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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

Teaching Art through Identity

Guide for Curriculum Unit 05.02.04

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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). 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 Bearden, 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." Once Bearden and Jones had learned aesthetics and traditional art they 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 lessons, each with a different focus on an aspect of life that influences identity. These aspects will include but are not limited to, each student's ethnicity, culture, traditions, family, experiences, physical appearance, fear, dreams and aspirations.

(Recommended for Art, grades 8-12.)

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