Understanding self and society through the visual arts

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Understanding Self and Society through the Visual Arts

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Abstract

There are growing concerns that traditional public schools fail in giving children a sound basis of values to prepare them to think critically and take responsible roles in society. This capstone project focused on using the rich resource of contemporary art to engage students in a discourse about present day social issues, and their relation to personal values and ethics. The project was comprised of five workshop classes held at the Boys and Girls Club in Santa Cruz for children ages eleven to thirteen. Each class was centered around a contemporary artist, or collective group of artists that have a shared theme. Students were introduced to the artist(s), analyzed the issues they address, and examined how the aesthetics and finer nuances of their artwork function to communicate a message. They used their understanding of the artist, as well as their medium and process to create artwork emulating the artist’s style. However, the context of the artwork was constructed under their own discretion. Thereafter, students shared their artists’ statements with the class. Student’s demonstrated a deep understanding of the artist’s role in society, how art can be powerful and transformative and how the artists studied in each lesson were being socially reconstructive, through the explication of their work.
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Backstory

Since childhood I’ve had an artistic gift. With the help of societal standards, I had accepted that beyond aesthetic means it was a relatively useless gift. Despite practicality, I pursued art—determined to discover its use. As I immersed myself in its world, the importance of the Arts in society became clear to me. I realized being an artist meant being an educator.

Mark Graham best defines an artist’s responsibility in society,

> For some artists, vision is a social practice, and art is a means to heal soulless approaches to the world. Art making can be rooted in holistic concerns, not the fruit of a disembodied, factual eye. Among these artists there is the possibility of meaningful iconography about the earth and the places to which we belong. Art becomes more than individual self-expression practiced by the strange and gifted. It becomes a language for a conversation about experience, a way to inquire about the world, even a way to change how we see the world and our relationship to it. (Gruenewald, & Smith, 2008)

Through my education and personal experiences, this epiphany grew into my personal manifesto. Art is a catalyst for reform and a silent protest. It holds a deep and wide history of being at the forefront of political and social change. This is what I want to be a part of. I grew aware transformation begins by awakening the social conscious through compassion. Art allows us to peer into the lives and feelings of others, and engage in empathetic awakening. This world is full of transgression, oppression, racism, and many other evils. Artists are working to illuminate these dangers and through illumination, offer society the opportunity to heal.

My infatuation with art led me to an internship opportunity at an art gallery in New York last summer. Like a child holding onto an overinflated balloon, the gallery acted as a sharp pin into my reality. I found the magic of art I had grown attached to being reduced to the integral equivalent of commercial advertising. It wasn’t that the art wasn’t amazing. The paintings and installations were as radical and satirical as possible. However, the virtue and examinations being offered were marginalized, and bottom line profitability served as the focal point.
I realized art upheld this intangible prestige; only to be considered and internalized by the elite and wealthy. However, some of the most revered artists have been those who’ve acted as a voice for the voiceless. They were radicals in their own right, choosing to see the world not as it was, but as it may be otherwise. Yet often the metaphoric beauty of artwork is at best a hot commodity. I’d argue artwork isn’t valuable because of its worth in dollars, but because of its ability to transform. It’s for this reason I’d like to see art interjected into schools. The ability to transform belongs to everybody. Who better to be aware of this than the future generation?

Last fall I spent time volunteering at the Boys and Girls Club in Santa Cruz, where I had the opportunity to form a relationship with their Area Director, Gretchen Long. Knowing my interests, she offered I switch roles from teaching P.E. to running an art program. Excitement and intimidation overwhelmed me, but one question daunted me most—what will I have them create? I dreaded the thought of pulling out a case of water colors and asking them to paint a picture of their families. In this way I’d only be reaffirming arts’ uselessness in education. Plus, I know better; if my journey as an artist has taught me anything it’s there are deeper levels to our being and coexisting, which the arts can transcend.

The public education system strays from teaching values and diverts from any encounters with compassion. Curriculum concerning reading, writing and arithmetic are essential. However, it is also important to remember the hope in schooling is to create an informed citizenry, capable of participating in a democracy. In order to reach this goal, children need a sound basis of values to prepare them to think critically and take responsible roles in society.

My contention is our lack of art education. I’m not referring to a pallet of water colors and instructions to paint your family. Rather, art education which uses the rich resource of contemporary art to engage in a discourse with students about present day social issues, and their relation to personal values and ethics.
My plan is to use my opportunity at the Boys and Girls Club to implement an art education program. The lessons will include learning about new artists and internalizing their works. We will discuss what issues the artists are addressing, what they’re hoping to achieve through their work, and how we feel in response. We’ll examine how aesthetics and the finer nuances of artwork work to communicate a message. Using this understanding, as well as learning the artist’s medium and process, students will create artwork emulating the artist’s style. All they’ve learned from the artist will function as tools in their ‘tool belt of expression.’ Ultimately the artwork they create will draw from their own reflections and values. This shows them they not only play the role of the informed, but also possess the power to transform others. Through this process I’d hope to show students that learning is not a passive process. When learning is deep, they’re the teacher as well as the student. Ultimately this program will serve to provide students with an understanding of the artist’s role in society, how art can be powerful and transformative, and how the artists we study in each lesson are being socially reconstructive.
Project Plans

For my capstone project I taught five art workshop classes at the Boys and Girls Club of Santa Cruz. Participants were preadolescent Boys and Girls Club members who voluntarily signed up for the workshop.

