



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2005 Volume II: The Challenge of Intersecting Identities in American Society: Race/Ethnicity, Gender and Nation

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## Teaching Art through Identity

Curriculum Unit 05.02.04  
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### Introduction

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I teach visual art at High School in the Community (HSC), a small urban magnet school. HSC is a unique teaching environment because we are a teacher-run school. This means that we do not have the administrative hierarchy of a typical public school. We are run by a "teacher democracy" where the body of teachers elects a facilitator, a student membership coordinator and two officers to run the office. Teachers at HSC fill all of these positions. Each position with the exception of the facilitator includes regular classroom teaching. This benefits the entire school because all of the people holding administrative positions have been elected to those positions and are still active in the classroom, unlike in most public schools. Each teacher plays an integral role in the operation of the school. We are all encouraged to create our own curriculum in alignment with both the Connecticut and New Haven teaching standards. I have a large amount of freedom to design my courses so I try to create courses which will engage my students, integrate with other subjects and relate to their lives personally.

HSC is a magnet school serving three hundred and fifty students. Two-thirds of the students are from New Haven and are selected through a lottery process. The other third of our population are students from surrounding suburban areas who choose to come to HSC instead of attending their local public high school. This selection process creates an extremely diverse community of students from a variety of different backgrounds. In our school the student population is roughly one-third white, one-third black and one-third Latino. This racial diversity is a large part of the reason that I am interested in the idea of identity and how identity is formed, because my students are very diverse and I would like them to be able to appreciate their differences but also see that they have many similarities connecting them. A majority of the two-thirds from New Haven are in a low socio-economic class, while many of the suburban students are from middle class families. Their parents are attracted to HSC because of its small size. They feel that students will be more easily accepted and will receive more one-on-one instruction. Each individual brings an extremely different set of experiences with him or her, creating a wonderful and sometimes challenging classroom environment.

Students attending HSC are required to take one full credit of art (some combination of visual art and music). This requirement sends many students through my door and finding a way to reach them all and keep them interested is one of my favorite challenges. Along with a diverse population there is a staggering imbalance in

their art knowledge. Some of the students have a strong art background, while others have not had art for over three years. This occurs as the result of students filtering in from many different school districts with different requirements for their students. It forces me to teach the basic elements and principles of design while also making things interesting to those students for whom they are review. In teaching high school it is imperative to teach through subjects that are interesting to your students. This can be challenging with art because they often have a very limited definition of art. Usually they associate art simply with "fine art", or art which is hung in a museum. One of my main goals is to help students create their own personal definition of art. Through this unit I would like to broaden students' idea of what is successful art, while also teaching them about themselves.

This unit will be designed for an introductory art class which meets an entire semester, four days per week for an hour each day. The unit is designed to take the entire semester. It is written for a class including students from both ninth and tenth grade as their first art class at HSC. Because of the content this unit could easily be adapted to fit an eighth through twelfth grade curriculum.

## Rationale

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This unit will address three specific needs that I see in all of my students. These needs are: fostering tolerance, encouraging critical thinking and facilitating successful self-expression. The first step is to teach them to be critical thinkers and to question EVERYTHING! Specifically, in this unit, I would like them to question stereotypes and learn to think twice before they make assumptions about another human being. I believe that this is extremely important. In the halls I often hear them being disrespectful to one another - making rude comments. I think that much of this language is used out of ignorance, and they are not actually thinking about what they are saying. I would like to teach them to be tolerant and respectful of each other.

HSC is a melting pot; it mirrors the variety of different races that are present throughout our entire country. Because of this diversity I believe that it is extremely important to teach tolerance and critical thinking. Tatum says, "My students have learned that there is a taboo against talking about race, especially in racially mixed settings," (Tatum 36). I observe this exact sentiment in my students. They are often quick to discuss stereotypes with their own race, but become uncomfortable or defensive when others draw attention to their race. Most of my Black and Latino students are in the stage of racial development Tatum classifies as the encounter stage; they are aware of the significance of their race, but they are not yet sure what to do with this realization. (Tatum 55) She also states that this is the stage many students get lost in because they now have a heightened awareness of negative stereotypes about themselves and are often not provided with positive role models within their race (Tatum 74). Students are surrounded by negative images of themselves on the television, through music and media. Students need to be proud of who they are and learn to ignore the negative images they see and focus on positive ones. I would like to provide them with a variety of Black and Latino artists and authors as positive role models who have become successful and also successfully found ways to express themselves, instead of keeping quiet.

