



Maya Lin

THINKING WITH HER HANDS

By Susan Goldman Rubin

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Ages 10 and Up * F&P Text Level Gradient: X

Lexile® Measure: TK

ABOUT THIS BOOK

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., is one of the most famous pieces of civic architecture in the world. But many people are not as familiar with the reserved college student who entered and won the design competition to build it. This accessible biography tells the story of Maya Lin, from her struggle to stick with her vision of the memorial to the wide variety of works she has created since then. Illustrated extensively with photos and drawings, the carefully researched text crosses multiple interests—American history, civic activism, art history, and cultural diversity—and offers a timely celebration of the memorial's 35th anniversary, as well as contributing to the current, important discussion of the role of women and minorities in American society.

In the tradition of *Delicious*, *Wideness & Wonder*, and *Everybody Paints!*, this is Susan Goldman Rubin's extensively researched and very accessible biography of civic activist Maya Lin, most famous for her design of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Maya Lin is an American artist, architect, and designer best known for her sculptural works and large-scale monuments inspired by history and science. Much of the content within *Maya Lin: Thinking with Her Hands* is appropriate teaching material for a wide range of ages, from late elementary school students to high school students. This curriculum guide features activities and discussion questions that can be customized for use across all grade levels. The Common Core State Standards and National Core Arts Standards included at the end of the guide are anchor standards which can be specified to fit any grade, while the Literacy in History/Social Studies Standards and Next Generation Science Standards are for students in grades 6–8; however, the text should not be limited to this grade range.

A Junior Library Guild Selection

COMMON CORE-ALIGNED TEACHER GUIDE

PRE-READING

Building Historical and Scientific Background Knowledge

To better understand the subject matter of Maya Lin's artistic practice, students need some background knowledge of certain historical and scientific events. Before reading Maya Lin's biography, separate the class into five groups and assign each group one of the following topics:

- The Vietnam War
- The Civil Rights Movement
- Chinese-American immigration
- Endangered and threatened animals
- Lewis and Clark's expedition and its effect on the indigenous people of Washington

Instruct each group to use an online interactive timeline creator to build a timeline that showcases the key events related to their topic in chronological order. In addition to important dates, these timelines should incorporate visual elements, details about the topic's historical impact or scientific legacy, and any other supplemental information or media that further illuminates the subject.

Have students present their finished timelines to their peers so that everyone in the class possesses an understanding of all five historical and scientific topics before beginning Maya Lin's biography.

Extension Activity

To help students further understand Maya Lin and her work, ask each group to create a symbol that embodies and represents the legacy of their historical or scientific topic. Show them examples of symbolic memorials such as: the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in Washington, D.C.; the Gateway Arch in St. Louis; the Jewish Museum in Berlin; and the Pentagon Memorial in Arlington County, Virginia.

DURING OR AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

Use the following discussion questions to guide whole-group discussions during reading, as writing prompts, or as discussion points for independent reading assignments.

1. Maya Lin states, "I try to understand the 'why' of a project before its 'what.'" What does this tell you about her thought process as she approaches each project?
2. From a young age, Lin did not like the color red. Why does she dislike this color? What does red represent to her? Despite her dislike of red, Lin included the color in her design for the Museum of Chinese in America. Why did she include the color red in this project, even though she does not like it?
3. Why did Lin choose to display names in chronological order on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial?
4. Some fought against Lin's design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (pp. 18-20), but Lin stuck with her plan and ultimately created one of the world's most famous memorials. Why were people opposed to her design?
5. After completing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Lin felt like she was boxed in as a "monument designer" and refused many invitations to complete more memorials. Why do you think she finally agreed to complete the Civil Rights Memorial?
6. How do Lin's earthworks and land sculptures embody her passion about ensuring her work fits into its surroundings?
7. How did 9/11 affect Lin's work (p. 54)? What project helped Lin begin working again? Why was that the right project at that time?
8. Lin knew very little about her family until she was in her twenties. As she learned more about them, she discovered a lineage of strong women in her family. What characteristics do Lin's mother, aunt, and Lin herself share that show they are strong women?

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9. How does the Museum of Chinese in America pay homage to Lin's family as well as to all Chinese Americans?
10. Lin's commitment to sustainability (avoiding the depletion of natural resources to maintain a balance within nature) is evident in her *What is Missing?* project as well as many other works. She states, "A lot of my work is not very glorious. If I succeed, you may never know I was here." How does Lin's message of sustainability come through her works?
11. *The Box House* is very different than the other pieces featured in *Maya Lin: Thinking with Her Hands*. Why do you think the author chose to include this work when choosing pieces for the book?
12. Lin's artistic process seems to be inspired equally by her mother and her father, a ceramicist and a poet. What attributes of a ceramicist do you see in Lin's process and in her work? What attributes of a poet do you see in Lin's process and in her work?
13. Lin has created memorials honoring a variety of histories, races, and ethnicities, including American, African American, Chinese American, and indigenous people. How does Lin ensure that her work accurately represents the people or histories she is focused on in each project?
14. Susan Goldman Rubin's chapter titles are comprised of very specific word choices. Looking at the titles ("Clay," "Granite," "Water," "Earth," "Glass," "Celadon," "Dunes and Driftwood," "Wood," and "Memories"), why do you believe the author chose these words as the chapter titles?

