

LESSON 2: EXPRESSIVE LANDSCAPES

Can anthropomorphizing elements of the natural world create empathy for our environment?

FEATURED ARTIST:

Pearl C. Hsiung

FEATURED ARTWORK:

Tidal Wretch, 2005
enamel on canvas, 96 x 72 in.

Deep Peep/Oculus Infinitus, 2006
enamel on canvas, 72 x 96 in.



“For me, often forms in nature seem grotesque, but actually it’s my interpretation and projections that make it grotesque and sometimes verging on the cosmic or sinister or uncanny. I am just interested in slowing things down, creating work that offers me another way to think about or deal with issues and concepts - something that takes me through ideas and also out of them.”

- Pearl C. Hsiung

CONTENT STANDARDS - VISUAL ART

Grade 6

1.0 Artistic Perception

- 1.1 Identify and describe all the elements of art found in selected works of art.
- 1.2 Discuss works of art as to theme, genre, style, idea, and differences in media.

2.0 Creative Expression

- 2.4 Create increasingly complex original works of art reflecting personal choices and increased technical skill.
- 2.6 Use technology to create original works of art.

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing

- 4.1 Construct and describe plausible interpretations of what they perceive in works of art.
- 4.2 Identify and describe ways in which their culture is reflected in current works of art.

Grade 7

1.0 Artistic Perception

- 1.1 Describe the environment and selected works of art, using the elements of art and the principles of design.
- 1.2 Identify and describe scale (proportion) as applied to two- and three-dimensional works of art.
- 1.3 Identify and describe the ways in which artists convey the illusion of space (e.g., placement, overlapping, relative size, atmospheric perspective, and linear perspective).

2.0 Creative Expression

- 2.4 Develop skill in mixing paints and showing color relationships.
- 2.5 Interpret reality and fantasy in original two- and three-dimensional works of art.
- 2.6 Create an original work of art using film, photography, computer graphics, or video.

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing

- 4.1 Explain the intent of a personal work of art and draw possible parallels between it and the work of a recognized artist.
- 4.2 Analyze the form (how a work of art looks) and content (what a work of art communicates) of works of art.

Grade 8

1.0 Artistic Perception

- 1.1 Use artistic terms when describing the intent and content of works of art.
- 1.2 Analyze and justify how their artistic choices contribute to the expressive quality of their own works of art.

2.0 Creative Expression

- 2.1 Demonstrate an increased knowledge of technical skills in using more complex two-dimensional art media and processes (e.g. printing press, silk screen, computer graphics).
- 2.3 Create an original work of art, using film, photography, computer graphics, or video.

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing

- 4.2 Develop a theory about the artist's intent in a series of works of art, using reasoned statements to support personal opinions.
- 4.3 Construct an interpretation of a work of art based on the form and content of the work.

Grade 9-12 Proficient

1.0 Artistic Perception

- 1.1 Identify and use the principles of design to discuss, analyze, and write about visual aspects in the environment and in works of art, including their own.
- 1.5 Analyze the material used by a given artist and describe how its use influences the meaning of the work.

2.0 Creative Expression

- 2.2 Develop and refine skills in the manipulation of digital imagery (either still or video).

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing

- 4.3 Formulate and support a position regarding the aesthetic value of a specific work of art, and change or defend that position after considering the views of others.

Grade 9-12 Advanced

1.0 Artistic Perception

- 1.1 Analyze and discuss complex ideas such as distortion, color theory, arbitrary color, scale, expressive content, and real versus virtual in works of art.

2.0 Creative Expression

- 2.1 Create original works of art of increasing complexity and skill in a variety of media that reflect their feelings and points of view.

3.0 Historical and Cultural Context

- 3.2 Identify contemporary artists worldwide who have achieved regional, national, or international recognition and discuss ways in which their work reflects, plays a role in, and influences present-day culture.

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing

- 4.2 Identify the intentions of artists creating contemporary works of art and explore the implications of those intentions.

