



# Classroom Activity

## Freedom of Artistic Expression: Visual Art

In this activity, students will examine four problematic visual art pieces. Once they have viewed the works, provide them with the discussion questions below to encourage deeper thought. This can be completed individually or in small groups. After students have answered the questions, bring the class back together to have an open discussion. Ask probing questions if necessary. Then, show students the post-discussion activity options. They can complete these in class or outside of class.

### Works of Art:

- "Guernica" (1937), Pablo Picasso
- "Piss Christ" (1987), Andres Serrano
- "What is the Proper Way to Display the U.S. Flag?" (1988), "Dread" Scott Tyler
- *The Perfect Moment* exhibit (1990), Robert Mapplethorpe

### Discussion Questions:

- What is going on with the artwork? Write down your initial feelings on the piece.
- What do you think the artist is trying to say in this piece? How does the title contribute to your understanding? Do you think this piece was intended to be a work of art or not?
- Why do you think the public considered this piece controversial? It might help to look up a few writeups here to dive further into the controversy. How do you feel about the controversy?
- Do you agree more with the artist or the public? Take some time to jot down additional feelings on the piece now that you know some opinions surrounding it. What do you want to remember about the piece? What do you want to forget? Should this piece of art be censored or banned from museums?
- How did the artist exercise their First Amendment rights through this piece?

### Post-Discussion Activities:

- Write a poem based on this art piece or the controversy surrounding it.
- Pretend you are Director of Communications for a museum with this piece in its collection. Write a press release stating whether you will display the piece and why/why not.
- Pretend you are the artist of this piece and respond to the critics. This can be done in a multitude of ways. I want to see your creativity here.

### References & Resources:

- ["Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment, Feb 25-Apr 16, 1989."](#) Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.
- Gooch, A. (1992). ["'Guernica,' Still Under Fire."](#) *The Washington Post*.
- Palmer, A. (2015). ["When Art Fought the Law and the Art Won."](#) *Smithsonian Magazine*.
- Rao, S. (2014). ["What is the Proper Way to Display the US Flag? An Interview with Dread Scott."](#) *School of the Art Institute of Chicago*.
- Stavans, I. and Gracia, J. (2013). ["On Desecration: Andres Serrano, \*Piss Christ\*."](#) *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 52(4).