



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2021 Volume I: The Social Struggles of Contemporary Black Art

The Curator as Social Change Agent

Curriculum Unit 21.01.07
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Introduction

This unit is about the role of the curator in the art world and their power to confer value and legitimacy within a culture. The intended audience for this unit is a high school entry level art class entitled Exploring Visual Design taken by all high school grade levels. The goal of the unit will ultimately be to address Anchor Standard 6 in the National Core Art Standards by asking students to curate their own art exhibit that communicates a message and conveys meaning to their intended audience. Along the way, students will also explore themes of identity, community and representation as they prepare for their role as curator.

This unit was inspired by the Yale New Haven Teachers Institute Seminar entitled “The Social Struggles of Contemporary Black Art” led by Professor Roderick Ferguson. Throughout the seminar, we explored readings and artworks that documented the work of artists, authors, intellectuals and activists of color who fought for social transformation within a society that was practiced in dismissing their voices. One of these readings, The AfriCOBRA Manifestos by Jeff Donaldson, provided the spark that set this unit on its way. Learning about this artist collective who chose to create their own aesthetic led to research on the Chicago art scene and the Southside Community Art Center and the various ways that African American artists have had to create their own venues and spaces to be seen in American society. I found within this such a powerful message of agency and perseverance that I felt it the perfect hook for my students.

My students represent a perfect cross section of all New Haven students. I teach art at Wilbur Cross High School, the largest school in New Haven serving approximately 1,450 students. Our student body is 57% Hispanic, 29% African American, 12% White and 2% Asian. Additionally, 17% are special education students, 22% are English Language Learners and 70% of the total population are eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch. Inclusive of all ability levels from Life Skills students to Honors students, my Exploring Visual Design class is an entry level survey of all artistic processes and media. Since many students take the class just to fulfill graduation requirements, engagement can be tricky and adapting the class to meet all needs is a constant work in progress. However, the arts provide a great avenue for self-expression and personal agency and it is always my hope to center this climate of exploration and choice above all else in my art room.

Content Objectives

According to the National Core Art Standards, one of the enduring understandings that art educators should pass along to their students is that “objects, artifacts, and artworks collected, preserved, or presented either by artists, museums, or other venues communicate meaning and a record of social, cultural, and political experiences resulting in the cultivating of appreciation and understanding.” Indeed, it is understood that art museums are a repository of values, instructing communities on what society deems admirable and worthy of study. What then does it mean when we discover that 85.4% of the ‘objects, artifacts and artworks’ collected and presented by museums come from white artists? What ‘appreciation and understanding’ are galleries fostering when African American artists make up only 1.2% of the total artists displayed? A 2019 study found that out of the 18 museums surveyed the ethnicity of the artists displayed broke down as follows: “85.4% white, 9.0% Asian, 2.8% Hispanic/Latinx, 1.2% Black/African American, and 1.5% other ethnicities” ¹. Curators, historically white and male, have controlled what is seen as the accepted aesthetic and therefore have enabled museums to reinforce social biases and stereotypes. As Kevin Coffee explains,

Cultural anthropologists and action sociologists generally agree that the manipulation of ideology, such as through style and iconography, is essential to defining, reproducing and contesting rank and power relationships in complex societies (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Geertz 1973; Hegmon 1992; Weiner 1980). In contemporary complex societies, museums may be used as instruments in that manipulation. ²

By only valuing certain artworks, art galleries act as agents of enculturation by “reinforcing gender, class, ethnic and other socio-economic distinctions prevalent in the larger society” ³. As the Black Lives Matter movement continues to encourage critical conversations about the history and legacy of racism in our society, galleries are grappling with the knowledge that “there remain problematic power dynamics that maintain white supremacy” in our museums.⁴ It is now up to museum educators and curators “to interrogate the ways in which racism (often unintentionally) manifests in our interactions with exhibitions, audiences, and colleagues if we wish to create inclusive spaces where multiple identities are valued equitably”⁵. Art curators must face the fact that they are either continuing to uphold systems of white supremacy or they must actively seek to be anti-oppressive.

African American Representation in the Art World

For African Americans, confronting racism and pushing for inclusion in the artworld is nothing new. Centered within a white European canon, museums have historically valued art objects from Europeans on the basis of their artistic merit while objects from other cultures are studied as anthropological artifacts outside of the existing canon. As Coffee explains, “nineteenth century French paintings show up in ‘art’ museums and nineteenth century Mangbetu sculptures are more often encountered in ‘ethnographic’ museums” ⁶. As such, African American, Native American and Chicano/a artists, to name a few, have historically been segmented out as cultural studies and excluded from contemporary art criticism. As the Civil Rights movement unfolded in the 1960’s, however, these groups began “demanding historical recognition and visibility in the mainstream art world” ⁷.

One exhibition proved to be a tipping point in this battle. In 1969, The Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibited a show entitled *Harlem on My Mind, Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968*. The exhibit consisted of large

photo murals that had the effect of treating Harlem as an anthropological case study. The fact that the Met sought no input from any members of the Harlem art community set off a huge backlash against the show and the treatment of Black artists in general. Protests led to not only the call for established museums to hire more Black museum professionals and incorporate more Black artists but also “artists and curators responded to the Metropolitan's disregard for Black artists by increasing their efforts to curate their own exhibitions”⁸. Thus, began two concurrent tracks that have progressed through the art world ever since.