CONTENT STANDARDS - LANGUAGE ARTS

Grade 6

Writing Applications

2.0 Genres and Their Characteristics:

2.1 Write narratives.

Grade 7

Writing Applications

2.0 Genres and Their Characteristics:

2.1 Write fictional or autobiographical narratives.

Grade 8

Writing Applications

2.0 Genres and Their Characteristics:

2.1 Write biographical or autobiographical narratives or short stories.

Grades 9-12

Writing Applications

2.0 Genres and Their Characteristics:

2.1 Write biographical or autobiographical narratives or short stories.

CONTENT STANDARDS - CROSS-DISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

Grade 6

Science:

Ecology/Life Science

5. Organisms in ecosystems exchange energy and nutrients among themselves and with the environment. As a basis for understanding this concept:
- Students know* energy entering ecosystems as sunlight is transferred by producers into chemical energy through photosynthesis and then from organism to organism through food webs.
 - Students know* matter is transferred over time from one organism to others in the food web and between organisms and the physical environment.
 - Students know* populations of organisms can be categorized by the functions they serve in an ecosystem.
 - Students know* different kinds of organisms may play similar ecological roles in similar biomes.
 - Students know* the number and types of organisms an ecosystem can support depends on the resources available and on abiotic factors, such as quantities of light and water, a range of temperatures, and soil composition.

Grade 11

Science:

Biology/Life Science

Ecology

6. Stability in an ecosystem is a balance between competing effects. As a basis for understanding this concept:
- Students know* biodiversity is the sum total of different kinds of organisms and is affected by alterations of habitats.
 - Students know* how to analyze changes in an ecosystem resulting from changes in climate, human activity, introduction of non-native species, or changes in population size.
 - Students know* how fluctuations in an ecosystem's population size are determined by the relative rates of birth, immigration, emigration, and death.
 - Students know* a vital part of an ecosystem is the stability of its producers and decomposers.

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ART ^{since the} 1960s
EXPERIENCE and EXPERIMENTS

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

OVERVIEW:

Pearl Hsiung paints large-scale fictional landscapes that juxtapose natural forms and material culture. Using high-gloss colors and grotesque humor, her images anthropomorphize the landscape and reveal and elicit empathy for the natural world. Students will research the characteristics of a biome and the potential environmental hazards to that biome. Using drawing and coloring techniques, they will create a comic strip that anthropomorphizes features of that biome in order to convey a message about that environment.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will compare and contrast color, style, and composition in works of art.
- Students will analyze how the media used by an artist contribute to the message of a work of art.
- Students will discuss how natural forms are anthropomorphized to evoke an emotion and/or convey an idea about the environment.
- Students will research the characteristics of a biome and the potential environmental threats to that biome.
- Students will compose a narrative that anthropomorphizes features of a biome in order to convey a message about the environment.
- Students will use drawing and coloring techniques and/or computer graphic illustration to create a comic/graphic story that anthropomorphizes features of a biome in order to convey a message about the environment.
- Students will use color, composition, and style expressively in a work of art.

MATERIALS:

- Transparencies of *Deep Peep/Oculus Infinitus* and *Tidal Wretch*
- Venn diagram worksheet
- Overhead projector
- Story map worksheet (this should include sections for brainstorming/describing characters [antagonist/protagonist], setting, conflict, resolution, theme)
- Examples of comic books
- Sketch paper, pencils, and drawing tools such as rulers and compasses
- 11" x 14" heavyweight white paper and colored pencils, inks, pens or markers or computers with digital software like Adobe Photoshop or Illustrator

TIME: 10 class sessions

KEY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What differences do you see between the two paintings?
2. What similarities do you see in the two paintings?
3. How would you describe the artist's style?
4. How is the natural world expressed in these paintings?
5. How are human characteristics used in these paintings?
6. What emotion(s) does the anthropomorphic landscape convey to the viewer?
7. What meaning or message about our environment does the artist convey in these paintings?
8. How can anthropomorphism be used to communicate a message about the natural world?

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SUGGESTED PROCEDURE:

DISCUSS:

Project transparencies of *Deep Peep/Oculus Infinitus* (2006) and *Tidal Wretch* (2005) side by side.

Tell students these are reproductions of works by the artist Pearl Hsiung from 2006 and 2005.

Distribute the Venn diagram worksheet. Tell students to use the diagram to map similarities and differences between the two paintings during the discussion of the works.

Ask students to describe the differences between the two works. In *Deep Peep*, students may notice the dominant use of flesh tones and deep blues and purples. They may note the horizontal orientation of the composition. They may identify a large eye-shaped form that appears to be surrounded by cracked flesh or earth with a large, symmetrical tear in a muddy color dropping towards the lower left side of the canvas. They may notice the many cracks around the eye and the fissures that extend to the edges of the canvas. Students may identify earth as the primary geological feature in the work.

