

NICK CAVE FEAT.

Educator Resource Guide



Nick Cave. *Soundsuit*, 2016.
Mixed media, including vintage toys,
wire, metal, and mannequin, 84 x 45
x 40 in. Courtesy of the Lewis Family.
© Nick Cave. Photo: James Prinz
Photography

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This Educator Resource Guide is designed to help students prepare for gallery visits and follow-up discussions. Leaders of scheduled school tour groups receive this guide with a packet of art reproductions. It highlights works from *Nick Cave: Feat.* and includes questions and activities that will encourage your students to look closely and think critically. The activities are compatible with Tennessee curriculum standards for visual arts, language arts, and social studies.

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CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS AND TENNESSEE STATE STANDARDS

Docent-guided school tours support Tennessee academic standards by introducing ideas relevant to the visual arts, language arts, and social studies curricula. Specific standards are addressed according to grade-appropriate levels. View connections for all grade levels (K–12) at tn.gov/education/topic/academic-standards.

Foundational Literacy Standards

FL.WC.4 Cornerstone: Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills when encoding words; write legibly.

6–12 Language Standards

L.CSE.1 Cornerstone: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

L.CSE.2 Cornerstone: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Writing Standards

W.TTP.3 Cornerstone: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

African American History

African American Issues in Contemporary Times

Students analyze the issues confronting contemporary African Americans in the continuing struggle for equality.

Contemporary Issues

Understanding and Solving Issues of the Contemporary World

The student will analyze selected contemporary events and issues.

State Fine Arts Standards

This Educator Resource Guide supports Tennessee fine arts standards. Educators may address specific standards in their classrooms according to grade-appropriate levels. View connections for all grade levels (K–12) at tn.gov/education/article/arts-education.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Nick Cave was born in Fulton, Missouri, in 1959. He received a BFA from the Art Institute of Kansas City and an MFA in fiber arts from Cranbrook Academy of Art, outside of Detroit. Cave's work has been featured in monographic exhibitions around the globe, at venues such as the Cranbrook Art Museum, the Denver Art Museum, the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, and is housed in the permanent collections of many major institutions, including the Brooklyn Museum, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Cave has received several prestigious awards, among them the Joan Mitchell Foundation Award, the Artadia Award, the Joan Mitchell Foundation Award, the Joyce Award, and multiple Creative Capital Grants. He has lived and worked in Chicago since 1990 and is the Stephanie and Bill Sick Professor of Fashion, Body, and Garment at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He is represented by Jack Shainman Gallery in New York.

TRANSFORMING IDENTITY: SOUNDSUITS AS CAMOUFLAGE AND DISGUISE

Chicago-based artist Nick Cave (b. 1959) produces work in a wide range of mediums, including sculpture, installation, video, and performance. His creations, bursting with color and texture, are optical delights that can be enjoyed by audiences of all ages and backgrounds. A deeper look reveals that they speak to issues surrounding identity and social justice, specifically race, gun violence, and civic responsibility.

His trademark human-shaped sculptures—called *soundsuits* because of the noise made when they move—began as a response to the beating of Rodney King by policemen in Los Angeles more than twenty-five years ago. They were originally conceived as a protective type of armor in the wake of the incident, when he felt particularly vulnerable as a fellow African American man. Cave has stated, “I started thinking about myself more and more as a black man—as someone who was discarded, devalued, viewed as ‘less than.’” Sitting in a Chicago park, Cave began to gather twigs and sticks (also discarded and devalued), eventually stringing them into a wearable sculpture. When he put it on, he realized he had created a second skin that camouflaged his race, gender, class, and sexuality, thereby shielding him from judgment. He called the work a “soundsuit” because of the rustling noise generated as he walked around in it. While soundsuits mask physical features of wearers, their “loud” auditory and visual presence boldly expresses alternate identities.

The now five-hundred-plus soundsuits in the series have become a collective army of resistance to profiling and violence, responding not only to police brutality but any crime motivated by hate—from the killing of Emanuel AME church members in Charleston to the Pulse nightclub massacre in Orlando.