The backlash to Harlem on my Mind pointed out the tension and complexity of creating inclusion in museum spaces. While some activists were calling for artists to create their own spaces for exhibition, others like the Art Workers Coalition (AWC) and the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC) were fighting to create change within established spaces like New York's Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney and the Met. The BECC created a list of demands for the Whitney that included not only purchasing and displaying works by black artists, but also hiring black curatorial staff⁹. As Benny Andrews, member of the BECC states, “with the great number of black art exhibitions taking place across the country, it is no longer necessary for the BECC to demand that black art work be shown or for black art exhibitions to take place; instead we have moved into the area of the employment of black expertise.”¹⁰ Andrews and others realized that true change and inclusion would only occur when there was black representation at all levels of the museum world, from curators to critics to board members to artists. Although the Whitney pushed back on this demand in particular, the Metropolitan Museum did indeed bring on Dr. Lowery Stokes Sims to lead community programs in an effort to start incorporating black expertise. But change was slow and not all agreed with Andrews' claim that there was no longer a need for black art exhibitions. The two tracks of pushing for identity-based exhibitions alongside the hiring of black expertise in established museums would run concurrently to the present day.

In the groundbreaking 1976 exhibition *Two Centuries of Black American Art* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, guest curator David C. Driskell endeavored to prove “that blacks had been stable participants in American visual culture for more than 200 years”¹¹. Building upon “The Negro in American Art,” (UCLA, 1966), “Ten Afro-American Artists of the Nineteenth Century,” (Howard University, 1967) and “The Evolution of Afro-American Artists: 1800-1950” (City College, 1967), *Two Centuries of Black American Art* established a historical record of high-quality work of black artists that had been previously omitted from scholarly discourse and recognition. With the goal always of art being “a visual dialogue about man's cultural history that can be read and understood without regard to the color of the artist”¹², Driskell acknowledged that these single race exhibitions were needed to highlight the systematic exclusion of artists of color. When asked by a critic why all Black shows were necessary in 1977, Driskell answered, “Because you have propagated the notion that blacks are not a part of this system. So, until such time as you free your thinking enough to see that they've always been a part of it, and should rightly be included in the history books and what have you, we'll have to keep having black shows.”¹³ For David Driskell, single race shows were a necessary counter to the omission of African American artists from mainstream museums.

While Driskell had a partner in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, many other artists found they would have to create their own venues if they wanted to be seen. A great example of this is the Southside Community Art Center in Chicago. As writer, curator and arts educator Keith Morrison explained, “until the Chicago Freedom Movement of 1965–67 raised the idea of ‘open occupancy,’ whereby anyone could live where they wanted, Chicago was legally and strictly segregated, a condition that still largely persists to this day.”¹⁴ While Black artists wanted to exhibit in the established galleries on the North Side or in the Hyde Park Art Center near the University of Chicago, they were restricted by a racial and geographical divide. The Southside Community Art Center was established in 1940 under Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration in

the Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago which at the time was the thriving hub of Chicago's African American Community. The Art Center's mission "was to educate young African American artists and to provide a venue for them to exhibit in the absence of such opportunities in the rest of Chicago" ¹⁵ . SCACC became an important gathering place for young and established artists including Charles White, Archibald Motley, Ralph Arnold and a host of Black photographers including Gordon Parks. Through this community center, artists created their own niche for community and self-expression that was otherwise denied in segregated Chicago.

AfriCOBRA (Coalition of Bad Relevant Artists) was another community alliance of Black artists working to fight for space in the artworld. However, rather than seeking a bridge for recognition within the established art scene, AfriCOBRA more closely aligned with the philosophy of the Black Power movement and sought to create a Black visual aesthetic "without concern for the opinions of white institutions and white critics" ¹⁶ . AfriCOBRA grew out of OBAC (Organization of Black American Culture) a group of artists, writers and poets formed amidst the burgeoning civil rights scene in Chicago who sought to empower their community through shared activism and racial pride. OBAC's visual arts branch, under the leadership of Jeff Donaldson, created The Wall of Respect in 1967, the first public mural project of the movement. With larger than life likenesses of such prominent African Americans as Harriet Tubman, Malcolm X, W.E.B. DuBois and Aretha Franklin prominently displayed in the Bronzeville neighborhood, the mural reminded residents of the Southside that they come from a rich tradition of accomplished creators and intellectuals. The mural represented one of the founding tenets of the Black Arts Movement: art created by the Black community for the Black community is valuable independent of white society.

Jeff Donaldson branched off from OBAC to found AfriCOBRA along with Jae and Wadsworth Jarrell, Barbara Jones-Hogu, and Gerald Williams in 1968. This collective took that idea of art by and for the Black community and ran with it developing 13 shared principles that all of the artists incorporated in their works in search of a Black aesthetic. In their Manifesto, Jeff Donaldson declares, "our guidelines are our people- the whole family of African People, the African family tree" and goes on to say, "our People are our standard for excellence." ¹⁷ Embracing the tenets of the Black Power Movement, AfriCOBRA reminds the community that they stem from a rich history and that they need to connect with that history in the present in order to project them into the future. As Donaldson stated, "it is our hope that intelligent definition of the past, and perceptive identification in the present will project nationfull direction in the future -- look for us there, because that's where we're at" ¹⁸ . By rejecting the art establishment and defining their own ideals, AfriCOBRA helped forge a new path for visibility for African American artists.