Each class was centered on a contemporary artist or collective group of artists who share the same disposition. I introduced the students to the artist(s): their biography, artwork and method. We sifted through a collection of photographs, books, interviews, documentaries and articles which reflect on the artist. We discussed what issues the artists are addressing, what they’re hoping to achieve through their work, and how we feel in response. We examined how aesthetics and the finer nuances of artwork work to communicate a message. Thereafter, I taught the students skills and techniques of the artist’s medium. Using their understanding of the artist, as well as the medium and process, students created artwork emulating the artist’s style. However, the context of the artwork regarded their own intentions. Afterwards students professed an informal artist’s statement about their artwork to the class. This process allowed students to undergo internalization of the artist’s work, self-identification, and how this responds to the greater good of society.

Deliverables

- Flyers for the workshop—prior to the start of classes, flyers will be passed out at the Boys and Girls Club, outlining the class: time and place, duration, topics discussed and group activities
  - These flyers will be used to inform Boys and Girls Club members of the workshop, and to invite those who are interested to join
- Five descriptive lesson plans outlining title, subject area, grade level, objectives, materials, suggested procedures, evaluation, and websites and resources
  - These lesson plans will be outlined in the traditional teacher format, so they can be easily replicated
- Printed PowerPoint presentation of selected artist
  - These PowerPoints will contains slides of the artist’s work
- Photographs of students’ artwork
  - Analysis of these photos will help me evaluate the effectiveness of my lessons
Timeline

March 6th – 12th
• Research artists to use in class discussions
  o Artists should reflect on the topics suggested by the community partner—those which create a discourse about issues and conflicts relevant to students lives

March 13th – 19th
• Create lesson plans based on chosen artists
• Collect materials on artists: photographs, books, interviews, documentaries and articles
• Collect art materials needed for projects

March 20th – 26th
• Spring Break

March 27th – April 2nd
• Conduct Introduction to Socially Conscious Art workshop
  o Document assessment journal

April 4th – 9th
• Conduct Street Art workshop
  o Document assessment journal

April 10th – 16th
• Conduct Street Art (part two) workshop
  o Document assessment journal

April 17th – 23rd
• Conduct Andy Goldsworthy workshop
  o Document assessment journal

April 24th – 30th
• Conduct Ways of Seeing workshop
  o Document assessment journal

May 1st – 7th
• Return to Boys and Girls Club to discuss the success of the workshop classes with the community partner
• Reconvene with students to discuss afterthoughts of the workshop
  o Have they continued to create art?
  o Has their approach to art making changed?
  o Have other circumstances in life caused them to reflect on our workshop discussions or artists we’ve learned about?

May 8th – 14th
• Capstone wrap-up
  o Compile all project materials and submit them to the CSUMB library for archiving
The Boys and Girls Club of Santa Cruz is a non-profit organization, part of the national Boys and Girls Club of America. The Boys and Girls Club’s mission is to provide children and young adults a safe place to spend time after school, rather than going to a home with no adult care. In Santa Cruz, their establishment comes fully equipped with a gymnasium, garden, cafeteria, library and art, music and computer rooms. Through recreation, community, and education the organization aims to enhance the development of children, by instilling a sense of competence, usefulness, and belonging.

Gretchen Long is the Area Director of the Santa Cruz Boys and Girls Club. She was also my site supervisor during my recent volunteer experience. When I completed my volunteer hours, Gretchen offered I come back and teach an art class to the children. Having an understanding of the Boys and Girls Club’s community and mission, I felt it would make an excellent community partner. Gretchen herself is a very open-minded, caring individual. She is focused on creating a positive, fun atmosphere for the children there. As a volunteer, she granted me freedom and autonomy in conducting activities, while remaining supportive and helpful.

Gretchen and I met to discuss how an art class could address greater needs of the Club’s members. I spoke about my opinion of art and how through its teachings, students could confront concepts of compassion and value. I felt relieved to learn of Gretchen’s openness to “crossing the line” from time to time. Aside from scheduling and room placement, meeting with Gretchen was very beneficial. Being someone who knows all the members by first name, she is very aware of their needs and conflicts.

We discussed issues which challenge children’s morals. Gretchen noted how the children are confronted with a large homeless population, especially on the streets of downtown Santa Cruz. Children have curiosity and uncertainties in understanding the homeless’ place in society.
We spoke about the children’s fascination and exposure to graffiti. Children wonder if it’s art or vandalism. Gretchen also brought up marijuana use. The kids often see teenagers sprawled out on the field across from the Club smoking marijuana. Santa Cruz is a very socially liberal city; often opinions on marijuana use fluctuate. Some children come from homes where it is accepted, and can feel conflicted by society’s disapproval.