Many of my white students are in the stage Tatum calls disintegration. They are certainly aware of racism through conversations and often times first hand experiences with their peers (Tatum 96). However, though they are aware and may want to do something about it, I see that many of them are very uncomfortable talking about it. I hope that through open discussions in this class they will become more comfortable

discussing these issues.

I would like students to learn about and embrace each others' cultural differences and celebrate their similarities. Most importantly I would like students to become critical thinkers and not accept stereotypes or jump to conclusions about others. By deconstructing stereotypes and creating a safe learning environment I would like to make students aware of all of the misinformation that they are confronted with. I would like them to leave my room with the skills to assess what they are told, research and think critically to determine whether or not what they are told is legitimate information.

Identity is a self-concept formed by family, history, social and economical factors. It is not simply formed by your environment. It is formed through both nature and nurture. Every human goes through identity formation. (Hancock May 10, 2005) The things that we identify with can bring us closer to people and can drive us apart. When an artist expresses a part of their own identity that we share or can relate to we are much more passionate about that piece of artwork.

Stereotypes are overly simplistic and exaggerate generalizations. They are usually acquired through secondhand information instead of firsthand and are often passed on through observation and imitation, ignorantly. (Hancock May 17, 2005) We use stereotypes everyday to help us get through life; it is one way that as humans we assimilate information. I have a stereotype that school lunch is unhealthy. It is a generalized exaggeration which prompts me not to buy school lunch. However, if I were to tell another teacher that "School lunch is unhealthy," they would be very surprised to find that you can buy a salad everyday. This is a stereotype which motivates me to bring in my own healthy lunch, however it is not entirely true. Stereotypes can be helpful for categorizing information, but you should always be sure to get your facts straight before perpetuating them. I would like to list all of the possible stereotypes for each ethnicity and talk about where or why the stereotypes may have originated. I would also like to find an example to use on student's level (The example we used in seminar was getting out of a parking ticket) I would like to talk to them about when they feel as though they've been treated unfairly (followed in stores or at the museum - I see this all the time!) We will also clarify that prejudice is an emotional attitude one holds towards a particular group of people to which they themselves do not belong. Discrimination is the behavioral application of prejudice. So you can be prejudiced but choose not to express the prejudice. (Hancock May 17, 2005)

A large part of your identity is influenced things which you were born into - like ethnicity, socio-economic class, etc. These are all things which become a part of you that you cannot change, however you can change how you look at them. Ethnicity is a set of cultural traits or behaviors often including cooking, traditions and religion. (Hancock May 17, 2005) For white students exploring their ethnicity be more of a challenge, as often times we do not have as many family traditions as other ethnicities. Still, I will urge students to ask their families and find out as much as they can about any family or cultural traditions.

Through deconstructing stereotypes and exploration of identity I would like students to gain a greater sense of self and what makes them unique. I would like them to be able to express a piece of themselves in every piece of artwork they do. Art is the perfect catalyst for this because, "Art has no race or gender. Art...was for me a realm where every imposed boundary could be transgressed" (Hooks xi). I would like to start inspiring students to create artwork which has meaning for them personally. It is easy to give students an assignment like a still life where they are simply recreating objects from observation; however, how are they invested in the outcome of a still life? The challenge is to find lessons where students can make personal choices about their artwork while also learning the fundamentals of drawing, painting and sculpture. When speaking about Lois Mailou Jones and Romare Beardon, Hooks says, "when they no longer focused exclusively on European

traditions and drew upon the cultural legacy of the African-American diasporic experience - that they fully discovered their artistic identity" (Hooks 5). Once Beardon and Jones had learned aesthetics and traditional art they used the base they had learned and made their artwork their own. They infused it with their own culture, race and personal history. This is what I would like my students to learn. I propose to do this by teaching through a series of eight lessons, each with a different focus on an aspect of life that influences identity. These aspects will include each student's environment, culture, traditions, family, friends, experiences, physical appearance, fear, dreams and aspirations.

Through the above discussion I would like students to come out of the conversation with the understanding that artwork surrounds us from the chairs we sit in to the cars we drive. Everything has an aesthetic design to it. I would like our definition of artwork to focus on two things: art as a form of personal expression, and art as creating something aesthetically pleasing. "One can be critically aware of visual politics - the way race, gender, and class shape art - without abandoning a fierce commitment to aesthetics" (Hooks xii). The most important part of artwork for students in this class will be the expressive part of the artwork, because that is what they bring to the artwork, not the aesthetics. Aesthetics can be learned. Emotion and expression in artwork comes from their passions and their personal experience. The piece of themselves they put into each piece of artwork is not something I can teach. It has to come from within them and that is what makes art so wonderful and different.

