

Janice Mason Art Museum  
LESSON PLANS FOR WIER EXHIBIT  
Background Information

**ARTIST NAME : Chuck Close**

**ART PIECE(S) ON DISPLAY: “Keith Four Times,” “ Keith V”**

**About The Artist**

Chuck Close was born on July 5, 1940, in Monroe, Washington to middle-class parents. His father was a metal-worker, plumber and small-time inventor. His mother was a classically-trained pianist. At age 4 he wanted to be an artist. For his 5<sup>th</sup> birthday, his father made him a small easel and got him a set of oil paints from Sears. When Close was 11, his father died, his mother got breast cancer, his grandmother was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease, and Close himself spent most of the year in bed with a persistent kidney infection. His art helped him to cope with all of the mind-numbing sadness and misery. As he was growing up, everyone considered him dumb and lazy because he was dyslexic. He was told to forget about college. When he was 13, he saw one of Jackson Pollock’s [drip paintings](#) at the Seattle Museum of Art. Pollock and [Abstract Expressionism](#) would remain a strong influence throughout his early years as a painter.

Initially Close wanted to become a [commercial artist](#). However, after attending a summer program at Yale University, he began to pursue painting seriously. Not only did Close attend college, but he received a B.A. from the University of Washington, a B.F.A. and a M.F.A. from Yale. During his time at Yale, major figures in the contemporary art world served on the faculty and as artists-in-residence including, Robert Rauschenberg and Frank Stella. After graduation in 1964, Close was awarded an Albright Scholarship to study in Vienna. He traveled throughout Europe and was influenced by the Old Masters. When he returned to the United States in 1965, he began teaching painting and photography at the University of Massachusetts. Two years later, he moved to New York to pursue a career as a full-time artist. At this time, his artwork took a new direction, and he destroyed all of his work done prior to 1968. It was at this time that he began making large [portrait](#) paintings from photographs. In the 1970’s he was exhibiting his work in prestigious international exhibitions. By 1980, he was widely recognized as an important figure in contemporary American art.

On December 7, 1988, at the age of 49, Close was at the height of his career as a [portrait](#) painter when he was stricken with a spinal blood clot that left him a quadriplegic. He was unable to move from his neck down and many, including Close, thought his career was over. However, encouraged by his wife and showing improvement through therapy, Close renewed his artistic endeavors, first holding a paint brush in his teeth and later using a special hand splint that allowed him to use his limited arm movements to paint once more. The methods he developed while learning to paint from a wheelchair transformed Close into an art-world legend.

## About The Art

Chuck Close started his career as a [realist](#) painter; however, photography has always been an integral part of his working method since his early career as an artist. He has also produced and exhibited works of photography independent of painting. Although Close is associated with the style of painting called [photorealism](#) or [superrealism](#), his style is hard to pigeonhole. He paints highly-realistic figures in a photographic style, but otherwise he has nothing in common with painters called “[photo-realists](#)”. His work cannot be labeled “[Pop Art](#)” though he has painted many famous artists and even President Bill Clinton. His paintings of heads cannot even be truly called [portraits](#), for they are not really about the people he paints. Traditional [portraits](#) tend to flatter the person being painted and are usually commissioned and owned by the subject. His renderings of warts, blackheads, wrinkles, and blemishes can hardly be called flattering to the subject, and his paintings are owned by museums and private collectors.

Close’s works are really about the process he has developed and his working method aligns him with the [Minimalists](#). Early in his career, Close began working with the reproduction of a photograph by the use of a [grid](#). Each grid of his painting would duplicate what he saw in the corresponding grid space of the photograph. After his debilitating stroke, however, this process became even more challenging. With great effort, Close drew a primitive grid on a piece of cardboard. He could barely move the upper portion of his arms. He moved the brush around in the paint for as long as he could bear it—at first only one or two seconds—and then he attempted to daub the paint into the space of the grid. He said, “I saw that each grid was in fact a tiny painting. I thought about making little teeny paintings. I’ll paint little two-inch paintings, and then they’ll go together on the wall like a big jigsaw puzzle. It will eventually build a big picture.” He starts a painting with a Polaroid photograph and then creates a grid. He works square by square until the painting is finished. One must step away from a Chuck Close painting in order to see it because standing too near the surface causes the painting to become a grid of markings. He produces, on average, one painting a year.

