

Zombies: Insatiable Consumers and Their Drive to Consume

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Introduction

Popular culture is a constantly changing force with new trends emerging and remerging as fast as society can consume them. One site of investigation of a recent popular cultural trend is society's fascination with zombies. They have been seen before in Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and Michael Jackson's famous zombie music video *Thriller*. However, I would argue that zombies have shambled and grunted their way into cultural dominance unlike in the past. Zombies proliferate culture throughout the year, not just during Halloween. For example, AMC's *Walking Dead* series along with the novels of Max Brooks' *World War Z* and *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead* have brought attention to the zombie as a source of entertainment and ultimately something to be consumed. This current fascination with zombies is precisely why I feel it would be an ideal theme for an art education classroom. Zombies can be used as a lens through which the art classroom can look deeper into consumerism and the students own drive to consume.

To begin this unit, students will analyze, discuss, and research consumerism. After this lesson, the class will discuss and analyze popular culture and zombies. The students will be evaluated using class participation, essay, journals, short film, group performance piece, and role in the haunted house. Students will apply their knowledge by creating a short film of their zombie performance piece and design & operate a haunted house commenting on consumerism. These projects will teach the students valuable skills for their possible future careers in: costume, makeup, and set design, marketing, public relations, organization, teamwork, and time management.

Conceptually, this unit will have two key notions dealing with consumerism and zombies. First, consumerism encourages people to purchase goods and services to the excess. We can feel the drive to consume and need to analyze our behavior in order to be smart consumers. Second, zombies can be interpreted as fictional representations of insatiable consumers. They symbolically represent excessive consumption beyond need and reason and could be considered to be a cultural trend designed to fuel the desire to consume. Hopefully, these concepts will

engage students to think deeper about their own consumption and “*become more conscious citizens who are better prepared to deal with socioenvironmental issues and crises*” (Grauerholz & Bubriski-McKenzie, 2012, p.334).

Consumerism

Consumerism is an ideal introduction to the unit because it brings a deeper meaning to zombies instead of merely the fictional characters “*who besides eating brains*” “*lurch, shamble, and drag barely hinged limbs down the street*” (Peake, 2010, p.65). This unit is “*designed to heighten students' awareness of overconsumption in the United States and allow them to see how their own consumption habits are linked to larger social factors*” (Grauerholz & Bubriski-McKenzie, 2012, p.333). Consumption as a unit “*offers instructors an excellent pedagogical means by which students can acquire a sociological imagination, reinforces key sociological principles, and links to broader goals within the discipline*” (Grauerholz & Bubriski-McKenzie, 2012, p.333). By using zombies and consumerism this may “*enhance cognitive understanding of consumption*” for the students because it is through the lens of zombies, making the connection from school to their outside interests.

The art classroom is a site where change can and does occur. In order to reinforce the need to teach consumerism there are statistics to support this claim:

“*The United States accounts for less than 5 percent of the world's population but one-third of all consumption. The average person living in the United States uses 300 shopping bags worth of raw materials every week. It would take the resources of three planets for everyone on Earth to live as people do in the United States. The typical American buys 53 times as many products as someone from China; one American's consumption of resources is equal to that of 35 citizens in India; and the average American will inflict 13 times more environmental damage than the average Brazilian*” (Grauerholz & Bubriski-McKenzie, 2012, p.334).

These statistics show that “*hyperconsumerism is entrenched in the American lifestyle and capitalist culture and as such, everyone has experience with consumption and, most likely, overconsumption*” (Grauerholz & Bubriski-McKenzie, 2012, p.334). Our students in the art classroom “*like other Americans, often survive on a steady diet of consumer products—fast food, clothing, snacks, books, music, alcohol, energy to fuel Internet bandwidth and cellphones, and so on*” (Grauerholz & Bubriski-McKenzie, 2012, p.334). It is for this reason that “*teaching about consumption offers an excellent opportunity*” to enhance students understanding of consumption (Grauerholz & Bubriski-McKenzie, 2012, p.334).

Zombies: What is a zombie? How is a zombie made?