Nick Cave. *Soundsuit*, 2016. Mixed media, including vintage toys, wire, metal, and mannequin, 84 x 45 x 40 in. Courtesy of the Lewis Family. © Nick Cave. Photo: James Prinz Photography

Questions

- How did Nick Cave’s personal experience influence his artistic expression?
- What is this soundsuit made of?
- Do you think this is easy to put on?
- How do you think it feels to wear it? Is it light or heavy?
- How would your movements change when wearing this?
- What are the benefits of wearing disguises? How would a disguise change how you are perceived? How would you act differently if your identity was hidden?

Activity: Descriptive Writing

Look at the image of the soundsuit and imagine it worn by a dancer during a performance. Write about what you see, hear, touch, taste, and smell while watching a soundsuit in motion.

Activity: Design a Disguise

Design a mask or costume that allows you to assume a new identity. What will this new identity be and how will it be communicated through your design choices? Consider Nick Cave’s artistic choices and techniques as you plan and design.

TRANSFORMING MATERIALS: MEMORIES AND MEANING

In addition to offering a shapeshifting shamanistic-like experience through soundsuits, Cave makes most of his sculptures by transforming unwanted objects into “fine” art. Cave traces the use of cast-off items to his childhood, when he carefully altered and patched together hand-me-downs from his brothers to make them his own. In some ways, he sees himself as rescuing the objects he purchases from flea markets, antique malls, and thrift stores by giving them new life and purpose. He has a nostalgic connection to many of the items, especially the ceramic birds and flowers that remind him of those admired and collected by his grandparents. Even before he incorporates “rescued” objects into an artwork, Cave carefully houses them in neatly organized spaces in his studio.

These densely assembled wall-mounted sculptures are made from ceramic birds, painted metal flowers, strands of crystals, antique gramophones, and other items sourced from flea markets and thrift stores. By transforming these found objects into art, he bestows value on associated memories and people that may be overlooked by mainstream society, an underlying theme throughout his practice.



Nick Cave. *Wall Relief*, 2013. Mixed media, including ceramic birds, metal flowers, afghans, strung crystals, and gramophone, 97 x 74 x 21 in. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.
© Nick Cave. Photo: James Prinz Photography

Questions

- Do you see objects in this work that evoke memories or hold sentimental value for you?
- What gives meaning to the objects that we use in our everyday lives?
- How are the objects collected and used by Nick Cave transformed when they become part of a work of art?

Activity: Narrative Writing

Select a found object used in Nick Cave’s *Wall Relief* or his soundsuit on page 4, and imagine the journey of that object. Think about how it was originally used. How old is it? Where has it been? Who might have owned it? What kind of condition is it in?

Activity: Found Object Assemblage

Create a found object assemblage using items that you have collected or that have been provided by a teacher. As you create your artwork, think about what the objects mean to you. Do they represent something? Are you “rescuing” the object and giving it new life and meaning?

TRANSFORMING THE VIEWER: DREAMS AND ASPIRATIONS

Transformation can occur during the experience of viewing Cave's art. Cave sees a need for more time and space in contemporary society to cultivate personal dreams and aspirations. Through immersive installations of his work, he wants to transport viewers to a dream state—away from the challenges of our everyday lives—where we can get lost in our own imaginations. Cave's emphasis on the imagination is not to escape reality, but to create new ideas to help us navigate and maybe even improve our condition.

Architectural Forest, a large-scale installation, features thousands of brightly colored beads and almost psychedelically patterned strands of bamboo hanging from the ceiling. Collectively, they evoke an enchanted forest. As visitors walk around the work, their visual perception of its architecture repeatedly shifts, an action that forms an interactive relationship and a sense of discovery.

Questions

- Have you spent time in a space that has activated your imagination?

Activity: Write a Postcard

Imagine entering *Architectural Forest*. Write a postcard to someone. Tell them what it feels like to be there and describe the sights and sounds.