One of the Close pieces in this exhibit is a progression of lithographs entitled “Keith Four Times”. This lithograph demonstrates how the size of the grid determines the clarity of the image. Close visited Landfall Press several times in an eighteen-month period to produce the [lithograph stones](#). Each square in the grid of the photograph was measured and given a [color value](#) between 1 and 20 – 1 being white and 20 being black. Close then applied [tusche](#) through an air gun by squirting the square the required number of times. This piece was completed in 1974 and measures h 34” X w 83”.

Another piece in this exhibit is entitled “Keith #5”. For this piece, Close made [paper pulp](#), divided into 20 buckets, and he colored the paper in each bucket in graduated white to black values. A screen was made with a grid, and the appropriate color pulp was placed in each square. The screen was removed, and the artist changed the image by pushing on the wet paper pulp with his hand. The [medium](#) used in this piece is handmade paper. This piece was completed in 1982 and measures h 35” X w 26 ¾”.

## **Related Terms**

color value  
commercial artist  
contemporary  
drip painting  
grid  
grid method  
lithograph  
lithograph stones  
media  
medium  
Minimalists  
paper pulp  
photographer  
photorealism  
photo-realist  
pin hole camera  
Pop Art  
portrait  
printmaker  
realist  
surrealism  
super-realist  
tusche`

## Age Specific Lesson Plans Grades K-5

### Kentucky Core Content

AH-E-4.1.31 Describe works of art using appropriate art terminology (subject matter, ideas, elements of art, principles of design).

AH-E4.1.34 Describe a variety of media and processes used to produce two-dimensional (2-D) and three-dimensional (3-D) artwork.

AH-E-4.1.35 Media-crayon, pencil, paint, fabric, yarn, clay, paper, paper-mâché (Used to produce artworks).

AH-E-4.2.35 Recognize that artists choose to express themselves in different styles and subject matters.

AH-E-4.1.42 Use a variety of media and art processes to produce two-dimensional (2-D) and three-dimensional (3-D) artwork.

AH-E-4.1.32 Art elements- line, shape, form, texture, and color (primary and secondary hues) and color groups (warm, cool, neutral).

### Objectives

- To learn that Chuck Close is a very important **contemporary** American artist who has overcome obstacles and handicaps to be the great artist he is today.
- To understand that Chuck Close was a painter, **photographer**, and **printmaker**.
- To understand that Chuck Close worked a long time to develop some of his art works. Artists often have to be very patient people.
- To realize that Chuck Close used different (**media**) materials to make the two works shown in the Janice Mason Art Museum.
- To learn that Chuck Close used a **grid** in composing **portraits**.

### Related Questions

1. What obstacles and handicaps did Chuck Close overcome to become the great artist he is today?
2. What shows us that Chuck Close was a very patient artist?
3. What kind of different art work can Chuck Close do?
4. What were some of the different materials (**media**) Close used in developing his art work we have at the Janice Mason Art Museum?
5. How were Chuck Close's **portraits** different from most artists?
6. What is a **grid**?

### Related Activities

1. Have students write a short paragraph about how Chuck Close is a brave, patient artist.
2. Have students use a **grid** to do a simple drawing.
3. Have students draw/paint a **portrait** putting in blemishes, wrinkles, or other unbecoming marks.
4. Let students experience making a photograph if cameras are available.
5. Secure directions from a science book and make a **pin hole camera**.

## Grades 6-8

### Kentucky Core Content

AH-M-4.1.31 Principles of Design: repetition, pattern, balance (symmetry/asymmetry), emphasis (focal point), contrast (light and dark), rhythm, proportion, and movement.

AH-M-4.1.32 Art Elements: line, shape, color (tints and shades) and color groups (monochromatic), form, texture, space (positive/negative and perspective), and value (light and shadow).

AH-M-4.1.34 Identify and describe a variety of art media, art processes, and subject matter to communicate ideas, feelings, experiences, and stories.

AH-M-4.1.35 Media: two dimensional-crayon, pencil, fabric, yarn, paint (tempera, watercolor), ink and pastels.

AH-M-4.1.39 Subject Matter: landscape, portrait, still life, abstract, and non-objective.

AH-M-4.1.42 Effectively use a variety of art media, processes, and subject matter to communicate ideas, feelings, and experiences.