In order to work together to illuminate these issues, I taught an art workshop about socially conscious art at the Boys and Girls Club. This class had various lesson plans which taught about contemporary artists, who are working to improve social concerns. Gretchen facilitated me with situational needs: classroom, scheduling, supplies, and organizing students, as well as the content of lesson plans. She helped me understand my audience: their needs, interests, and conflicts as I developed the curriculum.

I believe this was valuable for the Boys and Girls Club because it embodied matters they address in their vision statement. Competence—facing tough issues offered children a chance to think deeper, and more compassionately about conflicting issues in society. Usefulness—through creating artwork children had the opportunity to express and communicate their perspectives. They saw how they can be socially reconstructive as artists. Belonging—as children learned tolerance and acceptance, their sense of community grew wide and deep.

Art and education are subjects I’ve invested a great deal of time and heart into. I believe the Arts transcend our differences and allow us to be closer in touch with humanity. This project allowed me to see how the transformative process of the Arts unfolds. Furthermore, I learned the aspects of art students are curious about; which will help shape my understanding as an educator and an artist.
Literature Review

There are growing concerns that U.S. schools fail to give children a sound basis of values to prepare them to think critically and take responsible roles in society (Milbrandt, 2002). Furthermore schools limit children’s development. Children are becoming passive learners and are not being encouraged to explore and discover things for themselves (Adams, 2005). The Arts can bring education to a deeper level of learning. It can offer dynamic learning which actively engages students to study themselves, the world around them, and how the two interplay.

Greene (1995) notes that metaphors have the ability to open our eyes to new perspectives. In the same way poetic language has a special way to convey meaning, art, though subtle and seemingly passive, does the same. Barbara Brown Taylor best describes the power of the Arts over its audience, “Story and image do not come at the ear the same way advice and exhortation do—although they are, I believe even more persuasive. A story does not ask for decision. Instead, it asks for identification, which is how transformation begins” (Paterson, 2010).

Art programs established in alternative institutions have yielded successful outcomes in participants’ intrapersonal and interpersonal understanding. Art therapists utilize the metaphoric communication of art to transcend troubled youth’s emotional fortification. Group discussions interpreting different works of art drawn by the Art Therapist, allow patience to identify and communicate about their core emotions. Patients came to find empathy for themselves as well as others in the group (Franklin, 2010). This psychological connection between empathy and art is due to the mirror neuron mechanisms in humans (Gallese, 2003). Gallese (2003) stated that this “implicit, automatic and unconscious process of embodied simulation enables the observer to use his or her resources to penetrate the world of another without the need of explicitly theorizing about it” (2003).
A women’s prison in rural Florida introduced an arts-based educational program addressing personal, interpersonal, and social learning through the Arts. Evaluations showed female inmates benefitted from the program; demonstrating evidence of personal growth, and social and intellectual development. Furthermore the program accomplished its aim to decrease inmate’s recidivism. This was attributed to the strong support system inmates built through collaborative art practices (Mullen, 1999).

Programs which go beyond fine art and discipline-based curriculum: addressing violence, politics, and racism, can be difficult to approach. They challenge student’s conditioned dichotomy of “us” as good and “them” as evil and can create frustration and moral conflict (Cohen-Evron, 2005). However, students become actively engaged in art projects which push them out of their safety boundaries (Garber, 2003). Cohen-Evron (2005) notes how Israeli students re-examined and modified their repressive and racist stance of Palestinians throughout the layering process of creative artworks (2005). This reflective practice calls for students to focus inward for deeper understanding, and how that deeper understanding relates to the greater good of society (Campbell, 2005). Internalizing and creating artwork is a valuable tool for teaching humanity to children. When students are able to self-identify and look inward, they can begin to learn the value of social justice and tolerance for others.

Despite these findings, most children in traditional schooling have misconceptions about art’s educational value. They hold an oversimplified and relatively useless perception of art (Moran, 2010; Stockrocki, 1986). Elementary aged students view art as a “thing” e.g. picture-making, or a “place” e.g. the art room. They also hold the conceptions that art is “fun” and “pretty” (Stockrocki, 1986). Moran (2010) surveyed preadolescent youth and found that sixteen percent have creative goals—they aim to invent through symbolic media, such as art. While most are unsure of their creative purpose, twenty-five percent do it for fun and self-expression. They
are not as concerned how their creations can be proactive and socially reconstructive (2010). This could be due to the fact that art in middle school is not emphasized as a cultural and social entity. Rather it focuses solely on preparing students with formal and technical groundwork for high school level art (Hafeli, Stokrocki, & Zimmerman, 2005).

Educators are responsible for changing this standard. Art teachers must bridge the gap between self and curriculum so the two are not estranged. Curriculum should have social context and be relevant to student’s lives. Student centered education provides more meaning for students. It allows them to relate what is being taught to something they already know, or are curious to know (Hafeli, Stokrocki, & Zimmerman, 2005). The pupil managed primary school art group, Room 13, is run as a student democracy. The children are in command of their learning. Students’ curiosity engages them in artistic exploration which leads them to learn about the world and multiculturalism (Adams, 2005).