Similarly, The Studio Museum in Harlem blossomed out of the civil rights movement to establish a space for African American voices. Established in 1968, The Studio Museum in Harlem quickly became a hub for African American artists in New York to claim space and gain visibility. Throughout the years, the Studio Museum has held this place and continued to support artists particularly through their Artist in Residence program whose alumni include David Hammons, Kerry James Marshall and Kehinde Wiley, to name a few. Visionary curators such as their current Director and Chief Curator, Thelma Golden, have continuously created exhibitions that promote diversity and inclusion for marginalized communities in the arts.

The Role of the Curator

In her book *Curatorial Activism: Towards and Ethics of Curating*, author and curator Maura Reilly identifies the persistence of skewed representation in galleries and highlights the work of many curators who are working to make a change. Reilly, the founding curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, uses her expertise in feminist and queer theory to draw connections between all underrepresented

communities within the artworld and defines three “strategies of resistance” that ethical curators can employ to address these inequalities. The first strategy, revisionism, seeks to sort through the existing canon and seek out artists who were excluded. An example of this would be *Energy/ Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction 1964-1980* curated by Kellie Jones. While Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and Mark Rothko dominated the narrative about Abstract Expressionism, African American artists such as Norman Lewis, and Alma Thomas were contemporaneously creating works that were largely ignored. *Energy/ Experimentation* revised the narrative to re-insert these artists into the existing canon. The second strategy, area studies, spotlights work based on a “racial, geographical, gendered or sexual orientation”¹⁹. Examples of this strategy include David Driskell’s 1976 exhibition *Two Centuries of Black American Art* or Okwui Enwezor’s 1996 exhibition *In/Sight: African Photographers 1940-present*. Area Studies function as “curatorial correctives” that highlight marginalized communities who were excluded from mainstream collections. The final strategy, relational studies, seeks to abolish historic canons and reframe the dialogue amongst and between works of art based solely on the curators’ vision. This approach “is interested not in a monologue of sameness, but in a multitude or cacophony of voices speaking simultaneously”²⁰. Thelma Golden’s *Black Male* exhibition demonstrates this strategy as she brought together a diverse array of artists with the specific intention to create a space for “complicated dialogue” about the intersection of gender and race in American society.²¹ Through this unit, I will invite students to consider these strategies as they begin to curate their own exhibits. We will study the following curators in an effort to see how these strategies have been employed to build inclusivity in the art world.

Dr. Lowery Stokes Sims entered the field of art professionally as a direct response to the community protest over the Harlem on my Mind exhibition of 1969/70. Hired by the Metropolitan Museum in 1972 Stokes says she was part of the “first wave of a diversification and outreach in museums” as the artworld was beginning to grapple with the increased calls for representation by Black, Latino, and Native artists²². Starting in ‘community programs’ her role was to lead exhibitions and workshops in the education department until working her way up to become the Met’s first African American curator in 1975. In her 27 years at the Met, Sims curated over 40 exhibitions increasing equity with her expertise in African, Latino, Native and Asian contemporary art. In 2000, Dr. Sims left the Met to become the Director of the Studio Museum in Harlem, a place whose history she admired and whose legacy she would uphold. Always with an eye on the community, Sims worked closely with Deputy Director for Exhibitions and Programs Thelma Golden to launch the *Expanding the Walls* program which engages local teens in the study of James VanDerZee’s photography. Throughout her career Dr. Sims has had to wrestle with the notions of ‘area studies’ and ‘revisionism’ as she tries to create space for underrepresented cultures in her museums. When asked if there was still a need for the Studio Museum in the 2000s she replied with a hearty ‘Yes!’ and went on to explain “we needed an institution that was looking after our community twenty-four-seven, instead of just in February when you have Black History Month”²³. Although museums have made progress towards the diversity goals set out in the 1970’s Dr. Sims and her successor, Thelma Golden, continue to fight against the tokenism that continues to take place.

Thelma Golden has used her voice to build a new vocabulary for art exhibitions throughout her tenure as an art curator. Currently employed as the Director of the Studio Museum in Harlem, Golden began her career as a curator at the Studio Museum before working from 1988-1998 at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Her groundbreaking exhibition, *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary Art* (1994-95) showcased her desire to use the gallery as a catalyst for change. “My overall project is about art—specifically, about black artists,” she explains, “very generally about the way in which art can change the way we think about culture and ourselves.”²⁴ Defining curatorial work as “intellectual work, weaponized,” Golden sees her

role as inventing a new vocabulary outside of the traditional art history canon in which art and the artists engage with the public in real time and with real context.²⁵ In *Black Male*, Golden sought to open a conversation about the intersection of race and gender in contemporary American culture. By exhibiting a broad array of artists that touched on themes of Community and Leadership, Civil Rights, Business and Employment, Television and the Media, and Gender and Sexuality, Golden opened a dialogue that challenged the existing narrative. “It sought to express the ways in which art could provide a space for dialogue,” she explains, “complicated dialogue, dialogue with many, many points of entry – and how the museum could be the space for this contest of ideas”²⁶. This idea of art as a catalyst for change has always been at the heart of Golden who sees her work as a balance between artist, institution and audience. In her view, curators “have the opportunity to meet audiences where they are, to create space that makes it possible for art to be the agent of engagement”²⁷. Creating space for community to encounter and reflect on the work of black artists remains at the center of Golden’s work.