AFTER READING

Minimalism

The Art Story (www.theartstory.org), an art education website, classifies Lin as an artist associated with the movements known as Minimalism and Earth Art. While many of her works share characteristics of Minimalism and Earth Art, neither of these movements neatly contain Lin.

Minimalist artists "creat[ed] objects which blurred the boundaries between painting and sculpture, and [which] were characterized by unitary, geometric forms and industrial materials." Minimalists strove "to avoid metaphorical associations, symbolism, and suggestions of spiritual transcendence." Their work often showcases the geometric forms, the scale, and even the materials of architecture. Artists associated with the Earth Art movement worked with "the natural landscape to create site-specific structures, art forms, and sculptures . . . often utiliz[ing] materials that were available at the site on which their works were constructed and placed, honoring the specificity of the site." (www.theartstory.org)

Instruct students to research Minimalism and Earth Art further, and have them identify other artists associated with these movements. Ask students to form an argument based on the results of their research explaining whether Lin's work is most aligned with one of these movements, whether her practice is a combination of the two, or whether her work fits better within Post-Minimalism or a different contemporary art movement.

Extension Activity

Ask students to reflect on and answer the following questions:

- Do you believe that art changes over time? If you do, why?
- What are some examples of how art evolved over time to reflect changes throughout the history of human civilization?
- Can artists work in different art styles and idioms over time? Can they possibly work in different styles concurrently? Explain.

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Symbolism

Unlike traditional Minimalists, Maya Lin uses symbolism in her work. Begin a discussion on symbolism by asking students to reflect on familiar stories they already know. Discuss literature students have previously read in school, and brainstorm a list of symbols and the things they represent from these stories. Following this discussion, explain to students that symbolism in visual art is the same, and that it can be identified when a piece of art—or an aspect of a piece of art—represents something more than just its literal meaning. Then, ask students to analyze Lin's works and look for symbols within them. Have students create a symbolism T-chart to represent the symbolism they find in Lin's work.

Symbolic element of artwork	Interpretation of meaning
The ark shape of the Riggio-Lynch Chapel	Symbolizes that the chapel is a safe place just as Noah's Ark was.
The water on the Civil Rights Memorial	Symbolizes the justice rolling down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream mentioned in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.

Accommodations: Symbolism is a very hard concept for students to grasp, specifically in middle school, so some accommodations can be made to this activity. For example, give students the right side of the T-chart and have them fill in the left side, or vice versa.

Maya Lin's *What Is Missing?* Website

Maya Lin's website for her *What Is Missing?* project (www.whatismissing.net) includes extensive information about animal endangerment and extinction, sustainability, and other environmental issues, plus ideas for simple things anyone can do to help save the planet. The site also features an interactive map with timelines, videos, stories, and other educational material, including information about Greenprint, a series of e-books and booklets that explain sustainable living in an engaging, instructive, and thought-provoking way. Visit www.whatismissing.net/#info/about-us to learn more about the website. Some example videos can be found at vimeo.com/whatismissing.

The plethora of information about the environment available at this website can be used in many different ways.

Consider using the website in conjunction with some of the following activities:

- Have the class visit the interactive portion of the site featuring information about how we can save the planet. Instruct students to create an action plan for three things they are going to start doing at home with their families in order to help protect our environment.
- After viewing the interactive map, specifically the section on endangered animals, have students further research one animal of their choice and create a presentation or video to share information about the animal, how it became endangered, and ways people can help the animal thrive.
- Have students write their own stories about the wildlife they see in their everyday lives, similar to the "stories" aspect of the website.
- Greenprint focuses on eliminating our carbon footprint and living a sustainable lifestyle
 - * Have students complete the Carbon Footprint Calculator on the EPA's website at www3.epa.gov/carbon-footprint-calculator with their families to learn where they can reduce emissions and waste. Tell students to take notes as they complete the quiz so the next day they can share what their family plans to do to reduce their carbon footprint.
 - * As a class, look at ways to live more sustainably and have students add to their family's plan.

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Presidential Medal of Freedom and National Medal of Arts

Maya Lin has received both the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the National Medal of Arts. The Presidential Medal of Freedom is the highest award a civilian can receive, and the National Medal of Arts is the highest honor given specifically in the arts. Have students research these honors and the types of individuals who have received the recognitions in the past.