Still from The Walking Dead (2011)

Usually, the first question one would think to ask is what is a zombie? Larsen (2010) defines zombies as:

“*Undead and abject, the zombie is uncontrollable ambiguity. Slouching across the earth, restlessly but with hallucinatory slowness, it is a thing with a soul, a body that is rotten but reactive, oblivious to itself yet driven by unforgiving instinct.*” “*The zombie is pure need*

without morality, hence it promises a measure of objectivity; we know exactly what it wants—brains, flesh—because this is what it always wants.” (np).

This definition is representational and as an educator we would want to move beyond this into an analytical one in order for our students to think conceptually. Wallin (2012) instead asks, “*What is a zombie life? If we were to accept the general psychoanalytic exegesis that the zombie is fundamentally a representation of human social-psychology, the answer is relatively straightforward: We are zombies.*” Bringing meaning to zombies is the first step but the purpose of this unit is to connect zombies to consumers. Scholars have hypothesized zombies as representations of pure need, mindless persistence, desire for eternal life and even government, slaves, war and violence. For this unit, I will be focusing on the zombie as the insatiable consumer driven with the desire to consume to the excess.

Zombies as consumers

Linking zombies to consumers is not a novel one but it is one that I believe will benefit students the most since it applies to their own lives. Wallin (2012) states that, “*since zombies are unthinking, insatiable consumers, it is of course no great leap to insist upon their representational correspondence to those lumbering and brain dead mall-walkers invariably populating the modern shopping complex*” (np). Wallis (2012) expounded upon this by saying Romero originated the idea in his 1978 film *Dawn of the Dead* where he:

*“fulminated an ostensible parallel between mall-walking zombies and the ravenous schizo-impulses of the politically bereft contemporary consumer. The Simon Pegg and Edgar Wright penned *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) recapitulates this parallel by palpating the banal routines of human life to which zombies seem perfectly adapted, if not indistinguishable”* (np).

The zombies in Romero’s influential *Dawn of the Dead* can represent “*the bankrupt state of modern consumption in which the zombie functions to satirize the consumer as a co-opted, parasited, and insatiable ‘thing’ driven by a monological and joyless will to consume. In*

short, we become zombies because we are zombies" (Wallin, 2012). The goal of this unit is for students to realize they have the power to analyze and become smart consumers and not to be zombies.



Images from Pinterest

Zombies in Popular Culture

Popular culture in its very essence is what interests society at the moment and companies respond to the ever-changing desires of the masses by making their needs and wants. Sometimes society can dictate our newest trends but oftentimes it is a beast unto its own and is hard to predict. Larsen (2010) helps explain the presence of zombies in popular culture:

"The zombie is a twentieth-century monster and hence related to mass phenomena: mass production, mass consumption, mass death. It is not an aristocrat like Dracula or a star freak like Frankenstein; it is the everyman monster in which business as usual coexists with extremes of hysteria (much like democracy at present, in fact)" (np).

Perhaps this is why zombies are so popular, they are the everyman monster and we recognize the lack of control they have and fear it happening to us.

There is no denying the presence of zombies now because they are ubiquitous in popular culture “*from popular literature and comic books to video games and performance art, in smartphone applications and in homemade films, zombies are all around us*” (Lauro & Christie, 20, p.1). The zombie is not a novel idea since it has been a part of horror films for sometime. However, one could argue they are more popular now than ever before and “*it has even seemed to have crashed the boundaries of narrative and stepped into real life*” with newspapers running stories of “*large-scale games of zombie tag, of zombie proms, of zombie warnings posted on road signs,*” “*this transgression from screen to the street is but one of the many types of ‘zombie evolution’*” (Lauro & Christie, 20, p.1). Due to this transgression and evolution, we can harness its power in the art classroom for good by teaching our students the tools they need to be active citizens and consumers.

