

WHAT IS SCULPTURE?

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WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF SCULPTURE?

CAN A LIGHT BE A SCULPTURE? A GARDEN?

This guide was written to complement the tour theme of “**What Is Sculpture?**” at The Noguchi Museum. Both the tour and these materials are recommended for students in grades 3–12. We have left them as open as possible, in order to encourage teachers to adapt them to meet the needs of their students.

For each artwork pictured, we have included a large image for use in the classroom, information about the piece, and a suggested writing, art, or discussion activity. The information in the “About” section is intended for teacher reference, although it may certainly be shared with students during or after the activity. The quotations from Isamu Noguchi are included to offer educators connections with and insights into the artist’s thought process.

The three artworks featured in this guide are:

- *Brilliance* (1982)
- *Akari [E]* (c.1954–62)
- *California Scenario* (1980–82)

We welcome your feedback about this guide or about educational resources and programs at The Noguchi Museum. Please feel free to contact us at education@noguchi.org.



Brilliance

1982

Basalt

86 1/4 x 31 5/8 x 41 1/2 in.

Collection of The Noguchi Museum

Photo: Michio Noguchi

BRILLIANCE



“Before I set to work on a rock like this, I go often to stand in front of it and after a while, I begin to hear a voice speaking to me from the rock. I try to follow what that voice tells me, cutting the rock according to its own instructions. The next day, I may hear a different voice and then I’ll follow that one.” — Isamu Noguchi

ABOUT

Brilliance is made from a basalt stone Noguchi found in Japan. Basalt is a volcanic rock that contains iron, which gives the outside a rust color. He was attracted to this sort of stone because its interior and exterior look dramatically different. Noguchi used a number of techniques to break the stone. He selectively chose portions of the stone to drill into to encourage the stone to break naturally in weak spots. He also inserted bamboo sticks into drilled holes and then wet the bamboo to expand it, which cracked the stone. *Brilliance* was broken into three separate pieces, and then put back together. Noguchi considered his actions on the stone part of a conversation with the stone.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: GETTING TO KNOW A MATERIAL

Materials: Image of *Brilliance*; paper; pencil; a variety of rocks.

Look. What do you notice? Noguchi said, “Before I set to work on a rock like this, I go often to stand in front of it and after a while, I begin to hear a voice speaking to me from a rock. I try to follow what that voice tells me, cutting the rock according to its own instructions. The next day, I may hear a different voice.” What do you think this means? Imagine the voice in this rock. Based on the way Noguchi carved it, what might it have “told” him?

Research. Gather together a collection of rocks and pebbles. See what variety you can gather within this category.

Create. Select a rock to work with (each student should select his or her own rock). Get to know the rock first by describing it to someone else, and then by sketching it.

Reflect. What different aspects of the rock did you discover by talking and by drawing? If everyone put their rocks in a pile in the middle of a table, would you be able to pick out your rock? Try it! How might it change your art process to begin with this sort of “dialogue” with your material? Try this with clay, cardboard, or another sculpture material the class will be working with.



Akari [E]

c. 1954–62

Mulberry bark paper, bamboo, iron, steel

19 x 116 in.

Collection of The Noguchi Museum

Photo: Kevin Noble

AKARI



"Call it sculpture when it moves you so." — Isamu Noguchi

ABOUT

In 1951, the mayor of Gifu, Japan, asked Isamu Noguchi to modernize the design of the town's famous lanterns, making them more appealing to people in Europe and America. Noguchi chose to keep the traditional mulberry paper and bamboo armature, but instead of using a candle as a light source, Noguchi electrified the lamps and incorporated a lightbulb. He used wire to give the lamps a sculptural form. Noguchi called his lamps *Akari*, or "Light Sculptures," and made a case for them to be considered works of art. Akari lamps are still made in Gifu and can be purchased today.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: REDESIGN AN EVERYDAY OBJECT

Materials: Image of *Akari [E]*; paper and pencils; good paper such as watercolor paper for final designs; colored pencils or watercolors and permanent markers; paintbrushes, water and water containers; paper towels.

Discuss. As a class, create a definition of sculpture.

Look. Look at *Akari [E]*. What do you notice? How is this object the same as the lamps in your classroom or at home? How is it different? Noguchi said, "Call it sculpture when it moves you so." How does an Akari lamp fit or not fit your definition of sculpture?

Create. As a class, make a list of everyday objects. Each student should choose an object to redesign, retaining the original function of the objects. (Note: eating utensils and chairs are popular choices for this type of project.) Using pencils and paper, sketch a variety of (at least three) design ideas, and then select a design to use in making a final image. Use colored pencils or permanent marker and watercolor to depict the final design.

Reflect. What makes the object you designed art?



California Scenario
1980–82
Costa Mesa, CA
1.6 acres
Photo: Michio Noguchi

CALIFORNIA SCENARIO



"I like to think of gardens as sculpturing of space: a beginning, and a groping to another level of sculptural experience and use: a total sculpture space experience beyond individual sculptures. A man may enter such a space: it is in scale with him; it is real." — Isamu Noguchi

ABOUT

California Scenario is a sculpture garden situated between two buildings of the South Coast Plaza Town Center in Costa Mesa, California. The garden reflects the natural resources and topography of California. It contains the sculpture *The Spirit of the Lima Bean*. It also contains six elements reflecting California's resources: *Land Use*, *Water Source*, *The Desert Land*, *Water Use*, *The Forest Walk*, and *Energy Fountain*.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: TRANSFORM A NEIGHBORHOOD SPACE

Materials: Image of *California Scenario*; cardboard or chipboard base, at least 8 x 8 inches in size; pencils or pens; paper (either construction or plain white copier paper are fine); masking tape.

Look. Look at the image of *California Scenario*. Make a list of all of the things students notice about this sculpture garden. What are some of the choices Noguchi made for the garden?

Discuss. Choose an outdoor space in your community that you would like to see transformed. Describe what you enjoy about the site you have chosen. Imagine that you can now improve this space by taking away anything at all from it and then by adding anything at all to it.

Create. Use a piece of cardboard or chipboard as a base. Begin by drawing a bird's-eye map of the site on the cardboard that includes all of the things that you would like to keep (for example, trees, stairs, walls). Then take a sheet of paper. Explore transforming the paper from a two-dimensional material to a three-dimensional material by rolling, folding, cutting, etc., and share your methods. Then take a new sheet of paper, as well as tape and scissors, to create a model of your imaginary additions to the space, using your cardboard map as the base.

Reflect. Write a letter to the city suggesting your chosen space be transformed. Why is this transformation important? What would your transformed space look like?