AH-M-4.1.37 Art Processes: two-dimensional-painting, fabric design, printmaking, and mosaics.

AH-M-4.2.32 Purposes of Art- ritual, (celebration, commemoration), imitate nature(reflect the world), expressive (personal expression), narrative (make a point).

### Objectives

- To learn that Chuck Close used several different **media** during his lifetime to produce his art.
- To understand how Chuck Close was a patient, persistent, brave artist who overcame many obstacles and handicaps to become and remain a noted **contemporary** American artist.
- To find out various methods and materials that Chuck Close utilized to produce art.
- To note that Close utilizes **grids** in completing his portraits and why it is more important than ever for him to utilize this method.
- To find that Close is different than other **photo realists** or **super realists** and how his work is set apart.
- To understand the process to produce a **lithograph** like Close's work "Keith Four Times".

### Suggested Questions

1. What different materials (**media**) did Close use to produce his art?
2. Explain how Chuck Close was a patient, persistent, brave artist who overcame many obstacles and handicaps to become and remain a noted **contemporary** American Artist.
3. How did Close utilize **grids** to produce his portraits and other works?
4. How did Close get the desired colors he wanted for the two works in the Museum?
5. Explain the process to produce a **lithograph** such a "Keith Four Times."
6. How is Close's work different than other modern **photo realists** or **super realists**?

**Related Activities**

1. Draw a portrait utilizing the [grid method](#) like Close. Put in blemishes, wrinkles, or warts as he might have done.
2. Write a paragraph explaining how Chuck Close is an exceptional artist in many ways.
3. Experiment in utilizing a technique like Close in making the colors to paint the portrait you drew.

## Grades 9-12

### Kentucky Core Content

AH-H-4.1.31 Describe works of art using appropriate terminology.

AH-H-4.1.32 Art Elements: color and color theory: primary and secondary hues, values (tints and shades), intensity (brightness and dullness); color relationship: triadic, complementary, and analogous.

AH-H-4.1.33 Principles of Design: Balance (symmetry/asymmetry), emphasis (focal pattern), pattern, repetition, contrast, variety, movement, rhythm, proportion, transition/gradation, and unity.

AH-h-4.1.34 Defend personal interpretations of works of art and architecture by using arguments.

AH-H-4.2.36 Subject Matter: portrait, landscape, still-life, abstract, non-objective.

AH-M-4.2.32 Purposes of Art- ritual, (celebration, commemoration), imitate nature(reflect the world), expressive (personal expression), narrative (make a point).

### Objectives

- To understand that Chuck Close, a very famous contemporary American artist, overcame many obstacles and handicaps to become and remain a famous painter.
- To learn that patience is a needed virtue for many artists.
- To realize that artist's methods and techniques often vary from the first of their career to the end of their career.
- To learn different methods of [print making](#).
- To understand how Chuck Close continued to produce art after his illness.
- To know that several contemporary artists influenced Chuck Close's work.
- To learn that Chuck Close destroyed all of his art work prior to 1968.
- To understand how the [portraits](#) of Chuck Close are different than other [photo realist](#) or [super realist](#).
- To understand how Chuck Close managed color in his current works.
- To appreciate the intricacy of Chuck Close's [grid method](#) of producing art.

### Suggested Questions

1. How did Chuck Close overcome the his obstacles and handicaps in order to develop into and remain a famous painter, photographer, and printmaker?
2. How does Chuck Close's life story reflect the use of patience as a necessary ingredient for becoming and remaining a famous artist?
3. What methods did Chuck Close use to continue to make art after he became a quadriplegic?
4. What are the different types of [printmaking](#)? What method did Close use in developing "Keith Four Times"?
5. What contemporary artists influenced Close's work?
6. How did Close utilize color in his works in the Janice Mason Art Museum?
7. Explain how to make a portrait using a grid. How does Chuck Close use this method?
8. What method did Close use to do the picture "Keith V"?

9. What different art movements did Close embrace and utilize from the first of his career until now?

**Related Activities:**

1. Construct an artwork using [paper pulp](#) such as Close's "Keith V"?
2. Write an artistic critique of "Keith Four Times" using the [Four Steps of Artistic Criticism](#) as a guide.
3. Look on the internet/library to find out more about other artists who influenced Close and how this influence was reflected in his work.