Schools should be aware creativity can be socially and cognitively constructed (Ngara, 2010). Educators who introduce different ideas about art to their students at a young age broaden their understanding of the art world (Stockrocki, 1986). Classrooms which provide a stimulating environment of art can activate a student’s inherent capacity to create (Ngara, 2010).

Art education involves a great deal of interpreting art: the ways in which students connect self to image (MacGregor, 1997). Art teachers therefore play an active role in students’ interpretive blossoming. They help bring consciousness to matters which are not completely understood, or dimly sensed (1997). Teachers who have interests in multicultural and global education foster student’s abilities to learn divergent viewpoints (Hafeli, Stokrocki, & Zimmerman, 2005). They educate their students to become analytical and critical thinkers, capable of examining their life circumstances and broadening their view of social equality (Cohen-Evron, 2005).
I have learned through studying scholarly literature that values and compassion can be felt and understood through the Arts. It’s apparent through studies performed that American students do not grasp the transformative power art has. It is important for art-based education to speak personally to the students, and topics should have relevancy to their lives. Furthermore, an equal balance of learning about socially conscious art and creating art, are necessary components for multicultural art education to succeed.
**Assessment**

In order to assess my capstone project I relied on in-class discussions, guided by critical questions and prompts, and students’ verbalized artists’ statements of their artwork. I sought to measure their understanding of the artist’s role in society, how art can be powerful and transformative, and how the artists we studied in each lesson are being socially reconstructive.

The overarching objective was to deepen students’ understanding of art, beyond aesthetics and pleasure. Each lesson had narrower, more particular objectives; yet remain under the umbrella of *how can art be transformative?* The in-class discussion questions were scripted. However, the nature of the conversation raised alternative questions as well.

Essentially, the teacher prompts surveyed the students’ knowledge. This served as a pre-test. Thereafter, further information was provided to extend their knowledge. The artwork they created, along with their artists’ statements acted as a post-test. Their ability to demonstrate intent and personal values through this post-test measured their understanding of the lesson.

An overall evaluation of the students, lesson plans and myself as a teacher was recorded as a journal entry after each workshop. These entries highlighted important instances of the class discussions and my personal interactions with the students. My response to these events was recorded as well: analysis of the students in relation to the lesson’s objective, questions for further research and ways to expand lesson plans in light of the students’ responses.
Pre-Tests: Teacher’s Prompts

Day 1: Introduction to Socially Conscious Art
Objective: What is the purpose of art? What is public art?
- Is art just supposed to be pretty and art making just supposed to be fun?
- How can art force us to assess, or reassess, our personal values?
- How do we connect art work to social change?
- How does art give a voice to the voiceless (marginalized groups in society)?
- What are the benefits of understanding those who are different from us? (e.g. different origins, background, opinions, beliefs, etc.)
  - How could art allow us this understanding?

Day 2: Street Art
Objective: Is graffiti art or vandalism?
- Is it art if it’s not housed in a museum or gallery?
- How could graffiti respond to a larger, more diverse audience?
- What makes this art? What makes this public art? Why does it matter?

Day 3: Street Art (continued)
Objective: Exploring graffiti’s fixation on name, mark and identity

Day 4—Environmental Artwork (Andy Goldsworthy)
Objective: How does Goldsworthy’s method appropriate his message?
- What is lost and gained through this ephemeral approach?
- How could Goldsworthy’s sculptures serve as interventions in our lives?
- What makes this art? What makes this public art? Why does it matter?

Day 5: Wrap up and Conclusion
Objective: As a culmination of the workshop, this lesson will serve to emphasize empathy as a practice of social justice
- Have any of these artists reshaped or reaffirmed our values? Perspectives? Ideas?
- Could their artwork raise awareness for the respective message?
  - Could it help others gain a new perspective?
- In what ways would people feel compelled to act after internalizing their works?
  - How could this individual “call to action” contribute to a greater social justice?

Post-Test: Artist’s Statement

Explain your process:
- Why you choose to arrange the piece the way you did (composition)?
- In what way did composition and value help convey your message?
- What do you hope to communicate to the public through this piece?
- What problem or situation are you attempting to bring to light?
Results

My capstone project’s objective was to develop students’ understanding of the artist’s role in society, how art can be powerful and transformative, and how the artists we’ve studied are socially reconstructive. Students demonstrated an understanding of the artist’s role as social reconstructivists by sharing how it connected to their already existing knowledge or personal experiences. Students drew parallels between artists such as Emory Douglas to Chicano social activists, the Brown Berets. They commented how they had the same mission in terms of informing and uplifting a group of marginalized people. Students also shared how they identified with certain artists; such as the ones from the film Beautiful Losers, in how they disassociate from mainstream ideals and criticize the proverbial “American Dream.”

