Through and Beyond the Barbie: 3 Themed Lesson Sequences

Rabeya Jalil
Lesson Sequence

for Digication e-Portfolios

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Through and Beyond the Barbie
3 Themed Lesson Sequences
for early adolescents of 11-14 years (7-8th grades)

Summary/ Abstract

My teaching philosophy entails that art is a domain that celebrates freedom of expression, subjectivity and ideas that respect contextual representation and cultural interpretation. This lesson sequence will facilitate students to collaborate, explore and experience themes that they can personally relate to on a deeper and meaningful level. The purpose of this unit is to foster a safe and creative environment for early adolescents of 11 – 14 years (7-8th grades) to explore their personal identities, their gender, their socio-cultural beliefs, their values, through critical thinking, self-reflecting, and art making.

Through engaging in a conversation and exploratory dialogue to deconstruct the layers that form identity and culture, using both in the traditional and digital media (collage, printmaking, drawing, digital photography, video, Scratch programming software, Photoshop, iMovie and other digital software, and collage) students will learn to appreciate that a casual dialogue about a popular/ material/ visual culture phenomena (in this case, the Barbie) can reveal/ unfold critical insights into their deepest emotions, opinions and socio-religious inclinations by engaging with it.

Each lesson sequence in this unit revolves around three inter-connected themes:

1) Identifiers (Social/ Ethnic/ Conceptual Self and Body Image).
2) Gender Roles, Stereotypes in Context and Inner Outer Beauty.
Introduction: The Ethnic Self

Unit theme

My teaching philosophy entails that art is a domain that celebrates freedom of expression, subjectivity and ideas that respect contextual representation and cultural interpretation. This unit, and the curriculum that emerges from it, will facilitate the students to explore and experience themes that they can personally relate to on a deeper and meaningful basis. The purpose of this unit is to foster a safe and creative environment for early adolescents to explore their personal identities, their gender, their socio-cultural beliefs, their values, through critical thinking, self-reflecting, and art making.

Brief prelude to the curriculum

Wagner-Ott (2002) whose writing provided me an impetus to embark on this exploration, said that toys, including dolls and action figures had long been an important part of material culture. Though ignored by much of art education, the critical analysis of girls’ characteristics of playing with dolls/action figures provided valuable insights into the continuities of gender identities in American cultures. On the other hand, Wagner-Ott (2002) also highlighted the unfavorable or harmful effects of this hegemonic market strategy saying that “[t]he perpetuation of white, heterosexual, middle-class values of the fashion conscious Barbie icon had submerged heterosexual, racial, class, and ethnic identity themes” (p. 254).

Theme-based Goals and Philosophy

1. Create a Curriculum that critically examines notions of gender, utilizing visual/material and popular culture. The art syllabus could be designed in a way to counter gender, class social stereotyping.
2. Foster culturally-responsive teaching where students represent diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background.
3. Incorporate the complex meanings associated with visual (popular, material, consumer) culture as part of the classroom for the arts, as well as for education in general.
4. Critically consider visual/consumer and popular culture (along with the traditional forms of visual art).
5. Express opinions/perceptions about cultures, ethnicities and religions different from theirs through Barbie (a Western product and a relatively alien cultural phenomenon for them).
6. Study Garber’s (1995) notion of border studies (the in-between realm where multiple realities intersect when two cultures intermingle) considering the ways in which Barbie forms that “border.”
8. Navigate ways to avoid falling victim to such stereotypes, negotiate the intricacies and consequences of the visual environment and rationalize the pros and cons of the influence of imagery and forms in visual culture.
9. Observe the possible ways mundane and commonplace objects can be more persuasive in developing thought, behavior, feelings and attitudes than the fine arts, primarily because they are part of the regular, ordinary routine.
10. Reflect on how interacting with a “non-special” or ordinary everyday visual product or form, one may think more unconditionally, be less intimidated and perhaps be more likely to develop a first-hand opinion about it.
11. Learn ways to approach and respect the material/popular culture objects, art and artifacts of different cultures.
12. Learn to express their imagination, ideas about themselves and their socio-cultural beliefs.
13. Build up confidence and inter-personal skills by participating in discussions and collaborative projects.

