



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

Contemporary Black Art: Race as a Metalanguage for Intersectionality

Curriculum Unit 21.01.10
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INTRODUCTION

This unit is designed for middle-school students in the Content Area of Visual Art focusing on Identity Politics, Voice, Critical Race Theory, Activism and Social Justice. The unit is accessible for modification and inclusion of all grade levels. Anti-Bias and Anti-Racist training interwoven with Social-Emotional Identification and Self-Care gives students skills and guidance to navigate humanity in the twenty-first century. The objective of the unit is for students to gain critical awareness of the self in the past, present, and future. Students will be able to project and assist in their vocality and aspirations for the self and the collective. Students will explore critical race theory and identity politics in relation to the self and their visual art practice. Through research and application, students will consolidate, frame, and expand their visual thinking to be full of self-determination and self-respect.¹ Through critical analysis, students will activate their critical conscience and create a voice that is written, spoken, and established through visual representation. This visual art practice will give students a voice for change and act as a facilitator to sustain all paths of liberation.

RACE AS A METALANGUAGE

In Evelyn Higginbotham's article "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," Higginbotham writes, "We must expose the role of race as a metalanguage by calling attention to its powerful, all-encompassing effect of the construction and representation of other social and power relations, namely gender, class, and sexuality."² Race is a social construct originally created as a system for oppression for African Americans and Indigenous people. Race became a signifier for white, male, patriarchal America that ignored social distinctions of class, gender, and sexuality for African Americans. The blurring of these social categories and ignoring of their differences based on race's all-encompassing ability to outbalance and influence all other social relations is why one can describe race as a metalanguage. Once social categories of gender, class, and sexuality began to take root for African Americans, these societal categories were still constructed by and out of the same constructs that created race.

Eventually in American History, race was both a tool for racist oppression and a tool for collective unification. "For African-Americans, race signified a cultural identity that defined and connected them as a people, even as a nation."³ As African Americans were able to collect, connect, and unify through race, African Americans

were also able to reconstruct and redefine their own meanings around social categories including gender, class, and sexuality. With race's omnipresent ability to interject itself in the forefront of conversations, discussions, influences, thoughts, and ideas as forms of both liberation and oppression, race is a metalanguage with which individuals and collectives identify, culture is created, and information shared.

CONTEMPORARY BLACK ARTISTS

Through artistic production and practice, these Contemporary Black Artists critique the construction and representation of identity as social categories that intersect and encompass roles of race as a metalanguage.

ZANELE MUHOLI

Zanele Muholi is a South African artist and activist who focus their art on photography and activism. Muholi captures people and creates representations of marginalized LGBTQIA people of Africa. Muholi's work in activism brings awareness for a change in the systems and structures of and an increase in diverse representation for society, the art community, and art institutions. Muholi's self-portraits capture self-representation and experience in site-specific locations. Muholi creates self-portraiture through photography to define and establish visual representation that contests political hierarchical manifestations and attests to grounded and embodied empowerment. The contrasting compositional relations interwoven in the monochrome of each artwork activates a critical dichotomy and questions of social presence, responsibility, and respect.

KERRY JAMES MARSHALL

Kerry James Marshall is an African American painter who was born in Birmingham, Alabama. Marshall paints portraits and scenes of African Americans in daily life and configures them to align within the Art History Canon of Painting. By challenging, redefining, and inventing new practices and principles from previous masters, Marshall connects his paintings to the Art History Canon while adding a new image, the Black figure, that is autonomous, liberated, elevated, self-determined, and a consistent representation within art and American society. Marshall's images challenge, contest, and reimagine the systems and structures within painting and societal practices.

GLENN LIGON

Glenn Ligon is a painter and interdisciplinary artist. Ligon, influenced by his love of books, uses text, literature, photography, sculpture, and light in conceptual ways to illustrate and question African American experience in America. Using references from African American life of the past; a photograph from the Million Man March, boxes designed after Henry 'Box' Brown, protest signs from sanitation strikes, and text from James Baldwin; Ligon recreates situations that exhibit the ways in which African Americans have traveled and worked to achieve meaning, definition, value, and purpose in a world that is objective, subjective, and abstract simultaneously. Through blurring and representing words created to connect and empower African Americans during times of struggle, Ligon's text paintings become a metaphor, a window, and a mirror of the everyday practices and experience of African Americans. The text, the color, the material, the process is all a part of the metalanguage of race that Ligon creates to emphasize and inquire about Black American existence. This

metalanguage becomes a catalyst for other projects to define the Black experience and Black Art. Ligon's light works become metaphorical references: looking for black light and finding the absence of light allows for the black words to glow.

