VISIONARY ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM
Throughout history, visionaries have explored and envisioned utopian worlds through visual art, literature, leaders, and community members. The notion of idealism within these utopias can have a different meaning to each and every individual.

Both social visionaries, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and artistic visionaries, such as Paolo Soleri, have sought to change their utopian dreams into reality.

In this lesson, students will explore and examine visionary and utopian worlds and develop their own utopian world through concept writing and mixed media art.

Objectives:
- Students will learn about some of the significant visionaries throughout history.
- Students will develop working definitions of utopia based on prior knowledge, visual and literary accounts of utopia, and exploratory discussions.
- Students will investigate their own desires to inhabit utopian environments.
- Students will use mixed media to create works of art that represent their own utopian visions.

Critical Questions:
- What does it mean to be a visionary?
- Can you name some famous visionaries or visionaries in your life?
- Why is it important to have visionaries?
- What is a utopia?
- How do different people define utopia?
- What are some examples of utopian societies, or societies that were meant to be utopian?
- What is the relationship between a desire to inhabit utopian environments and the actual creation of utopian societies?
- What are 3 problems of today’s society? How would this utopian society solve those problems?

Activities:
Introduce the term visionary and have students share both social and artistic visionaries that they are aware of. Discuss why these individuals are considered visionaries, and whether their “utopian world” is realistic and sustainable. Discuss founders, successes, and failures of these utopian worlds.

1. Write an essay describing your own utopian world. Give your “perfect” community a name, a system of government, a physical description, and an account of how people spend their days. Think about how that community would change and grow. What are the rules or laws? What happens if someone breaks them? How would these rules affect individuals? Schools? Families? Government? Include as many details as possible.

2. Create a visual representation of your utopian world. Determine what materials will best represent your vision. Use at least 3 materials and/or techniques.
Resources:
2. A public TV Series focused on extraordinary individuals who had a vision and have had incredible influences on their communities. Visionaries Institute International at Chester College of New England: http://www.visionaries.org/
5. Paolo Soleri’s artwork currently on display at the American Visionary Art Museum

Standards:
Maryland Visual Arts: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3; 2.4; 3.1
Language Arts: Speaking and Listening SL.6-12.1; SL.6-12.4
Language Arts: Writing W.6-12.1; W.6-12.2; W.6-12.3
History, Integration of Knowledge RH.6-8.7
History/Social Studies: Reading History, Integration of Knowledge RH.6-8.8
History/Social Studies: Writing, Text Types and Purposes WHST.6-12.1; WHST.6-12.2

Above and Beyond:
Create Your Own Utopia: Grades 9-12
Social Studies, English
Analyze how individual responsibility and commitment to law are related to the stability of American society; discussion of how participation in civic and political life can contribute to the public good. http://teachersnetwork.org/ntny/lessonplans/caviasco.htm

Virtual/Perfect: Utopia, Virtual Spaces, and Avatars: Grades 6-8
Media Arts, Civic Ideals and Practices
Handheld Art, accessed September 22, 2014
http://handheldart.cas.sc.edu/items/show/547
A shrine can be defined as a case, box, or receptacle for sacred relics. A shrine can also be a place that people visit because it is connected with someone or something that is important to them. Shrines are common in many cultures and religions, and can range from huge outdoor spaces to small household nooks.

Judy Tallwing created a shrine for Saint Kateri to honor her willingness to care for the sick regardless of the dangers to herself. The shrine includes mixed media materials and symbolic elements.

Objectives:
• Students will be able to identify how shrines are used in various cultures and religions.
• Students will plan and develop a shrine that commemorates a non-fictional or fictional hero.
• Students will explore different materials, techniques, and processes to elicit different responses and communicate their experiences and ideas.
• Students will demonstrate critical thinking through the expressive use of everyday objects/found objects.

Critical Questions:
• What is a shrine?
• Why do we create shrines?
• How are shrines used in different cultures and religions? In artwork?
• What does it mean to be a hero?
• What characteristics make up a hero?
• What qualities do you admire in a hero and why?
• Who is your personal hero (fictional or non-fictional)?

Activities:
1. Begin with a discussion on what it means to be a hero. Discuss both fictional and non-fictional heroes, including well-known individuals and personal acquaintances. Have students share ideas on how one might honor or recognize a hero.

2. Discuss the purpose of shrines and share visual examples. Be sure to include examples of shrines found in a variety of cultures, religions, and art. Have students identify types of materials and techniques used, and how they evoke different types of emotions.

3. Have students select one personal hero to create a commemorative shrine for. Revisit the types of materials and techniques used in the shrines discussed earlier. Have students sketch ideas for a shrine that will commemorate their personal hero. Remind them to think about everyday/found objects that they could include as symbolic or sacred “relics.” Share final projects with the class.
Resources:
1. Judy Tallwing’s *Kateri*, currently on display at the American Visionary Art Museum
   http://www.bottlevillage.com/index.htm
2. Grandma Prisbey’s Bottle Village
   http://sensitivefern.hubpages.com/hub/ofrenda
3. Ofrendas: Mexican Day of the Dead Shrines
   http://sensitivefern.hubpages.com/hub/ofrenda
4. Edgar Allen Poe Shrine
   http://www.art-shrines.com/walltable/poeshrine.htm
5. Creating Personal Shrines
   http://www.kporterfield.com/creativity/shrines.html

Standards:
Maryland Visual Arts: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3; 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4; 3.1, 3.2; 4.1
Language Arts: Speaking and Listening SL.K-12.1; SL.K-12.4
Language Arts: Writing W.K-12.1; W.K-12.2; W.K-12.3

Above and Beyond:
Have students write an essay that describes their commemorative shrine. This should include reasoning behind the hero selection process, as well as their design process. Be sure to have students explain the main elements within the shrine (why they are important and what they symbolize). Encourage students to expand their thoughts by proposing questions such as:
   “What is the ideal location of your shrine and who will visit it?”
   “What do you hope visitors will feel when they visit?”
   “Will the shrine change over time?”
Visionary artist Patrick Burke, also known as Sunflower Aquarian and Golden Hands, was part of a community called The Source Family. One of his roles within The Family was to create talismanic jewelry imbued with beneficial magical powers. His work is fashioned with various symbols representing the purpose within.

