

# THE EDIBLE ILLUSION

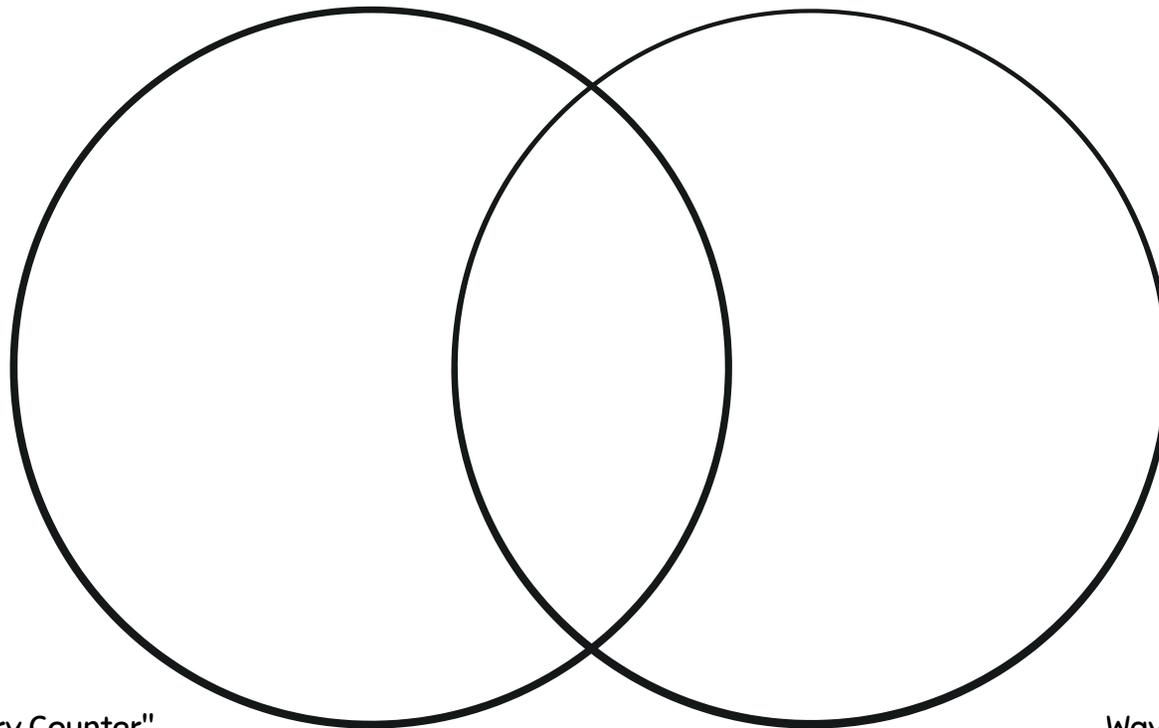
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Sharon Core is a photographer who doesn't just "take" pictures; she "makes" them. To create her Thiebauds series, she didn't just find a bakery—she became a baker! She spent months studying 1960s cookbooks and practicing decoration techniques to perfectly recreate the cakes from Wayne Thiebaud's famous paintings in real life. Once the physical cakes were perfect, she photographed them to look exactly like the original oil paintings.



Core, S. (2004). Bakery Counter, 1962 [Chromogenic print]. Yancey Richardson Gallery, New York, NY, United States.

Spot the Difference: Using the Venn diagram, compare Sharon Core's Bakery Counter (2004) with Wayne Thiebaud's Bakery Counter (1962).



Sharon Core's "Bakery Counter"  
(2004)

Wayne Thiebaud's "Bakery Counter"  
(1962)

1. The Taste Test: Imagine you could step into both works. Which "Bakery Counter" looks like it would taste better? Why do you think the texture of paint vs. the texture of actual sugar changes how we feel about eating it?

2. The Act of Copying: Sharon Core worked for months to copy Thiebaud's style exactly. Is a "copy" still original art if the medium (paint vs. photography/baking) is completely different? Explain your position.

3. The "Uncanny" Factor: Sometimes things look so real they feel a bit strange or "off." Does Core's photograph feel like a real bakery you could visit, or does it feel like a "ghost" of a painting?

The "Missing" Dessert: Look closely at the rows of cakes and pies. Notice that most are round or triangular. What is missing? Is it a square brownie, a tall éclair, or a stack of cookies? What would you add to complete the counter?

# Teacher's Guide: Sharon Core's "Bakery Counter"

This guide is designed to help you lead a classroom through an exploration of reality, illusion, and the "art of the copy" using Sharon Core's 2004 photograph.

Suggested grades: 6 to 9.

## Phase 1: Leading the Discussion

Use these questions to move students from simple observation to a deeper understanding of the two works: Sharon Core's "Bakery Counter" (2004) and Wayne Thiebaud's "Bakery Counter" (1962).