To foster students’ understanding of how art can be transformative, we sought to understand how art can offer new perspectives and help its viewers assess, or reassess, their values. Students’ morals were challenged in some instances, such as during our discussion of the legality of street art. The class came to recognize the belief that street art is unanimous with gangs and violence, is a misconception. While graffiti may be vandalism, some street artists do communicate virtuous messages. While studying Andy Goldsworthy students had to acknowledge that although his pieces were beautiful, his work speaks volumes about the jeopardy of the environment. In both instances students learned to look beyond the surface aesthetics of artwork and delve deeper for the metaphors. Over the course of five weeks I noticed a maturation in some students’ artwork as it reflected on their thoughts and personal values. Our final art activity exemplified this, in which they collaboratively created peaceful, harmonious imagery. These pieces contrasted their collage pieces from our introductory workshop, which glorified material possessions.
To understand the transformative quality of artwork we examined how changing others’ perspectives contributes to social change. By being tolerant and accepting towards others who are different there is the chance for equity and social justice to prevail. In light of this ideology of togetherness, students demonstrated a growing sense of unity and respect for each other over the course of the five weeks. While stenciling t-shirts during our Street Art lesson, students collaborated to solve problems; they suggested design ideas or technical solutions to one another. They also demonstrated admiration and selflessness; they complimented each other’s work and volunteered to donate their work to be publically displayed at the Boys and Girls Club. Moreover, they retreated from their initial competitive approach to the art activities and began to appreciate one another’s work and feel pride in the collective success of the group.

Beyond my objectives, there were many other ways this capstone project served as a rich learning experience for the students and myself. Over the course of the program, the students’ confidence in creating artwork improved. My Instructions to create using their imagination and communicate a message they felt was important, initially intimidated students. There was little diversity or depth among the artwork they produced. However, further into the workshop, students’ artwork showed more originality as they began to take pride in their individual creativity.

A wonderful part about having art in the classroom is students intuitively work through many levels of discipline. For instance, during our Street Art lesson, student’s used an intense amount of logic to structure their stencils. They measured and calculated proportions, thought through how the stencil will be used as an inverted design tool, and determined their cuts to preserve distinction and style. Students were engaged with an incredible amount of problem solving and deductive reasoning.
This capstone gave me the opportunity to better myself as a teacher and refine my techniques. Initially, I was apprehensive about the activities having strict structure, as I didn’t want to stifle the students’ creativity. However, I found that when I introduced the art activities with more structure and limitations the children worked very diligently. They took careful time to perfect their work and were conservative with the materials and supplies. I learned a valuable lesson in teaching: instruction and structure do not inherently inhibit creativity. By supporting the rules with meaningful explanation students demonstrated a deeper respect for the project at hand.

I found it challenging to keep the children focused on the discussion part of our workshop class; they were usually eager to start the art activity. For this reason, I relied on showing children video clips of the artists we studied. Film served as an excellent teaching tool, as it captivated them through music and visuals. In general, I found technology to be an excellent resource. I used the internet to show students the artists’ websites, art blogs and a range of internet communities dedicated to public art projects. This gave them the chance to see how accessible education on contemporary art is.

Conducting this program gave me a lot of confidence in myself as an educator. I felt affirmed in my ability to construct creative lesson plans that students’ could enjoy and grow from. I learned there is a lot of preparation involved in conducting a workshop: materials, technology, time management and knowing your audience. However, despite all my planning, my capstone project really took on a life of its own. In many instances I restructured my lesson plans in response to trends I saw in the students’ behavior. I crafted the curriculum so it would agitate their ethical perception and move them into a deeper reflection of their personal values. It was magical to watch the power of education transpire and rewarding to know I sparked the process.
Overall my capstone project has been a success in meeting its objectives. However, I believe my greatest achievement is the seed I’ve planted in these students by introducing them to socially and ecologically active artists, encouraging their creativity, and building self-confidence and appreciation for each other. This project allowed me to make practical use of the knowledge I’ve acquired at CSUMB. Having a foundation of educational philosophies and pedagogical methods aided me in creating and teaching this curriculum. This project gave me the opportunity to cultivate what I found most impressionable in my student career and pass it on to the youth: exploring life and society through art.
References


<http://media.schoolofvisualarts.edu/sva/media/9490/small/moviemovie.html>.


Kennedy, F.J. (1963, October). *Remarks at Amherst College*. Amherst College, Amherst, MA.


Art Workshop

Understanding Self and Society through the Visual Arts
Learn a variety of mediums and create your own public works of art

Ages 12-13

Wednesdays March 30th—April 27th
@5:30 pm in the art room

Sign up at the front desk—only 20 spots available!
Appendix B: Introduction to Socially Conscious Art

Lesson Plan: Introduction to Socially Conscious Art

Title: Introduction to Socially Conscious Art

Subject area: Contemporary Art History & Visual Studio Arts

Grade Level: 6th—8th

Objectives: Introduction to workshop

- What is the purpose of art? What is public art?
  - Is art just supposed to be *pretty* and art making just supposed to be *fun*?
  - How can art force us to assess, or reassess, our personal values?
  - How do we connect art work to social change?
  - How does art give a voice to the voiceless (marginalized groups in society)?
  - What are the benefits of understanding those who are different from us? (e.g. different origins, background, opinions, beliefs, etc.)
    - How could art allow us this understanding?

