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ALBERT PALEY

SOUTH 24TH STREET BRIDGE
OVER INTERSTATE 80

ODYSSEY

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Albert Paley was born in 1944 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He is an internationally-known artist who creates large-scale metal sculptures. His very first connection to metal was through his grandfather and uncles who were all plumbers and worked with pipes and machines. He spent his early years in the city of Philadelphia where there were row houses, asphalt, concrete and very few trees. Later his family moved to an old farm community where he discovered fields and open spaces. Through this experience and his involvement in Boy Scout activities, he developed a love of nature. This connection to both nature and machines would be expressed later in his life through the gestures, shapes and sense of movement in his artwork.

Albert Paley struggled in school because of his dyslexia which made reading difficult, but in a high school art class he found a way to express himself. He said, " In that context there were things I'd never experienced before, things like moving color around, and the magic of drawing ... Some kind of perceptual window had been opened for me." Paley grew up with no expectation of going to college since everyone in his family had to work during the Great Depression. After visiting Tyler School of Art he decided to use his only savings to enroll. He said, "I realized after four or five months that I never wanted to leave the reality I was experiencing ... And from then on, all I had to do was discipline myself. All I had to do was apply myself."

Not only did he finish college, but he went on to graduate school where he focused mainly on using metal to make jewelry. He also began to create larger works of art like candleholders and mirrors. In 1972 he won a competition to create metal doors for the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D. C. These *Portal Gates* made him famous and began his interest in creating artistic gateways and passageways with large metal sculptures.

WORK OF ART

MEDIUM AND DESCRIPTION

Albert Paley's *Odyssey* is a monumental gateway over Iowa Interstate 80. Each of the four sculptures that make up this one artwork sit on the four corners of the South 24th Street Bridge. The sculptures tower up to 100 feet above the interstate. *Odyssey* is Albert Paley's biggest work of art to date and is made of bronze, which the artist has processed to create a green color, COR-TEN® steel which develops a rust color, and stainless steel which remains silver and reflects the sunlight. Metals are made from minerals found in the earth and Albert Paley believes that these reflect the Iowa landscape, the earth, the green plants and the light of the big sky.

Albert Paley said, "Metal was the most challenging material that I confronted, and it was something that was worth the effort and the struggle... I was drawn to metal because of this aspect of resistance and the aggressive approach it requires."

Each sculpture is created with up to 15 different sections and weighs between 51,000 and 70,000 pounds.

What kinds of shapes do you see in the sculptures? Albert Paley says, "I put an emphasis on a very strong visual profile so they would stand out against the starkness of the sky."

When Albert Paley begins sculptures like these he starts with drawings and then creates cardboard models. From the cardboard models he then fabricates small metal models where he works out how the sections of the sculpture will be supported and joined. The four sculptures that make up *Odyssey* were fabricated and built near Rochester in upstate New York, where Albert Paley works with a team of assistants. The sculptures were then taken apart and moved to Council Bluffs. Thirteen flatbed trucks and two cranes were necessary to transport and lift the sculptural sections into place. It took more than three days to assemble each sculpture.

Albert Paley is concerned with making the sculptures sturdy and being sure each part is properly supported. But he also says that even the bolts that hold the sculptures together must be placed to fit the artistic design. Where do you see the bolts that hold sections together?

Albert Paley says that he is fascinated with the quality of line. Where do you see lines in the sculptures?

The edges of the metal sections form lines against the sky. Albert Paley says, "The edge is all that divides the metal and the air around it." He sometimes projects metal into space and sometimes includes space inside the metal shapes. Find places where the metal projects into space. Find places where you can see through the metal.

Albert Paley believes that the gestural quality of line is important in his works of art and gives them a sense of movement even though they don't actually move. Gestures are motions that people make, but even though these sculptures do not look like people they do seem to make motions. Make a motion that you see in one of the sculptures and have your classmates see if they can find it in the sculpture.

Each of these sculptures is made up of a number of different sections. Albert Paley had to arrange them so that the different sections would come together to create a single sculpture, a quality artists call unity. For example, find a sculpture in which straight upright sections gesture toward the sky and are joined together by curving shapes.

Odyssey is one work of art made up of four individual sculptures. The artist had the task to unify all the parts so they connected as a whole. First, Albert Paley had to unify up to 15 smaller shapes in each of the single sculptures, and then he had to unify the four larger sculptures which are placed at the corners of the bridge into one work of art. The four sculptures have to connect across a large area of space. Albert Paley says that they do this because they gesture one to the other. Find gestures that one sculpture makes to another. How does the other sculpture respond?