So far, I have mentioned several examples of zombies in culture. There are countless others but I would like to share some more that can be applied in this unit. For visual exemplars: *the Walking Dead* graphic novel artists Tony Moore, Charlie Adlard, and Cliff Rathburn and the zombie portrait artist Rob Sacchetto. Other literature: the Center for Disease Control’s *Preparedness 101: Zombie Pandemic* and *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith. There are lots of zombie films but I would recommend staying current so your students can recognize the work. The only exception I would make is Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) since it is the original inspiration for the shopping mall setting. Film suggestions include: *28 Days Later* (2002) *Dawn of the Dead* (1978 and 2004), *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), *Warm Bodies* (2013), and *Zombieland* (2009). For TV shows: *The Walking Dead* show and webisodes and National Geographic channel’s *Doomsday Preppers* for a realistic depiction of how people prepare for a possible apocalypse.



Film Still from Dawn of the Dead (1978)



Film Still from Shaun of the Dead (2004)

Zombies in Performance Art

Recently, part of the zombie phenomena has been performance based. Watson (2012) used performance art in his classroom in the hope they would discover the energy and faith from the “*contemporary practice of interventionist artists who seek to creatively transform spaces and disrupt the ritual of the everyday.*” Watson (2012) puts “*emphasis on participation, transformation, and radical action*” that is central to the work of these artists “*who use interventionist tactics (such as culture jamming) to eliminate the passivity of the spectator*” (pp.33-34). By

using these same elements it will hopefully inspire the students to create a zombie performance piece commenting on consumerism. They will be encouraged to choose a familiar space of the everyday in order to transform it into something new and hopefully engage the spectators into awareness. Wallin (2012) uses the example of “*Jillian McDonald’s Situationist inflected Zombies in Condoland, a performance-protest in which community participants are performativity machined into zombie-swarms for the conceptual-material occupation of city space*” (np). Peake (2010) says the zombie walks in Toronto “represents new meanings for a continuing cultural insecurity about who we are, who the enemy is, and whether s/he is us” (p.66). Students will film their performance pieces to learn media arts skills and “question the existing realities and create something new” through their short film (Pantz, 2000, p.5). The creation and execution of the haunted house will be a culminating project because it will be a great application of all the skills learned throughout the unit. Consumerism will be subtly commented through the student’s choices of set and costume design as well as the advertising and marketing for the house. For this unit, I want the zombie performance piece to “serve an essential social function: to act as a means for working through” consumerism and what it means to them (Peake, 2010, p.66).



Image of Jonesboro Zombie Walk



Image of Buy Nothing Day zombies in Portland

Conclusion

At first, it is easy to underestimate the zombie as merely a fictional character. By looking beyond this we can use zombies to represent the insatiable consumer because in a sense *we are zombies*. The goal of this unit is to use “*the zombie as a conductor for material practices of social critique*” and to plant “*the seed of conservation before students have the means to become major consumers can nurture greater understanding of the consequences of such future actions and the necessity of change at both individual and social levels*” (Wallin, 2012, np; Grauerholz & Bubriski-McKenzie, 2012, p.347). There is an “*urgency of remaking art education*” “*to acknowledge the importance of new media, and to devise curricula in partnership*” with students (Duncum, 1997, pp.3-4). Art educators need to use subject material they are interested in so we can engage them in topics they would otherwise become zombies during and not actively participate. As Pantzar (2000) said picture this unit as “consumption as play, consumption as work, and consumption as art” (p.6).

References

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Larsen, L. B. (2010). Zombies of immaterial labor: The modern monster and the death of death. Retrieved from <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/zombies-of-immaterial-labor-the-modern-monster-and-the-death-of-death/> on April 17, 2010.

Pantzar, M. (2000). Consumption as Work, Play, and Art: Representation of the Consumer in Future Scenarios. *Design Issues*, 16(3), 3-18.

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Watson, J. (2012). We Turned Your World Upside Down: Contemporary Art Practice in the High School Classroom and Spaces Beyond. *Art Education*, 65(1), 33-39.

Wallin, J. (2012). Living...Again: The Revolutionary Cine-Sign of Zombie-Life.