Dr. Kellie Jones is an art historian, curator and professor whose career has spanned over 30 years. As the daughter of poet Hettie Jones, and Black Arts Movement member Amiri Baraka, Jones’s career in the arts might seem preordained. In an interview with the art blog Hyperallergic, Dr. Jones explains that her passion to become involved in art curation stems back to high school. During art history class she noticed that all the artists of color shown were ‘ancient’. “They’re Egyptians, they’re Aztecs,” she explains, “but after that you don’t see people, and I thought this was wrong”²⁸. She has since made it her life’s work to increase representation among artists of color throughout her career. Her exhibitions include

- New York: Brooklyn Museum, 2005
- *Energy / Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction, 1964-1980*. New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2006.
- *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles, 1960-1980*. Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, October 2, 2011 – January 8, 2012; MOMA PS1 in Long Island City, New York, from October 21, 2012 – March 11, 2013; and at the Williams College Museum of Art in Williamstown, MA, from July 20-December 1, 2013.
- *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties*. New York: Brooklyn Museum, March 7-July 13, 2014. Co-curated by Teresa A. Carbone and Kellie Jones.

Through all of her exhibitions, Jones “refuses to treat the work of black artists as an isolated phenomenon, instead drawing on a keen attention to cross-cultural aesthetics and a highly developed sensitivity to the formal properties of art objects to integrate their work into the broader artistic production of the United States in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries”²⁹. In *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles, 1960-1980*, Jones examined the transformation of African American identity within American culture as the result of the Black Arts and Civil Rights movements. But true to character, Jones maintains an eye on not segregating black artists from contemporaneous art movements saying, “with *Now Dig This*, people think it’s a ‘black art show.’ But in fact, there is a range of voices that are in dialogue about American and African American art-making in that period”³⁰. Through her art analysis and curation, Jones has been a powerful voice for bringing a new understanding of the role of black artists throughout history.

Credited by the New York Times as the “Curator who Remapped Art World” Okwui Enwezor used his platform to shatter boundaries established by the white European canon. Born in 1963 in Nigeria and being displaced several times during the Biafran War, Enwezor “learned what it means to be the Other” and used this world view in his visionary exhibitions. *In/Sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present* “was one of the first museum exhibitions to present imagery from African by Africans themselves, beyond the stereotypes of

Western ethnography”³¹ . Following the relational studies strategy of art curation Enwezor sought to

“construct a new and inclusive discourse for art in an age of globalization, one that could confront the ‘ethics and limits of occidental power,’ demand a radical overhaul of contemporary structures of power and privilege, and thereby depart from hegemonic, Euro-US cultural perspectives and their exhibition projects, criticizing the latter’s tokenist inclusion of ‘non-Western’ peoples” ³² .

Enwezor was the first non-European to be tapped as the artistic director of Documenta (11th edition, 2002) which he restructured with a global focus creating 5 platforms in Vienna, Berlin, New Delhi, St. Lucia, and Lagos. More than half of the artists he selected to exhibit were from the developing world connected through the theme of globalism in a “historically engaged view of the whole, roiling planet, where artists and images were in constant motion”³³ . Enwezor established himself as a thought leader in the world of art history and curation and expanded the understanding of African Art around the world.

Mari-Carmen Ramirez, curator of Latin American Art at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, draws on her bicultural background to introduce Americans to unknown LatinX artists. Her 2004 exhibition, *Inverted Utopias*, is credited with shifting the perception of Latin American art in the United States by sidestepping the heavy hitters like Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo and instead shining a light on less well-known avant-garde South American artists. Born in Puerto Rico, Ramirez began her curatorial career as the assistant director of the Ponce Museum of Art before earning her PhD and being appointed as the first curator of Latin American art in the United States at the art museum of the University of Texas at Austin³⁴ . When accepting the position at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Ramirez made it conditional upon creating a research center there to study and promote Latin American artists. “I have been operating from the margins, whether in Puerto Rico or in Texas,” Ramirez states, “And I also have been representing or standing for artists who have been marginal until very recently”³⁵ . Ramirez makes it her mission to ensure that the entire complexity of Latin American art is understood and appreciated by the American audience.

Rationale

This unit will draw on the preceding content to challenge students to consider the role of the curator in modern society. How does the identity of the curator affect the objects and artifacts chosen and exhibited? Should identity be a factor when curating exhibitions? Have we made any progress on the 1969 call to hire more diverse curators and art historians in museums? Is there still a need for single race shows in the current era? What was the intent behind shows such as “Black Male” and how did these collections influence public opinion?