I will be using identity as a way to encourage students to include themselves in their artwork and also as a tool to help them start discovering that their identity is something which has been constructed by the things around them and that they *do* have control over it and they *can* change it. Each of my students is at a point in their life when they are going to start making valuable decisions about what type of person they are going to be. I would like them to explore how their values and morals have been shaped to help them make these decisions. I would also like them to understand that even though it feels like they may not have much in common with some of their classmates, they have more in common than they will ever realize.

## Strategies

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I will use a variety of different teaching strategies to help students to understand how to better analyze artwork, learn different media techniques and express themselves personally in their artwork. I will do this by introducing Feldman's method, "do nows", sketchbook exercises, modeling, step-by-step examples and critiques. I will provide a lesson structure that becomes routine to students and incorporates teaching to all different learning styles.

Along with having an extremely diverse population racially, HSC also services a variety of learning styles, like any school. About one sixth of our population are students with special needs. I often find that these students can find success in the art room that they might not be able to find in other places. Because of the variety of learning styles and integration I make a point to try and structure each lesson so that it reaches every type of learner. Each lesson starts with a brief introduction (or "do now") usually through observation, writing and note taking which is also spoken for the audio and visual learners. Next a demonstration is given and then replicated by the students for kinesthetic learners. I hope that this unit will be designed to also focus on students intrapersonal skills in discovering their own identity, along with interpersonal skills through group discussions and projects. (Hancock June 14, 2005)

"Do nows" are a popular strategy at HSC and because they are employed throughout the entire school they provide a sense of routine and stability for students. In most classes that students attend they will have a "do now" waiting for them on the board when they arrive in class. This gives students an activity to focus on immediately and provides the teacher with the opportunity to either review a concept covered the previous day, or introduce something new. I use "do nows" as an opportunity to introduce students to new artwork, or to have them brainstorm ideas for their projects. They are often five minute writing or drawing assignments that get the students focused and provide an introduction to the lesson for the day.

One of my favorite "do nows" is putting a piece of artwork up on the board and having students do a thumbnail sketch of it, then analyze it. One of the most important jobs I have as an art teacher is teaching students to analyze artwork. I find that students initially have a very hard time doing this. They are used to analyzing literature, not visual information. They are often quick to make judgments and interpretations, but do not take them time to slow down and actually look at the artwork. I believe this difficulty arises because students have never been asked to analyze a piece of artwork before. In order to simplify the process I use Feldman's method which breaks the analysis down into four steps: describe, analyze, interpret and decide. (Simpson, 123) By placing a piece of artwork in front of the students and telling them nothing about it you encourage them to look more closely. The first step in Feldman's method is to describe. This means, simply describe exactly what you see: shapes, colors, objects and their location in the artwork. Students should not be making assumptions about the artwork in this stage, which they sometimes need to be reminded about. I tell students to pretend that they want someone to find this particular work of art out of an entire museum full of artwork. They need to include enough detail that someone could pick out this exact artwork and be sure it is the one being described. The next step is to analyze the artwork. This means to explain the different principles of design that the artist has used, such as balance, repetition, contrast, etc. This is the step that students have the most trouble with because they do not have the vocabulary or understanding of enough artistic concepts to successfully complete this part of the analysis. As the semester goes on I see great leaps and bounds in this area. The third step is for students to interpret the artwork. I often ask my students to put themselves in the artist's shoes and explain to me what they might have been thinking when they created the artwork. Why did they make certain decisions? What in the artwork leads you to believe that? The last step is to decide whether or not you think it is a successful piece of artwork. This is a personal decision, however, I always ask students to back up their decision with a specific reason, beyond "I like it" or "I don't like it". This process takes a while for students to get used to, however once they have a handle on it, it can lead to some very interesting discussions. This is one of my favorite processes to use for getting students to talk about abstract artwork because they often have a hard time doing so. It is always interesting to have them talk about a piece, and give them the title and some background history *after* the discussion to see how it changes their opinions.

Artists always keep sketchbooks as a way to record their ideas, brainstorm, try new materials and mostly just express themselves. To teach my students that this is an important part of the artistic process I have my students keep a sketchbook. I urge them to make it their own and include things besides only class work in it. I use the sketchbook as a place for students to experiment with new materials, brainstorm, collect ideas and images and as a journal to write in as well. I tell them that they may include anything in their sketchbook and if there are things they do not want me to see they can simply paperclip the pages together. Often times students will bring in their own personal sketchbooks to share with me too! I check the class sketchbooks at least once a week to observe student progress.

