

Dot, Dot, Dimension

Learn about an avant-garde artist
and the dynamics of the dot

(art + history)

Artist Yayoi Kusama is obsessed with dots. “Polka dots,” she has said, “are a way to infinity.”

Kusama was born in Japan, but came to New York in 1957 and joined a community of avant-garde artists. Over the next two decades she became a painter, sculptor, pop artist, performance artist, cultural activist, fashion designer, and author. She staged “happenings” at which she would cover models in polka dots.

The dots reflect visions Kusama experienced since she was a child, images of a world that is covered and eventually obliterated by dots. Through her art she has brought order to the chaos of these visions and expresses her sense that she (and all human beings) are “one of the dots among the millions of dots in the universe.”

Kusama’s “Infinity Rooms,” filled with mirrors and endless dots, are part of an international traveling exhibition celebrating her life’s work.

Dots are fun, dots are fast, dots are universal. Anyone can start with a dot, diverge to a pattern, and end with a painting. The trick is repetition — of shape, sizes, colors, and patterns.

Dots are not necessarily flat. They can be rounded or spherical, tall or short. They can rise above a surface and form assemblages and small sculptures. Dots can be negative spaces. Dots can be made with paint, buttons, spools, lids, beads — anything that makes a circle makes a dot. Considering all the different things a dot can be and the ways they can be made — why not dot?

GRADES K-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.



Process

1. Begin with a surface. Making lots of dots takes time, so, depending on the time allotted, smaller areas may work best. Surfaces should be rigid, so they can support the weight of attached items. Some surface options:

Canvas panel or shaped panel, up to 8" x 10" maximum size

- Mini stretched canvas
- Ceramic bisque tile
- Wood shape or panel
- Heavy chipboard

2. Paint dots can be made with so many things! One of the easiest and most cost-effective ways is to fill detail squeeze bottles with acrylic paints. The long tip controls the paint flow and easily creates uniform dots. Other ideas for making paint dots:

- Round tip brushes
- Pencil erasers dipped in paint
- Bullet tip paint markers
- Sponge tip marker bottles
- Fingertips
- Cotton swabs



Materials (required)

Elmer's X-Treme School Glue, 4 oz (23916-1004); share between two students

Surface Options:

Blick Economy Canvas Panels, class pack of 24, 5" x 7" (07015-1000)

Fredrix Jr. Paint-a-Shape Canvas Panels, flowers, package of 25 (07016-4025)

All-Purpose Chipboard, 30 ply, 22" x 28" (13115-2232)

Blick Mini Canvas, assorted sizes (07197-)

Walnut Hollow Pine Plaque, 4" Dia small circle (60464-1010)

Options to Make Flat Dots

Mayco Detailer Writers, package of 6 (32929-1009). Fill with:

Blickrylic Student Acrylics, assorted colors (00711-)

Handy Art Empty Marker Bottles, package of 12 (03324-1012). Fill with tempera or liquid watercolor only:

Blick Premium Grade Tempera, assorted colors (00011-)

Blick Liquid Watercolor, assorted colors (00369-)

Do-a-Dot Markers, assorted color sets (67104-)

Uni Posca Waterbased Paint Markers, bullet tip, assorted colors (19994-)

Creativity Street Art and Craft Swabs, package of 100 (61792-1100)

Helix Bow Compass (56638-1001)

Westcott C-Thru Circle Templates, large or small circles (55475-)

Options to Make Raised Dots

Simply Art Wood Shapes, circles, package of 130 (60408-1010)

Colored or Natural Wood Spools, package of 180 (60476-)

Craft Button Assortment, 1 lb (61495-1001)

Assorted Macramé Beads, package of 100 (60709-1000)

Creativity Street Large Wiggle Eyes, round, package of 100 assorted (60938-1009)

Creativity Street Cupped Sequins, 1 oz (60717-1003)



Process, continued

3. Dots are not necessarily flat. Raising dots from the surface can be accomplished with:

Spools	Lids or caps
Wood shapes	Metal washers
Compact Discs	Beads
Cardboard tubes	Buttons

4. Dots can be created on surfaces by tracing, using a template or a compass, then filled in with paint or marker. Dots can be created within dots — as repeating rings or a border pattern.

Options

- Keep a tally of how many dots make up each piece of artwork. See who can include the most dots.
- Choose a dimensional surface to cover with dots, such as a box or household item. Yayoi Kusama has invited participation in her art exhibits by providing a room filled with pristine white furnishings and giving visitors dot-shaped stickers to apply.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

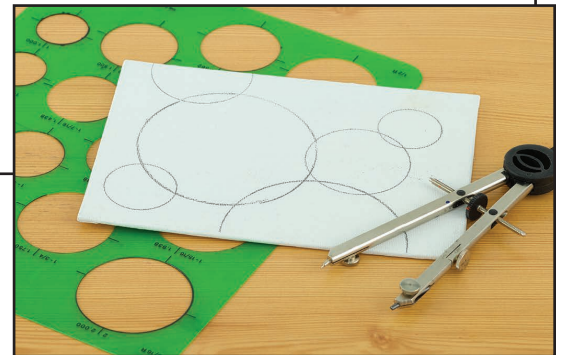
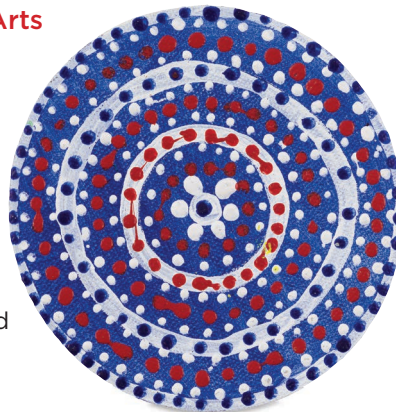
Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Creating

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.



Step 1: Start with a surface. Create large dots by tracing, using a template, or using a compass.



Step 2: Make flat dots with paint or markers.



Step 3: Make raised dots with a variety of materials.