As I complete my second year at Wilbur Cross, I have been revising my curriculum and re-structuring my class to increase student engagement and better align with our district’s goals of promoting 21st Century Competencies. I am exploring methodologies like Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB), Project Based Learning (PBL) and Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) as the foundations for my classroom structure as I believe they offer more opportunities for authentic learning and engagement.

The unit that follows is designed as a PBL unit meant to address Anchor Standard 6 in the National Core Art Standards:

Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

“How does the presenting and sharing of objects, artifacts, and artworks influence and shape ideas, beliefs, and experiences?”³⁶

The unit places high school students in my Exploring Visual Design class in the role of art curator and asks them to actively engage in curating their own exhibit designed to communicate or inform their viewers on a particular social issue. The problem posed will be that the Yale University Art Gallery is noticing a decline in their admission rates. Upon further study, they notice that very few community members visit the gallery. Students will visit the gallery to view work on display. They will then be asked to consider the factors that might dissuade the community from visiting and to try to combat those factors by curating an exhibit designed to draw people in. Drawing on exhibits such as Thelma Golden’s *Black Male*, David Driskell’s *Two Centuries of Black American Art*, Peter Bradley’s *The Deluxe Show*, and others, students will understand the influence a curator has to connect with and speak to a community based on the objects included in the exhibit. In true PBL fashion, students will have the opportunity to ‘ask the expert’ by meeting and questioning a working curator. They will identify themes that might form a connection with the New Haven community and research artists that showcase that theme. The final product will be virtual group exhibits shared with the Yale Art Gallery and the larger New Haven community.

Why Project Based Learning?

The goal of contemporary classrooms has moved beyond acquiring facts and skills to empowering students to apply what they’ve learned in school to the complex problems they will face in the real world. Motivating students to move beyond being passive receptors of information into active participants in their own education is central to this goal of applying and transferring knowledge. Fundamentally, PBL “is an inquiry-based method that organizes the curriculum around ill-defined problems that reflect real-life situations”³⁷ . According to John W. Thomas, “Project Based Learning designs, because of their emphasis on student autonomy, collaborative learning, and assessments based on authentic performances are seen to maximize students’ orientation toward learning and mastery”³⁸ . PBLs are grounded in the inquiry process, beginning with an essential question then leading into students developing their own questions to move them towards a solution to the stated problem. The simple question ‘what do I need to know to solve this problem’ leads to students taking ownership of their learning not just for the sake of learning facts but as a means to applying the knowledge in an authentic way. The PBL method has been proven to support higher order thinking skills as “learning that occurs in the context of problem solving is more likely to be retained and applied”³⁹ . Additionally, “such learning is also seen as being more flexible than the inert knowledge that is acquired as a result of more traditional didactic teaching methods”⁴⁰ .

Not only does Project Based Learning support student engagement, it also addresses issues of equity in education. The traditional approach to acquiring new skills in school is what’s known as the ‘climb the ladder’ approach in which teachers must “cover lots of content *before* allowing students to use that content in authentic situations”⁴¹ . This approach tends to have the greatest negative impact on lower performing students. Under this approach some students, typically the lower achieving students, “will never get beyond the first rung of the coverage ladder, with its isolated and uninteresting approach to content; they will therefore have minimal opportunities to engage in and actually use what they are learning in a meaningful way”⁴² . Research shows that “the prevalence of low-level tasks contributes to students’ lack of understanding of content and process and poor attitudes toward learning and schooling,”⁴³ . By flipping the sequence from

content first to essential questions first, students are given a hook to understand how this knowledge can be applied to authentic real-life situations. This authenticity combined with the group work structure provides the scaffolding and motivation to allow all learners to “(1) *acquire* important information and skills, (2) *make meaning* of that content, and (3) effectively *transfer* their learning to new situations both within school and beyond it”⁴⁴ .

Although Project Based Learning has great potential as an instructional approach, it must be structured and scaffolded properly to achieve its intended results. Having tried PBLs in the classroom before, I know that students do not magically become motivated overnight just because you ask one interesting question. Teachers must create the right classroom culture of open communication, collaboration and curiosity for students to sustain motivation throughout the challenging tasks that PBLs present. Students who are used to teacher centered direct instruction models may balk at the more demanding and sustained thinking required for PBL work. Additionally, although they often request and enjoy the ability to work in groups, “students may not have the skills to benefit from collaborative work”⁴⁵ . To help properly scaffold this unit, I plan to begin the year by teaching Visual Thinking Strategies, an approach developed by Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine that uses looking at art to build visual literacy, thinking and communication skills. Similar to PBL, Visual Thinking Strategies are rooted in inquiry and ask students to build meaning in a work of art just based on what they observe. By using these strategies throughout the year, students will have the opportunity to develop artistic language and practice the collaborative work and discussions that will be necessary to be successful during the PBL unit.