Nick Cave. *Architectural Forest*, 2011. Bamboo, wood, wire, plastic beads, acrylic paint, screws, fluorescent lights, color filter gels, and vinyl, 136 x 372 x 192 in. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, in collaboration with the Fabric Workshop Museum, Philadelphia. © Nick Cave. Photo: James Prinz Photography



Tondo, a round work assembled from scraps of discarded beaded and sequined formalwear, is meant to evoke a starry night sky. Cave has happy memories of lying in his grandparents' fields as a child in the Missouri countryside with his six brothers, looking for constellations and shooting stars. He wants his art to create similar transformative experiences where viewers' creativity and imagination can be sparked.

Nick Cave. *Tondo (Untitled)*, 2008. Mixed media, including beaded and sequined garments, fabric, and wood, 96 x 96 x 2 in. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. © Nick Cave. Photo: James Prinz Photography



Nick Cave. *Heard* performance. © Nick Cave. Photo: James Prinz Photography

Performance sponsored in part by

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CONNECTIVITY AND COMPASSION

At the heart of Cave's practice is his belief that art can be an agent of connectivity and compassion. A self-described messenger, he wants his work to extend beyond museum and gallery walls to reach and include a population that may not often experience meaningful aesthetic or cultural events. Cave therefore directs major art performances that utilize local communities after many months of preparation and engagement. On April 6, 2018, the Frist Center's project will culminate with two free public performances that feature a cross section of our creative community—dozens of professional and student dancers, musicians working in a range of genres, vocalists, poets, and others—as well as ten social services organizations, including Conexión Américas, Thistle Farms, FiftyForward J. L. Turner Center, and the Oasis Center. Cave's goal is to bring people of different backgrounds together, showcase under-recognized talents on a highly visible platform, and give participants a sense of their worth and potential.

Watch

Visit youtube.com/watch?v=wVdIGBSQy78 to watch *AS IS* by Nick Cave, a documentary about Cave's Shreveport, Louisiana, performance, or vimeo.com/141557825 to learn more about *Nick Cave: Heard • Detroit*.

Activity

Use the masks and costumes you created during the "Transforming Identity" section of this guide and collaborate with others to create a public reading, a public work of art, or performance. Share your collaborative work with others and assess your experience.

NICK CAVE FEAT.

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RESOURCES RELATED TO NICK CAVE

Books

Nick Cave: Epitome. With Nato Thompson, Elvira Dyangani Ose, and Andrew Bolton. Munich: Prestel, 2014.

Nick Cave: Sojourn. With Kyle MacMillan and William Morrow. Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2013.

Nick Cave: Until. With Denise Markonish, David Byrne, Carl Hancock Rux, Lori E. Lightfoot, and Claudia Rankine. Munich: DelMonico/Prestel, 2017.

Children's books

Ancona, George. *Let's Dance!*
New York: Morrow Junior, 1999.

Beaumont, Karen, and David Catrow. *I Like Myself!*
Orlando: Harcourt, 2004.

Ewald, Wendy. *The Best Part of Me: Children Talk About Their Bodies in Pictures and Words.* Boston: Little, Brown, 2002.

Lionni, Leo. *Little Blue and Little Yellow.*
New York: HarperCollins, 2012.

McKee, David. *Elmer.* New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1989.

Pinkwater, Daniel Manus. *The Big Orange Splot.*
New York: Scholastic, 1993.

Digital resources

Falbaum, Evan, director. *AS IS by Nick Cave.*
Shreveport, LA: Moviesauce, 2016. [youtube.com/watch?v=wVdIGBSQy78](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wVdIGBSQy78). 70 minutes.

Fusaro, Joe, and Wesley Miller. *Art in the Twenty-First Century: Educators' Guide to the Eighth Season.* New York: Art21, 2016. art21.org/for-educators. 64 pages.

Nelson, Stanley, director. "Chicago." *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, season 8, episode 1. Premiered September 16, 2016, on PBS. art21.org/chicago. 55 minutes.