**Material-based Goals/ In-class Learning Outcomes**

1. Initiate theme-based and material-based lesson sequences, projects and activities through which students will create work by combining, connecting and collaborating across different mediums (traditional and digital media).
2. Facilitate and generate a creative space that enables students to have a seamless transition when dealing with a bricolage of traditional media, digital media, visual arts, performance arts (music, dance, theatre), literary arts.
3. Work with and merge the traditional materials and mediums of art making to the digital, electronic media.
4. Develop students’ fluency in going back and forth within a variety of media (digital technology, drawing, sculpture) to maximize productivity towards their creative expression.
5. Learn to work in a communal space and in collaboration with each other.
6. Learn to document their work.
7. Learn to appreciate and evaluate their own and others works. Interpret, reflect upon, and evaluate the characteristics, purposes, and merits of their work and the work of others.
8. Build up confidence and inter-personal skills by participating in discussions and collaborative projects.
9. Exhibit and present projects/artwork with a structure that can be used in the future portfolio and art repertoire building.
10. Solve visual arts problems with originality, flexibility, fluency, and imagination.
11. Use materials, methods, information, and technology in a safe and ethical manner.
12. Identify, analyze, and apply criteria for making visual aesthetic judgments of their work and the work of others.
13. Strengthen critical thinking, independent thinking and decision-making skills.

**Structure of the Unit**

This unit is designed for adolescents of 11 – 14 years (7-8th grades). Each lesson sequence revolves around three inter-connected themes that might also feed onto and draw inspiration from each other:

1) Identifiers (Social/ Ethnic/ Conceptual Self and Body Image).
2) Gender Roles, Stereotypes in Context and Inner Outer Beauty.

The students will explore a variety of materials in the traditional and digital media and get hands-on experience with painting, collage and digital software/ programs to create visual forms and imagery that is personal and meaningful to them.

The curricular structural framework will inform children’s aesthetic responding, foster collaboration, culturally responsive teaching, student centered learning, introduce and integrate digital art processes in some of its learning stages and focus on a conceptual orientation for approaching individual and group art projects.
Through and Beyond the Barbie
Lesson Sequence

Student Body: 7th & 8th Grade, 11-14 years old
12 students (will be divided into groups of 3 for some activities)

Umbrella Objective:

Through engaging in a conversation and exploratory dialogue to deconstruct the layers that form identity and culture, using collage, printmaking, drawing, digital photography, video, Scratch programming software, Photoshop, iMovie and other digital software, and collage, students will learn to appreciate that a casual dialogue about a popular/ material/ visual culture phenomena (in this case, the Barbie) can reveal/ unfold critical insights into their deepest emotions, opinions and socio-religious inclinations by engaging with it. Also, students will learn to work both in the traditional and digital media simultaneously from observation, memory, and ultimately, from their imagination and also learn to merge and diffuse the two through their creative expression and critical/ personal inquiry.

Pre-requisites:

1. Students should have already experienced lessons in the one or all of the Printmaking techniques used for this unit.
2. Students should be familiar with Photoshop, Apple iMovie.
3. Students should have prior experience of digital photography and the use of scanners.
Introduction: Lesson 1

Activity: Introduction to the Unit and its theme

1. Identifiers (Social/ ethnic/ conceptual self and body image)
2. Gender Roles and Stereotypes in context, beauty (inner, outer)
3. Representation and celebration (Identity/ existence in a Socio-Cultural/ Ethnic construct/ context)

Time Allotted: one 45-minute period

Motivational Dialogue/ Opening Statement/ Association/ Dialogue

Dialogue and class discussion will involve an interaction and conversation with the students about their experiences and connection with the Barbie. (Prior to the day, students will be asked to bring their/ a Barbie to share at the beginning of this unit, if they have one). This popular visual culture phenomenon will be discussed elaborately on the first day. Students will be asked about their opinions on her body semiotics (physical attributes; hair/ skin, body language, color, style, clothes, shoes, etc.). A set of hypothetical questions about students’ opinions on a variety of Barbies will motivate them to deconstruct the notion of this visual form.