After students complete a "do now" in their sketchbook whether it be brainstorming for a new project, analyzing an artwork or responding to an assignment from the previous day, I then model for them what they

will be doing for the rest of the class period. Since art is about a process it is important for students to watch me model what they will be doing, especially when they are learning about a new material. Often times by simply watching me do it first they avoid many problems they could encounter, and they waste less materials because they know how to use them correctly initially. Once students have learned to use materials correctly they are given more freedom to try using them in less traditional ways.

Looking at a finished artwork can be very overwhelming when you are trying to determine how the artist came to create the finished product. To eliminate the overwhelmed sensation I always have an example of the assignment students are working on up on the board, broken down into the specific steps it took to get there. For instance if students are working on a collage there will be an example up on the board, in steps. The first step will show the first layer or background of the collage only. The second step will show the background with the middle ground added on top of it. The third step will show the background, middle ground and foreground. The final step will show the completed collage, including all three previous layers and details added to provide finishing touches. This is very helpful so that students can identify what steps they have completed, and what they need to do next.

Although the process of creating artwork is important, the finished product is also important. Students should always have in mind the concept that they are trying to express, and should be thinking about ways that will strengthen that message in their artwork. In order to determine whether or not their artwork is expressing what they want it to students participate in group, peer and self-critiques. Group critiques are helpful if a group works at about the same pace because students can look at each others' work and pick out what makes a successful piece. They can then translate this information into their own artwork. When doing group critiques I have students look at all of the artwork as a whole body, with no names and have them talk about the artwork as a whole, comparing and contrasting different pieces. Peer critiques can also be helpful, where students are paired up and given more specific questions to answer about one other classmate's artwork. I will usually have students do a peer critique when they are about three-quarters of the way through a piece of artwork because it gives them a second opinion other than mine about how they can improve their artwork. I have students complete self-evaluations when they feel they are finished with a piece. This way if there is something they are unsatisfied with we can look at it together and figure how to improve their artwork. Students fill out their self-evaluation using the same rubric that I use to give them a grade, this way they are grading themselves the same way I will be.

Students will be evaluated using a rubric to grade their artwork. The rubric will be broken down into three main categories. First will be **expression of identity** - have the students successfully expressed an idea about themselves even if it is not the original idea they had initially? Included in this category will be brainstorming to come up with ideas, and the process of learning the materials and editing ideas. Next will be **aesthetics** - is the artwork pleasing to look at and did the students use all of the elements and principles of design required? Did they master use of the materials? Lastly, **presentation** - Does the work look finished? Is it ready to be hung at school? Although I think that the artistic process is an extremely important one and do not like students to feel as though they can do "bad" artwork, as Delpit states "In this country students will be judged on their product regardless of the process they utilized to achieve it" (Delpit 287). For this reason I believe that it is important to include their effort and artistic process in their grade, while also assessing the final product.

## Classroom Activities

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### What is Art and How Do We Judge its Success?

Critics determine whether or not something is a successful piece of artwork based on its aesthetic value. There are a variety of theories on aesthetics and what is beautiful. These theories vary largely based on time period and culture. Different time periods and cultures have assigned different aesthetic values to particular aspects of a work of art. I would like my students to determine the success of their artwork based on a combination of two different aesthetic theories: formalism and expressive theory. (Simpson 122)

Formalism developed as a reaction to abstract art. Previous aesthetic theories stated that art should mimic life, therefore art should always be realistic and should serve a purpose. Once abstract art was introduced to the scene a new theory needed to be created. Abstract art is not realistic, in fact it does not have an easily identifiable subject. Thus formalism was created where the idea of aesthetic beauty shifted to the formal elements of a piece of artwork in order to validate abstract art as successful in the art world. "Formalism focuses primarily on the way the art elements and design principles are used to achieve a unified expression" (Simpson 122). It focuses on the lines, shapes and colors used along with balance, unity, etc. It is easy to teach students to create artwork that is formally successful. There are certain compositions that are more appealing to our eyes and to create art successfully in this way is easy – simply by learning how to employ the elements and principles of design. This is the first way I would like students to assess their artwork and it is also Feldman's second step of analyzing a piece of artwork.

The second method of assessment will be expressive theory. This theory of aesthetics "suggests that to be called 'art', an image or object must express emotion, and communication of strong feelings is valued more than realism" (Simpson 122). This is where the idea of identity plays a part. I want to be sure that each student is including a part of themselves, their emotions and opinions in their artwork. This aesthetic is far more difficult to teach and must come from individual passions. I believe it can be extremely difficult for high school students to express themselves this way because they are at an age when they are looking strictly to conform with their peers and not to differentiate themselves from "the norm". My first lesson will be for students to form their own definition of art, hopefully combining these two ideas.

