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Women of Our Worlds: Women Raising Voices Against Violence

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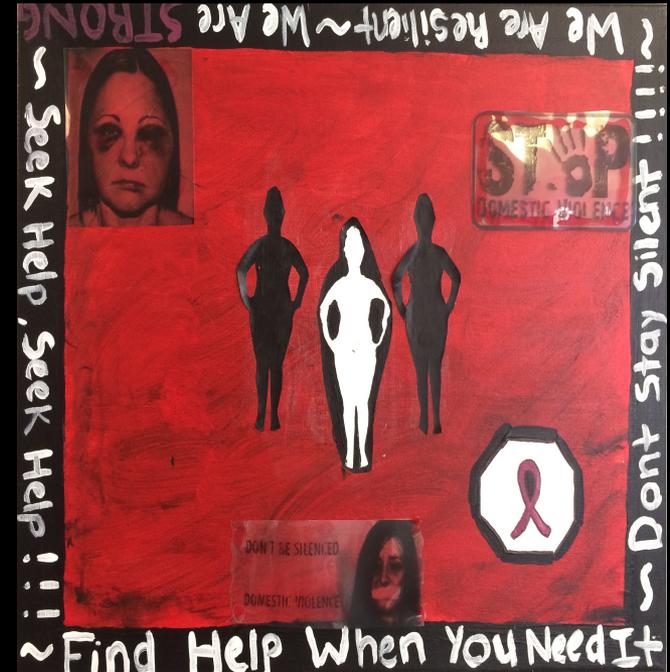
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Women Raising Voices Against Violence



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CSTAE: Caucus of Social Theory in Art Education <http://cstae.org/>

NAEA. New York. 2017

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UNIT TITLE: *Women of our Worlds / Women Raising Voices Against Violence*

Project description

In a high school painting and drawing course, students investigated what contemporary women artists were making, saying, protesting, and changing in multiple art worlds. Group dialogue centered on generative themes in which students chose interconnected topics of combating domestic violence, affirming diverse body expressions and family relationships to launch a painting on canvas project. Students took leadership in activism to invite community workers into the art room resulting and in-school interventions such as, installing art exhibit in the school office, and projecting text and imagery in school cafeteria walls. Expanding into the community, students produced and installed info-art-posters in sites where they knew women needed access to information such as nail salons, homeless shelters and the employee break rooms of low-wage employment retail stores. This led to students teaching painting classes at a local women's shelter. The study of contemporary women artists empowered students to reconsider what counts as art, and re-envision their role as art-makers in their worlds.

Sociopolitical context

All the students enrolled in this drawing and painting course name their intersecting gender and cultural identities as females of Puerto Rican heritage and/or African American heritage, charging me with a responsibility to assert deliberately anti-racist feminist pedagogy focusing on contemporary practices. Heretofore this school year, my students had exceptionally limited access to art education in their PK-8 learning. I made deliberate pedagogical choices to teach students as empowered citizens with emerging studio skills rather than a more traditional starting point, which may have focused on elements and principles skill sets. Vocabulary expansion and depth of conceptual investigation are a priority to embolden students in their art production. Tactile studio skills are expanded in this classroom through investigations about what it means to be an emerging artist with responsibilities in our communities.

Within that backdrop, I assert that this unit plan may be meaningful to students in multiple settings, of all gender identities and racial affiliations. Critical multicultural education is beneficial to all students, and it has the potential to expand social justice understandings across a wide range of human difference within our classrooms.

Enduring Understanding:

- Students will understand that women artists bring voice and vision to unheard, unseen and unspoken realities.
- Students will understand ways in which artist engage social responsibility through narrative art and conceptual art.

Essential Questions:

- What does it mean to be a citizen artist?
- What does it mean to be a socially engaged artist?
- What perspectives do women artists bring to contemporary dialogue?
- What knowledge do I bring to my art making and what do I want to say?
- How may research about contemporary artists expand my practice?

STANDARDS

The following National Core Art Standards are met in this unit of study:

<http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/content/national-core-arts-standards-anchor-standards#creating>

Visual Arts: Creating.