INTERPRETATION

Albert Paley said that the four sculptures of *Odyssey* "are seen as the gateway of Iowa. The whole thing is about an act of passage, or creating a sense of place and an identity. When you're driving, especially on the interstate, it becomes fairly monotonous, but the magnitude of these sculptures really defines Council Bluff's image."

The South 24th Street Bridge is high over the interstate and the *Odyssey* sculptures were intended to project up into the sky to provide a grand entry into Iowa. Albert Paley says he wanted to create a dynamic profile to catch the eye and define the place.

What large-scale structures make you think of a particular place? (for example: Eiffel Tower, St. Louis Arch, Statue of Liberty)

Albert Paley is concerned about the way people experience his sculptures. He says that you understand them differently as you get closer to them. How would you see the sculptures differently if you saw them from a car on the Interstate below or if you were walking or biking on the path along the bridge?

When Albert Paley came to Iowa to see the location for the sculptures it was winter and cold and he felt the high winds and saw the brown cornstalks and the stark trees sitting bare in the flat fields. He was impressed by the huge sky and the large open spaces. He used these experiences to create some of the symbolic shapes that are in the sculptures.

Where do you see shapes that look like dry cornstalks or leafless trees in winter? What shapes look like they are blowing in the wind?

Albert Paley says that although he does not create kinetic sculpture (sculpture that actually moves) he wants to give the experience of movement in the gestures of the banner shapes. The spire shapes reach to the sky and emphasize its size.

When Albert Paley flew in an airplane over Iowa he saw the fields divided into squares like a patchwork quilt of farms. Where do you see shapes that look like the squares of a patchwork quilt?

He also noticed the similarity between the natural shapes of the yucca plant and the fall cornstalks and marveled at the idea that the plants of the natural prairie and cultivated land could exist side by side. What three colors do you see in the sculptures? What kinds of metals form these three different colors? (see Medium and Description)

Albert Paley connects these three colors to the land and sky. The brown rust color of the COR-TEN® steel is the color of the earth. The green patina of the bronze is the color of plants. The silver of the stainless steel reflects the light from the sky. Albert Paley feels these colors are important because they connect to the landscape around the sculptures and the agricultural history of Iowa. He takes the colors from the area to have the people re-experience them in a new way in the sculptures.

Albert Paley sees these sculptures as symbols of the transformation of the Iowa landscape through agricultural machines and the railroad. Where do you see shapes that look like parts of machines?

Albert Paley uses geometric shapes to refer to mechanization, to agricultural machines like combines and to the railroad. The organic shapes relate to nature. These both refer to the history of the land in Iowa that has been transformed through agriculture which has been changed by mechanization.

The title given to Albert Paley's sculptures is *Odyssey*. The first reference that comes to mind is the famous *Odyssey* written in ancient times by Homer. This is a story about Odysseus who traveled for 10 years trying to reach his home. What connections can you make between Paley's *Odyssey* and Homer's *Odyssey*?

Albert Paley sees these sculptures as a landmark and gateway to Iowa. They are above an Interstate highway on which people travel and are meant to mark a passage through space.

VOCABULARY

Abstraction – freedom from representational qualities in art, not representing any object in the physical world

Gateway – a means of access or entry to a place

Geometric – characterized or decorated with regular lines and shapes

Gesture – a movement of part of the body to express an idea or meaning

Industry – a particular form or branch of economic or commercial activity, such as the car industry, the tourist industry or the agricultural industry

Odyssey – a long and adventurous journey

Odyssey (literary reference) – a Greek epic poem by Homer describing the travels of Odysseus after the fall of Troy as he journeyed for ten years trying to get home

Organic – characterized or decorated with irregular shapes that seem to resemble or suggest forms found in nature

Site-specific – created, designed, or selected for a specific place or location

Realism – the quality of representing an object or person in a way that is true to life

Technology – the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, especially in industry

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

EXPLORE BIG IDEAS:

Artists use their art to identify and define gateways.

Connect with Other Art, Artists and Cultures

Albert Paley has created gateways many times in his work. His first major work of public art was the doors for the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. D.C.