Materials:

- Construction paper
- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Markers
- Portfolios
- Loose leaf

Suggested Procedures:

1. Show video clip: Beautiful Losers (Rose, 2008)
2. Arts Purpose—
   - *Teacher prompt: Is art just supposed to be “pretty” and art making just supposed to be “fun”?*
     - Question power
     - Provide a voice for the voiceless
       - Marginalized groups in society (those who are often discriminated against)
         - Low socio-economic status, African-American, Latino, LGBT, women
         - Groups in American history who have been oppressed (kept down by authority)
E.g.—slavery, segregation, inability to vote based on gender, skin color, or country of origin
  • Although laws and policies have changed, prejudice, racism, sexism, stereotypes and discrimination remain (Cai, 1998)
    o Question societal norms
    o “Mainstream culture”
      • The American Dream
        • What is “mainstream”? 
        • What is “the American Dream”? 

3. Art Activity
   1. Each student gets a piece of paper 
   2. On one side, using the collection of magazines and newspapers, cut, past, and create an image that represents “the American Dream”
      a. What typical things do we associate it?
      b. What typical people do we see in that role? 
   3. On the opposite side of the paper, create a collage that represents your personal goals, aspirations and dreams for the future (If it helps, draw your life as you hope it will be 20-30 years from now) 
      a. How is this image similar to your “American Dream” image?
      b. In what ways does it differ from the “American Dream”? 

4. Thoughts and words on the artist in society:
   • Mark Graham, Place-Based Education—the artist’s responsibility in society (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008)
   • President John F. Kennedy: Remarks at Amherst College (Kennedy, 1963)
   • Paterson—The Power of Story
     o The Arts—illumination & healing
     o Pinpoint problems—bring about social change (Paterson, 2010)

5. How do we connect art work to social change? 
   • Get people to talk about it 
     o Their interpretation/opinions/standpoint
     o Raising awareness of the problem/issue
   • Evoke empathy 
     o Allow others to see something from a new perspective
       • Others can feel other’s pain, suffering, and hope through art
   • Identify 
     o Others can relate their own lives and experiences to experiences foreign to them
     o Identifying with others sets us up to better understand them
       • What are the benefits of understanding those who are different from us? (e.g. different origins, background, opinions, beliefs, etc.)

6. Socially reconstructive artist—photos of art, history, affect
   • Emory Douglas—Black Panther Party
     o Black Panther Party—an African-American revolutionary movement
     • Created to protect African-American neighborhoods from police brutality
     o Worked as the Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party (1967-1980)
His graphic art was featured in the *The Black Panther* newspaper.

He used the newspaper's popularity to incite deprived citizens into action.

He portrayed the poor not as victims but as outraged, unapologetic and ready for a fight (Zach, 2007)

- **Guerilla Girls—Feminist Art**
  - Guerilla Girls is an anonymous group of radical feminist artists established in New York City in 1985.
  - They wanted to bring attention to women artists and artists of color and expose the art establishment for being male dominated.
  - They fought for: equal opportunity, the end of gender-based discrimination, equal access to education, freedom from sexual exploitation and abuse, and human rights for women everywhere (Chadwick, 1995)

7. What is public art?

- **Karl Marx—Art should be public and socially reconstructive** (Hirsch, 2008)
- **Barry McGee—a vital method of communication, one that keeps him in touch with a larger, more diverse audience than can be reached through the traditional spaces of a gallery or museum** (PBS: Art21, 2011)

**Evaluation:**

**POST-TEST—ARTIST’S STATEMENT**

Explain your process:

- Why you choose to arrange the piece the way you did (composition)?
- In what way did composition and value help convey your message?
- What do you hope to communicate to the public through this piece?

**Websites:**

- [http://www.pbs.org/art21/](http://www.pbs.org/art21/)
  
  This site hosts Art in the Twenty-First Century, a PBS documentary series about contemporary visual art in the United States and the artists who make it.

  
  This is the official site of the Guerrilla Girls. The Guerrilla Girls are an anonymous group of radical feminist artists who established in New York City in 1985. Known for their posters, books, billboards, appearances and other creative forms of culture jamming, the group aims to expose discrimination and corruption.

- [http://www.moca.org/emorydouglas/](http://www.moca.org/emorydouglas/)
  
  This site offers information on the MOCA’s art exhibition entitled, *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas*. This exhibition explores the history and legacy of the Black Panther Party, its revolutionary politics, grassroots ideology, irrepressible leaders, and the struggle for justice that continues today.

