No Computers Needed! Foundational 2-D Graphic Design Projects

*Empire State Creates: Teaching Artist-Led Activities for Everyone*

**Project Title:** Project 3A: Formstorming a Noun

**Age(s):** 14-Adult (focus on high school students, early college students)

**Time:** 45-120 minutes

**Arts Discipline:** Graphic Design (Visual Art, Media Art)

### ACTIVITY AT A GLANCE

Students choose a noun (person, place, thing, or creature) and through formstorming exercises (visual brainstorm), they will explore history, culture, story, views, associations, idioms, sayings, puns, materiality, and change-over-time (verbing) aspects of the noun. They will take 16 ideas forward to create mini 2” x2” cards that display each individual idea within the theme of the main noun.

‘Formstorming’ as defined in ‘Graphic Design: The New Basics’ by Ellen Lupton

Students will share with a small group of people (5 or more is ideal) to get reactions, impressions, and have discussion over the choices. What is surprising, funny, visually appealing, etc. ? Which ones stand out the most? Why?

### GOALS

Learning objective Students will walk away with a solid understanding of visual brainstorming methods that open up possibilities (before jumping too quickly and safely to easy and possibly shallow solutions), resulting in deeper design solutions.

### MATERIALS

- Mechanical pencil with eraser
- Ruler
- Acrylic paints, markers, colored pencils, a printer, whatever you have on hand.
- 11” x 14” Bristol paper
- Scissors
- Access to a computer for image searches, magazines, reference books.

### NEW WORD(S)

Formstorm: A method of visual brainstorming, where a variety of diverse ideas are represented in the visual.

### NYS ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS

HS Advanced, VA: Cr1.2.HSIII, a. Choose from a range of materials and methods of traditional and contemporary artistic practices, following or breaking established conventions, to plan the making of multiple works of art and design connected by a theme, idea, or concept.
HS Advanced, VA: Cr3.1.HSIII, a. Reflect on, re engage, revise, and refine works of art or design considering relevant traditional and contemporary criteria as well as personal artistic vision.

### STEPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step #1</th>
<th>Choose a noun (person, place, or thing), try not to be too specific, keep it broad. Some suggestions include: egg, apple, cloud, boot, bird, worm, ice, leaf, snake.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step #2</td>
<td>Now measure 2” x 2” squares on your Bristol paper. Make 16 total squares, and carefully cut them out.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Step #3 | Write up a list of anything you can think of related to that noun, from history, culture, popular story, views, associations, idioms, sayings, puns, colors, textures, materiality (what it's made of), and change-over-time (verbing) aspects of the noun. Do your best to do this part without the aid of the internet. Search your own thoughts first. Have a variety of types of ideas.  
(Ex: Egg --- omelette, ovulation, babies, cracked shell, springtime, pregnant woman, ‘nerd glasses’ (egghead), bacon, humpty dumpty, chickens, meringue pie, ramen bowl with egg, Easter egg hunt, rabbit (Cadbury commercials, Easter), Nest, Sunrise, Dr. Suess (Green Eggs and Ham).) |
| Step #4 | Now search images online as reference and draw, paint, print*, glue, collage those onto the 16 squares. Even physical things can be glued to your squares. Your challenge is to visually communicate each reference as best you can without adding words; so don’t label these. Push your thinking and take risks with your ideas. |
| Step #5 | Show those 16 to a group of 5 or more people for reactions and feedback. Without explaining anything to them (even your noun!) see if they can guess. What are they finding interesting and surprising? What is making them react with emotion? Are there any cultural differences with the noun in your group? Are there some references that are universally understood? If a reference isn’t immediately obvious to anyone, what could you do to make it more recognizable to at least some? Remember, you want to create visuals that are not too boring, yet not impossible to understand. |

### ACTIVITY MODIFICATIONS

You can do less or more than 16- however, this number is meant to stretch thinking into areas that might be more experimental and outside of the obvious choices.

### TAKING IT TO DIGITAL

This entire exercise can be done with digital collage by pulling images from searches on the internet.

*It is important to note that you cannot claim these images as your own. They are only meant to communicate planning ideas; they are not for profit, and are not your intellectual property.*