Look at gateway sculptures by Albert Paley: *Odyssey*, Council Bluffs, Iowa
Portal Gates, Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Stairway Sculptures, Wortham Center for Performing Arts, Houston, Texas
Synergy, Ceremonial Archway, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Reconfiguration, Hotel Pattee, Perry, Iowa
Animals Always, St. Louis Zoo, St. Louis, Missouri
Transformation, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa

Links available at www.iowawestpublicart.org

Which of these artworks could you walk through?

Which ones take you from outside to inside? (Note to teachers: Inside could mean inside a building, or inside a new space, such as the zoo, or inside a new state such as Iowa.) Albert Paley says that the archway at the St. Louis Zoo marks a boundary between the city and the animals' world.

Albert Paley says that he wants to create landmarks with many of his gateways to establish a sense of place and a memory of passage. He wants people to experience going through and coming back.

A landmark is an object or feature of a landscape or town that is easily seen and recognized from a distance, especially one that enables someone to establish their location.

Which of these art works do you think could serve as landmarks?

Look at the following works of art:
Pylon temples, Ancient Egypt
Arch of Constantine, Ancient Rome
Charles Brown, *Totem Night Clan House*, Alaska
Cincinnati Gateway, Ohio
St. Louis Gateway Arch, Missouri
Martin Puryear, *Ampersand*, Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, Minnesota
Christo and Jeanne Claude, *The Gates*, Central Park, New York City, New York

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Which of these artworks could you walk through?
Which ones take you from outside to inside?
Which of these works of art are single entrances and which include multiple gateways?

The St. Louis Gateway Arch refers to the role of the city in the westward expansion of the United States in the 19th century. St. Louis was a passageway to the West for many pioneers. This makes the St. Louis Gateway Arch a symbolic gate to the West.

The Cincinnati Gateway forms a passage between a riverfront park and the city. There are 17 major elements in the Cincinnati Gateway, including a miniature Ohio River, Indian mounds, a flood column and flying pig sculptures.

The ancient Roman triumphal arch is both an actual passageway and a symbolic entrance to the city through which a victorious leader would enter.

Which of Albert Paley's artworks are symbolic gateways and which are actual entrances?

Albert Paley's *Odyssey* creates a gateway with multiple sculptures. Which of these other public works of art does that?

Experiment With Art Making

Look again at:
Martin Puryear, *Ampersand*
Albert Paley, *Odyssey* and *Synergy*

These works are different in that they use several separate sculptures to suggest an entrance. The sculptors had to connect the separate works of art over space without having them touch. Remember that Albert Paley says that he has the sculptures that make up *Odyssey* gesture to one another.

How do the two sculptures that make up Martin Puryear's *Ampersand* connect to one another?

Working in small groups, design two sculptures that will create an entrance or gateway. Create your sculptures out of clay or air-dry medium or from cut paper.

Where will you place your sculptures? Your location could be an actual place in your community or an imaginary place.

Where will your gateway lead? How will your two sculptures connect across space to one another? Will they gesture to one another or will they have similarities of form?

Write an artist's statement describing how your artwork creates a gateway or passage.

EXPLORE BIG IDEAS:

Artists deal with both natural and technological forms.

Connect with Other Art, Artists and Cultures

Artists often use forms from the natural world of animals and plants in their art works. They can create art that looks like specific animals and plants or they can simplify forms or even use shapes that don't represent any specific things but that suggest living forms.

Look at the following works:
Henri Rousseau, *Surprise I*
Deborah Butterfield, *Horse*
Alexander Calder, *Cheval Rouge*
Alexander Calder, *Eagle*
Robert Davidson, *Eagle of the Dawn*
Louise Bourgeois, *Maman*
Roxy Paine, *Graft and Split*
Albert Paley, *Animals Always*

Links available at www.iowawestpublicart.org

What natural forms can you identify in these works of art?

Butterfield's and Calder's sculptures both make reference to horses. How are they different?

Do you think Albert Paley's *Animals Always* is more like Butterfield's or Calder's sculpture? Why?

Albert Paley's *Animals Always* includes 60 endangered animals and is one of his most realistic sculptures, even though the animal forms are simplified.

The Davidson and the second Calder sculpture both represent eagles. How are they different? Are they similar in any ways?

Although the Davidson work of art looks like an eagle, notice that it has abstract patterns on it. Robert Davidson is an artist working today who draws upon the style and traditions of his Native American Northwest Coast heritage.