If you ask five different people for a definition of art I guarantee you will obtain five very different answers. The definition of art is a very personal thing and often differs depending on your experiences. I would like students to expand their idea of what art is by introducing them to the Da Da movement and to folk art specifically. I believe that these two movements will be effective in broadening their scope of art because both were very controversial movements and are not typically thought of as successful artwork.

The Da Da movement is an art movement which started in the early twentieth century after World War I. With the decline of social and moral values artists felt they had nothing to believe in and so created nihilistic artwork. They would put ordinary objects on display and claim them as artwork. The style was poking fun at traditional art forms and stretching the definition of art. There were many influential artists involved in this movement including Duchamp, Ernst and Grosz. (Da Da, artlex.com) I would like to show students examples of the Da Da art movement focusing on ready-made which were everyday objects which artists signed and called art. A very well known ready made is a urinal which Duchamp signed as R. Mutt. Others include vacuums, telephones and other everyday objects. I would also like to show students examples of canvases painted black, like Rothko (although not specifically part of the Da Da movement his artwork is also pushing the

definition of art). I love watching students' reactions to these pieces of artwork. They usually become extremely angry and don't understand how something like this can be called art. A phrase I often hear is, "I could do that!" I want students to understand that they *can* create successful art and often times the concept or idea behind the piece is what is most important, not what the piece looks like upon initial viewing.

In contrast I would also like to introduce students to folk art. Folk art is artwork created by artists who have little or no artistic training. It is often artwork which has been created traditionally by a certain culture and is created for personal use or expression. Folk art was not considered "fine art" in the art world until this past century. Folk art often is rich in historical and cultural background. Artists like Horace Pippin, Faith Ringgold, masks and aboriginal art are all examples of folk art. (Simpson 162)

From this discussion I would like to lead students into a discussion about "What is successful art?" Often times if students do not find a piece of artwork aesthetically appealing they label it as "bad" artwork. I would like students to look past the idea of "bad" artwork to try and understand what the artist was thinking about, and whether or not the artwork has meaning and leaves an impression, not necessarily whether or not they think it is beautiful. I would like students to leave with the understanding that although they can not personally like a piece of artwork, it can still be "successful" artwork. I want students to be fearless in their artwork, and never be afraid to try something just because it may not come out "looking pretty". I hope that by showing students these two different styles of artwork it will help them reform their definition of art and successful artwork to include both formal elements and personal expression.

### *Lesson One*

This lesson is designed for two 55 minute class periods.

#### Day One

**Do Now:** Write your own definition of art without using the dictionary. Look around the art room at different examples as you create your definition.

**Class Discussion:** Students will choose one or two words from their definition that they feel are most important. They will write these two words on separate post its. The post its will then be collected, stuck to the board and grouped to see which elements of the definition are most universal. Students will compose a rough definition of art using these words as a starting point.

**Analyzing:** Students will be shown Duchamp's Urinal. They will use Feldman's method to describe, analyze, interpret and decide about this artwork. We will go through this process together so that students see the process modeled first. I will then give students a brief history of the Da Da movement and we will discuss if this changes their feelings on the artwork at all.

**Activity:** Students will look through magazines and collect images and words which they think show art. Students will collage these into their sketchbooks.

**Homework:** Students should ask five different people for their definition of art.

#### Day Two

**Do Now:** Apply Feldman's Method to an African Mask.



Class Discussion: We will share responses to the mask and write them on the board.

Comparison: I will place examples of other folk art around the mask and ask students to compare and contrast them. We will talk about what folk art is and why it is considered successful art.

Activity: Can you think of any folk art which is in your home? Draw a piece.

Creating a Definition: Using their homework, our previous definition and our new knowledge we will create a working definition of successful art.

What is Identity and What Influences It?

The things that we identify most readily with are the ones that other people react to most commonly. Our identity is reflected to us by other people and the things we remember most about ourselves are the ones that we hear from other people most often. (Hancock May 10, 2005). This is what makes it difficult to realize that we can change and shape our own identity. I would then like students to create a photography book about their everyday life and what things influence them.

We will look at the *A Day in the Life* series of photography by Rick Smolan. Each of these books are a day in the life of people living in a certain place. One hundred different photographers capture a variety of different things about the place, the people, surroundings, interactions, etc. and document them all using photographs. These books are not a progression through one person's day as the students will be doing, however they offer the students a variety of subjects and styles of photography to look at as examples.

In order for students to begin to understand how their own identity is being formed, after we have reached a definition for identity, their first project will be to record all of the things in their life that influence who they are every single day. I would like to start the project by giving each student a 36 exposure disposable camera to record their environment. By giving students a camera two things will happen. First they will immediately become less inhibited because everyone can use a camera, whereas students often get discouraged about drawing or painting. Second it will provide them with reference photography for later assignments. They will have a file of images of things which are important to them to look back through later on.

