

# Matthew Jensen Lesson Plan

## High School Lesson

**Lesson Title:** Equivalents

**Activity:** Students will explore abstract and mimetic possibilities of photography

**Grade level:** 9-12

**Time:** 3x45 min. periods

**Objectives:**

By the end of this lesson, each student will have produced at least two finished the digital or darkroom photographs (black and white is encouraged). The photographs will be zoomed in and cropped photos of found objects or surfaces that resemble objects in nature, or become abstract patterns.

*(Drawing Variant):* By the end of this lesson, each student will have produced one charcoal drawing or graphite drawing. The drawing will be a zoomed in and cropped view of found objects or surfaces that resemble other object in nature, or become abstract patterns.

**Materials:** For each student:

1 4"x6" piece of black construction paper

Scissors

Cellphone with zoom camera

Or

Digital Camera with zoom feature

Or

35 mm camera

35mm black and white print film

For the class as a whole:

Digital photo printing paper and Photo printer

Or

Darkroom Access

*(Drawing Variant):*

For each student:

Sketchbook, or several sheets of 9x12 paper

1 sheet 12x16 white drawing paper, or charcoal paper

1 simple black construction paper viewfinder

For the class as a whole:

Vine charcoal and kneaded rubber erasers

Or

Pencils (various hardness) and erasers

**Vocabulary:** Equivalents, abstract, observable phenomena, natural phenomena, opaque

**Inspiration:** Beginning in 1925, the great photographer Alfred Stieglitz created a series of photographs of clouds he called “Equivalents” At one level, these photos were an attempt to create abstract photographs: photographs that reflected inner emotional states, rather than external observable phenomena.

In 1992, the artist Vik Muniz saw an exhibition of Stieglitz’s Equivalents at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. Muniz was inspired by the photographs and realized that the marble tiles on the museum’s floor looked like the abstract clouds in Stieglitz’s photographs. Muniz took photos of the marble floor that look like Stieglitz’s photos of clouds.

Similarly, Matthew Jensen found small quartz pebbles on the beach at Sandy Hook. Some of those clear pebbles had opaque areas. Photographed up close, the opaque areas in these pebbles look like clouds in the sky.

Alice Momm finds small fragments in nature—bits of tree bark or leaves—whose shapes resemble other things—The profile of a person speaking, or blowing smoke.

Photographed up close, many things may come to reflect others. One natural object may resemble another. Sometimes man made objects (bread crumbs on a cutting board) may look like natural phenomena too.

Use a digital camera, or 35 mm camera to take close up images of objects (play with lighting too) to create abstract images, or images that look like other things. Changing the images into black and white may help.

*(Drawing Variant)*

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Similarly, Matthew Jensen found small quartz pebbles on the beach at Sandy Hook. Some of those clear pebbles had opaque areas. Photographed up close, the opaque areas in these pebbles look like clouds in the sky.

Alice Momm finds small fragments in nature—bits of tree bark or leaves—whose shapes resemble other things—The profile of a person speaking, or blowing smoke.

Enlarged, many things may come to reflect others. One natural object may resemble another. Sometimes man made objects (bread crumbs on a cutting board) may look like natural phenomena too.

Use your viewfinder to select several views of objects or surfaces. Make a quick sketch of each view in your sketchbook, or on loose paper.

Select one sketch that seems most successful, and create a small (4"x 6") finished drawing. Using point-to-point technique, enlarge the small drawing onto a large sheet of paper, 12x16, or 18x24. Use charcoal or pencil to complete the drawing. Exaggerate the contrast as needed.