A symbol is something that stands for or represents something else. Symbols are a visual system of communication, and can work on a global or personal level. Although symbols have been around since the dawn of man, the most common symbols we see today include traffic signs, safety labels, and various branding applications. The meaning of symbols and how they work can be very powerful.

In this activity, students will design and make a unique medallion using symbolism to represent who they are or who they want to be.

Objectives:
- Students will understand the nature of symbols and how they work.
- Students will examine samples of symbols they encounter in their everyday lives.
- Using visual art, students will be able to express and communicate complex ideas through visual art medium.
- Students will create a personal symbol that represents who they are or who they want to be.

Critical Questions:
- What are symbols?
- How long have symbols existed?
- What types of symbols exist?
- Why are symbols important and what are they used for?
- How can information be represented symbolically?
- Why can we identify symbols?

Activities:
Introduce the concept of symbols and how they are used in everyday life. Have students write/draw symbols they see in everyday life. Ask students to identify and discuss the expressive qualities of symbols.

1. Have students create an idea board for their own personal symbol by gathering images, text, and photographs of things that are important or meaningful to them. Things to consider when collecting for idea boards:
   - Things that make you happy
   - Hobbies and other images that reflect your personality
   - An image that represents your values and/or culture
   - Characteristics and/or important events that define you
2. Using their idea board as inspiration, have students create one complete personal symbol that will represent who they are or who they want to be. Follow the steps below.
   a. Sketch final symbol onto a piece of paper.
   b. Draw final symbol onto *Shrinky Dinks* shrinkable plastic using colored pencil and sharpie marker.
   c. When the drawing is complete, punch holes where the leather/yarn will attach to make the symbol into a wearable medallion.
   d. Shrink according to package instructions. Attach leather/yarn.
   e. Present your final medallion to the class, describing why certain design elements were selected.

**Special Materials:**
Shrinky Dinks Shrinkable Plastic
http://www.shrinkydinks.com
http://www.amazon.com/Shrinky-Dinks-Shrinkable-Plastic-Frosted/dp/B0042SYZDE

**Resources:**
1. Sunflower Aquarian’s jewelry currently on display at the American Visionary Art Museum

*Part of this activity was adapted from The National Center for Quality Afterschool
http://www.sedl.org/afterschool/toolkits/

**Standards:**
Maryland Visual Arts: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3; 2.1, 2.2, 2.4; 3.1, 3.2; 4.1
Language Arts: Speaking and Listening, Comprehension and Collaboration SL.K-12.1
Howard Finster, one of America’s most prolific self-tutored artists, was known to fill any available space with imagery from his frequent visionary experiences. He was also known to paint the inhabitants of other planets that he saw in his visions.

Visionary artist Ingo Swann is known for his “remote viewing” capabilities, where he can envision details of distant, even planetary, locations. He once described rings around Neptune before astrophysicists even knew they existed!

In this activity, students will hone in on their own visionary skills to imagine and develop a planet or world of their own.

Objectives:
• Students will identify the basic requirements for survival and sustainability.
• Students will develop a complete file that describes life on an imaginary planet or world.
• Students will create detailed depictions of their imaginary planet or world using visual art.

Critical Questions:
• Can there be life on other planets?
• Do you believe in another world?
• If so, who are the inhabitants? What is the environment? How is it sustained?
• What are the basic requirements for survival?

Activities:
Have students imagine what life is like in another world yet to be discovered. Create a “fact file” for this new world that includes its name, environmental specifications, and descriptions of its inhabitants. Students should come up with at least 5 facts about their worlds, and should consider current and future prospects of life in this world.

Next, using the information gathered in their fact files, have students create a detailed visual representation of their new world or planet.

Resources:
1. Finster’s and Swann’s artwork currently on display at the American Visionary Art Museum
2. Finster, H., Patterson, T. (1989). *Howard Finster: Stranger from Another World; Man of Visions Now on This Earth* by Howard Finster as told to Tom Patterson, Abbeville Press.
3. Are We Alone?
   http://www.esa.int/esaKIDSen/SEMRFIWJD1E_LifeinSpace_0.html
Standards:
Maryland Visual Arts: 1.1, 1.3; 2.1; 3.1
Language Arts: Speaking and Listening, Comprehension and Collaboration SL.K-12.1
Language Arts: Writing W.K-12.1; W.K-12.2; W.K-12.3
Science and Technology: Writing WHST.6-8.2; WHST.6-8.4; WHST.6-8.7

Above and Beyond:
Astro Venture: Design A Planet: Grades 5-8
Astronomy, Atmospheric Science, Biology, Geology
http://astroventure.arc.nasa.gov/teachers/pdf/AV-DesignaPlanet.pdf