## *Lesson Two*

This lesson is designed to take two weeks, but only the first four lessons are broken down here. After that students will continue constructing books and writing a paragraph about each image they have taken. The final project will be a book including images and text about a day in their life.

### Day One

Do Now: Students will title a page in their sketchbook "I AM..." (Hancock May 5, 2005) I will give the students an example of a more abstract being, like R2D2 - What might be on R2D2's list? (I AM... a robot, a sidekick, made of metal and wires, famous, etc.) Students will be asked to complete the sentence "I am..." with as many different things as they can in four minutes.

Class Sharing: Students will have to find one thing in common with every other student in the class. They will find common bonds that they were not aware existed. Students will then be asked to look at their list at the things that they did not share with others that make them different. They will simply note these in their sketchbook; they will not be required to share them.

Class Discussion: Once students have done this we will share as a class the things that unified them with their classmates, to find out what everyone has in common. Next we will discuss which things students' listed first, at the top of the page, being the most important. We will talk about how these I AM statements show what you identify yourself as.

Brainstorming: Students will brainstorm a list of things which influence them throughout the day from when they get up in the morning, through school, until they go to bed at night - starting from their families, neighborhood, advertisements, friends, school, after school activities, etc. This will simply be a brainstorming exercise so that students can begin thinking about which thirty six different things in their lives they would like to record as influences in their identity.

Homework: Make a list of as many influences as you can think of throughout your day.

## Day Two

Do Now: Compare and contrast three images from *A Day in the Life of America* .

Class Discussion: How are the three images similar? How are they different? What is composition? What makes a strong composition? What is the point of interest in each? How does your eye travel through the composition?

Activity: Students will break into small groups and choose one image to write a description about - what they think was going on, what the artist was trying to capture, what is interesting about the image. This will model the writing process they will use for their own images.

Demonstration: Using the camera. How close or far you can be from your subject. When is the flash necessary? How to advance the film. Choosing your 36 subjects CAREFULLY!

Homework: Begin taking pictures (take only 10 tonight)

## Day Three

Do Now: What 10 things did you take pictures of? How was using the camera - any problems or concerns?

Class Discussion: What did people take pictures of? Answer any questions.

Activity: Begin making book to hold pictures once finished. Introduce students to bookbinding vocabulary and start making covers.

Homework: Finish rest of film.

## Intersecting Cultures Combine

Students will use some type of paper (map, poem, etc.) as a base for a still life which involves three objects that symbolize traditions which have influenced them. In talking about how location plays a role students will look at maps of New Haven and also of other places where they have family members. Students will look at flags and landmarks as representations of these places. They will collect symbols of tradition from their homes and create a still life. Students will learn about form, values, composition, overlapping and cropping. They will explore the idea of how their ethnicity also intersects with their New Haven, or American, life.

Many of my students have moved to New Haven from elsewhere and bring with them a set of values and traditions which are different from the American culture in urban New Haven. Students express pride in their ethnicity and where they have come from, while also embracing the culture in New Haven. I would like them to create a drawing juxtaposing parts of their ethnicity which they hold onto with part of New Haven culture that they embrace. There are two artists I would like to introduce students to for this assignment they are Jaune Quick-to-See Smith and Betye Saar.

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith is a Native American Artist who combines her Native American past with the modern world around her, creating very powerful imagery. Smith says, "There are these strange juxtapositions of modern life and traditional tribal life that I think are quite wonderful." She often uses humor in her artwork to draw the viewer's attention to an issue in a positive way. One of her main concerns is the idea of land ownership which has obviously had a large effect on her culture. Her artwork uses Native American imagery with modern imagery to create interesting and provocative visual statements. (Modern Native American Artists 3).

Betye Saar is an African American artist who creates artwork from found objects. She creates installations which combine pieces of her cultural past, often rituals and myths, with pieces from today's urban world. Saar created a lot of politically charged work during the 1960s involving the civil rights movement. Her piece *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* shows a stereotypical black character portrayed in the 1960s in three different views, changing the way the viewer thinks about Aunt Jemima both as an icon and as an African American woman. (African American Sculptors 6)

I believe that these are two artists with whom my students will be able to relate. Smith says, "Art between two cultures is difficult without losing oneself in the process." I would like my students to be able to create a piece showing pride in both of the cultures they experience, as both are an important part of their identity.