- [http://www.juxtapoz.com/](http://www.juxtapoz.com/)
  
  This site is the online version of the contemporary and underground art magazine, Juxtapoz Art and Culture. It features articles, blogs, video, reader art, gallery guides, forums, and archives.
Why does it matter?

A Deeper Understanding of Art’s Purpose and Public Art

Beautiful Losers
Guerilla Girls

Do women have to be naked to get into U.S. museums?

Less than 3% of the artists in the Met. Museum are women, but 85% of the nudes are female.

Guerilla Girls
GUERRILLA GIRLS’ POP QUIZ.

Q. If February is Black History Month and March is Women’s History Month, what happens the rest of the year?

A. Discrimination.

Guerilla Girls

Female by Birth
Feminist by Choice
Lesson Plan: Street Art

Title: Street Art

Subject area: Contemporary Art History & Visual Studio Arts

Grade Level: 6th—8th

Objectives: Is graffiti art or vandalism?
- Is it art if it’s not housed in a museum or gallery?
- How could graffiti respond to a larger, more diverse audience?
- What makes this art? What makes this public art? Why does it matter?

Materials:
- Fabric paint
- T-shirts
- Rollers
- Paper plates
- Cardboard
- Cardstock paper
- Scrap paper
- Newspaper
- Scissors
- Tape
- Pencils

Suggested Procedures:
1. Show video clip: Infamy (Pray, 2005)
   - What demonstrations of graffiti did we see?
   - What actions were defiant of authority?
     - Graffiti artists—Claw, Earsnot, Enem, Jase, Saber and Toomer
     - The “graffiti guerrilla”—Joe Connolly
   - Does this film make a distinction between the art and the culture of graffiti?
   - Is there a particular story you were drawn to?
2. Understanding Graffiti
   - The “causes” of graffiti
     - Motives/desires for creating graffiti
       - Leaving your mark
         - Territory, gangs and ego
           - A platform to communicate ideas to the public (public art?)
       - Uncensored expression
- Anonymity—expression without social restrictions (Bartholome & Snyder, 2004)
  - Graffiti Culture
    - Urban Landscapes/Skateboard/Hip-hop subculture (Watkins, 2010)

3. Vandalism or art
   - Expression, ideas and provocation in a public space
   - Graffiti artist’s as interventionists
     - Artwork which intervenes your thoughts as you move about your day
   - Does the illegality of graffiti add to its intrigue? (Winn, 2005)

**Art Activity—Stenciled t-shirts**

1. Cover tables with newspaper to protect from paint stains
2. Each student will receive a t-shirt, a piece of cardboard, a paper plate with some fabric paint, a few sheets of scrap paper and cardstock paper
3. Practice sketching possible designs on the scrap paper
4. The final design will be sketched on a piece of cardstock paper
5. Cut the design out of the cardstock paper to create stencil
6. Place the piece of cardboard inside the t-shirt so it provides a flat surface to stencil on
7. Place stencil on top of t-shirt
8. Dip paint roller in fabric paint
9. Roll the paint roller over the stencil
10. Lift carefully
11. Allow 15 minutes for fabric paint to dry
12. Use markers or various colors of fabric paint to expand on the design

**When choosing a stencil design, think of how this t-shirt will function as your “public space”**

What statement will you make?

**Evaluation:**

**POST-TEST—ARTIST’S STATEMENT**

Explain your process:

- Why you choose to arrange the piece the way you did (composition)?
- In what way did composition and value help convey your message?
- What do you hope to communicate to the public through this piece?

**Expand:**

- Exploring graffiti’s fixation on name, mark and identity
  - Show video clip: Kaws (Summer, 2008)

**Websites:**

http://www.banksy.co.uk/

This site exhibits the indoor and outdoor artwork of Banksy, an anonymous British graffiti artist, political activist, film director and painter. His satirical street art and subversive epigrams combine irreverent dark humor with graffiti done in a distinctive
stenciling technique. Such artistic works of political and social commentary have been featured on streets, walls, and bridges of cities throughout the world.

http://www.infamythemovie.com/

This site promotes the film documentary, *Infamy*. This film follows the intense journey into the dangerous lives and obsessed minds of six of America’s most prolific graffiti artists. From New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and San Francisco this film offers insight and raises questions on contemporary graffiti culture.

http://www.woostercollective.com/

This site is dedicated to showcasing and celebrating ephemeral art placed on streets in cities around the world. It contains a collection of street art, stickers, posters, graffiti and culture jamming.
Street Art

Graffiti Culture: Is it Art or Vandalism?
Go to work, send your kids to school
Follow fashion, eat normal
Walk on the pavement, watch T.V.
Save for your old age, obey the law
Repeat after me: I am free.
Exit Through the Gift Shop
Name, Mark & Identity

Kaws: Graffiti Artist and Toy Designer

HUFFPOST POLITICS

Maine Mural Projection Artists Discuss ‘Photo-Bombing’
Lesson Plan: Environmental Art: Andy Goldsworthy

Title: Environmental Art: Andy Goldsworthy

Subject area: Contemporary Art History & Visual Studio Arts

Grade Level: 6th—8th

Objectives: How does Goldsworthy’s method appropriate his message?
- What is lost and gained through this ephemeral approach?
- How could Goldsworthy’s sculptures serve as interventions in our lives?
- What makes this art? What makes this public art? Why does it matter?