Some questions that may be asked to open and facilitate a dialogue and instigate/ stimulate the thought process:

1. What do you think about this particular Barbie’s (or a set of Barbies) personality? The Barbies may be discussed individually or in groups. Images of Barbies could be shown also to facilitate further dialogue.
2. What might her name be?
3. What is her daily routine like?
4. What are her eating habits?
5. Her occupational activities?
6. Her environment and living space?
7. Her religion (belief system)?
8. Her imaginary family, her husband, children and her relationships?
9. What would it be like to hypothetically be a Barbie’s friend? Would you like to be her friend? Why?
10. Where and how do you think she lives? Which country?
11. What language does she speak?
12. What are her occupational activities? Where does she work? What’s her profession?
13. What are her hobbies?
14. What would a Barbie look like in different regions of the world (for example, in Karachi (Pakistan), in Mumbai (India), in New York (USA), in Beijing (China), in Istanbul (Turkey), in London (UK))?
15. What would a Barbie be like in your neighborhood/community/family?
16. What if she goes to a foreign country/your ancestor’s country/city/place (if it is a different one)? What if the Barbie goes to your favorite country/city/place/neighborhood? What would she do there? How would she live? What clothes would she wear? What food will she eat?
17. What if the Barbie came to the real world?
18. Could she live with your family? How would she live?
19. If you were to make your own Barbie, how would she look like? How would you personalize it? What would her name be? What clothes will she wear? Language? Food? Belief system? Hobbies? Profession?
20. What about Ken dolls? (May repeat the above questions).

Suggested readings


Some Blogs and websites:
http://www.patriciaanders.com/?category_name=art-dolls
http://www.alteredbarbie.com/users/candi33
http://www.alteredbarbie.com/artwork/saddle-barbie-campaign-trail
http://www.freewayblogger.com/
http://www.chinh.in/
http://scratch.mit.edu/
http://scratched.media.mit.edu/
http://vimeo.com/19408116
http://pinterest.com/seanjustice/

Suggested artists

Some artists who have used Barbie in their art/ photography: Bani Abidi, Margaux Lange, Max Beets, Mariel Clayton uses Barbie as subject on her photo’s, Barbara Hosein

Thoughts to hold onto for next class (homework):
1. How would you identify yourself if asked what is your identity?
2. Think of 10 identifiers (things/ objects/ images/ forms/ ideas/ names that identify you).
LESSON SEQUENCE 1:

Theme and Title: Identifiers (Social/ Ethnic/ Conceptual Self and Body Image).

Lesson 2

Activity:
Create a Trading Card Project in the form of a Box-Print Portfolio through printmaking (monoprinting, collagraphs or styrofoam printing) and mixed media.

Materials Used: Styrofoam, acetate sheets, water based ink/ tempera paint, pencil, brushes, tempera paint.

Time Allotted: one 45-minute period.

Opening Statement/ Association/ Dialogue/ Visualization to stimulate the thought process

1. How would you identify yourself if asked what is your identity?
2. What are identifiers?
3. Prepare a list of 10 personal identifiers (things/ objects/ images/ forms/ ideas/ names that identify you) with thought to how to visually re-present each item on a card the size of a playing card in preparation for our next class project.
4. What is it that you feel proud of?
5. What is it that you feel insecure about?
6. Who do you associate with and regarding your physical appearance, your body image, your historical context, your present, your future, your educational context?
7. Which community do you belong you? Your family, your relatives, school community, your sports club, literary club, your religious community, your neighborhood, your racial community, your ethnic community, your gendered community, your intellectual community?
8. How would you visually represent the 10 identifiers?