Teaching through the pandemic has really made me consider what my essential learning objectives are and how I can best structure my class to give students multiple ways to demonstrate learning. Knowing that my ultimate goal is to ensure that my students can communicate, collaborate and walk away with an understanding of the role that art plays in society has led me to these teaching methods and this unit as our culminating activity. Although in the past, I created opportunities for my students to acquire and demonstrate knowledge, by focusing more on art skills and techniques than on open ended projects I stifled creativity and the chance to apply these higher order thinking skills and make meaning from their learning. This unit and the preceding Visual Thinking Strategies lessons will allow us to dive into the essential questions ‘what is art’, ‘what is the purpose of art’, ‘how do artists communicate’, and ‘what role do museums play in society’ for a richer understanding of the impact of art and artists on their lives.

Classroom Activities

Scaffolding/ Pre-teaching

1. Visual Thinking Strategies: Learning to read a work of art
 - a. Students will have used this inquiry-based method throughout the school year to build art vocabulary and learn how to derive meaning from diverse works of art.
 - b. Based on the philosophy that how you look shapes what you see, VTS forms discussions around the following questions: 1. What's going on in this picture? 2. What do you see that makes you say that? 3. What more can we find?
 - c. More on VTS in the Teacher Resources section
2. Question Formulation Technique

- a. QFT is a process designed to help students internalize their learning by teaching them how to produce, improve, and strategize how to use their own questions. ⁴⁶
 - b. Students will have practice in creating questions to guide their own learning through the curation unit.
 - c. More on QFT in the Teacher Resources section
3. Windows and Mirrors
- a. When students see themselves reflected in a work of art, this is known as a 'mirror'. When students gain insight into another's worldview, this is known as a 'window'. Viewing works of art as windows or mirrors develops understandings of identity and diversity throughout the year. This format allows students to build self-esteem and pride as they see themselves and their culture represented and builds empathy and understanding when getting a view into other cultures.
 - b. This approach is used in combination with VTS throughout the school year.

Project Based Learning Unit

I. Learning Goals:

A. Enduring Understandings:

1. People create and interact with objects, places, and design that define, shape, enhance, and empower their lives.
2. Artists and other presenters consider various techniques, methods, venues, and criteria when analyzing, selecting, and curating objects, artifacts, and artworks for preservation and presentation.
3. Objects, artifacts, and artworks collected, preserved, or presented either by artists, museums, or other venues communicate meaning and a record of social, cultural, and political experiences resulting in the cultivating of appreciation and understanding.
4. People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.

B. Essential Question(s):

1. How do objects, places, and design shape lives and communities?
2. How do artists and designers create works of art or design that effectively communicate?
3. What criteria, methods, and processes are used to select work for preservation or presentation?
4. Why do people value objects, artifacts, and artworks, and select them for presentation?
5. What is an art museum? How does the presenting and sharing of objects, artifacts, and artworks influence and shape ideas, beliefs, and experiences? How do objects, artifacts, and artworks collected, preserved, or presented, cultivate appreciation and understanding?
6. How does art help us understand the lives of people of different times, places, and cultures? How is art used to impact the views of a society? How does art preserve aspects of life?

II. Major Products

- A. Art Exhibit: curated around a theme of the students (individual or group) choice for a specific audience
 1. Formative Assessments: Charts of artists/ themes, Knowledge of virtual exhibit software
- B. Curatorial Statement: Explains how the artists chosen connect to students' chosen theme
 1. Formative Assessment: Outline, Peer critique
- C. Community Event(s) to support exhibit (optional extension)
 1. Connect to New Haven Arts and Ideas Festival to examine how curators/ galleries can host

community events to bring a greater understanding to the theme of the exhibit

III. Project Milestones

A. Milestone 1: How can we use art to advocate for social justice?

1. Kickoff: Introduction to Unit
 - a. Guiding Question: How can we as art curators create an exhibit that facilitates a dialogue and influences understanding of a social justice issue.
2. Activity 1: Field trip to the Yale University Art Gallery
 - a. Introduce the “problem”: the Yale Art Gallery wants more visitors from the community. How can they create an exhibit that will engage the community and create opportunities for community discussions?
 - b. Windows or Mirrors Activity: While exploring the museum, students will select up to 3 works with which they personally connect. Were these works windows or mirrors? Students could perhaps use these choices as a jumping off point for their collections.
3. Activity 2: Ask a Curator
 - a. Students will have the opportunity to speak with a curator from the Yale Art Gallery along with curators from other community galleries. Through this experience, students will learn about the job of an art curator and be able to ask questions about their processes behind art curation.
4. Activity 3: Learning from examples of past art exhibits
 - a. Students will be guided through research to understand how exhibits have been used to address underrepresented communities in the past.
 1. Lowery Stokes Sims, Thelma Golden and the Studio Museum
 2. Kellie Jones, “Now Dig This”
 3. David Driskell, “2 Centuries of Black American Art”
 4. AfriCOBRA and the Southside Community Art Center
 5. Mari-Carmen Ramirez
 6. Okwui Enwezor
 - b. Formative Assessment: Project Information Sheet
 1. Strengths and weaknesses of current Yale exhibits
 2. Need to know Questions (QFTs)
 3. Brainstorming ‘hooks’ for community engagement, social justice topics that students

B. Milestone 2: How can we identify the social justice issue we care about the most and select artwork to include in our art exhibit?