Materials:
- Large sheets of construction paper
- Natural found materials
  - Twigs, leaves, branches, rocks, flowers, etc.
- Digital camera

Suggested Procedures:
   - Natural art vs. street art
     - How does Goldsworthy as an artist, similar to the street artists we looked at last week? How is he different?
       - “Leaving a mark”
         - Natural vs. urban landscape
           - Social justice vs. environmental justice—public art as intervention
         - Ephemeral—some of Goldsworthy’s work is easily demolished by weather or seasonal changes (i.e. ice melting in the spring time) (Goldsworthy & Friedman, 2004)
   - The importance of process
     - Whether the work is colossal and elaborate or miniscule and delicate—how is his work all similar in the sense of the process?
       - He only uses the natural found materials at hand
         - No tools, glue, or bolts are used
           - He allows *nature* to fuse materials (i.e. waiting for the sun to set so the temperature will drop and cause his design of natural elements to be fused by the water freezing, or using tree sap)
     - *Emphasizing* the beauty of nature—a call to action
       - Preserve the environment
       - “Tread lightly” (Adams, 2007)
Art Activity
1. Each student will receive a large piece of construction paper
2. Students will choose from a variety of natural found materials
3. They will arrange the materials on the paper as desired
4. When complete, the teacher will take a digital photo of each piece of artwork

Evaluation:
POST-TEST—ARTIST’S STATEMENT
Explain your process:
• Why you choose to arrange the piece the way you did (composition)?
• In what way did composition and value help convey your message?
• What do you hope to communicate to the public through this piece?

Websites:
This website documents artist Andy Goldsworthy. It offers a multitude of photos of his artwork and past exhibitions, as well as his bibliography and philosophy. The site contains reflections and quotes from Andy Goldsworthy in regards to his mission as an artist.
Art from Nature

The Art and Practice of Andy Goldsworthy
Lesson Plan: Conclusion: Ways of Seeing

Title: Conclusion: Ways of Seeing

Subject area: Contemporary Art History & Visual Studio Arts

Grade Level: 6th—8th

Objectives: As a culmination of the workshop, this lesson will serve to emphasize empathy as a practice of social justice

Materials:
- Acrylic sheet
- Tempura Paint
- Paint brushes
- Rope
- Hole puncher
- Paper plates

Suggested Procedures:

1. Show video clip, *MPS Art Therapy Video* (Farber, 2011)
   - The artists we have looked at over the past four weeks have sought to raise awareness and evoke compassion in the viewer for a particular purpose
   - In our introduction, we observed art as something possible to bridge understanding between the viewer and the subject
   - **Revisit Introduction:**
     - How do we connect art work to social change?
       - Get people to talk about it
         - Their interpretation/opinions/standpoint
         - Raising awareness of the problem/issue
       - Evoke empathy
         - Allow others to see something from a new perspective
           - Others can feel other’s pain, suffering, and hope through art
       - Identify
         - Others can relate their own lives and experiences to experiences foreign to them
         - Identifying with others sets us up to better understand them
           - *What are the benefits of understanding those who are different from us? (e.g. different origins, background, opinions, beliefs, etc.)*
         - For this activity, we will examine how understanding each other and accepting our differences is a vital part of contributing to the broader fight for social justice

   How do we connect art work to social change?
• Get people to talk about it
  o Their interpretation/opinions/standpoint
  o Raising awareness of the problem/issue
• Evoke empathy
  o Allow others to see something from a new perspective
    ▪ Others can feel other’s pain, suffering, and hope through art
• Identify
  o Others can relate their own lives and experiences to experiences foreign to
  them
  o Identifying with others sets us up to better understand them
    ▪ What are the benefits of understanding those who are different from
      us? (e.g. different origins, background, opinions, beliefs, etc.)

Art Activity
1. Pair students off randomly (counting by two’s, pulling names out of a hat, etc.)
2. Each pair of students will get a piece of plexiglass
3. Each student will get a paper plate with a dollop of red, yellow, and blue tempura
   paint
4. Students will sit across from each other and stand the piece of plexiglass up
   between them on its stand
5. Using their pallets of paint, students will paint on their side of the plexiglass, as
   their partner simultaneously paints on the other

Evaluation:
POST-TEST—ARTIST’S STATEMENT
Explain your process:
• Why you choose to arrange the piece the way you did (composition)?
• In what way did composition and value help convey your message?
• What do you hope to communicate to the public through this piece?

Websites:
http://media.schoolofvisualarts.edu/sva/media/9490/small/moviemovie.html
This video demonstrates the Visual Arts Therapy program at the School of Visual Arts in
New York. It illustrates activities students engage in, including painting on sheets of acetate
simultaneously with classmates.
Ways of Seeing

Going from societal to interpersonal understanding