### 1. Observation: The Material Reality

- The Evidence of Touch: Where is the artist's physical hand visible? Compare the "drag" of Thiebaud's brush against the "gravity" of Core's real frosting.
- The Weight of Objects: Which counter feels heavier? Analyze how photography captures the literal mass of a cake compared to how oil paint captures the idea of one.
- The "Double-Flip": Thiebaud used paint to mimic food; Core used food to mimic his paint. How does this reversal change your perception of what is "real"?

### 2. Conceptual Inquiry: Intent and Authenticity

- The Labour of the Maker: If Core had simply photographed a commercial bakery, would the work retain its meaning? Discuss why the act of hand-making the cakes—specifically to match a painting—is essential to the art.
- The Uncanny Factor: Why does a perfect, high-definition recreation often feel more "eerie" or artificial than a stylized drawing?

### 3. Modern Connection: The Constructed Image

- Calculated Reality: We live in an era of filters and AI-generated imagery. Is Core's "staged" bakery an honest photograph, or is it a physical version of a digital manipulation?

## Phase 2: Analyzing Art Elements

- Repetition & Rhythm: Discuss how the rows of cakes create a sense of order and consumerism (the idea of mass-produced sweets).
- Texture: Compare the visual texture of Thiebaud's oil paint to the actual texture of Core's fondant and buttercream.

- Colour Palette: Notice the "pastel" and neon-adjacent colours. Why are these colours associated with mid-century America?
- Space: Discuss the "shallow depth of field." The cakes are lined up right against the glass, making the viewer feel like they are standing at the counter.
- Atmospheric Perspective: Notice how the light in Core's photograph feels "clinical" or studio-lit, whereas Thiebaud's light feels "warm" and remembered.
- Repetition: The use of a grid to suggest mass production and the "American Dream" of abundance.
- Texture/Surface: The contrast between the matte finish of old oil paint and the glossy, wet look of real sugar and fat.

### Phase 3: Create

The Challenge: Have students act as the "third artist" by designing a new dessert that fits into the existing bakery counter grid.

1. Select a Style: Direct students to choose one of the two approaches studied:
  - The Painter (Thiebaud): Focus on impasto. Students should use oil pastels or heavy crayons to create thick, swirling "frosting" textures and use bright colours to outline the edges (halation).
  - The Photographer (Core): Focus on forensic detail. Students should use sharp pencils or fine-liners to draw tiny, realistic "flaws" like crumbs, cracks in glaze, or reflections on a plate.
2. Identify the "Gap": Ask students to look at the original works and identify a shape or dessert that is missing (e.g., a rectangular éclair, a square brownie, or a round donut).
3. The Drawing: Instruct students to draw their dessert from a direct side-view (profile) so it looks like it is sitting behind the glass of the display case.

### Phase 4: Biographical Information

Wayne Thiebaud's *Bakery Counter* (1962) serves as a masterpiece of American nostalgia, rooted in his background as a Disney animator and commercial sign painter. Rather than painting from life, Thiebaud worked from memory, using impasto—the thick, sculptural application of oil paint—to allow the medium itself to physically stand in for frosting. His work is defined by halation, a technique where objects are outlined in vibrant, contrasting colours to create a shimmering "glow" that mimics the fluorescent lighting of mid-century shop windows. By organizing his subjects in a strict grid composition, he elevated mundane treats into a study of rhythm and mass production, making the paint feel as edible and tactile as the subject it depicted.

Sharon Core's 2004 recreation is a work of conceptual photography that explores the simulacrum, or a copy of an image that never truly existed in the physical world. As both a trained painter and a professional pastry chef, Core engaged in a "method" performance, spending months researching vintage 1960s ingredients to bake and decorate real cakes that matched Thiebaud's brushstrokes. The resulting chromogenic print creates a "reverse" trompe l'oeil effect; while Thiebaud used paint to mimic food, Core used real food to mimic paint, forcing the viewer to question the boundary between reality and representation. Her process highlights a forensic level of labour, where the art lies not just in the final photograph, but in the gruelling physical construction of the scene.

### Art Terms:

- Impasto: A technique where paint is applied in very thick layers, making the texture of the brushstrokes or palette knife clearly visible on the surface.
- Halation: A "glow" or shimmering effect created by painting thin lines of contrasting colour (like bright orange or blue) around the edges of an object to make it stand out.
- Composition: The intentional arrangement or placement of visual elements in a work of art, such as the grid-like layout of the cakes.
- Conceptual Photography: A type of photography where the "idea" or the process of creating the scene is just as important as the final picture itself.
- Chromogenic Print: A high-quality colour photograph made through a specific chemical process that captures extreme detail and colour depth.
- Trompe l'oeil: A French term meaning "deceive the eye"—an art style that uses realistic imagery to create the optical illusion that the objects are three-dimensional.



Core, S. (2004). *Bakery Counter*, 1962  
[Chromogenic print]. Yancey Richardson  
Gallery, New York, NY, United States.



Thiebaud, W. (1962). *Bakery Counter*  
[Painting]. Private Collection.