



# Art Outreach Program

## Projects & Lesson Plan: Tarot Card Painting

### 5TH-8TH GRADE PAINTING PROJECT

### Lesson Overview:

Students will learn about Niki de Saint Phalle's Personal & Artistic Biography, highlighting one of her major works, the Tarot Garden. Students will analyze symbols on the Tarot Cards to learn to express visual meaning and create their own Tarot Card

### Project Overview:

Using a variety of Tarot Card examples, students will make their own version of a Tarot Card. Students will use color theory, symbolism, and the principles and elements of design to paint their own rendering of a Major Arcana Tarot Card

### ART VOCABULARY:

**Sculpture:** Making a 3-dimensional art piece by carving or casting

**Prints & Lithographs:** A finished product that comes from the process of reproducing original drawings with printmaking machinery

**Symbols:** A drawing, sign, or word that signifies or is understood as representing an idea, object, or relationship

**Foreground:** The images that are located closest to the viewer or towards the bottom of the image are what makes up the foreground, colors are usually more vibrant

**Middle ground:** The space between the background and the foreground

**Background:** The scene that is furthest away, with slightly duller colors and smaller objects with less detail

## TAROT CARDS



## Niki de Saint Phalle

Niki de Saint Phalle - Tarot Cards, lithograph  
Here is a full spread of the 22 Trump Cards of the Tarot Deck by Niki. Notice that they are all but the Star are Closed Compositions!

**Open Composition:** An image that extends beyond the boundaries of a frame

**Closed Composition:** An image that is contained within the frame

**Color Theory:** The study of how colors work together to create a composition and to communicate imagery further

# LEARN ABOUT NIKI DE SAINT PHALLE

## Background:

- Niki de Saint Phalle, born Catherine Marie Agnès Fal de Saint Phalle on October 29th 1930, was a Franco-American artist. She lived in many places such as New York, Paris, Tuscany and San Diego! She did not go to art school and was not professionally trained, that is why her art works is often known as "outsider art." Her works are found in many countries, such as Germany, France, the US, Japan, Italy, Sweden, and Taiwan. She is a world renowned artist that has had many exhibitions in her lifetime and continues to after her death.

## Art in the making:

- Niki has constructed big houses and architectural works. She created the Tarot Garden in Tuscany that includes 22 large sculptures that were based off of the Major Arcana from the Tarot Deck. The sculptures were made with mirrors, hand made tiles, stones and cement. One of the sculptures, the Empress, even has a hidden apartment.

- In addition to sculptures, Niki also illustrated the Tarot Deck and had lithographs made from each rendering of the cards. Lithographs are produced much faster than hand drawn artwork, so an artist can create the same image multiple times as "editions."

### • What is Tarot?

It is an ancient card game consisting of 78 cards. There are 22 Trump cards also known as Major Arcana, and 4 suits consisting of 10 number cards and 4 court cards. Each card is loaded with symbols. The Major Arcana has 22 cards, each with its own title and meaning. Some universal symbols include the Sun, the Moon, Death, Strength, the Tower, and the Star.

- Niki created her own version of the Tarot Cards in drawings and then made them into sculptures. Sometimes as an artist, you can use already existing material to inspire you, and create your own version of it. Instead of using the same images that someone already made, you can transform them and making them into your personal rendering.



Niki de Saint Phalle *Il Giardino dei Tarocchi* 1998, The garden is made up of sculptures that represent the Trump Cards of the Tarot deck.

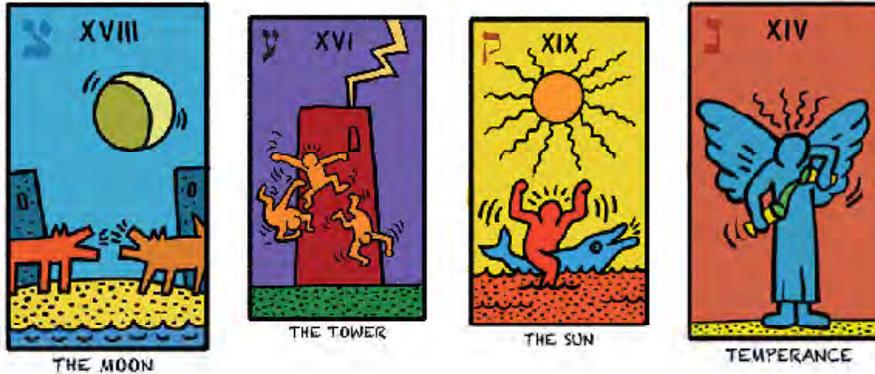


Take a closer look at the these cards done by Niki de Saint Phalle, What can you take away from her choice of color?

Take a look at the examples from the Rider-Waite Tarot, what type of compositions are used? Are the titles easily recognized in the imagery of each card?



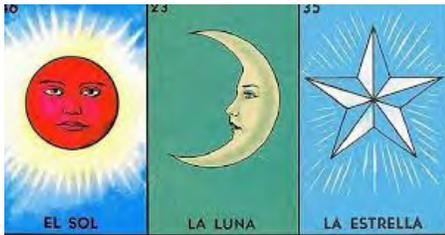
# TAKE A LOOK AT THE COMPOSITION & COLOR OF TAROT CARDS...



