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## Masterpiece: Untitled, 1981

### By Jean-Michel Basquiat

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**Keywords:** Color, abstract, imbalance,  
Neo-Expression, mural

**Grade:** 6th

**Month:** February

**Activity:** Your World in Transition:  
A Cooperative Mural

#### Meet the Artist:

- Jean-Michel Basquiat was born in 1960 in Brooklyn, New York.
- He was an avid reader and spoke multiple languages including English, French and Spanish.
- After High School, he moved to Lower Manhattan and spent the majority of his life there in the art community.
- Began his artistic career doing illustrations and writing poetry using Magic Markers.
- In 1980, at the age of 19 he had his first solo exhibition of his colorful acrylic and oil paintings.
- In 1984, at the age of 23, his first "Graffiti" painting was auctioned at the famous auction house in New York known as Christie's. This painting sold for \$19,000. From the sale of this painting and became instantly famous and his work was in high demand.
- He became well known for his quirky personality, wild hairdos and he rarely wore shoes.
- His work is well respected in the art community and categorized as Graffiti Art.
- His brightly colored images typically contain broad brush strokes but are distinctly different from other graffiti artists because of their unique form and content.
- As an African American artist, his work broke many barriers in the art community including a new respect and appreciation for the bold graffiti style.
- He died in 1988 and left behind a diverse body of work including his colorful graffiti murals and wonderfully illustrated children's books.



## KEY WORD

*Neo-Expressionism*: A graphic and figurative style from the 1980s and 90s, characterized by haphazard, random brushstrokes, and bright, dramatic colors.

### Possible Questions:

- What is abstract about this image?
- What are the main colors he uses to express himself in his work?
- Do you see balance and symmetry in this image? Why or why not?
- Does a work of art such this inspire you? Why or why not?

### Activity: Your World in Transition: A Cooperative Mural

#### Materials Needed:

1. 36" x 48" canvas/muslin sheet—7-8 per class
2. Chalk: Red, White, Yellow, Black
3. Hairspray (fixative)
4. Sharpies: Black, King Size
5. Table covers—**Sharpies will soak through fabric, please protect the desks.**

**\*\*Note to Art Guide:** As this is a February project, have students create a poster emphasizing peace, global cooperation, shared cultures, benevolence, harmony, etc. They may need a jump start with ideas for their message. Consider some of the following, but encourage the groups to brainstorm about their world to promote creativity and sharing of ideas. Write themes on the board. Discourage the "easy out" of hearts, flowers, peace signs, etc

Earth and how we take care of it

Exercise/Play

Voting

Music / musicians

Censorship

News media

Communication/Cooperation

Current events

Sports; athletes, events, venues, Olympics

Community Gardens

Public arts; theater, movies, outdoor sculptures, museums

#### Process:

1. This is a cooperative project and requires the students to be divided into groups of 3-4. (Note: there is not enough material for pairs.)
2. The goal is to consider a variety of ideas/messages that the students wish to convey in their mural. The theme is "Your World in Transition", therefore, the students should be encouraged to brainstorm a variety of ideas and then decide which one(s) to use. The message can be displayed in words or images or both like Jean-Michel Basquiat's work.
3. Have students use the chalk to decorate the muslin/canvas to display themed images
4. Add words or short bits of original poetry or song lyrics using the black markers.
5. When students are satisfied with their work, take it outside and lightly spray with hairspray to keep the chalk from smearing.

## Photograph of Jean Michel Basquait and Other works