Objective, goals and discussions for the day:
1. Divide students in groups of 3.
2. Demonstrate how to cut cards, make boxes to hold the cards and carry out some basic Printmaking techniques (collagraph, monoprinting, styrofoam relief printing)
3. Initiate the activity for students to cut their own cards.
4. (Students will) Make 4 boxes to hold 15 cards each. One box will contain 15 cards (15 x 3; 5 identifiers from each student from a total of 3 students in a group).
5. Create the plate/matrix through printmaking techniques and prepare them to print in the next class session (on the theme of Identifiers).
6. Wrap up and clean the class.
Lesson 3 (lesson continued)

Theme and Title: Identifiers (Social/ Ethnic/ Conceptual Self and Body Image).

Activity: Box-Print Portfolio/ Trading Card Project through printmaking (monoprinting, collographs or styrofoam printing) and mixed media.

Materials Used: 3” x 4” thick construction paper cards, 20 for each student (4 x 5).

Time Allotted: one 45-minute period.

Objective, goals and discussions for the day:

1. Select 5 images from the 10 to make editions of 4 for each of the 5 plates (total: 5 x 4 = 20 cards for each student).
2. Introduce the concept of editing in Printmaking.
3. Print plates. Make an edition of 4 prints from each of the 5 selected plates that were created from their identifiers project from last class, using Styrofoam, acetate sheets, pencil, brushes, water-based ink, tempera paint, and paper.
4. Learn that a line drawing can be reversed and replicated through printing, and printmaking is a medium with which to express form, texture and character and create multiple editions from a plate/ matrix also.
Lesson 4 (lesson continued)

Theme and Title: Identifiers (Social/ Ethnic/ Conceptual Self and Body Image).

Activity: Box-Print Portfolio/ Trading Card Project: Collaborative activity and portfolio exchange.

Time Allotted: one 45-minute period (Shift).

Objective, goals and discussions for the day:
1. Conduct an exchange activity to share all the identifiers amongst the groups. For each group, exchange prints and assemble 15 prints in each box (5 of their own, 5 each from the other two members of the group).
2. Each student to eventually have one box each. The 1 extra box will be part of the class/ school archives.
3. Discuss, reflect and document work in a group.
4. Enable students to feel proud of their heritage, individual and collective cultural/ ethnic identity and socio cultural context through this activity.
5. Give students an opportunity to share their personal/ ethnic selves innovatively and confidently through a print exchange.
Lesson 5

Theme and Title: Identifiers (Social/ Ethnic/ Conceptual Self and Body Image).

Activity:
Create an “About Me” Project in Scratch, a programming language learning environment.

Materials Used: Scratch programming software (free software), computers.

Time Allotted: one 45-minute period.

Objective, goals and discussions for the day:

Introduction to Scratch
Scratch is a programming language learning environment, enabling beginners to get results without having to learn syntactically correct writing first. Created by the MIT Media Lab, it is intended to motivate for further learning through playfully experimenting and creating projects, such as interactive animations, games, etc. Advocates suggest that individuals who use Scratch at a young age develop a solid foundation of knowledge that can help prepare them for the use of higher level programming languages and math. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scratch_%28programming_language%29)

Thoughts to hold onto for next class (homework):

1. Play around, tinker in Scratch.
2. Visit the Scratched resources website.
3. Introduce the idea of remixing.
LESSON SEQUENCE 2:

Theme and Title: *Gender Roles and Stereotypes in context. Inner/ Outer Beauty.*

**Lesson 6**

**Activity:**
1. Make sketches/drawings/collage in response to the content of the theme of the lesson sequence.
2. Make rubbings of natural and man-made materials or scan various materials or surfaces to achieve various textures.
3. Start working on your code animation in Scratch, stop-motion animation in iMovie, visual narrative poem or an illustration in a digital format that is familiar to the student.

**Materials Used:** Colored crayons, white drawing paper, Scratch software, computers, scanner, Adobe Photoshop, pencils, drawing materials, drawing paper, charcoal, color pencils, acrylics, iMovie.

