



# Everything **Old** Is **New** Again

**Donnalyn Shuster**

One of the first questions raised in my grade nine studio art classes in September is “Are we going to do those big paintings that were in the library last year?” Spurred on by the resurgence of interest in the cultural icons of the last few decades, I designed a painting project that incorporated traditional methods with current technology to examine the way society values famous personalities.

Keeping in mind students’ interest in retro fashions and the fact that they missed the revolutionary sixties and the disco-driven seventies, I came up with the perfect lesson to pay homage to cultural icons of the past. Inspired by VH1’s series *The 200 Greatest Pop Culture Icons*, students were asked to research a pop cultural icon from

the last fifty years and create a larger-than-life painting in a posterized style.

## Setting the Stage

A discussion of what defines popular culture set the stage for the unit. Students compared ways that current pop culture values mirror those from decades past—the “live for the moment” lifestyle promoted by the media and the entertainment industry. The use of the catch phrase “larger than life” from a literal or figurative standpoint resulted in lively exchanges

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about characteristics of famous people in the news. Monumentalization of celebrities, such as Marilyn Monroe and Michael Jordan, reflects our enticement by the power of advertising to follow trends and fads. Students completed a worksheet using

the CNN article “MTV: Rewinding 20 Years of a Music Revolution,” to discover the roots of one of their favorite networks as purveyors of pop culture.

## Behind the Scenes

Using a list of 100 pop culture icons, students chose a person to “interview” using Web and print resources. This process afforded them the chance to fully explore the influences of the era, including music, fashion, television, toys, trends, sports, literature, world events, movies, and technology. Students also searched for images of their icon for use in the computer graphics segment of the project.

## Posterizing the Icon

Once images were selected (from the Web or scanned photos), students manipulated them using Adobe Photoshop and the posterize feature, cre-



ating Andy Warhol-style renditions in an 8 x 10" (20 x 25 cm) format. After a brief demonstration of the process, students eagerly transformed their icons using at least four different values. These grayscale prints served as the basis for their grid enlargements.

### Monumentalizing the Icon

These images were transformed into a larger-than-life format using a grid system. The original was enlarged at least three times, taking into account elimination of excess negative space and positioning of the image. Students drew a 1" (2.5 cm) grid on the original and tripled or quadrupled the scale on the 24 x 36" (61 x 91 cm) tag board. During the transfer process, students worked square-by-square to accurately retain the characteristics of the original piece. With encouragement through this grueling section, their careful work paid off in dramatic images ready for color.

### In Living Color

Students considered carefully their choice of color for their paintings, reflecting the image of the person or

### Learning Objectives

Students will:

- become aware of the impact the media and entertainment industry has had on society.
- be introduced to the computer as a creative editing tool.
- use computer software to effectively edit imported images.
- develop flexibility in solving problems.
- learn how to use a grid to enlarge an image.
- develop fluency in painting with acrylics.

### Materials

- library/Internet access
- computer lab with Adobe Photoshop or equivalent program
- rulers, sheets of 24 x 36" (61 x 91 cm) tagboard
- acrylic paints
- brushes
- plastic containers with lids
- fine- and broad-tipped brushes
- pencils
- erasers

the values of the era. Many who chose movie stars from the forties and fifties for example, used a black, white, and silver theme with gold accents to emphasize the lost glamour of Hollywood. Others chose specific color schemes with warm/cool or split-complementary themes.

Using acrylics, students painted out sections, often using a "paint by number" approach to label sections that had the same color value, so they would not forget small areas. We found that with the amount of color-mixing needed, using small plastic, lidded containers kept palettes fresh from class to class. I also provided individual water containers.

### The Really Big Show

Even the most reluctant painter found success with this project over the four-week period. As the projects started to take shape with color, enthusiasm grew and many students came in for extra time to work on their images. Due to the size of the tag board, we often set up the artists in the hall. The images taped to the lockers drew daily interest to our wing of the building and provided a great gallery space to view the icons from a distance. Once completed, the images were displayed in the large windows of our media center. 🎨

### Evaluation/Assessment

Students were assessed based on a checklist covering research, fluency with Adobe Photoshop, enlargement and painting technique.

To what extent did the student:

1. manipulate the image successfully in Adobe Photoshop using the posterization methods?
2. create a successful grid enlargement?
3. select a color scheme to symbolically portray an accurate "visual image" of the person?
4. demonstrate technical proficiency in painting with acrylics?
5. create a dynamic image of their icon?

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### NATIONAL STANDARDS

*Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.*

### WEB LINK

[www.warhol.org](http://www.warhol.org)