In *Tidal Wretch*, they may note the dominant use of reds and pinks. They may mention the vertical orientation of the composition. They may describe what looks like an open mouth with black lips, jagged teeth, and a partially formed tongue that hangs over the bottom lip of the mouth and ends in drips of pink paint. They may note the pink and purple body of water inside the mouth and the curve of the large wave. Students may identify water as the primary geological feature in the work.

Ask students to describe the similarities between the two works. In *Deep Peep*, they may note the use of celestial forms within the eye—deep purple layers of clouds at the edges; a large, glossy, deep blue circle at the center of the composition; rays of orange and yellow; and smaller circular shapes, flecks of paint, and stars. They may compare this to the use of celestial forms in *Tidal Wretch*—the deep red background punctuated by small stars and the pink clouds inside the mouth. They may notice the **large-scale** oval shape that serves as the central motif in both paintings. They may discuss the use of bodily and geological imagery in both works, as well as the use of clearly delineated shapes and rich, vibrant colors.

Ask students if the artist's style reminds them of the work of any other artists or any other visual media. Students may mention examples of pop art, comic books, animé, manga, or print advertising.

Tell students that Hsiung uses color to clearly define forms in her compositions. As a student at UCLA she



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developed an interest in **hard-edge painting**, a term used to describe works by abstract painters who sharply delineate colors in their works. They often apply tape to their canvases in order to achieve a clear, sharp line. This clear differentiation of color is also used in billboards, comic books, and **pop art**, all influences on this artist's work. Hsiung employs a variety of painting techniques like stenciling to achieve this hard-edge effect. Hsiung also uses **color value**—variations in the lightness and darkness of color—to create a sense of volume.

Ask students what parts of the natural world they see in these works. Could these paintings be described as **landscapes**? Why or why not? What types of imagery do they usually associate with landscape painting?

Ask students how the human body is represented in *Deep Peep* and *Tidal Wretch*. In reference to *Deep Peep*, students may mention the large eye shape that dominates the canvas with the pupil-like sphere at the center. They may describe the flesh tones of the paint that cracks open around the eye. With *Tidal Wretch*, students may discuss the painting's open mouth with teeth, lips, and tongue.

Ask students what they think the mouth in *Tidal Wretch* might say if it could speak. Does the eye in *Deep Peep* convey an emotion? What emotion does it express? Students may bring up sickness or sadness. Why might the eye be interpreted as sad or the mouth/ocean as sick? How might this relate to the state of our world?

Ask students to imagine that *Deep Peep* and *Tidal Wretch* are two parts of a portrait of the world. What would the other parts look like? Ask students why they think the artist combines elements of the natural world and the human body in her works.

Tell students that Hsiung **anthropomorphizes** the landscape—she gives the landscape human characteristics. Fantasy and unusual juxtapositions are important in this artist's work. Hsiung's landscapes have been described as surrealist. **Surrealism** is a movement in art and literature that seeks to reconcile the rational world with the unconscious mind. Hsiung often incorporates and anthropomorphizes geological features, celestial forms, and objects from material culture. Hsiung has referred to her paintings as "landscape portraits" and "manscapes"; explore how issues of identity play out in her landscapes through the representation of body parts.

Ask students to discuss other examples of anthropomorphism that they have seen in visual media. Students may provide a wide variety of examples, from cartoon characters like Sponge Bob to talking trees in live-action fantasy films like *Prince Caspian* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Ask students what purpose anthropomorphism serves in Hsiung's paintings and the other examples they have discussed. What message is communicated about the environment?

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WRITE/CREATE:

GRAPHIC STORY: LIVING LANDSCAPE

Ask students to name different types of **biomes** (e.g. freshwater, marine, forest, desert, grassland, tundra). Ask students to discuss the definitions of **biome** and **ecosystem**.

Tell students to research a biome/ecosystem of interest to them. What features characterize the physical environment? What types of organisms inhabit the biome/ecosystem? How has this biome/ecosystem changed over time? What factors contributed to these changes? Is the stability of the biome/ecosystem currently at risk?

Tell students to plan a story set in the biome/ecosystem they researched. Students should anthropomorphize both **biotic** and **abiotic** elements of the landscape to serve as the characters in their stories. The stories should communicate a message about environmental issues relevant to the biome/ecosystem. The message of the story may be explicit, or it may be left open to a variety of interpretations.