1. Activity 1: consider which underrepresented community/ social issue students would like to address through their exhibit.
 - a. Examine chart from 2019 study about breakdown of representation in galleries
 - b. Reflect on how many ‘mirrors’ they saw in the Yale Art Gallery. Did they see themselves represented? Did they see the issues they care about represented?
 - c. Students choose what issues or communities to spotlight in their exhibition
2. Activity 2: Research artists to exhibit
 - a. Create Anchor chart: Artist, Artwork, theme/ identity of work
 - b. Use notes from artists we have studied throughout the year
 - c. Use teacher resources/ books to find artists that align with their theme/ identity/ social issue

C. Milestone 3: Making the exhibits public

1. Activity 1: Crafting a curatorial statement
 - a. What is the 'big idea' of your show? What do you hope the audience will learn? How do the artists you chose represent your theme?
2. Activity 2: Community forums/ events
 - a. What can you do to engage the public with your exhibition?
 - b. Explore the Afrocosmologies exhibit as a guide on possibilities (in Teacher Resources)
3. Activity 3: Virtual Exhibit
 - a. How can you 'publish' your exhibit and curatorial statement to the New Haven community?

Teacher Resources

I. Visual Thinking Strategies

- A. <https://vtshome.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Eye-of-the-Beholder.pdf>
- B. https://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/teaching_visual_thinking_strategies.shtml

II. Question Formulation Technique

- A. <https://rightquestion.org/what-is-the-qft/>
- B. https://my.pblworks.org/system/files/documents/PBLWorks_Need%20to%20Know%20Questions_Strategy_1.pdf

III. Project Based Learning

- A. <https://my.pblworks.org/>

IV. Windows and Mirrors Lesson

- A. <https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/teaching-strategies/close-and-critical-reading/window-or-mirror>

V. Artists to Explore

- A. Titus Kaphar
https://www.ted.com/talks/titus_kaphar_can_art_amend_history?language=en&fbclid=IwAR3zBh1P6zt60bjcP1bUIA-lJcCV_jSUU138CrTOYhS0BBnl_4tEK-odAk
- B. Zanele Muholi
 1. Faces and Phases
- C. Miriam Schapiro (Femmage)
- D. Bisa Butler (Quilt Portrait Artist)
- E. Kerry James Marshall
- F. Kara Walker
- G. Betye Saar
- H. Emory Douglas (Black Panther Art)
- I. Derek Webster (Afro-Panamanian)
- J. Daniel Lind-Ramos (Puerto Rican artist)
 1. Maria-Maria, Meet the Artist Video; <https://whitney.org/media/42718>
- K. Clotilde Jimenez, (Queer collage artist) "The Contest"
- L. Mariane Ibrahim Gallery (for contemporary artists)
- M. Hew Locke, "El Dorado"
- N. Rotimi Fani-Kayode, "Every Moment Counts"

- O. Maren Hassinger, "Paradise"
- P. Uzo Egonu, "Guinean Girl"
- Q. Faith Ringgold, American People Series, 1963-67
- R. Carrie Mae Weems (Photographer)
- S. James Van Der Zee (photographer)
- T. Hank Williams Thomas
- U. Barkley Hendricks
 1. Kehinde Wiley on Barkley Hendricks; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZOW3jYJmEU>
 2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRdbeKrkZj4>

VI. Curators to Explore

- A. Kellie Jones
- B. Thelma Golden
 1. <https://charlierose.com/videos/1213>
 2. https://www.ted.com/talks/thelma_golden_how_art_gives_shape_to_cultural_change/transcript?language=en
 3. <https://brooklynrail.org/2017/05/art/Thelma-Golden>
- C. Dr. Lowery Stokes Sims
 1. <https://massart.edu/dr-lowery-stokes-sims>
 2. <https://studiomuseum.org/article/legacy-leadership-dr-lowery-stokes-sims>
- D. Okwui Enwezor
 1. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/18/obituaries/okwui-enwezor-dead.html>
- E. David Driskell, 2 Centuries of Black American Art, 1976 exhibition in Los Angeles
 1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZCOPfSNuAE>
- F. Peter Bradley, The Deluxe Show
- G. Afrocosmologies @ Wadsworth Atheneum museum
 1. <https://www.thewadsworth.org/afrocosmologies-american-reflections/>
- H. Holliday T. Day & Hollister Sturges Art of the Fantastic
- I. Hispanic Art in the United States
 1. <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/exhibitions/1149>
- J. Curator Mari-Carmen Ramirez (born in Puerto Rico)
 1. <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/23/magazine/23ramirez-t.html>
 2. <https://www.visithoustontexas.com/about-houston/my-houston/mari-carmen-ramirez/>

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

Our district follows the National Core Arts Standards for Visual Arts. This unit covers many standards within the Presenting, Responding and Connecting processes but focuses on the following standards:

Visual Arts/Presenting Standard #VA: Pr.4.1

Anchor Standard: Select, analyze and interpret artistic work for presentation.

Enduring Understanding: Artists and other presenters consider various techniques, methods, venues, and criteria when analyzing, selecting, and curating objects artifacts, and artworks for preservation and

presentation.

Essential Question: How are artworks cared for and by whom? What criteria, methods, and processes are used to select work for preservation or presentation? Why do people value objects, artifacts, and artworks, and select them for presentation?