### **Procedure/Activity:**

#### Period 1

- Review of Images; Stieglitz, Muniz, Jensen and Momm.
  - Discussion questions: What is unexpected or unusual about Stieglitz's photograph?
  - What did Stieglitz do to ensure that these images would appear to be abstract?
  - In what way(s) do Muniz's images resemble Stieglitz's images?
  - In what ways(s) do Muniz's images differ from Stieglitz's images?
  - How do Matthew Jensen and Alice Momm's images build on and extend Muniz's and Stieglitz's images?
- Brainstorming:
  - What are some strategies that Stieglitz, Muniz, Jensen and Momm use to help create their images?
  - What are some characteristics of a successful "equivalent" image?
  - What are some sources that students might begin to explore?
- Students create a "viewfinder" by cutting a small rectangular opening in a 4x6 piece of black construction paper.
  - Fold paper in half, cut two short parallel lines, perpendicular to the fold.
  - Make a cut parallel to the fold that connects the two previous cuts.
  - Remove small rectangle
  - Unfold paper to reveal rectangular opening.
- Students hold viewfinder close to their eye, or far away to see how the content within the frame changes. (This simulates "zooming in")
- Working alone or in pairs, students shoot first round of images, focusing on surfaces and objects available in the art studio and/or in and around the school and/or elsewhere in

the community for homework.

### Period 2

- Students create contact sheets/ thumbnail print outs of first set of images, and highlight two or three favorites
- Group critique of images
- Working alone or in pairs, students shoot second round of images, focusing on surfaces and objects available in the art studio and/or in and around the school and/or elsewhere in their community for homework.
- Students create contact sheets/ thumbnail print outs of first set of images, and highlight two or three favorites

### Period 3

- Students produce two final prints (from either first or second round)
- Final critique

### **Procedure/Activity: (*Drawing Variant*)**

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- Review of Images; Stieglitz, Muniz, Jensen and Momm.
  - Discussion questions: What is unexpected or unusual about Stieglitz's photograph?
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  - Make a cut parallel to the fold that connects the two previous cuts.
  - Remove small rectangle
  - Unfold paper to reveal rectangular opening.
- Students hold viewfinder close to their eye, or far away to see how the content within the frame changes. (This simulates "zooming in")
- In a sketchbook, students make quick initial sketches, focusing on surfaces and objects available in the art studio and/or in and around the school and/or elsewhere in the community for homework.

## Period 2

- Working in pairs, or small groups, students review sketches, selecting an image to pursue further.
- Based on peer feedback, students complete a small (4"x6") drawing of one of the sketches, working from memory (as provided by sketchbook) or from observation if possible.

## Period 3

- Students work independently to complete point-to-point blow-ups of drawings from previous session.

### **Standards:**

New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for  
Visual and Performing Arts

1.1.12.D.2: Stimuli for the creation of artworks can come from many places, including other arts disciplines.

1.3.12.D.3: The artist's understanding of the relationships among **art media**, methodology, and visual statement allows the artist to use expressionism, abstractionism (nonobjective art), realism/naturalism, impressionism, and other **genre** styles to convey ideas to an audience.

1.3.12.D.5: Two- and three-dimensional artworks can be rendered culturally specific by using the tools, techniques, styles, materials, and methodologies that are germane to a particular cultural style.

1.4.12.B.2: The cohesiveness of a work of art and its ability to communicate a theme or narrative can be directly affected by the artist's technical proficiency as well as by the manner and physical context in which it is performed or shown.



**NEW JERSEY COUNCIL  
FOR THE HUMANITIES**

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**Images: (To be stored as separate files)**

Alfred Stieglitz—Equivalents



**ALFRED STIEGLITZ**

*Equivalent*, 1929

Gelatin Silver Print

4 5/8 x 3 5/8 in

The Alfred Stieglitz Collection, gift of Georgia O'Keefe © The Georgia O'Keefe Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

[http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/american\\_art/artwork/Stieglitz-Equivalent1843+.htm](http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/american_art/artwork/Stieglitz-Equivalent1843+.htm)



**ALFRED STIEGLITZ**

*Equivalent*, 1930

Gelatin Silver Print

4 5/8 x 3 3/8 in

The Alfred Stieglitz Collection, gift of Georgia O'Keefe © The Georgia O'Keefe Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

[http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/american\\_art/artwork/Stieglitz-Equivalent1845+.htm](http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/american_art/artwork/Stieglitz-Equivalent1845+.htm)



Vik Muniz, *Equivalents* (The Museum of Modern Art)



Vik Muniz

1995

Gelatin silver print

5 x 4 in.

