

# WHERE DOES YOUR STRENGTH LIE?

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Considered one of the premier public artists in the United States, Tom Otterness has exhibited widely and completed commissions in the U.S. and abroad. His stylized bronze figures combine into sculptural ensembles that explore the range of human experience, from grand ambition to common foibles, plucking imagery and themes from popular culture and subtly transforming them into humorous commentary. His work appeals to young and old alike which testifies to the universality of his themes and characters. Pictured is one of seven bronze 1999 sculptures that comprise *Feats of Strength*.



©Tom Otterness. Photo credit: Rod del Pozo

## VOCABULARY

**Feat**—an extraordinary accomplishment

**Aesthetics**—the philosophical discussion about the nature of art

## WASHINGTON STATE EALRS

- 1.3 Understands and applies art styles from various artists, cultures and times
- 2.1 Applies a creative process in the arts
- 3.1 Uses the arts to express and present ideas and feelings
- 3.3 Develops personal aesthetic criteria to communicate artistic choices
- 4.2 Demonstrates and analyzes the connection between the arts and other content areas

## VIEWING/DISCUSSING QUESTIONS

### AESTHETICS ISSUE

Most people enjoy viewing the little green sculptures of people that Tom Otterness installed on the Western Washington University campus. Yet, others complained that the sculptures were too juvenile for a university campus where serious, academic work is completed. Moreover, the sculptures are installed between buildings that house departments of science, technology and business. Do you feel that the sculptures are appropriate for a university campus? Tell why or why not. Do you think that the sculptures would be better suited to be situated next to other departments such as those that encourage the arts, i.e. theatre, music, or dance? Would you like to have the sculptures installed in your schoolyard? Tell why or why not.

### CAMPUS VISITS

Describe what the people are doing. Are their bodies realistic? How are the bodies different from “real” peoples’? Why do you think that the artist created the characters with cartoon-like forms? Do the forms remind you of any other characters that you have seen in the movies or on television?

Stand in front of several of the sculptures. Have the students mimic what the characters are doing by posing in the same positions as the characters. Ask: What do you think that the characters are thinking and feeling? Have you felt this way before? What do you think that the artist’s message is?

## STUDIO PRODUCTION

### INTRODUCTION

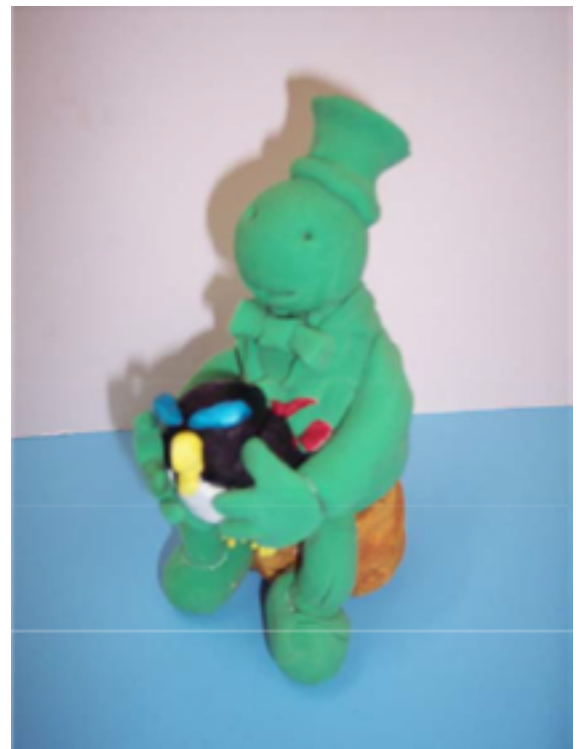
Provide students with pictures of Tom Otterness' *Feats of Strength*. Ask students the following questions: What is a feat? What does it mean to be strong? Why do you think that the artist titled his work *Feats of Strength*? If you could give the work a title, what would you call it?

Today, we are going to make our own *Feats of Strength* by deciding which things we are good at doing.

1. Provide students with a list of adjectives. Ask students to select an adjective that describes themselves or something that they are good at doing.
  - Athletic—good at playing sports or any other physical activity such as martial arts
  - Brave—good at taking risks and being courageous
  - Creative—good at coming up with unique or original ideas
  - Funny—good at telling jokes or amusing people
  - Honest—good at telling the truth
  - Artistic—good at drawing, painting, or sculpting
2. Next, ask students to think of an object that represents the selected ability or skill. For example, a baseball bat could represent someone who is good at sports. Or, a paint brush could represent someone who is skillful in art.
3. Now have them think about how they could create a little green person holding an object that represents something that is a strength of theirs.
4. Provide students with green Model Magic and tag board. Students sculpt a person in the style of Tom Otterness. Next, sculpt an object that represents your skill and incorporate the object into the sculpture. Optional: Students can make the object out of cardboard to make it lighter or could use a real object, rather than a sculpted one.
5. Allow sculptures to dry on tag board sheets for 24 hours.

