
Rationale | Make Your Mark

Visual Arts • Year 8 • Victorian Curriculum 2.0

Why this Unit

My background is in visual communication, system thinking and visual storytelling, with a specific focus on critical media theory and representation. That training tracks cultural change and asks what it demands of us visually: who gets to speak, through what forms, and whose image gets to exist in public space. When I began planning this unit, I started with resistance art. Because I felt resistance is an emotion early teens easily recognise in their lives. Then came street art as the natural visual starting point. It resists, claims, is public and easily accessed. It also holds a very contemporary urgent messaging through its medium. It is the art form that most directly asks the question at the heart of this unit: what happens when you claim the act as your own?

Street art meets Year 8 students where they already are. Rudolf Steiner understood early adolescence as the moment when inherited structures are no longer enough, and the young person must begin building their own relationship to truth, to authority, and to meaning (Steiner, 1996). That process cannot be rushed or directed from outside. It needs to be discovered. And I think it can also be invited.

James Scott's concept of everyday resistance (1985) gives this a sociological frame: resistance does not have to be loud or organised. A stitch, a tag, a doodle made in the margins of a notebook. These are all acts of agency within constraint. But Scott's everyday resistance is only the beginning. Albert Camus argued that meaning is not found, but that it is made. In the myth of Sisyphus, a man condemned to roll a stone up a mountain for eternity, finds freedom not by refusing the stone, but by claiming it as his own (Camus, 1942). The unit is designed to create that shift: the moment when what a student needs to do becomes what they want to do. That is where agency is built.

John Dewey argued that genuine learning is experiential, and that it happens through doing (Dewey, 1934). Students in this unit are continuously invited to do exactly that. They listen, make, look, reflect (in making or in thinking) and respond in every lesson, Over and over again. This process deepens every time and makes the actual work more meaningful and deliberate. It creates

space for the unexpected, boundaries for discomfort and permission to do something out of the ordinary. The four lesson arc is one continuous process of iteration, reflection and deepening.

Why the Kaylene Whiskey resource card

The Kaylene Whiskey Artist Research Card is the primary resource for this unit, used in Lesson 3. Kaylene's work is full of life, full of joy and it draws you in. She cuts through boundaries simply by being fully herself. And that is a hard thing to do, at any age, but especially at fourteen.

The artists introduced across this unit each resist differently, and together they trace a full arc of what Scott (1985) means by everyday resistance. There are many quiet, persistent, and creative ways people push back within constraint. Haring resists through joy and accessibility; his art is for everybody, on every wall. Banksy resists through irony and anonymity, appearing where authority would rather not look. Basquiat resists through dignity and rage; his crown asserts what the art world tried to erase. Cornbread resists through pure presence; a twelve-year-old writing his name until the city had to notice. Blek le Rat resists through stealth and wit. COBRA resists through collective spontaneity, painted with the same urgency as the artists of the German interbellum who made work under censorship and political oppression: 'kunst als verzet', art as resistance (Museum Paleis Lange Voorhout, n.d.). Niels Shoe Meulman resists through the letter itself. A concept he calls calligraffiti, the word becoming the mark (Shoe, n.d.). Frankey resists through joy and mischief, transforming the ordinary into something that makes people smile (De Ruwe & Bolten, n.d.). And Whiskey resists through celebration. By being fully, joyfully, unapologetically herself (Whiskey, 2025).

Together they show students that resistance is not one thing. It is a spectrum. And somewhere on that spectrum is their mark.

My background in critical media theory makes Laura Mulvey's work on the gaze a natural frame here. Mulvey (1975) argued that visual culture is shaped by who gets to look and who is looked at, and that reclaiming the gaze is an act of power. Sturken and Cartwright (2009) extend this into a broader framework of visual culture. Images do not simply reflect the world, they actively construct it, and understanding that construction is the beginning of agency. Street art is exactly that reclamation. Basquiat's crowns assert dignity. Whiskey's paintings insist that Anangu life is vivid, contemporary and entirely

self-defined (Whiskey, 2025). The resource card asks students to engage with that reclamation as both viewers and makers.

The card moves through four questions, from close looking to personal response to the harder territory of joy as cultural assertion and freedom within tradition. The final question has no single right answer. By Lesson 3, the students are ready for that.

How the resource integrates in the sequence

The card is introduced in Lesson 3 after students have already met several different forms of visual (and emotional) forms of resistance. They have made marks, developed a stencil and begun thinking about colour and feeling. They arrive at Whiskey's work with their own emerging visual vocabulary, which means they can read her choices with genuine understanding and be inspired by it.

The fourth question, about freedom within cultural tradition, carries into Lesson 4 where students develop their resolved work. It becomes a question they ask of their own practice: what are the constraints I am working within, and what freedom do I find inside them? The resolved work in Lesson 4 functions as the summative assessment for the unit. It is not a test of technical skill, but evidence of a student's capacity to make intentional, personal choices across all four lessons.

The teacher's role

Maria Montessori's principle of following the child shapes how I move through this unit (Montessori, 1912). I came to Montessori through her writing and through practical training in working with children and I brought it into my teaching practice.

The teacher in this unit is not directing content or correcting output. They are circulating, observing, offering what is needed, perhaps just silence and attention. Photographing (documenting), asking quiet questions, offering the next material or prompt at the moment the student is ready. In Lesson 4 particularly, the teacher must be invisible but available. Present without interfering with the process. That means all senses activated, anticipating, preparing, offering without words and staying in the background. This approach reflects APST Standard 1 (Know students and how they learn) and Standard 3 (Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning), which

together underpin the responsive, student-centred pedagogy of this unit (AITSL, 2011).

Why this supports inclusive learning

The mark-making practice that returns in every lesson is the same activity for every student, but what each student makes is entirely their own. There is no model answer, no correct mark. The challenge is personal: finding your own mark, following it, trusting it enough to build a resolved work across four lessons.

Whiskey herself is an inclusion strategy. Her work is immediately appealing before it is intellectually demanding (Whiskey, 2025). She gives every student at least one way in, through the colour, through the joy, through the simple radical act of being completely yourself.

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