<http://www.cavetocanvas.com/post/31926171809/vik-muniz-the-moma-series-1995-from-the>



Vik Muniz

1995

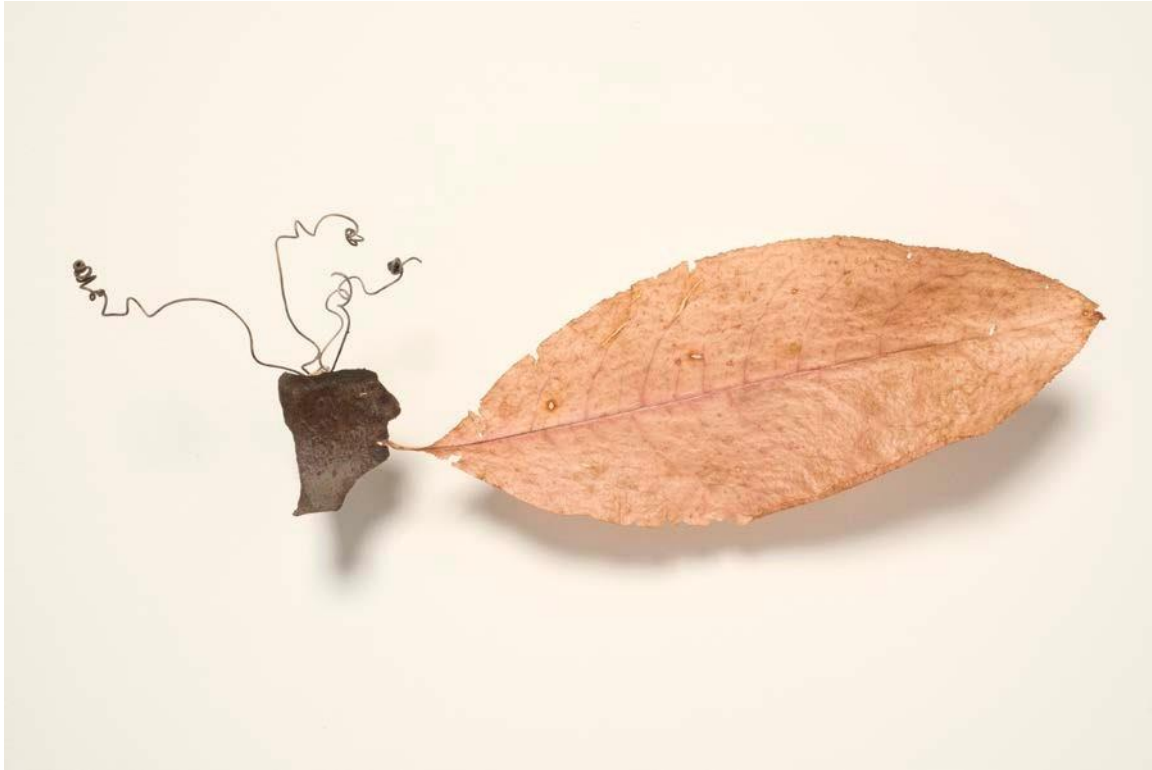
Gelatin silver print

5 x 4 in.

