Dot, Dot, Dimension

Learn about an avant-garde artist and the dynamics of the dot

*Art + history*

Artist Yayoi Kusama is obsessed with dots. “Polka dots,” she has said, “are a way to infinity.”

Kusama was born in Japan, but came to New York in 1957 and joined a community of avant-garde artists. Over the next two decades she became a painter, sculptor, pop artist, performance artist, cultural activist, fashion designer, and author. She staged “happenings” at which she would cover models in polka dots.

The dots reflect visions Kusama experienced since she was a child, images of a world that is covered and eventually obliterated by dots. Through her art she has brought order to the chaos of these visions and expresses her sense that she (and all human beings) are “one of the dots among the millions of dots in the universe.”

Kusama’s “Infinity Rooms,” filled with mirrors and endless dots, are part of an international traveling exhibition celebrating her life’s work.

Dots are fun, dots are fast, dots are universal. Anyone can start with a dot, diverge to a pattern, and end with a painting. The trick is repetition — of shape, sizes, colors, and patterns.

Dots are not necessarily flat. They can be rounded or spherical, tall or short. They can rise above a surface and form assemblages and small sculptures. Dots can be negative spaces. Dots can be made with paint, buttons, spools, lids, beads — anything that makes a circle makes a dot. Considering all the different things a dot can be and the ways they can be made — why not dot?

**GRADES K-12** Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

**Process**

1. Begin with a surface. Making lots of dots takes time, so, depending on the time allotted, smaller areas may work best. Surfaces should be rigid, so they can support the weight of attached items. Some surface options:
   - Canvas panel or shaped panel, up to 8” x 10” maximum size
   - Mini stretched canvas
   - Ceramic bisque tile
   - Wood shape or panel
   - Heavy chipboard

2. Paint dots can be made with so many things! One of the easiest and most cost-effective ways is to fill detail squeeze bottles with acrylic paints. The long tip controls the paint flow and easily creates uniform dots. Other ideas for making paint dots:
   - Round tip brushes
   - Pencil erasers dipped in paint
   - Bullet tip paint markers
   - Sponge tip marker bottles
   - Fingertips
   - Cotton swabs
Process, continued

3. Dots are not necessarily flat. Raising dots from the surface can be accomplished with:
   - Spools
   - Wood shapes
   - Compact Discs
   - Cardboard tubes
   - Lids or caps
   - Metal washers
   - Beads
   - Buttons

4. Dots can be created on surfaces by tracing, using a template or a compass, then filled in with paint or marker. Dots can be created within dots — as repeating rings or a border pattern.

Options

- Keep a tally of how many dots make up each piece of artwork. See who can include the most dots.
- Choose a dimensional surface to cover with dots, such as a box or household item. Yayoi Kusama has invited participation in her art exhibits by providing a room filled with pristine white furnishings and giving visitors dot-shaped stickers to apply.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating
Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Creating
Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Connecting
Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.