Anchor Standard #2. Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

High school Advanced. VA:Cr2.1.IIIa : Experiment, plan, and make multiple works of art and design that explore a personally meaningful theme, idea, or concept.

Visual Arts: Presenting.

Anchor Standard #4. Analyze, interpret, and select artistic work for presentation.

High school Advanced. VA:Pr4.1.IIIa Critique, justify, and present choices in the process of analyzing, selecting, curating, and presenting artwork for a specific exhibit or event.

Visual Arts: Responding.

Anchor Standard #7. Perceive and analyze artistic work.

High school Advanced. VA:Re.7.1.IIIa Analyze how responses to art develop over time based on knowledge of and experience with art and life.

High school Advanced. VA:Re.7.2.IIIa Determine the commonalities within a group of artists or visual images attributed to a particular type of art, timeframe, or culture.

Visual Arts: Connecting.

Anchor Standard #10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

High school Advanced. VA:Cn10.1.IIIa Synthesize knowledge of social, cultural, historical, and personal life with art-making approaches to create meaningful works of art or design.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students can explain commonalities across the group of contemporary women artists we study in our *Women of Our Worlds* unit to uncover the intersecting meanings in women's voices.
- Students can interpret the multiple meanings in the work by each of the contemporary women artists, and in the work of their peers to uncover what it means to be a citizen artist.
- Students can apply new skills and techniques with art media to complete two canvases with acrylic paint and mixed media through experimentation and planning to explore a personally meaningful theme, idea, or concept.
- Students see in perspective how to critique and present choices in the process of analyzing, curating, and presenting artwork for the specific exhibit *Our Worlds/Women Raising Voices Against Violence* and events including: the opening reception; the invitation to social workers; the production and distribution of posters in the community and the art workshops at women's shelter.
- Students demonstrate empathy by studying the voices of women in the pieces we study, and by participating in classroom dialogue that synthesizes peer experiences and personal knowledge to produce art that responds to social concerns.
- Students reveal self-knowledge by making connections to the messages of the contemporary women artists' work, and by applying personal experiences to in their own studio production/art-making.

ASSESSMENT

- **Can students cite commonalities and differences across the body of work studied?** Teacher observes and supports classroom dialogue, inviting all students to participate while visually documenting all students' voices. Students take turns facilitating classroom dialogue.
- **Did student experiment with art media to cultivate skill, technique and personal meaning in studio production?** Students experiment with acrylic and mixed media, and document their experimentation through a portfolio collection of investigative sketches. Teacher guides students in maintaining a portfolio collection of evidence of sketches/experimentation with media. Additional work that is collected in the portfolio includes: source materials from research about practices of contemporary artists; student written reflections from generative dialogue in theme development. Teacher reviews portfolio collection with student throughout studio production process to inform daily studio production.

- **Do students demonstrate understandings of multiple meanings, or attempt to stretch one’s understanding of various artists’ work, including peers and professional artists who are the focus of the study?** Teacher and students document dialogue through white board and chart paper when investigating meaning. Classroom dialogue revisits each artist’s work and re-checks previous comments and questions to deepen understanding. Lists of student questions are posted publicly to guide classroom discussion and research. Vocabulary lists are generated with classroom-curated definitions.
- **Do students demonstrate empathy and reveal self-knowledge through their participation in classroom dialogue and in studio production?** Students work on several drafts of a written artist’s statement using the peer review process to check for how others understand their work and statements, as well as for deeper understandings of peers’ work. Students include citations of professional contemporary artists’ work and how that research has influenced their studio processes and meaning-making.

LEARNING PLAN

Art class days: This unit may require from 8 to 15 art class meetings, depending on your school schedule structure, number of students, how many contemporary artists you choose to investigate and the scale of finished art pieces you assign.

Materials: Acrylic paint supplies including range of brushes, papers for experimentation, palettes. Mixed media supplies including a range of printed imagery from magazines, newspapers, textural scraps and found materials. Student folders or portfolios are required to collect student experimental sketches, research materials and artist statement drafts.

Computer and internet access: Students need to be able to delve deeply into at least one contemporary artist of their choosing. Invite students to investigate all aspects of the artist’s work and biography. Access to a printer for students to print images for their portfolio sketch collection is helpful. Students are crafting several drafts of artist’s statement, so they will need access to word processing and printing.