**Time Allotted:** one 45-minute period.

**Opening Statement/ Association/ Dialogue/ Visualization.**

1. Have a conversation about ideas of sameness, difference, American Beauty, traditional beauty, conventional beauty.
2. Have an open dialogue about a gender-centric poem that raises issues of stereotypes: "Barbie Doll", by Marge Piercy.
3. Discuss work by artists *artists who have used Barbie in their art/photography: Bani Abidi, Margaux Lange, Max Beets, Mariel Clayton uses Barbie as subject on her photo’s, Barbara Hosein. http://www.alteredbarbie.com/users/barbarahosein*
4. Discuss how might this inform the students’ work.

**Objective, goals and discussions for the day:**

1. Make sketches/drawings/collage in response to the content of the theme of the lesson sequence.
2. Collect different textures through scanning tangible textures (fibers, laces, net, sandpaper etc.) and manual rubbings of the surfaces of various buildings/building materials and three rubbings of natural materials (leaves, bark, pebbles, etc.) in and around their school using paper and crayons. (Students will) Learn that
different surfaces within a setting have different textures and that texture is an important element to consider when working from observation.

3. Learn to combine and collaborate with the traditional and digital media. Students will first create work manually and will later render and treat it with the new media; in Photoshop, through a scanner, in Scratch, as a video, etc.


5. Use sketches/drawings/collage and collected/scanned textures as the raw material to render in Scratch and make a code animation (code poem) in it.
   Or

6. Use sketches/drawings/collage and collected/scanned textures as the raw material to make a stop motion animation in iMovie.
   Or

7. Use sketches/drawings/collage and collected/scanned textures as the raw material to create a visual narrative poem or an illustration (could be a series of photographs also) in any digital format familiar to them.

**Thoughts to hold onto for next class (homework):**
Continue to work on Scratch or make a code animation (code poem), stop motion animation, digital visual narrative poem or a digital illustration.
Lesson 7

Theme and Title: Gender Roles and Stereotypes in context. Inner/Outer Beauty.

Activity:
1. Continue to work on the code animation (code poem) in Scratch, stop motion animation, digital visual narrative poem or a digital illustration and analyze each other’s processes.
2. Discuss, resolve and debug individual problems collectively.

Materials Used: Pencils, drawing materials, drawing paper, charcoal, color pencils, acrylics, Scratch software, computers, iMovie, Adobe Photoshop.

Time Allotted: one 45-minute period.

Thoughts to hold onto for next class (homework):
1. Continue to work on Scratch.
2. Bring one or more images, artworks, clippings, videos, webpages, websites, films, advertisements (about gender occupations, roles and identities) that intrigues, fascinates or disturbs you.
Lesson 8:

Theme and Title: *Gender Roles and Stereotypes in context. Inner/Outer Beauty.*

Activity: In groups of 3 or 4, create 2 or 3-D tangible / traditional forms or compositions through traditional materials and found objects and then transform or render the artwork through the digital media to create a video, gif, stop motion, code animation, website, blog in collaboration with the help and resources of the new media department and digital technologies department.

Materials Used:
Optional traditional media: glue, brushes, and a variety of paper (tissue paper, construction paper and magazine clippings), clay, cardboard, found objects, toys, dolls or any other materials.


Time Allotted: one 45-minute period.