In these Keith Haring-inspired cards, we see a combination of bold lines and colors with both closed and open compositions, Roman numerals and Hebrew Letters.



Although these cards are not Tarot Cards, but Loteria Cards (A Mexican bingo game). They also have a title, a number and a main symbol that represents the title.



Take a look at these cards, they are in black and white and have very beautiful details, that are made up of many types of symbols. *Tarot Cards for Halsey's HFK*

These cards by Sonia Lazo also use vibrant colors a balance between foreground, middleground and background. What are some repeated symbols, with in the same cards by different artists? *By Sonia Lazo*



## Prompt:

- What are examples of symbols we see everyday that convey a meaning?

Examples: X (crossing), heart (love), star, infinity symbol, peace sign, emojis.

- What symbol do you resonate with? What is a symbol that you would relate yourself with?

Example: I would relate myself to an icon of glasses because I wear glasses, or a mushroom, or a scorpion because it is my zodiac, or an elephant because it is my favorite animal.

- We see how Niki took symbols from a Tarot Card Deck and made her own versions for her garden. How can we create our own meaning to existing symbols? What are they going to say/communicate with others?

Choosing a symbol that means something to us and accentuate that meaning in our imagery of it. For example, if your symbol is a rhino because it is strong you will draw a big muscular rhino, not a skinny weak rhino.

- What are some of your virtues and strengths?

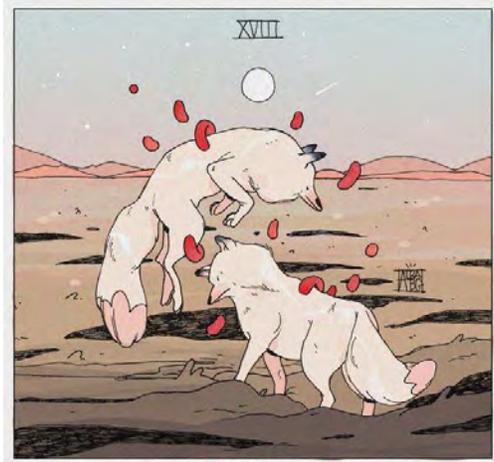
Are you patient, kind, funny, an explorer, a good sport, a problem solver...

- What card do you like and why?

Possible answers: The moon card because I like the night time, the Strength card because I like lions and I am strong, The Fool because I am on a journey of self discovery!

- Is there an attribute of human nature that you think is missing from the Major Arcana? What is it?

[Here is a link to the 22 Trump cards.](#)  
[Scroll towards the bottom of this page,](#)  
[and click on any title of a card you](#)  
[want to see! Use this as a reference for](#)  
[symbols, color and imagery related to](#)  
[each card.](#)



- THE MOON -



- THE SUN -



- THE STAR -



- TEMPERANCE -

# START THE PROJECT

## PROJECT:

### PREPARE:

At the beginning of lesson have students quickly draw:

1. Star 2. Moon 3. Sun and 4. The World.

Then have them draw less universal symbols:

5. The Tower, 6. Strength, 7. The Wheel (of fortune).

Later, compare and contrast similarities of symbols on the first list vs the second list. Highlight how the simple symbols all look similar but have their own flair; whereas, those of the second list look different in everyone's own version. This brings back the idea and awareness of universality in symbols and individuality in production.

## STEPS TO PAINT A TAROT CARD:

- Students will choose a Tarot Card to recreate in their own way. They can choose a card and change the symbols or main imagery to reflect their own version of the card.

- Each Painting should include the following components:

  - A number for the card

  - A title

  - The main symbol, in the middle ground or foreground

    - Supporting symbols or details in the background or foreground.

- Students will sketch and compose their card, be it a spin on an original or one of their own making.

- Students will paint the background of their canvas one solid color and let dry. If the background is black, students should either leave white space for the middle ground and foreground so as to be able to paint their subjects easily.

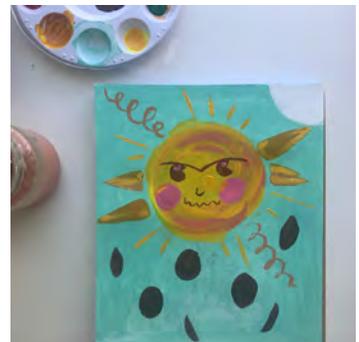
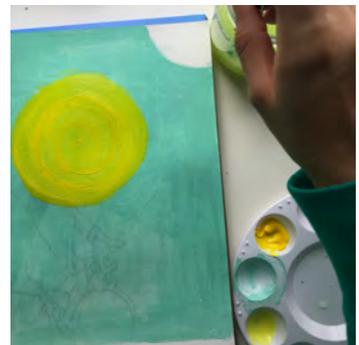
- Students can either use a graphite transfer to place their sketched image to the canvas once the paint is dry, or they may freehand the sketch on the canvas or freehand the painting.

- Allow each layer of paint to dry as you add more details to the card.

- Be creative with your composition, colors and symbols!

## MATERIALS

- any type of paint
- brushes
- canvas panel or heavy stock paper any dimension
- cup with water



# STUDENT SAMPLES