Introduce the unit: “Women of Our Worlds” - plural worlds/citizen artists. Invite students to consider why “worlds” is plural. Prompt dialogue about the concept of multiple experiences within one neighborhood, one city, one region, one state, one country, one world. Ask about ways in which various women may hold a wide range of experiences within these worlds. Alternatively, consider ways in which the experiences of women may hold commonalities. Prompt discussions about various “art worlds.” Show some videos about the Guerilla Girls and ask what meaning the students make from the Guerilla Girls work. Ask

about what it means to be citizen artists. Post all the students' response on chart paper around the room.

RESPONDING in the learning plan.

Provide overview of artists and images. See images in the attached power point which include work by the following artists. Add more if you choose. In the first day of the unit, invite students to make sketches and take notes about what they see and think. Do not have vocal dialogue at first. Follow up by delving deeply into one or two artist s and images each day for several days as a prompt to the studio production portion of class.

Dialogue with images. Use inquiry-based dialogue strategies for investigating art images. What do you notice? What do you wonder? Can you Say More? What makes you say that? These four questions are adapted strategies from three sources: *Visual Thinking Strategies* <http://www.vtshome.org/>, *Harvard Project Zero's Visible Thinking and Artful Thinking* <http://pzartfulthinking.org/> and Terry Barret's (2002) frameworks for *Reflecting, Wondering, Responding to Art*.

Take several days to delve into one or two images/artists each day. See images in the attached power point which include work by the following artists: Betye Saar, Alison Saar, Kara Walker, Howardeena Pindell, Renee Cox, Barbara Kruger, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, lois Mailou Jones, Faith Ringgold and others. Follow up each dialogue about one or two artists and the images of their work by experimenting with acrylic paint, mixed media and brainstorming the meaning each student may want to convey in their own studio production on final canvases.

Narrative art and Conceptual art. While discussing each image invite students to consider understandings of narrative art and conceptual art. Break down each term: *narrate* and *concept*. Each approach may be viewed in much of the work in the slides, and it is important to note that the two are not mutually exclusive, especially in much of contemporary art. One may view a common understanding of a narrative that is presented in a conceptual format, for example see Renee Cox's (1996) *Yo Mama's Pieta*. Here are some possible definitions. Invite your students to expand on these and develop classroom definitions that will enrich student vocabulary and empower writing and dialogue about art.

- The *Illustrated Dictionary of Art* defines narrative art: "Art which illustrates or tells a story. It usually describes self-explanatory events from daily life or those drawn from a text, well-known folk tale or myth."
- The Tate Museum defines conceptual art: "Conceptual art is art for which the idea (or concept) behind the work is more important than the finished art object. It emerged as an art movement in the 1960s and the term usually refers to art made from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s."
www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/c/conceptual-art

CREATING in g the learning plan.

Dialogue and studio production/experiment, plan and make multiple works of art. Each day begins with students retrieving their portfolios and gathering in a class meeting to examine and discuss of an image or artist. Students keep notes and sketches during the dialogue. After the class meeting, students experiment with acrylic paint and mixed media, drawing inquiry from artist who was studied. Specific studio productions may focus on the role of color, the role of the figure in narrative, the surprise effect of juxtaposition and more. Generate questions during the dialogue and post the question on the board during studio experimentation.

Make multiple works of art that explore a personally meaningful theme, idea, or concept. Dedicate one or two class meetings to an all-class discussion of the themes that emerged in the art that was studied. Ask what themes may be pertinent to women of OUR worlds, here in our lives, in our neighborhood in our school. Document the generated themes on white board. Invite students to write silently on two index cards. *What narrative images come to mind when considering personally meaningful themes? What concepts do they want to communicate?*

CONNECTING in the learning plan:

Dedicate several studio production days to synthesizing and relating knowledge and personal experiences to make art. Confer with students about the work they have collected and the writing they have completed about personal themes. Compare their ideas to some of the professional contemporary work that has been studied. Encourage experimentation. Unleash inhibition about what counts as art by affirm contemporary practices such as re-appropriation of images through tracing and projecting, rather than focusing on traditional skills of drawing.