Wallin, J. (2012). Putrid Deadagogies: Zombie Life and the Rise of the Chaosmopolis

Curriculum Unit Theme: Zombies

Teacher: Sara C. McGregor

Grade Level: 9-12

State Visual Art Goals: VAH1-1.1, VAH1-1.2, VAH1-1.3, VAH1-1.4, VAH1-1.5, VAH1-3.3, VAH1-4.4, VAH1-5.1, VAH1-5.2, VAH1-5.4, VAH1-6.2, VAH1-6.3
(Same standards apply for Levels 1-4)

State Media Arts Goals (if any): MAHS1-1.1, MAHS1-1.2, MAHS1-1.3, MAHS1-1.4, MAHS1-1.5, MAHS1-2.1, MAHS1-2.4, MAHS1-3.1, MAHS1-3.2, MAHS1-3.3, MAHS1-3.4, MAHS1-3.6, MAHS1-3.7, MAHS1-4.1, MAHS1-4.2, MAHS1-4.3, MAHS1-6.1, MAHS1-6.2
(Same standards apply for Levels 1-4)

State Language Arts Goals (if any): E1-1.6, E1-1.8, E1-4.1, E1-4.2, E1-4.3, E1-4.4, E1-5.3, E1-5.4, E1-5.5, E1-6.1, E1-6.2, E1-6.3, E1-6.4, E1-6.5, E1-6.6, E1-6.7, E1-6.8
(Same standards apply for Levels 1-4)

General goals for the curriculum (describe in 2-5 sentences):

In teaching this unit, I would like for my students to analyze and interpret that consumerism encourages people to purchase goods and services to the excess and that we can feel the drive to consume and need to analyze our behavior in order to be smart consumers. Zombies can be interpreted as fictional representations of insatiable consumers, they symbolically represent excessive consumption beyond need and reason and could be considered to be a cultural trend designed to fuel the desire to consume. Students will take an in-depth look at consumerism and their own drive to consume through class discussion, research, and an essay and use the subject of zombies to create a performance piece, short film, and haunted house commenting on consumerism.

Lesson Title (name each lesson to reflect a general unit theme)	Visual Exemplars (list specific images and artists, TV shows, and/or books that you plan to use for each lesson)	Motivation / Dialogue (list basic issues and questions to be explored during classroom dialogue and any other motivational strategies that you plan to use for each lesson)	Media / Process (list artistic processes that your students will engage in during each lesson)	Concepts and/or Design Principles to be learned during each lesson	Closure/Assessment (list an assessment strategy used for each lesson)