Objective, goals and discussions for the day:
1. Divide the class into groups. Work in groups and share resources.
2. Collaborate within two programs/ departments/ specialties, experience multidisciplinary collaboration.
3. Combine and collaborate within various kinds of materials; with the traditional and digital media. Students will first create work manually and will later render and treat it with the new media.
4. Discuss and deconstruct the images, artworks, clippings, videos, webpages, websites, films, advertisements (about gender occupations, roles and identities) that intrigues, fascinates or disturbs you.
5. Discuss how students would respond to them.
6. Visually articulate your thoughts and concerns by making a 2 or 3 dimensional composition, installation, collage or bricolage through the material of your choice (tempera, clay, fiber, plasticine, play dough, bubble wrap, music/ songs cardboard, packing material, illustration, found objects, toys, dolls, materials from popular culture, acrylics, magazine cuttings, construction paper, printmaking, pastels, etc.).
7. Further treat it or render it (once the form is created), to make a video, game, performance, music, dance, play/ theatre, blog, website, code poem, animation, bricolage (with photographs, images or any with digital media), images, stop motion animation/ video, gif etc.
Thoughts to hold onto for next class (homework):
Continue to work on the current project for another two class sessions.

Lesson 9: continue to work.
Lesson 10: continue to work, wind up work, documentation, group discussion, critique, and reflection.

Thoughts to hold onto for next class (homework):
Bring one or more cultural objects, ritualistic objects, popular/material cultural icon, toy, anything from your material, visual and popular culture that has a personal, cultural and/or communal significance in your life.
LESSON SEQUENCE 3:

Theme and Title: Representation and Celebration (Self/ Identity/ living in a Socio-Cultural/ Ethnic construct/ context).

Lesson 11:

Activity: Collaborate with, combine and connect various kinds of materials; with the traditional and digital media. It will be the reverse of the previous sensibility; students will first create work digitally this time and will later render and treat it manually/ outside an interface/ in the traditional media.

Materials Used:


Optional traditional media: tempera, clay, fiber, plasticine, play dough, bubble wrap, cardboard, packing material, found objects, toys, dolls, materials from popular culture, acrylics, magazine cuttings, light box for tracing, construction paper, printmaking, pastels, printmaking, sculpture, collage, glue, brushes, and a variety of paper, tissue paper, construction paper and magazine/ newspaper clippings, clay, cardboard, found objects, toys, dolls or any other materials.

Other mediums of expression: Performance, dance, music, play, theater, poetry, narrative, story.

Time Allotted: one 45-minute period.

Objective, goals and discussions for the day:

1. Collaborate within two programs/ departments/ specialties, experience multidisciplinary collaboration.
2. Work in groups from across disciplines and share resources.
3. Discuss the cultural objects, ritualistic objects, popular/ material cultural icons, toys, anything from your material, visual and popular culture that have a personal, cultural, communal significance in your life.
4. Discuss how the students would respond to it?
6. Combine and collaborate within various kinds of materials; with the traditional and digital media. It will be the reverse of the previous sensibility; students will first create work digitally this time and will later render and treat it manually/ outside an interface/ in the traditional media.

7. Articulate, visually or verbally (through poem, narrative, phrases, drawings, sketches) your cultural object/s (or anything else you wish to work with or include) that have personal, cultural and/ or communal significance for you. They could be celebratory customs, rituals, traditions, religious events and practices or ceremonial activities.

8. Visually articulate your thoughts and concerns by photographing, printing digitally in 3-D or 2-D, making a video, taking a piece of music/ song, dance, documentary, film, drama, website, code poem, animation, stop motion or gifs etc.

9. (After creating the digital forms) render and visually articulate those works to create an installation, a stop motion video by physically manipulating the 3-D printed objects, a performance piece, a performative space, zines, text based installations, bricolage, sculpture, illustration, an object of utility (a dress, a curtain, a chair, table etc.), a collage with the physical ‘you’ in it (like a projection onto yourself), printed images, quilt, curtain, mat, rug, altar (or anything hanging, floating, standing, moving on the wall/ floor/ ceiling) or a series of photographs that convey personal narrative or a celebration.

Thoughts to hold onto for next class (homework):
Continue to work on the current project for another two class sessions.

Lesson 12:
Continue to work individually bit in collaboration with another department/ program/ discipline.

Lesson 13:
Continue to work individually but in collaboration with another department/ program/ discipline.

Lesson 14:
Curate, display, document, reflect and have a critique on the created works, followed by an official display in the school campus space, if possible.

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References


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