Work toward final studio production by synthesizing knowledge of social, cultural, historical, and personal life with art-making approaches to create meaningful works of art or design. Support pair-shares or small group discussion whereby students provide one another with critical feedback as they prepare their final work for an exhibit.

PRESENTING in the learning plan.

THE FOLLOWING COMPONENTS OF THE LEARNING PLAN ARE THE RESULTS OF STUDENT-GENERATED AND STUDENT-DIRECTED ACTIONS THAT WERE SPAWNED BY THE UNIT, "Women of Our Worlds. YOUR STUDENTS WILL BE DRAWN TO ACTION WITHIN THEIR OWN SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT IN WAYS THAT MAKE MEANING FOR YOUR SPECIFIC COMMUNITY.

Through class meeting dialogue and collaborative studio production, these students chose to mount an exhibit titled “Women Raising Voices Against Violence”

Students learn to critique, justify, and present choices in the process of analyzing, selecting, curating, and presenting artwork for an exhibit titled “Women Raising Voices Against Violence.”

Selecting, curating, labeling and statement making. Students complete several drafts of written artist statements using the peer-review writing process. Students study the methods of galleries and museums to make gallery labels, signage and post artist statements in their student-curated art exhibit in the school office.

CONNECTING and PRESENTING in the learning plan.

Citizen artists. Students take up the role of citizen artists by acting upon the social, cultural, historical, and personal life knowledge they have embodied with art-making approaches. Students chose to develop a series of art-posters to distribute and post throughout the communicate to educate women about where to get help to emancipate from domestic violence.

Connecting with cultural workers. Students invited social workers into the art room to learn more about the statistical realities of domestic violence and to gain information about how women may help themselves to emancipate from domestic violence.

Taking responsibility for our community. As a result of this work and the art exhibit, students accepted an invitation to teach art workshops at a local womens’ she;ter. They provided watercolor demonstrations with an investigation of Georgia’ O’Keefe’s symbolism of the flower as a motif.

RESOURCES FOR DIALOGUE AND VOCABULARY

Inquiry-based dialogue to study artists’ works (adapted from *Artful Thinking of Harvard Project Zero* <http://pzartfulthinking.org/> and *Visual Thinking Strategies* <http://www.vtshome.org/>):

- What do you notice?
- What do you wonder?
- What makes you say that?
- Can you say more?

Vocabulary expansion in Women Raising Voices Against Violence. Cultivate your own classroom community understandings of this terminology.

- contemporary
- citizen artist
- narrative art
- figurative art
- conceptual art
- installation art
- socially engaged art
- tactile media
- new media
- citizen artist

RESOURCES

Online links to artists we investigated in *Women Raising Voices Against Violence*

María Magdalena Campos-Pons http://pem.org/exhibitions/188-alchemy_of_the_soul_maria_magdalena_campos-pons and <http://www.smfa.edu/maria-magdalena-campos-pons> and https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/maria-magdalena-campos-pons

Renée Cox <http://www.reneecox.org/>

Njideka Akunyili Crosby <http://njidekaakunyili.com/>

Jenny Holzer <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/jenny-holzer>

Guerilla Girls <http://www.guerrillagirls.com/>

Barbara Kruger <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/barbara-kruger>

Howardeena Pindell
https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/howardena-pindell

Faith Ringgold <http://www.faithringgold.com>

Betye Saar <http://www.visionaryproject.org/saarbetye/> and <http://artforum.com/words/id=58415>

Alison Saar <http://nmwa.org/explore/artist-profiles/alison-saar>

Kara Walker <http://www.art21.org/artists/kara-walker>

Museum sources for *Women Raising Voices Against Violence*

Institute of Contemporary Art Boston <https://www.icaboston.org/>

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago <https://mcatchicago.org/>

National Museum of Women in the Arts <http://nmwa.org/>

Brooklyn Museum Elisabeth Sackler Center for Feminist Art
<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa>

Smith College Museum of Art <http://www.smith.edu/artmuseum/>

Online educational resources:

National Visionary Leadership Project <http://www.visionaryproject.org>

Rethinking Schools <http://www.rethinkingschools.org>

Zinn Education Project <http://zinnedproject.org/>