<p>Lesson 1 Consumerism (3 class periods)</p>	<p>A. Watch consumerism by robynretro and Consumerism! The Musical from youtube</p> <p>B. PowerPoint presentation of consumption</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Fast Food: McDonalds -Supermarkets -Shopping Mall: Mall of America -Media: Viral ads, commercials -Credit cards: Show image of options, statistics of average credit card user -Cultural trends: Vampires i.e. Twilight, Boy bands i.e. One Direction, Zombies i.e. Walking Dead <p>C. Consumerism in Art</p> <p>-Ad busters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Planetary Endgame ○ Buy Nothing Day Campaign and its Zombie Walk ○ Watch "North American Piggy" anti-advertisement <p>-Chris Jordan photographs</p> <p>-Andreas Gursky photographs</p> <p>-Bandalism project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Watch '<i>taking the piss with a point</i>' video ○ Look through gallery of images 	<p>A. Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Consumerism -Excessive consumption -Cultural trends -Drive to consume <p>B. Discussion Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Who/What/ Where/Why do we consume? 2. What drives you to consume? 3. Name cultural fads or trends you know. 4. What cultural trend(s) do you like? Not like? 5. Name a time when you consumed but did not need to. 6. If you could make a statement about consumerism, what would it be? 	<p>Students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Discuss consumption, the drive to consume, and how it connects to their own lives. -Write reflections and sketch after class discussions in their sketch books. -Research individually a chosen site of investigation of consumerism to gain a deeper knowledge of their drive to consume. -Create an anti-advertisement commenting on their choice of consumerism. -Discuss & analyze examples of advertisements and anti-advertisements. -Research and write an essay on a site of investigation in consumerism. 	<p>Students will analyze & discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Consumerism encourages people to purchase goods and services to the excess. -We can feel the drive to consume and need to analyze our behavior in order to be smart consumers. <p>Vocabulary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consumerism ○ Cultural trend ○ Drive to consume 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Was the student actively participating in class discussions? 2. Did the student sketch and write in their journals about consumerism, advertisements and anti-advertisements? 3. Did the student make any connections from consumerism to their lives? 4. Was their consumerism essay effectively written and demonstrated their understanding of consumerism and their site of investigation? 5. Did they create an anti-advertisement that effectively and appropriately commented on consumerism?
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<p>Lesson 2 Zombies in Culture (1 class period)</p>	<p>A. Image of “The Social Media Zombie Apocalypse” B. Image of “I fear...” social media commentary C. Image of “People who don’t use their heads...” D. Image of Apple zombie E. Film stills of Dawn of the Dead (2004) F. Film stills of Walking Dead show G. Images of Zombie products H. Artists - Rob Sacchetto - Cliff Richards - Tony Moore, Charlie Adlard, and Cliff Rathburn, I. Literature (pass around) - Pride and Prejudice and Zombies by Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith - CDC Preparedness 101: Zombie Pandemic - The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead by Max Brooks, - The Walking Dead graphic novels</p>	<p>A. Issues -Consumerism -Excessive consumption -Cultural trends and appeal -Drive to consume -Zombies as consumers B. Discussion Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is a zombie? How is a zombie made? 2. Name popular culture examples of zombies. 3. What would a zombie consumer do? Where would they go? Why would they consume? 4. If you could be a zombie consumer where would you go and what would you consume? Why? 5. Why are zombies so popular? What is their appeal? 	<p>Students will:</p> <p>-Discuss consumption, the drive to consume, and how it connects to their own lives.</p> <p>-Discuss and analyze zombies as a cultural trend and their role as consumers.</p>	<p>Students will analyze & discuss:</p> <p>-Consumerism encourages people to purchase goods and services to the excess.</p> <p>-We can feel the drive to consume and need to analyze our behavior in order to be smart consumers.</p> <p>-Zombies can be interpreted as fictional representations of insatiable consumers.</p> <p>-Zombies symbolically represent excessive consumption beyond need and reason and could be considered to be a cultural trend designed to fuel the desire to consume.</p> <p>Vocabulary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consumerism ○ Cultural trend ○ Drive to consume ○ Zombie 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Was the student actively participating in class discussions? 2. Did the student sketch and write in their journals about consumerism and zombies? 3. Did the student make any connections from consumerism to their lives?