Distribute the story map worksheet. Tell students to use the sheet to guide their story planning. Students should determine who their characters are, where the story takes place, what the conflict is, and how the conflict is resolved. Students should also determine the message the story will convey about the biome/ecosystem. Write the title of the story at the top of the sheet

Tell students their stories will take the form of a comic book. They will illustrate their anthropomorphized biomes in the style of a comic or graphic novel in order to convey a message about the environment. Students should employ unusual juxtapositions of objects and anthropomorphize both abiotic (e.g. water, rocks, soil) and biotic (e.g. plants, animals) elements of the landscape. The action of the story will be conveyed through illustrations and dialogue between the characters as well as internal dialogue that appears in text boxes or bubbles.

Distribute examples of comic books for students to examine. Encourage students to look at the way that action is communicated, how the dialogue bubbles work with the illustration, the different styles used by various artists, and the different ways that panels are arranged on each page.

Distribute scrap paper, pencils, colored pencils, and helpful drawing tools (such as rulers and compasses) so that students can plan their comic books. Students should create a mock-up of their comic book by folding pieces of paper in half. They should determine how many pages they will need, what the cover will look like, the shape and size of the panels on each page, the action that will take place in each panel, and where and how they will incorporate dialogue bubbles. Using colored pencils, students will experiment with and plan how they will use color and color value to best define form and convey meaning. Once the mock up is complete, students should number each page (the cover is page one).

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Distribute 11" x 14 " paper to the students along with colored inks, pens, and/or markers. Instruct students to pencil a straight line down the center of both the front and back of each piece of paper so that each piece of paper becomes four pages of their illustrated story, with each page measuring 7" x 11".

Tell students to lightly number the pages of their mock-ups. They will then create a series of fully colored panels from their planned compositions. They will begin by blocking out their panels and drawing their compositions on the paper, then experimenting with color value and using it to help define space in their compositions. Once drawing and coloring are complete, students should carefully fold their papers and assemble their comics, using staples to bind the pages.

In lieu of drawing and painting on paper, students may build their graphic stories using computer software like Adobe Photoshop or Adobe Illustrator. Students can experiment with layers to create an illusion of space. They can use a variety of effects to create different textures and to define the forms of their landscapes. They can adjust CMYK to experiment with color and color values.

CRITIQUE:

Exchange the comic books in small groups. Ask each student to present the work of another student in his or her group to the class. The student should discuss the content of the work and articulate the message they believe is conveyed. The student should also describe the style of the work and how that style was achieved.

LESSON EXTENSION #1:

ANALYTICAL ESSAY

Ask students to brainstorm works of film or literature that are set in a fantasy or science-fiction universe. Identify ways in which filmmakers/authors describe places that are distant from our visual experience. How are these characterizations different from descriptions of realistic settings? How is setting important in these works?

Tell students to watch or read and analyze a science fiction or fantasy film, short story, graphic novel, or novel that addresses environmental themes. (*Wall-E* or any of the films by Hayao Miyazaki, particularly *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and *Howl's Moving Castle*, are good choices, as are the novels *Dune* by Frank Herbert and *Earth* by David Brin.) Students should write a response to the selected work that focuses on the setting and the ecological themes that are developed.



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The response should discuss the use of imagery and stylistic devices to create a sense of place, the importance of setting to the work as a whole, and the success of the description. What message does the fictional/fantasy story convey about the environment?

LESSON EXTENSION #2:

PRODUCE AND PERFORM A PLAY

Divide students into small groups in which they will work together to produce and perform short plays based on their stories. Each group should select a story by one of the members of the group. They should determine who will play each character, and design costumes for the characters. Tell students to make adjustments to dialogue as needed and to plan how they will stage the action of the story. Students should practice their performances a number of times before they perform for the class.

Tell students they will also work with their groups to paint backdrops showing the biomes/ecosystems explored in their plays. They will begin by planning the composition on a piece of paper. Students will then pencil their designs onto the backdrops (you can create backdrops using canvas, a canvas drop cloth, an old sheet stretched over wooden frames and primed, or paper tacked to the wall). Distribute acrylic paints to the groups. Students can use a variety of tools and techniques as they paint their compositions, including using tape on the canvas to block shapes and create hard edges, making stencils, and applying paint with different tools in order to create varying surface textures.

