like a sculpture? How is it different?



Observe: Look and Discuss

Ask students to look carefully at Barton's *Tunnel Map* and begin describing and interpreting what they see. Visual Thinking Strategies (vtshome.org) is a highly effective method for facilitating productive conversations about art with your students and introducing new vocabulary in a meaningful way. Following the conclusion of this initial exploration of the work, you may wish to revisit certain concepts in more depth using some of the questions below.

- What is the **shape** or **form** of the book?
- Which parts of a book can they find? Is there a **spine**? Where is the **binding**? How many **pages** are in this book? Where is the **cover**?
- What materials did the artist use?
- Is there any **text** in the book?
- How can the book be read? Can it be read left to right or top to bottom? Is there more than one way to read it?
- What is the book about?
- How do the **book form** and its materials help you understand what the book is about?

Tell students that *Tunnel Map* is an example of an artist's book.

- How is this book different from a traditional book? How is it similar?
- How is the book's form part of its message?
- How is *Tunnel Map* different from a sculpture? How is it similar?

Ask students to look carefully at Claire Van Vliet's [Circulus Sapientiae](#). Use the questions above to guide their discussion. Once they have described it, ask them to compare it to Barton's *Tunnel Map*. What is similar about the two books? What is different? How has each artist used materials, forms, images, and text in her artist's book to express an idea or feeling? Are the book forms part of the message?

Create: Decorate Your Flag Book

Have students work with the flag books they created in Lesson 5. Lead a short discussion about the flag book's form and how it can be manipulated. For example, it can be read as if it has two pages (each made of three flags) or it can be pulled apart, separating the flags and allowing the viewer to see both sides at once.

- Ask students what kind of ideas and images the flag book form makes them think about.
- Ask students what styles of text might work well with the book form.
- Opening a flag book can be surprising. How can students make use of the element of surprise?
- Remind students they made this book form during the lesson on abstract art and that they can use this form to explore abstraction and the elements of art.

Reflect

Have students respond to one of the following prompts in their journals.

- What questions do you have about artists' books now that you didn't have before?
- What would it take to change a book in a library to become an artist's book in a museum?
- My flag book will surprise others because _____.



LESSON EXTENSIONS**Visual Arts and Writing**

- Have students write six similes, one for each flag. They might want to consider drawing one part of the comparison. For example, in the simile “My love is like a red, red, rose,” they could write “My love” on one side of the flag and create an image of a rose on the other side.