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<p>Lesson 3</p> <p>Performance Piece</p> <p>(1 class period & 1 after school for the performance. Must be performed after 1st short film lesson)</p>	<p>A. Watch Performance vs. Acting: Marina Abramović, Klaus Biesenbach and James Franco at MoMA on youtube</p> <p>B. Watch Jack Watson's student 'Action' videos</p>	<p>A. Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Performance art vs. acting -Consumerism -Zombies as consumers <p>B. Discussion Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is performance art? 2. What does it do? 3. Is it art? If so, why? If not, why? 4. What is acting? 5. If you could create a performance piece what would it be and why? 	<p>Students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Discuss and analyze performance art. -Discuss and analyze zombies and their role as consumers. 	<p>Students will analyze & discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Consumerism encourages people to purchase goods and services to the excess. -We can feel the drive to consume and need to analyze our behavior in order to be smart consumers. -Zombies can be interpreted as fictional representations of insatiable consumers. -Zombies symbolically represent excessive consumption beyond need and reason and could be considered to be a cultural trend designed to fuel the desire to consume. -Performance art is a medium that involves four basic elements: time, space, the performer's body, or presence in a medium, and a relationship between performer and audience. <p>Vocabulary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consumerism ○ Cultural trend ○ Drive to consume ○ Performance art ○ Zombie 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Was the student actively participating in class discussions? 2. Did the student sketch and write in their journals about zombies and performance art? 3. Was the student an active participant in their group? 4. Did the student put forth their best effort in the piece? 5. Was the performance piece organized and executed effectively and in an appropriate manner?
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<p>Lesson 4 Short film (3 class periods)</p>	<p>A. Watch webisode of the Walking Dead B. Watch clips from: -Dawn of the Dead (1978) and (2004) -Shaun of the Dead (2004)</p>	<p>A. Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -How to make a short film -Consumerism -Zombies as consumers <p>B. Discussion Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is a short film? 2. What are good examples of zombie films? Why was it good? 3. How can a performance piece be turned into a short film? 	<p>Students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Discuss and analyze short films. -Discuss and analyze zombies and their role as consumers. -Write reflections and sketch after class discussions in their sketchbooks. -Plan, organize, and execute their original zombie performance piece and short film collaboratively as a group. -Apply their knowledge by creating and editing a short film of their zombie performance piece commenting on consumerism collaboratively in groups. 	<p>Students will analyze & discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Consumerism encourages people to purchase goods and services to the excess. -We can feel the drive to consume and need to analyze our behavior in order to be smart consumers. -Zombies can be interpreted as fictional representations of insatiable consumers. -Zombies symbolically represent excessive consumption beyond need and reason and could be considered to be a cultural trend designed to fuel the desire to consume. <p>Vocabulary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consumerism ○ Cultural trend ○ Drive to consume ○ Short film ○ Zombie 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Was the student actively participating in class discussions? 2. Did the student sketch and write in their journals about zombies, performance art, and the short film? 3. Was the student an active participant in their group? 4. Did the student put forth their best effort in the short film process? 5. Was the short film organized and executed effectively and in an appropriate manner?
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<p>Lesson 5 Haunted House (4 class periods and after school hours)</p>	<p>A. Watch youtube videos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Episode 1.06 Face Off- "The Dancing Dead" Preview -Syfy's Face Off Transformations (Season 1, Episode 6 - The Dancing Dead) <p>B. Images of Universal Studios Walking Dead maze</p> <p>C. Images of costumes, set, and zombies from Zombieland (2009), Dawn of the Dead (1978 and 2004), Shaun of the Dead (2004), and Warm Bodies (2013)</p>	<p>A. Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -How to create a haunted house -Roles in haunted house creation and execution -Consumerism as an underlying theme/message <p>B. Discussion Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -What makes a good haunted house? Why? -What do you think are the jobs required to create and execute a haunted house? Could any of these be a future career? -How does consumerism fit into a haunted house? -What supplies do we need to make a haunted house? Can we get any of these donated? -Where will the haunted house be located? 	<p>Students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Discuss and analyze haunted houses and how it can comment on consumerism. -Write reflections and sketch after class discussions in their sketchbooks. -Plan, organize, and execute the haunted house collaboratively as a group. -Apply their knowledge by creating and editing a short film of their zombie performance piece commenting on consumerism collaboratively in groups. 	<p>Students will analyze & discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Consumerism encourages people to purchase goods and services to the excess. -We can feel the drive to consume and need to analyze our behavior in order to be smart consumers. -Zombies can be interpreted as fictional representations of insatiable consumers. -Zombies symbolically represent excessive consumption beyond need and reason and could be considered to be a cultural trend designed to fuel the desire to consume. <p>Vocabulary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consumerism ○ Cultural trend ○ Drive to consume ○ Zombie 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Was the student actively participating in class discussions? 2. Did the student sketch and write in their journals about zombies and the haunted house? 3. Was the student an active participant in their group? 4. Did the student put forth their best effort in the haunted house process? 5. Was the haunted house organized and executed effectively and in an appropriate manner?
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Lesson #2