Grade HS proficient

VA: Pr.4.1.HSI

Analyze, select, and curate artifacts and/or artworks for presentation and preservation.

Grade HS accomplished

VA: Pr.4.1.HSII

Analyze, select, and critique personal artwork for a collection or portfolio presentation.

Grade HS advanced

VA: Pr.4.1.HSIII

Critique, justify, and present choices in the process of analyzing, selecting, curating, and presenting artwork for a specific exhibit or event.

Visual Arts/Presenting Standard #VA: Pr6.1

Anchor Standard: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Enduring Understanding: Objects, artifacts, and artworks collected, preserved, or presented either by artists, museums, or other venues communicate meaning and a record of social, cultural, and political experiences resulting in the cultivating of appreciation and understanding.

Essential Question: What is an art museum? How does the presenting & sharing of objects, artifacts, & artworks influence & shape ideas, beliefs, & experiences? How do objects, artifacts, & artworks collected, preserved, or presented, cultivate appreciation & understanding?

Grade HS proficient

VA: Pr6.1.HSI

Analyze and describe the impact that an exhibition or collection has on personal awareness of social, cultural, or political beliefs and understandings.

Grade HS accomplished

VA: Pr6.1.HSII

Make, explain, and justify connections between artists or artwork and social, cultural, and political history.

Grade HS advanced

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VA: Pr6.1.HSIII

Curate a collection of objects, artifacts, or artwork to impact the viewer's understanding of social, cultural, and/or political experiences.

Visual Arts/Responding Standard #VA: Re7.2

Anchor Standard: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Enduring Understanding: Visual imagery influences understanding of and responses to the world.

Essential Question: What is an image? Where and how do we encounter images in our world? How do images influence our views of the world?

Grade HS proficient

VA: Re7.2.HSI

Analyze how one's understanding of the world is affected by experiencing visual imagery.

Grade HS accomplished

VA: Re7.2.HSII

Evaluate the effectiveness of an image or images to influence ideas, feelings, and behaviors of specific audiences.

Grade HS advanced

VA: Re7.2.HSIII

Determine the commonalities within a group of artists or visual images attributed to a particular type of art, timeframe, or culture.

Visual Arts/Connecting Standard #VA: Cn11.1

Anchor Standard: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

Enduring Understanding: People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.

Essential Question: How does art help us understand the lives of people of different times, places, and cultures? How is art used to impact the views of a society? How does art preserve aspects of life?

Grade HS proficient

VA:Cn11.1.HSI

Describe how knowledge of culture, traditions, and history may influence personal responses to art.

Grade HS accomplished

VA: Cn11.1.HSII

Compare uses of art in a variety of societal, cultural, and historical contexts and make connections to uses of art in contemporary and local contexts.

Grade HS advanced

VA: Cn11.1.HSIII

Appraise the impact of an artist or a group of artists on the beliefs, values, and behaviors of a society.

Notes

1. Chad Topaz, "Diversity."
2. Kevin Coffee, "Cultural Inclusion."
3. Ibid
4. Wendy Ng, "Activating Diversity."
5. Marit Dewhurst and Keonna Hendrick, "Identifying and Transforming Racism in Museum Education."
6. Kevin Coffee, "Cultural Inclusion."
7. J. McGee, "The Evolution of a Black Aesthetic."
8. Bridget Cooks, "Black Artists and Activism."
9. Kellie Jones, "It's not Enough to say Black is Beautiful," 399.
10. Ibid.
11. J. McGee, "The Evolution of a Black Aesthetic."
12. David C. Driskell, "Two Centuries."
13. J. McGee, "The Evolution of a Black Aesthetic."
14. Keith Morrison, "Ralph Arnold and a Tale of Two Chicagos."
15. Ibid.
16. Wadsworth Jarrell, "AfriCOBRA."
17. Jeff Donaldson, "AfriCOBRA Manifesto."
18. Ibid.
19. Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism*, 25
20. Ibid, 30
21. Thelma Golden, "How Art Gives Shape to Cultural Change."
22. Lowery Stokes Sims, "A Legacy of Leadership."
23. Ibid.
24. Thelma Golden, "How Art Gives Shape to Cultural Change."
25. Thelma Golden, Interview by Joachim Pissarro.
26. Thelma Golden, "How Art Gives Shape to Cultural Change."
27. Thelma Golden, Interview by Joachim Pissarro.
28. Kellie Jones, "Art Does Change Things."
29. Columbia University. "Kellie Jones."
30. Deborah Willis, "Witness."

31. Jason Farago, "Okwui Enwezor."
32. Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism*, 142
33. Jason Farago, "Okwui Enwezor."
34. Arthur Lubo, "After Frida."
35. Ibid.
36. National Core Art Standards.
37. Tracie Constantino, "Problem-Based Learning."
38. John W. Thomas, "A Review of Research on Project Based Learning."
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Grant Wiggins, "Put Understanding First."
42. Ibid.
43. Soloway Blumenfeld, "Motivating project-based learning."
44. Grant Wiggins, "Put Understanding First."
45. Soloway Blumenfeld, "Motivating project-based learning."
46. Right Question. "Introducing the QFT."

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