### *Lesson Three*

This lesson is designed for about two weeks of class time. The first three classes are broken down, after that students are given time to work on their still lifes. The teacher should plan peer and self-critiques as necessary and do nows can be tailored to where the teacher sees the students' strengths and weaknesses throughout the artistic process.

#### Day One

**Do Now:** Students will compare and contrast Smith's *Gifts for Trading Land with the White People* and Saar's *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* .

**Class Discussion:** What are the similarities and differences between these two works of art? What was each artist thinking about? How does each break down a stereotype? What is a stereotype and how do you encounter them in your daily life?

**Class Reading:** We will read aloud as a class the article on Betye Saar and students will be asked the following questions: What is installation artwork? What two cultures are seen in her artwork and how do you know this? What is symbolism and how does she use it?

**Activity:** What two cultures are *you* a part of? Students will brainstorm a list in their sketchbook of parts of New Haven culture that they identify with. They will then break into groups by ethnicity and brainstorm lists of

things that they identify with in their own cultures.

Homework: Students will have two days to collect articles, maps and objects which reflect both their New Haven culture and their ethnicity.

### Day Two

Do Now: Do a drawing of a Native American in your sketchbook.

Class Discussion: Students will share drawings and discuss why they included certain details. We will talk about stereotypes and stereotypes for their particular cultures as well. We will talk about how stereotypes are formed and how they are passed on.

Activity: Students will practice drawing basic shapes and learning to break down objects into basic shapes so that when they begin their still lifes they have an idea where to start.

Homework: Bringing in objects for still life!

### Day Three

Do Now: Analyze Jaune Quick-to-See Smith's *Memory, 2000* using Feldman's method.

Class Discussion: Which two cultures are combined? What symbols are used from each? How does she use layering to combine the two cultures?

Activity: Students will set up their own still life in three different poses and do a thumbnail sketch of each pose thinking about composition, cropping and layering. Students will also consider what they would like to use as their background layer (maps, menus, articles, etc.)

### *Who Influences Your Identity? My Hero!*

The next project will explore who influences your identity. Students will discuss the people who have had an influence on their lives from parents, to friends to the media. First we will talk about where you obtain information that you respect. Then we will talk about what specific people we look up to - why do we look up to them? What makes us respect someone? Students will then choose their hero to represent in a portrait.

One of the most common subjects in art are portraits. Since the first recordings man has in some way created a representation of him/herself; from crude symbols to more detailed ones. Before there were cameras having portraits painted and busts commissioned were a sign of wealth, and they only way that people had to record both family and history. Now we can easily create reproductions of each other using photography. However how you choose to represent someone artistically can say a lot about that person. I will have students look at how three different artists have represented themselves in their artwork: Robert Arneson, Chuck Close and Frida Kahlo.

Robert Arneson creates very witty and humorous self-portrait sculptures. Arneson originally loved drawing, but became a teacher and had to learn ceramics in order to teach it. He learned the correct techniques but was uninspired by thrown pots so he began creating self-portraits. Arneson uses symbolism in his work to represent traits about himself. For instance in one work he is literally losing his marbles through a crack in the sculpture, in another he is gasping for air because in his life he feels as though he is drowning. His sculptures

are entertaining and playful while revealing a lot about his personality. (Sculpting in Clay 5)

Frida Kahlo is a Mexican artist who also created a variety of self-portraits. Kahlo had a lot of hardship in her life which is expressed in many of her portraits. As a teenager she was in a bus accident which left her with injuries that would plague her for the rest of her life. She married another Mexican artist, Diego Rivera. Both were active in the communist party and both were successful artists. However, Diego often cheated on Frida and they were divorced for a short time only to be remarried again. Frida's self-portraits symbolically depict her relationship with Diego, her struggles with her health and her pain over having a miscarriage. Her paintings are a very powerful depiction of who she is. (Frida)

Chuck Close is an American artist who used to paint photorealist portraits which are nine feet tall. He suffered something similar to a stroke and now paints much more abstracted portraits of people. What interests me most about Chuck Close is his ability to continue working through such a difficult time, and also the method he uses to create these giant portraits. Close has one of three large polaroid cameras in the whole world. It takes three foot large polaroids. Close photographs his subjects using this first, and then breaks the photographs down into a grid. He then creates a grid on his canvas of an equal ratio. This allows him to look at each square as its own little image to be reproduced. It makes it much easier to recreate an image because you begin looking at what is actually in the square instead of thinking about the fact that you are drawing a facial feature which should look a certain way. This is the method I would like my students to use to draw their portraits. (Chuck Close)

Students will choose their hero and create a portrait of that person, using symbolism to include information about the person's personality. Students' artwork will be submitted to myhero.com upon completion. Students will also be asked to do a short writing piece about their hero. Myself and another teacher would like to create an HSC Heroes night where students honor their local heroes with a dinner and presentation of the writing and artwork.