Title: Zombies in Culture

Grade: 9-12

Teacher: Sara C. McGregor

Length: 1 class

State visual art goals: VAH1-2.1, VAH1-2.3, VAH1-3.1, VAH1-3.2, VAH1-4.4, VAH1-5.1, VAH1-5.2, VAH1-6.1, VAH1-6.3

State media arts goals (if any): MAHS1-3.4, MAHS1-3.5, MAHS1-3.6, MAHS1-3.7, MAHS1-4.1, MAHS1-4.2, MAHS1-6.1

State language arts goals (if any): E1-1.1, E1-1.5, E1-1.6, E1-1.7, E1-1.8, E1-5.2

Objectives:

- Discuss consumption, the drive to consume, and how it connects to their own lives.
- Discuss and analyze zombies as a cultural trend and their role as consumers.
- Write reflections and sketch after class discussions in their sketchbooks.

Concepts and vocabulary:

-Consumerism encourages people to purchase goods and services to the excess. We can feel the drive to consume and need to analyze our behavior in order to be smart consumers.

-Zombies can be interpreted as fictional representations of insatiable consumers. They symbolically represent excessive consumption beyond need and reason and could be considered to be a cultural trend designed to fuel the desire to consumer.

Terms:

- Consumerism- See concept above
- Cultural trend- also known as the “bandwagon effect” and is a form of groupthink in behavioral science with many applications. The general rule is that conduct or beliefs spread among people, as fads and trends, with the probability of any individual adopting it increasing with the proportion who have already done so
- Drive to consume- the urge to consume beyond need and reason, usually to the excess
- Zombie- See concept above

Teacher materials:

- Image of a shopper and a zombie
- Image of “The Social Media Zombie Apocalypse”
- Image of “I fear...” social media commentary
- Image of “People who don’t use their heads...”
- Image of Apple zombie
- Film stills of Dawn of the Dead (1978) (2004)
- Film stills of Walking Dead show
- Images of Zombie products
- Artists Examples
 - Rob Sacchetto
 - Cliff Richards
 - Tony Moore, Charlie Adlard, and Cliff Rathburn
- Literature (optional)
 - Pride and Prejudice and Zombies by Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith
 - CDC Preparedness 101: Zombie Pandemic
 - The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead by Max Brooks
 - The Walking Dead graphic novels

Student materials:

- Sketchbooks
- Pencil or pens

Procedures (detailed step-by-step description including dialogue):

Introduction (5 minutes)

- When students enter the room, they will be greeted with an image of a shopper and a zombie.
- “Why do you think I put these two images together?” “What did we discuss last lesson?”
- Students will learn that a zombie can be a representation of the insatiable consumer.

Discussion (20 minutes)

- What is a zombie?
- How is a zombie made?
- Name popular culture examples of zombies.
- What would a zombie consumer do?
- Where would they go?
- Why would they consume?

- If you could be a zombie consumer where would you go and what would you consume? Why?
- Why are zombies so popular?
- What is their appeal?
- What is a cultural trend? Are zombies a trend?

Activity (20 minutes)

- Students will view, analyze, and discuss two charts called “The Social Media Apocalypse” and “I fear...” social media commentary chart.
- Students will be shown several images of zombies as consumers. The class will talk about the works and their interpretations.
- Students will view film stills of the Dawn of the Dead (1978) (2004) and the Walking Dead (2011). They will analyze and discuss the images.
- Students will view zombie products. They will discuss, analyze, and interpret their meaning and place in society. Point out the cultural trend of zombies if it is not made.
- Students will view artist examples of zombies including: Rob Sacchetto, Cliff Richards Tony Moore, Charlie Adlard, and Cliff Rathburn. Students will discuss, analyze, and interpret their meaning.
- Students will pass around literature examples of zombies. Suggested examples: Pride and Prejudice and Zombies by Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith, CDC Preparedness 101: Zombie Pandemic, The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead by Max Brooks, and The Walking Dead graphic novels
- Students will write down at least two inspirations they got from the lesson in their journals.

Assessment/Closure:

(5 minutes)

Assessments (during lesson):

- Students will be assessed via a tally checklist of who contributed to the discussion, use of art vocabulary, and if they made a connection their lives.
- Students will be assessed through their sketchbook reflections, sketches, and two inspirations.

Closure:

- Students will discuss their inspirations with a neighbor.
- Students will be dismissed.

Learning center/ back up activity (if any):

- If the students need prompting ask for examples of zombies they have experienced or enjoy.
- Have youtube videos of zombie film clips for backup.

- Have additional film stills ready if students move through the others quickly.
- Ask students to zombify a partner in their sketchbooks.
- Ask students to share something they found in the literature passed around.