

# Looking and Learning

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Andrea Zittel (American, born 1965)

*Repair Work (Table)*, 1991

Wood and glue

22 x 18 x 13" (56 x 46 x 33 cm)

Collection of Barbara and Howard Morse, New York



**Albright-Knox Art Gallery**

Expect the unexpected.

## LESSON PLAN: LIFE BY DESIGN

### TRANSPARENCY

Andrea Zittel (American, born 1965)  
*Repair Work (Table)*, 1991  
Wood and glue  
22 x 18 x 13" (56 x 46 x 33 cm)  
Collection of Barbara and Howard Morse, New York

### THESE THINGS I KNOW FOR SURE

Andrea Zittel (American, born 1965)  
*These things I know for sure* (as of Spring 2005)

### SUPPLIES

Chalkboard, chalk, and a location that is suitable for playing the game you have selected.

### BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Read "Further Information for Educators" before viewing the transparency. Remember there are no right answers to these questions – encourage speculation from your students! Start by asking them about what they see, and share factual information as they make their own discoveries. Discussing works of art has been shown to increase students' literacy skills, especially spoken word skills. ("Guggenheim Study Suggests Arts Education Benefits Literacy Skills," *New York Times*, 27 July 2006.)

### ANDREA ZITTEL IS HARD TO CATEGORIZE

Think of Andrea Zittel as an artist whose raw materials are ideas, rather than paints, or clay, or photographs. Zittel translates ideas into drawings, sculpture, and inventions to govern her life. Her furniture, clothing, and food are designed to fit her needs, and also serve as her artwork.

When your students visit the Gallery, they will see some of the artworks featured in this lesson. Other artworks will vary in size, materials, and presentation. It is not necessary to do all of the activities in this lesson plan, but try to introduce at least one so students will be familiar with Zittel's quirkiness.

### PART ONE: RULES AND GAMES

Zittel feels that rules provide a sense of security. She knows that having rules makes life run a little more smoothly. She also knows she has the freedom to change her own rules if she wants to or needs to. Sometimes she changes her rules just to see what will happen – will her life be better or worse?

Choose a game such as *Mother May I?*; *Red Light, Green Light*; *Duck, Duck, Goose*; or *Tag*. (If you have the space and equipment, you could choose a game such as kickball or softball – but these games have a lot of rules.)

Before you begin, ask students to decide the rules of the game. Write them down. The new rules do not have to be traditional rules. It is very important that you let students come up with the rules, because they will see what does not work as they play. You may have to intervene for safety and point out rules that will not work because they are unsafe. When you have a set of rules that students think is correct, play the game.

## GUIDELINE QUESTIONS FOR DECIDING THE RULES

### Before you start the game

- How will you decide who plays which position, or who is on each team?
- How will the game start?
- How will you (or will you) keep score?
- How will you know when the game is over?

### Rules for during the game

- What are the rules of play?
- Are there teams or individual players?
- How will teams or players take turns?
- What happens if a PA announcement comes on during the game?
- What happens if a player cheats or behaves badly?

### Rules for after the game

- Is there a winner? How will you know who wins?
- Is there a prize for the winner(s)?
- If you play again, how will the next game start?

## PLAY THE GAME!

If students have questions during the game, don't change the rules right away. Try playing with the "bad rule" for awhile. After the game, ask students if there are rules they want to change. If there are, change the rules and play again. If not, go on to the discussion.

### Discuss the game and the rules

- What part of deciding the rules and playing the game was work? Why?
- What part was play?
- Did you feel more tired working or playing?
- Why did you need the rules?
- If you changed the rules, how did that change the game? Did it make the game easier to play, or harder?
- What did you like about the game? What did you not like?
- Was there a part of the game that was annoying or boring? Can you think of a rule to fix that?
- If you changed the rules once, would you like to change the rules again? (For example, if everyone wanted to be the mother in *Mother May I?*, could you change the rules to make it easier for everyone to have a chance?) Try changing the rules and play again.
- If everything worked well, do what Zittel does and change a rule to see if it makes the game better (or worse).

**Alternative:** If space and time make this activity impossible, change the classroom rules you set in the beginning of the year, or create new rules for class behavior. Try them for a week. Should the rules be modified? Should any be added? Taken away?

## IDEAS ABOUT RULES

Zittel is constantly examining her life, including her work and her play. She has created a list called *These things I know for sure*, which is included with this lesson plan. Read #9 to your students, and ask them if they agree or disagree with her.

9. *The creation of rules is more creative than the destruction of them. Creation demands a higher level of reasoning and draws connections between cause and effect. The best rules are never stable or permanent, but evolve naturally according to context or need.*

## ACTIVITY: CREATING BELIEFS

Review *These things I know for sure* and share some or all of Zittel's beliefs with your class. Have each student create a list of things that they know for sure.