Perform each play for the class or for a larger group of students.



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ASSESSMENT:

- Did students compare and contrast color, style, and composition in works of art?
- Did students analyze how the media used by an artist contribute to the message of a work of art?
- Did students discuss how natural forms are anthropomorphized to evoke an emotion and/or convey an idea about the environment?
- Did students research the characteristics of a biome and the potential environmental threats to that biome?
- Did students compose a narrative that anthropomorphizes features of a biome in order to convey a message about the environment?
- Did students use drawing and coloring techniques and/or computer graphic illustration to create a comic/graphic story that anthropomorphizes features of a biome in order to convey a message about the environment?
- Did students use color, composition, and style expressively in a work of art?

RESOURCES:

Pearl C. Hsiung:

<http://www.pearlchsiung.com>

Terms and Definitions:

Tate Collection Glossary

<http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/>

Biomes:

<http://www.worldbiomes.com>

<http://www.fi.edu/tfi/units/life/habitat/habitat.html>

Comics:

Comic Art and Graffix Gallery

<http://www.comic-art.com/history.htm>

Comic Books Internet Resources

<http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/asl/guides/comics.html>

The Collins Compendium of Free Online Comic Books

<http://www.lorencollins.net/freecomix/>

Landscape Painting in America:

National Gallery of Art

<http://www.nga.gov/education/american/landscape.shtm>

Adobe Techniques:

Adobe Photoshop

<http://www.photoshopsupport.com/>

Adobe Illustrator Tutorials

<http://www.ndesign-studio.com/resources/tutorials/>

Reading Resource Lists:

California Department of Education: Recommended Literature (K-12)

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/r/l/>

Themes/Genres in Science Fiction:

<http://phobos.ramapo.edu/~kfowler/sfthemes.html>

Using Science Fiction to Understand Biological Concepts:

http://www.woodrow.org/teachers/bi/1994/science_fiction.html

Science Fiction about Ecology and Biology:

<http://www.magicdragon.com/UltimateSF/eco.html>

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VOCABULARY:

Abiotic:

non-living factor in an ecosystem

Anthropomorphic:

the attribution of human qualities to something that is not human

Biome:

an area classified according to the predominant vegetation and defined by geography and climate that is made up of similar ecosystems, or communities of plants, animals, and soil organisms

Biotic:

living factor in an ecosystem

Color value:

the relative lightness or darkness of color

Composition:

the arrangement of elements within an image

Ecosystem:

a dynamic community of organisms and their physical environment interacting as a functional unit
grotesque: characterized by distortion, absurdity, and/or a bizarre combination of natural forms and deformed or monstrous figures

Hard-edge painting:

a term coined by critic Jules Langster in 1959 to categorize work by abstract painters (mostly on the West Coast) whose work is characterized by sharply delineated areas of color
landscape: a genre of art that represents natural scenery

Oculus:

an eye, or a circular opening at the center of a dome

Pop art:

a term used for art of the 1950s and '60s that was inspired by popular and consumer culture

Scale:

the apparent size of an object in relation to another object, to a person, or to its environment

Surrealism:

a movement in art and literature that began in the 1920s that sought to reveal the unconscious through dreams or free association; surrealism is often characterized by imagery that is fantastic and that displays unusual juxtapositions