<http://www.cavetocanvas.com/post/31926171809/vik-muniz-the-moma-series-1995-from-the>

Matthew Jensen: (Images to be determined)

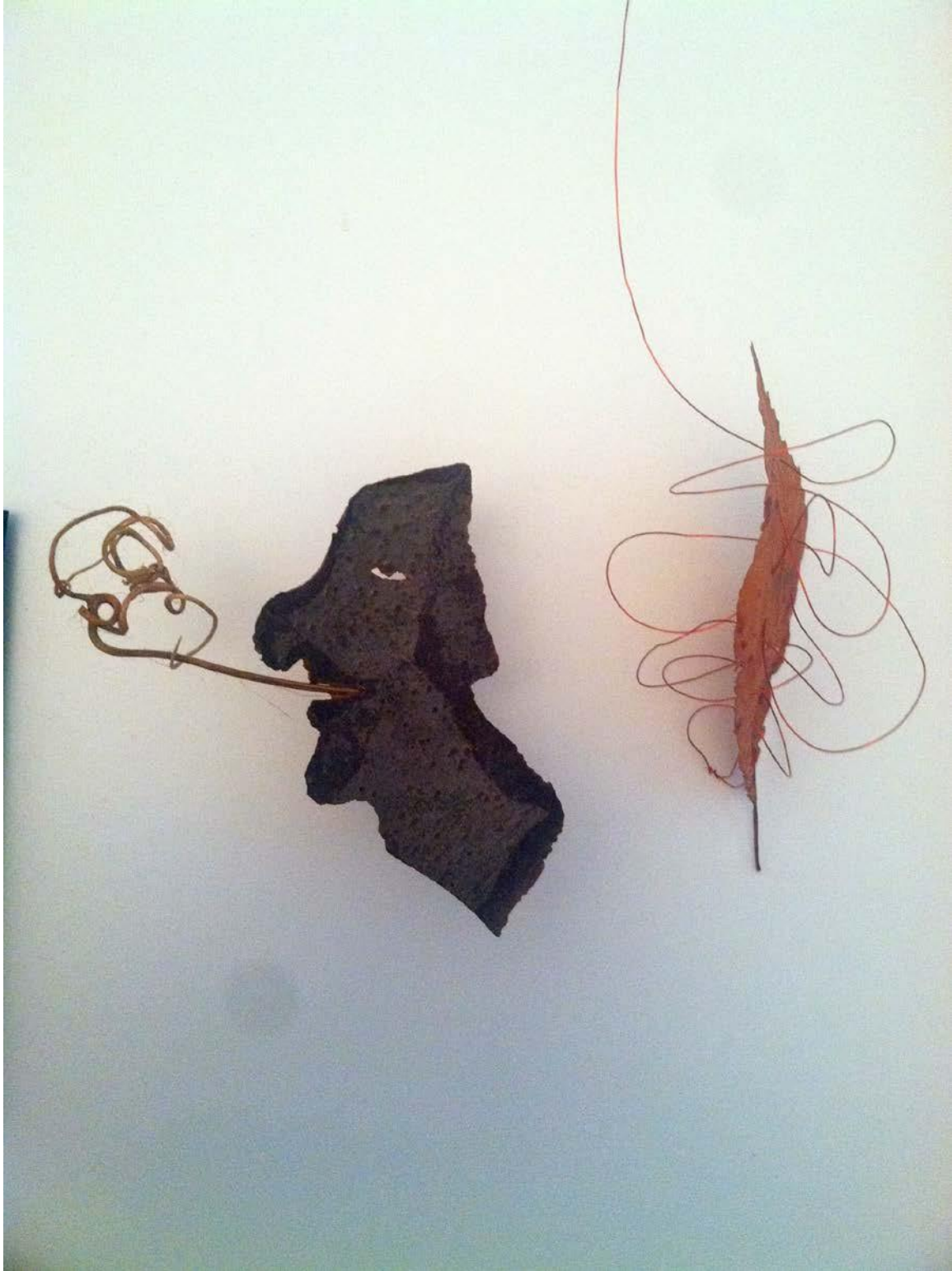
Alice Momm:



Alice Momm

The Storyteller

Courtesy of Visual Arts Center of New Jersey



Alice Momm

Smoking Man Loops in Leaf

Courtesy of Visual Arts Center of New Jersey