

# **The Artist as Entrepreneur**

## **Introductory Lesson: The Artist as Entrepreneur**

### **Lesson Description**

In this lesson, students will be introduced to the artist as entrepreneur. The artist is an atypical entrepreneur. Where entrepreneurs generally recognize an opportunity or a niche that would appeal to consumers, artists create what they like and hope that consumers will share their vision.

### **Concepts**

entrepreneur  
opportunity recognition

### **Related Subject Areas**

Communications:     creative writing  
                              critique  
                              oral presentation

### **Objectives**

Students will:

state possible scenarios where an opportunity was recognized  
provide possible reasons for the entrepreneurial success of several artists

### **Materials**

mail-order catalogs with innovative products  
[www.harrietcarter.com](http://www.harrietcarter.com)

Artist research materials such as the following:

[www.maryengelbreit.com](http://www.maryengelbreit.com)  
[www.cherishd.com](http://www.cherishd.com)  
[www.nrm.org](http://www.nrm.org)  
[www.illustration-house.com](http://www.illustration-house.com)  
[www.dollmasters.com](http://www.dollmasters.com)  
[www.horizon-gallery.com](http://www.horizon-gallery.com)

### **Lesson Procedures**

1. Ask students in what ways their career might involve their interest in art. (*Students may suggest they plan to enter into their own business producing art or plan to work in some peripheral area.*) Explain that people who enter into their own businesses are referred to as entrepreneurs.

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2. Explain that “entrepreneur” is often described as someone who sees an opportunity and invests his or her own money, time and effort trying to build a business around that opportunity. There are essentially two parts to this description. The entrepreneur first discovers the opportunity, and then the entrepreneur addresses the opportunity.
3. Distribute notions catalogs or pages from this type of catalog (i.e. Lillian Vernon, Harriett Carter) to pairs of students. Direct each pair to find an unusual product and write a scenario describing what the inventor of the product was doing just before his or her great idea – the opportunity – became apparent.

As an example, explain the following: One catalog featured a product that raised the height of a bed. The product was simply a six-inch plastic tube that was half hollow and half solid. The bed leg was inserted into the hollow end and rested on the solid section. The bed was raised three or four inches. Pose the following scenarios:

Justin is running the vacuum in his bedroom. He lowers the vacuum handle to its flattest position, but it still won't fit completely under his bed. As he tries to push his bed away from the wall so that he can vacuum under it, he scrapes his arm on the plaster and bangs his leg on the bed frame. He yells “Why can't they build bed frames higher?”

Nicole just returned from a ski trip. Actually, she came home three days early because she sprained her knee. She can manage to get into bed at night, but has found that it's really hard to get out of bed in the morning. As she slowly lifts her leg over the side of the bed, she mutters, “I wish this bed were three inches higher.”

Loren loves his early 20<sup>th</sup>-century apartment. It has high ceilings, large windows, and four large rooms. He uses one of the rooms for a studio. The only problem he has is that old apartments have very little closet space. He has enough room in one large closet to store his art supplies and about half of his clothes. He bought boxes to store the rest of his clothes under his bed, but the boxes were two inches too tall. Two days later, as he jammed his toe into one of the bricks he had placed under the bed legs, he muttered, “There has to be an easier way to raise the bed frame!”

4. Have the students present their products and scenarios to the class.
5. Explain that the examples they have portrayed are of entrepreneurs who recognized an opportunity and then addressed the opportunity. This is commonly how an entrepreneur gets started. However, the artist as entrepreneur often follows a different path.

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6. Ask students to name the types of art that would be found in someone's home. (*visual arts, such as paintings, prints, photographs, sculpture; media arts, such as video and computer images; functional arts, such as furniture, fiber arts, and jewelry, and so on*) Explain that, although we all know the different types of art consumers purchase, it's difficult to ascertain what themes or subjects consumers may want in their art. Even if the artist knows the subject an art consumer desires, the artist may not find the subject appealing.
7. Explain that for artists, the entrepreneurial process is very different. Artists do their own thing in various media where interest or opportunity is unknown. Sometimes an artist's work becomes trendy with common consumers, such as the work of Norman Rockwell, Peter Max, Thomas Kincaid, and Mary Englebright. More often, however, the artist must find a match – a consumer who appreciates the artist's vision.
8. Divide students into groups. Instruct each group to think of an artist who became popular in his or her own time. Have each group research the artist and write a critique of the artist's work, answering the following questions:
  - ◆ What might account for the mass appeal of this artist's work?
  - ◆ Did the artist attempt to change his or her subject or style over time? If so how was the change accepted by the consumer?
  - ◆ Did the artist expand into other media?
9. Have students present their assessment of the artist and his or her work to the class.

Closure:

Explain that in this unit, students are going to learn about methods that will help them find consumers of their art. However, that is just the first step. Students are also going to learn how to manage the business of art, how to maintain financial information, and how to understand laws concerning the arts.