Now look at the following:
Ferdinand Leger, *The City*
Diego Rivera, *Detroit Industry*
Nam June Paik, *Family*
Bart Vargas, *Nest*
Mark di Suvero, *Johnny Appleseed*
Albert Paley, *Odyssey* and *Reconfiguration*

Links available at www.iowawestpublicart.org

What natural forms can you identify in these works of art? Remember that humans are natural living beings. What other kinds of forms do you see?

How would you categorize these forms? (mechanical, architectural, technological)

Which artists have combined both natural and technological forms in their art?

Both Bart Vargas and Nam June Paik use discarded electronics to make forms that refer to the natural world. What kinds of materials do you see in these sculptures?

Nam June Paik was one of the first artists to use video in his works. Bart Vargas is trying to make people think about the environment and how it is affected by what we throw away.

Look at Albert Paley's *Reconfiguration*. This work of art was made in Perry, Iowa, with the help of the entire community. Albert Paley asked people of the town to look for objects from their history. They found metal objects from the history of agriculture and transportation in the surrounding area. From these found objects Albert Paley put together a gateway for the town. Welders from the area helped to assemble the gateway according to Albert Paley's instructions. Now as people walk through this sculpture they remember stories from their past associated with these objects.

Albert Paley says, "Reconfiguration was taking a plow and then it becomes something other than a plow. There are times when a horse-drawn plow is placed next to the crankshaft of a car, and so you are talking about power, you're talking about horsepower, you're talking about machine power, you're talking about the passage of time."

What kinds of objects can you recognize in *Reconfiguration*?

Look at *Odyssey*. What technological or machine forms can you find in the sculptures? Even though these forms are simplified and are not the actual objects, as they were in *Reconfiguration*, Albert Paley says that they refer to agriculture and the way machines have changed agriculture over time. So just like *Reconfiguration*, *Odyssey* refers to the history of the community in the changes in the land and agriculture. Albert Paley says, "technology transforms society."

What natural forms can you find in the sculpture? Remember that the colors of the sculpture make reference to the land and plants, to the earth and to the sky. Notice that some of Albert Paley's shapes are organic and seem to refer to natural forms like cornstalks. Other forms are more geometric and refer to agricultural machines and square fields created by machine.

Experiment with Art Making

Even when artists are referring to natural objects, like horses and eagles, they sometimes change them from organic to geometric forms.

Look at:
Roxy Paine, *Graft and Split*
Piet Mondrian - Progression of paintings of trees (put in order of realistic to abstract)

Links available at www.iowawestpublicart.org

How does Roxy Paine transform real trees in his sculptures? Do the sculptures use organic or geometric forms?

Mondrian started with a more organic looking tree and changed the forms to be more and more geometric. What geometric forms do you see in Mondrian's paintings?

You are going to create two drawings referring to the same object, but one will use natural organic forms and the other will change the object to seem more mechanical by using geometric forms.

Choose an object from nature and make a drawing using pencils, colored pencils, or charcoal on one sheet of drawing paper. This drawing will look more realistic and follow the natural organic forms of the object.

Now make some sketches to help you transform the object into geometric forms that seem more mechanical and simplified. When you are satisfied with your final sketch, create your second drawing on a second sheet of drawing paper.

Using colored paper, frame the two drawings side by side.

Activity Extension: Cut the basic shapes of each of your drawings from oak tag. Put your two shapes together to create a three-dimensional sculpture.

Writing Extension: When Albert Paley's *Odyssey* was first installed on the bridge there were some people who didn't appreciate it. Why do you think someone might not like this sculpture?

You are now going to become an art critic and consider your own reaction to the sculpture. Professional art critics are people who evaluate and write about art. Before they make their decisions about whether or not they like a work of art, they learn as much about it as they can. Some of the things they consider are how it fits the location, how it relates to the community, how the work looks, and what meaning it has.

Now that you have learned something about Albert Paley's *Odyssey* write a persuasive essay about whether you think it makes the bridge look better or more interesting. Be sure to back up your ideas with information you have learned and your own observations on location, community connections, visual characteristics and meaning.

WHAT IS IWPA?

Iowa West Public Art (IWPA) is an initiative of the Iowa West Foundation. Launched in 2007, IWPA is guided by a community-driven Public Art Master Plan. The result is the designation of more than 50 locations for site specific public art throughout the city of Council Bluffs, Iowa. The Master Plan envisions that by the year 2015, Council Bluffs is a community with a national and international reputation for high quality art that attracts visitors from all over the world, fueling economic development. Learn more at www.iowawestpublicart.org.

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