About the Artwork:

*Electronic Superhighway* is Nam June Paik’s tribute to the United States, his adopted homeland. Paik, born in Korea in 1932, moved to New York in 1964 and lived in America until his death in 2006.

Though the outlines of the fifty states are familiar, *Electronic Superhighway* challenges the viewer to look with new eyes at the cultural map of the United States. Each state is represented by video footage reflecting the artist’s personal, and often unexpected, associations with the place. He celebrates some states for their connections to his artistic friends and collaborators--composer John Cage in Massachusetts, performance artist Charlotte Moorman in Arkansas, and choreographer Merce Cunningham in Washington. Some states he knows best through classic movies---*The Wizard of Oz* for Kansas, *Showboat* for Mississippi, and *South Pacific* for Hawaii. Sometimes he chose video clips or flickering slideshows evoking familiar associations, such as the Kentucky Derby, Arizona highways, and presidential candidates for Iowa. Topical events such as the fires of the 1993 Waco siege, or Atlanta’s 1996 summer Olympics create a portrait of a moment in time. Old black-and-white TV footage and audio of Martin Luther King speeches recall Civil Rights struggles in Alabama. California has the fastest-paced imagery, racing through the Golden Gate Bridge, 0s and 1s of the digital revolution, and a fitness class led by O. J. Simpson. A mini-cam captures images of Superhighway’s viewers and transmits their images onto a tiny screen representing Washington, D.C., making visitors a part of the story.

Nam June Paik is hailed as the “father of video art” and credited with the first use of the term “information superhighway” in the 1970s. He recognized the potential for media collaboration among people in all parts of the world, and he knew that media would completely transform our lives. *Electronic Superhighway*—constructed of 336 televisions, 50 DVD players, 3,750 feet of cable, and 575 feet of multicolor neon tubing—is a testament to the ways media defined one man’s understanding of a diverse nation.

Links

Nam June Paik biography
http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artist/?id=3670

High Resolution Image

Superhighway Scholars
http://americanart.si.edu/education/rs/index.cfm
An educational website that includes a video about *Electronic Superhighway*, a teacher guide, and a student gallery. Submit your students’ work for inclusion.