#### *Lesson Four*

This lesson is designed to take about three weeks. The first four classes are broken down here. After that students will continue working on their portraits. Do Nows will relate to what students are working on that particular day and critiques will be scheduled regularly.

#### Day One

Do Now: Where do you get information about things? Throughout the day what do you collect information from?

Class Discussion: We will create a list of influences on the board. We will also refer back to their photography project for more influences. Next we will look at a popular song (choose a song which is in the moment) and deconstruct it. Students will be asked to list all of the negative issues in the song. Then each student will choose one of these issues and circle the number of times it is present in the song. We will discuss whether students ever listened to the words, and why they like the music.

Ratings: Students will go through their list of influences and choose the top five they trust the most.

Class Discussion: What five sources do you trust the most? We will put these up on the board and tally which sources are most trusted and talk about how you earn someone's trust and what you have to do to keep it.

Homework: Define hero.

## Day Two

Do Now: List three people who you consider heroes. Make sure that one of them is someone you know.

Class Discussion: We will have a discussion defining a hero. Students will then be asked to revisit their own list of influential people. Does anyone on their list fit the definition of a hero? What is it about that particular person that they admire?

Activity: Students will try doing a self-portrait from memory in preparation for drawing a portrait.

Homework: Get an image of your hero if you do not already have one.

## Day Three

Do Now: Analyze Robert Arneson's *Klown* using Feldman's method.

Class Discussion: After talking about the analyzing students will discuss what type of person they think Arneson is – what does the portrait say about him?

Activity: Students will learn the correct proportions for the human face and will copy them down into their sketchbooks. They will do a thumbnail sketch of their hero using the correct proportions and the picture as a guide.

Homework: What are qualities about your hero that you think might be important to show in your portrait? List ten.

## Day Four

Do Now: Analyze Frida Kahlo's *Self-Portrait as Tehuana* using Feldman's method. Compare to Arneson's portrait.

Class Discussion: After talking about the analyzing students will discuss what type of person they think Kahlo is – what does the portrait say about her? How are the two portraits similar? How are they different?

Activity: Students will be introduced to the grid method which Chuck Close uses to create portraits. They will start their large grid on paper and will grid their small image of their hero.

## *Other Ideas*

Following are a few more ideas for assignments dealing with identity that I did not have time to further explore in this curriculum, but will give you a jumping off point.

## Life Story

Students will be broken into groups based on their own ethnicity (usually the class is split fairly evenly) and asked to research the story of that ethnicity. They will be given the opportunity to dispel some of the stereotypes we've talked about while also introducing new information about the ethnicity. Students should include music, food and traditions in their presentations. Students will do a brief timeline of the history of that

ethnicity and then will choose a specific event or turning point for that ethnicity as inspiration for a piece of artwork. Students will then create a mural for the particular ethnic group they have chosen. They will study art styles of that ethnicity and incorporate that particular style of art to create a mural about the turning point event which they have chosen. Students will look at examples from Diego Rivera, Pablo Picasso, and other mural artists. We will go on field trips to see the murals around New Haven which have been preserved from the WPA. Students will learn about composition, color theory, human proportions and art history.

### My Journey

In contrast to their research on a particular group's journey students will create a narrative artwork about a piece of their own journey. Students will remember a turning point in their lives – an incident which they remember vividly that they would like to express for others to relate to. Students will read "Mother" by Gwendolyn Brooks and look at Frida Kahlo's *Henry Ford Hospital* (1932). Both of these works of art express the loss of a baby in two different forms. The juxtaposition of writing and visual expression should motivate students to express an important event in their lives. Though Frida's work is mostly painting, students will look at the artwork of Faith Ringgold and Romare Beardon to create narrative artwork in the style of these two artists. They will create a collage or quilt square depicting the event they would like to portray. Students will learn about contrast, overlapping, perspective, narrative and composition.

### Sometimes the Clothes Do Not Make the Man

Students will be challenged to think about how physical appearance can affect your identity – both the way you are treated and the way you view yourself. I would like students to think about how they feel people view them versus how they would like to be viewed. I would like them to try and create a piece of artwork as if they were someone else. They will do this by having them take pictures of each other and then mixing up the pieces, or having them actually exchange identities with someone else and dress differently for the day. Students will look at artwork by Nikki Lee and Cindy Sherman who disguise themselves in their artwork as other people.

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<http://www.artlex.com/> Viewed June 26, 2005. A wonderful resource for exemplars, definitions and art information.

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## Reading List for Students

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