Have students write a persuasive letter to the President of the United States arguing why Lin deserves both of these medals, as if she had not received them yet. Instruct them to use the resources below along with everything they learned about Lin in *Maya Lin: Thinking with Her Hands* to support the claim that Lin deserves both honors.

Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_recipients_of_the_National_Medal_of_Arts

<https://www.arts.gov/honors/medals>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidential_Medal_of_Freedom

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/node/349666>

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Executive_Order_9586

Monument/Memorial Creation

Now that students have some familiarity with the process behind the making of a monument or memorial, have them propose their own ideas for a monument. Instruct students to create a written explanation of what their memorial represents (much like Maya Lin did for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial competition). Students can propose a monument to honor themselves, their school, or other events as assigned.

Extension Activity

Ask students to include symbolism within their memorial and have them create a written explanation of their symbolism. Once the proposals for all the monuments are complete, ask students to review each other's work and analyze the symbolism within each memorial.

Cumulative Writing Assignment: Legacy

Maya Lin states, "You need to see me whole as an artist. What I'm doing is art, architecture, and memorials." Have students write an informative essay explaining how Lin has fulfilled her legacy as an artist, architect, and memorial designer. Tell students to use evidence from the text, as well as other provided resources, to support their claim.

Resources:

<http://www.whatismissing.net/>

<http://www.mayalin.com>

<http://www.biography.com/people/maya-lin-37259> <http://www.theartstory.org/artist-lin-maya.htm>



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Standards that may be met when using the above activities and discussion questions:

Common Core State Standards English Language Arts Anchor Standards

READING

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3

Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8

Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

WRITING

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.8

Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism. relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

SPEAKING/LISTENING

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.5

Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

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Common Core State Standards Literacy in History/Social Studies Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.3

Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.5

Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6

Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8

Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

Next Generation Science Standards

- MS-ESS3-3. Apply scientific principles to design a method for monitoring and minimizing a human impact on the environment.
- ESS3.C: Human Impacts on Earth Systems
 - * Human activities have significantly altered the biosphere, sometimes damaging or destroying natural habitats and causing the extinction of other species. But changes to Earth's environments can have different impacts (negative and positive) for different living things. (MS-ESS3-3).
 - * Typically as human populations and per-capita consumption of natural resources increase, so do the negative impacts on Earth unless the activities and technologies involved are engineered otherwise. (MS-ESS3-3), (MS-ESS3-4)

National Core Arts Anchor Standards

NCAS Anchor Standard #1

Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

NCAS Anchor Standard #7

Perceive and analyze artistic work.

NCAS Anchor Standard #8

Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

NCAS Anchor Standard #9

Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

NCAS Anchor Standard #11

Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Susan Goldman Rubin grew up in the Bronx and dreamed of becoming an artist. As a young woman, she studied painting and drawing and began to show her work in galleries. She has written art books for children of all ages, including middle grade biographies of Georgia O'Keeffe and Wayne Thiebaud, and a series of board books published by Chronicle. Her books for other publishers include biographies of Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, Roy Lichtenstein, Edward Hopper, Edgar Degas, and Andy Warhol. Now she lives in Malibu, California.

OTHER TITLES BY THIS AUTHOR:



Everybody Paints!

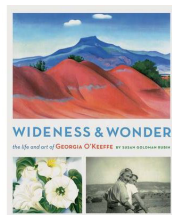
The Lives and Art of the Wyeth Family : N.C., Andrew, and Jamie

A Booklist Top 10 Biographies for Youth

A New York Public Library Title for Reading and Sharing

A Junior Library Guild selection

- ★ "An ideal introduction to the Wyeths."
—School Library Journal, starred review
- ★ "Clearly written and engaging."
—Booklist, starred review

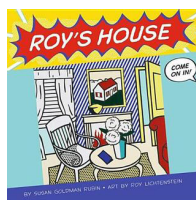


Wideness & Wonder: The Life and Art of Georgia O'Keeffe

An ALA Amelia Bloomer Reading List selection

A Junior Library Guild selection

A VOYA Nonfiction Honor List selection



Roy's House

"An inviting introduction to Lichtenstein's iconic art. . . . An accessible, engaging approach to the pop artist's paintings for a younger crowd."

—Booklist

"Readers will feel welcome in Roy's house."

—Kirkus Reviews

Find out how to invite an author
to your school or library!
chroniclebooks.com/authorvisit

This guide was created by Kellee Moye, a middle school reading coach and teacher from Orlando, Florida. Kellee is the co-author of the blog Unleashing Readers; the author of various teaching guides; the chair of the 2014 Amelia Elizabeth Walden Book Award committee; a member of the 2016–2019 ALAN Board of Directors; and a member of NCTE, ALAN, ALA, YALSA, and ILA.