### MATERIALS

- Images of Tom Otterness' work
- Green Model Magic
- Various objects to represent skills
- Tag board
- Glue gun or Elmer's Glue to assemble symbol of feat to sculpture depending on weight of object



## ART EXTENSIONS

### EXTENSION #1: ART AND HUMOR

Study artists whose work evokes humor. Claus Oldenburg is an example of an artist whose works elicit laughter through the use of unexpected subject matter such as teddy bears and hamburgers and humorous materials such as lumpy paper mache and slick, shiny plastic. He also uses scale to create iconic images from everyday, mundane objects. Oldenburg stated:

“I am for Kool-Art, 7-UP art, Pepsi art, Sunshine art,  
39-cents art. . .Menthol art. . .Now art. . .I am for U.S. government inspected art, Regular  
Price art, Yellow Ripe art,  
Extra Fancy art, Ready-to-eat art.”

Read the quote and discuss what Oldenburg was expressing with the humorous quote. Have students brainstorm their “kind of art.”

Examples of works to be studied include:

- Soft Toilet, 1966
- Clothes Pin, 1976, Location: Philadelphia
- Two Cheeseburgers with Everything On It, 1962
- Cherry and Spoon, 1985-8, Location: Minneapolis

Study the works and create paper maché sculptures out of everyday objects such as batteries, tools, food items, scissors, etc.

### EXTENSION #2: Artists and Comic Strips

Study artists who use comic strips or comic book characters in their art. Roy Lichtenstein is an artist whose examples of Pop Art utilize comic strips in their paintings. After studying the work of Lichtenstein, students will bring in a scene from a comic strip or comic book that they will enlarge and paint.

### EXTENSION #3: Additional Humorous Works by artist Tom Otterness

Study additional works by Tom Otterness that exhibit his personal perceptions and philosophy. Examples of works to be studied include:

- Rich Cockroach, 2004
- Fallen Rich, 1999
- Small Fish with Moneybag, 2002
- Dressed Up Millipede, 2004 (See resources for image source)

## ASSESSMENT/REFLECTIONS

Self-Assessment	Yes!	Mostly	Not quite
My sculpture shows obvious effort and time spent in construction.			
My sculpture shows an important feat that I am skillful at doing.			
My sculpture shows body features similar to the artists’.			
I chose an object for my sculpture that clearly represents my ability.			
I cleaned up my art supplies and area completely.			

## INTEGRATION

### INTEGRATION #1: Sculptures that Portray People Who Have Achieved Great Feats/Accomplishments

Study artists whose sculptures memorialize the works of significant persons throughout history. In order to understand the artworks, various contexts such as history, philosophy, religion, and literature must be studied.

Subject Area	Sculpture Title	Artist
Literature	<i>Balzac</i>	Rodin
History	<i>Mount Rushmore</i>	Gutzon Borglum and 400 workers
History	<i>Lincoln Memorial</i>	Daniel Chester French
History	<i>George Washington</i>	Horatio Greenough

### INTEGRATION #2: Artists whose Work Achieved Great Feats

Study artists whose work is the result of monumental processes. Artists to study include:

- Christo—Unique environmental works that include the wrapping of entire buildings, the installation of miles of sheet material along entire coastlines, and large-scale installations of objects such as dozens of umbrellas and draperies of silk fabric
- Richard Serra—Large scale bronze works that require major equipment to construct and install
- Robert Smithson—Massive earth works that involve the manipulation and design of prodigious amounts of soil and other earthen materials

### INTEGRATION #3: Character Conversations

Students will write imaginary conversations that could occur between the characters in the works. Discuss what the characters are thinking, doing, and feeling. Conversations could also be written into comic strip form and duplicated for the entire class to read and share.

## ADVANCED STUDY

Study community artworks that pay homage to great feats or endeavors. A good example is the N.Y. Dogs project, a series of bronze sculptures decorated by artists in order to recognize the accomplishments and contributions of dogs to the rescue efforts after the 9-11 terrorist attacks. After study, students can create memorials to those in society who have accomplished great feats.

## RESOURCES

- Additional Tom Otterness images—"Wit and Whimsy" exhibit, [MarlboroughGallery.com](http://MarlboroughGallery.com)
- "Art Ed Books and Kit: Roy Lichtenstein"—book written by Janet Boris, 2001.
- Books about Pop Art for children: "Andy Warhol: Paintings for Children" written by Silvia Nesters; and Series titled—Getting to Know the World's Great Artists: "Warhol."
- Videos about Pop Art for Middle School Students: Portrait of an Artist: Roy Lichtenstein and Claus Oldenburg available from SAX Arts and Crafts (800) 558-6696.
- Art Prints for all ages about Pop Art: Take 5 Art Prints available at SAX Arts and Crafts.
- DogNY Project: America's Tribute to Search & Rescue Dogs [akc.org/meet-the-9-11-dogs/dogny](http://akc.org/meet-the-9-11-dogs/dogny)
- Lincoln Memorial and Mount Rushmore: National Park Service [nps.gov/index.htm](http://nps.gov/index.htm)

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