## HOMEWORK

Have your students write down some rules for having a meal at home. Ask them to try these rules with their family. Afterwards, do they want to change any of the rules?

## PART TWO: GETTING SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

### SUPPLIES

Broken items, assorted art making materials, and tape and glue (if possible).

### SHOW THE TRANSPARENCY

Explain that Zittel started as a young artist in New York City with very little money. She noticed that the streets were full of broken items that people did not want. Zittel collected these items and repaired them, returning them to usefulness. She loves the idea of getting something for nothing.

During your visit to the Gallery, students will see some of the artworks that Zittel calls "repair work." This is one of her repair works, *Repair Work (Table)*. Ask your students to discuss this work:

- What is it?
- How did she fix it?
- Why would an artist do this?

### ACTIVITY

Find a broken item at home or in school. Repair it using glue, tape, twine, or other materials. Students can fill in the missing parts with other broken items, too.

## FURTHER INFORMATION FOR EDUCATORS

**“I think that I’m generally a pretty good prototype of a ‘typical’ citizen of my own cultural background, age and gender. I’m also a total ‘product’ of the suburban southern California culture that I grew up in – critical of this ultra consumerist culture yet seduced by it.”**

Zittel is one of the most exciting artists of our time because she makes art about those questions that nag us everyday: what to wear in the morning, what to fix yet again for dinner, how to deal with all the clutter, and how to escape the tyranny of the clock.

She also tackles the bigger questions of the human condition, especially the American condition: What do we really know? How can we feel free? What really makes us feel secure? Are the unwritten “rules” that govern society providing the benefits they promise? Is there an alternative to the American model of endless consumption?

Part philosopher, part scientist, part designer, part artist, Zittel has made her own life an experiment about the best way to live. Some of her works are practical — as a young artist living in a New York City apartment without plumbing and only 200 square feet of space, Zittel designed portable living units that fulfilled her needs and took up very little space. Some are elegant — she created carpets with patterns to serve as furniture for the truly space-and-income-challenged. Some are fashionable — especially her handcrafted A-Z Personal Uniforms, and her tables with built-in bowls and plates. Some are comical — in one of her early works, she created a breeding unit with the goal of reintroducing flight to the domestic chicken.

While many of her artworks look like something you might find in a showroom at IKEA, in a science museum, or in the Smithsonian of the future, Zittel offers us a new way to view the world. She makes her argument with furniture, clothing, drawings, and models, and occasionally with words. When you view her artwork, find a friend, family member, or two sides of yourself and get ready for some conversation and debate. Part of Zittel’s mission for making art is to get people thinking and talking.

Born in 1965 in Escondido, California, Zittel attended San Diego State University in San Diego, California, and the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Rhode Island. After graduate school, she moved to New York City, where she created a studio/office called A-Z Administrative Services. Eight years later, she moved back out West to Joshua Tree, California, where she established A-Z West. Like all great American explorers, Zittel is fearless, seeking the most of what life has to offer and eager to share it with all of us.

# Looking and Learning

## These things I know for sure:

1. It is a human trait to want to organize things into categories. Inventing categories creates an illusion that there is an overriding rationale in the way that the world works.
2. Surfaces that are “easy to clean” also show dirt more. In reality a surface that camouflages dirt is much more practical than one that is easy to clean.
3. Maintenance takes time and energy that can sometimes impede other forms of progress such as learning about new things.
4. All materials ultimately deteriorate and show signs of wear. It is therefore important to create designs that will look better after years of distress.
5. A perfected filing system can sometimes decrease efficiency. For instance, when letters and bills are filed away too quickly, it is easy to forget to respond to them.
6. Many “progressive” designs actually hark back towards a lost idea of nature or a more “original form.”
7. Ambiguity in visual design ultimately leads to a greater variety of functions than designs that are functionally fixed.
8. No matter how many options there are, it is human nature to always narrow things down to two polar, yet inextricably linked choices.
9. The creation of rules is more creative than the destruction of them. Creation demands a higher level of reasoning and draws connections between cause and effect. The best rules are never stable or permanent, but evolve naturally according to context or need.
10. What makes us feel liberated is not total freedom, but rather living in a set of limitations that we have created and prescribed for ourselves.
11. Things that we think are liberating can ultimately become restrictive, and things that we initially think are controlling can sometimes give us a sense of comfort and security.
12. Ideas seem to gestate best in a void—when that void is filled, it is more difficult to access them. In our consumption-driven society, almost all voids are filled, blocking moments of greater clarity and creativity. Things that block voids are called “avoids.”
13. Sometimes if you can’t change a situation, you just have to change the way that you think about the situation.
14. People are most happy when they are moving forwards towards something not quite yet attained. (I also wonder if this extends as well to the sensation of physical motion in space. I believe that I am happier when I am in a plane or car because I am moving towards an identifiable and attainable goal.)

—Andrea Zittel (as of Spring 2005)