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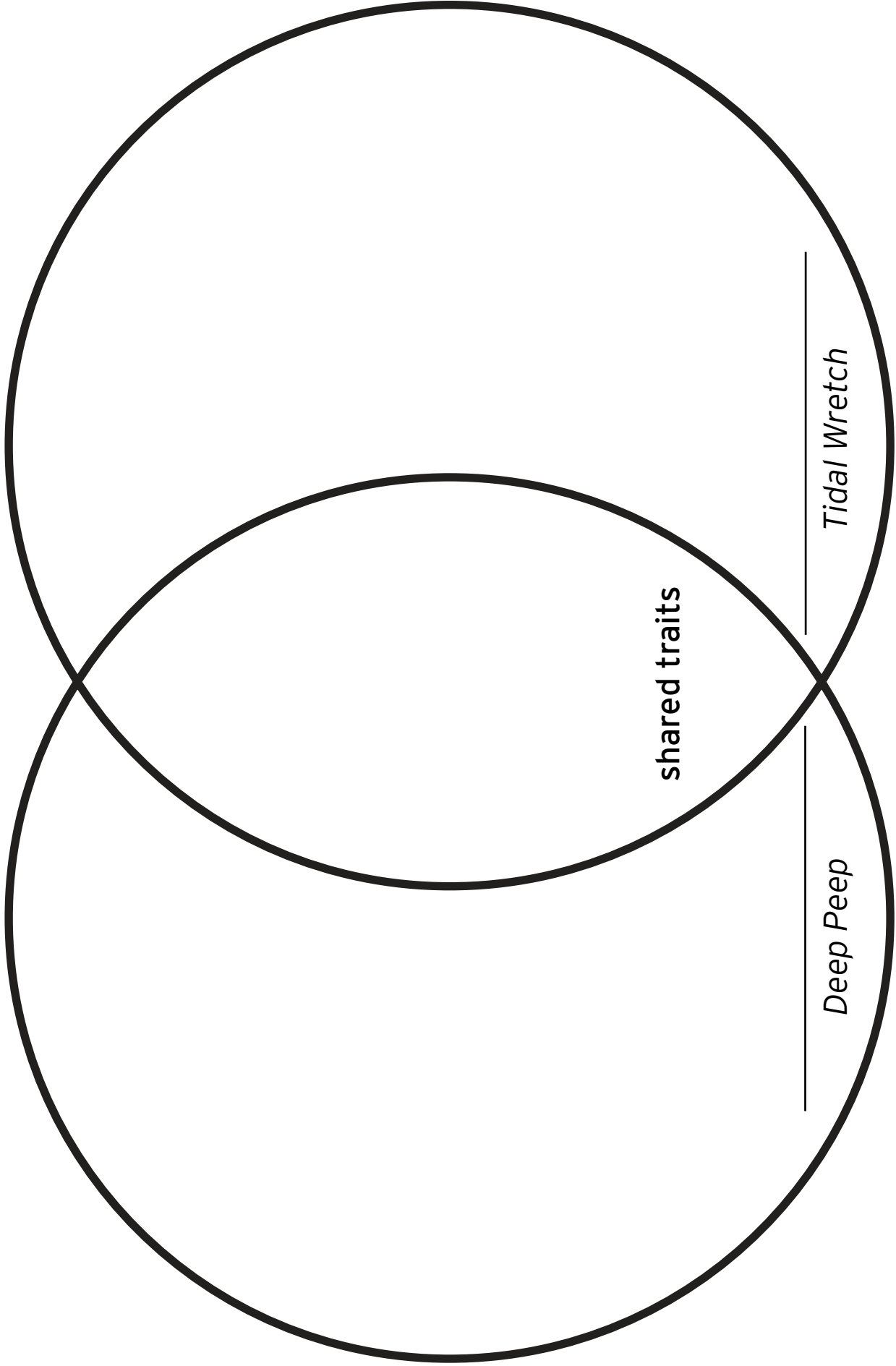
WHO IS PEARL C. HSIUNG?:

Pearl C. Hsiung was born in Taichung, Taiwan, in 1973. When she was still a toddler, she moved with her parents to Los Angeles. Hsiung grew up in Southern California, but she also spent many summers in Taiwan. She was exposed to and influenced by the popular culture, advertising, and street art of both places. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1997. After graduating from UCLA, Hsiung designed youth-oriented clothing. She eventually decided to continue her education at London's Goldsmiths College, where she received a Master of Arts in 2004. The artist currently lives and works in Los Angeles.

Hsiung's artistic influences include a diverse mix of popular media like science fiction, comic books, and billboards, as well as the 20th-century artistic movements, surrealism and pop art. An emerging artist, Hsiung has experimented with installation, sculpture, and video, but painting is the medium to which she most often turns. Although Hsiung's various works do not form a cohesive piece, they share common themes and symbols. Her recent large-scale paintings in glossy, richly colored enamels are fantasy landscapes in which geological and material objects are juxtaposed in unexpected ways and are often given human characteristics. Fissures, eruptions, cosmic symbols, and elements of commercial culture are featured in scenes of disruption, transformation, and destruction that are both tempered and intensified by humor.

Hsiung's work has been featured in solo exhibitions at galleries in Los Angeles, London, and China, and in group exhibitions at numerous venues in the United States and abroad.

Venn diagram worksheet





Pearl C. Hsiung
Deep Peep/Oculus Infinitus, 2006



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Tidal Wretch, 2005