EMORY DOUGLAS

Emory Douglas is an African American artist and activist. Douglas was a member of the Black Panther Party and helped to create and define their "Revolutionary Art." The Black Panther Party supported "Teaching by illustrating."⁴ Douglas created graphic illustrations, cartoons, and prints for the Black Panther's newspaper, *Black Panther*, that was distributed throughout African American communities to share knowledge, educate, and empower. Douglas's work helped create a positive vision for African Americans as they moved toward self-determination, resistance, and liberation during a moment in American history when Black identity was reinventing and redefining itself within the African American community. Collaborating with international artists who created revolutionary imagery for freedom, Douglas used their "graphic language and semiotic devices" to illustrate Black revolution for liberation in America.⁵ "Douglas's images changed the story from Black people as victims to Black people as freedom fighters, allying themselves with concurrent global revolutionary movements."⁶ A contributor to the Black Arts Movement, Douglas worked with Amiri Baraka on sets for The Black Arts Repertory Theater/School.

BISA BUTLER

Bisa Butler is an African American artist and quilter who uses textiles to create large-scale quilted portraits of African Americans. Butler researches old found photographs of African Americans known and unknown throughout historical identification. Butler's quilts recreate portraiture of the past into elevated portraits of African Americans in luxurious design for the present. In keeping with African American quilt-making tradition, Butler's quilts incorporate different fabrics from various sources: family member vintage African fabric, previously owned dressmaker fabric, donated fabric, seasonal African fabrics, all combine to create a unique arrangement of collaged patterns, as if fabric were a painting. Her technique for line, pattern, and color combinations and layering makes Butler's quilted portraits incredibly captivating. A student of Jeff Donaldson, Butler's influence and studies come from AfriCOBRA and Black Arts Movement.

WANURI KAHIU

Wanuri Kahiu is a Kenyan based artist who directs, produces, and writes films. Kahiu's film, *Pumzi*, is an Afrofuturist film about the earth post-world war over water. The film depicts a matriarch that wants to dilute grandeur beliefs about reality to dominate and preserve. Themes of nature, the mother, the seed, the unknown, the ancestor, and elements of science fiction make Kahiu's film great art to compare African culture and tradition to Afrofuturistic ideas and perceptions. Kahiu discusses in her interview how elements of science fiction and Afrofuturism are indigenous to African cultures. Stories about visionaries who predict the future, animals that can talk, people that can transform have always been a part of African folktales. Kahiu brings a thought provoking and prophetic insight into philosophical questions about race, social constructs, systems, and structures in Afrofuturism.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

IDENTITY

From the beginning of our lives, we form and shape our identity. From the sounds we hear, the rhythms we feel, the flavors we taste, the scents we smell, the forms we visually shape; everything is potential and possible in influencing our preferences that contribute to our identity. Through our development and understanding of what we like, we continue to form and shape who we are. We look around us to our school, media, and our home to get inspiration for what we are attracted to, what we believe, what makes us laugh, what keeps our attention and interest. As we grow and become more aware of our presence within society and the impact that our presence has on humanity, we begin to include within our identity ways in which we would like to see the world. Visual, auditory, theoretical, psychological, and philosophical references found within our daily lives shape our personality: how we act, what we say, how we think. On a superficial level with or without ethical reflection, we use visual and tangible references to determine how we want to look: how we will dress, how we transform our body language, to how we will style our hair. These references can dictate if and how we define beauty, what we are attracted to in friends, and attributes we look for in interpersonal relationships. Our teenage years, filled with hormones, puberty, new responsibilities, and relationships, are a barrage of experiences and experimentations testing out what we like, what works, and what are total fails. We recreate old perceptions of ourselves that we outgrow or that we no longer need to define ourselves. Parts of ourselves stay with us forever. They may hibernate for years to be woken up again years later. Some people stick with what they know and where they are comfortable within their comfort zone. Some will constantly develop and display new transformations and variations of themselves as they regularly shift with their internal and external influences. Sometimes developing identity can be difficult. Identity formation can feel like a riptide of force directing our instincts away from what we know and feel goes against our beliefs and is inaccurate to our moral groundings. Identity can also appear through acts of unconscious ambiguity in mimicry and justification and idolization of our ideals. True identity is formed through self-reflection and action. Questioning every thought, act, belief, visual representation presents actualization of the self. True morality comes from questions about the origins and formations of these acts and representations. Are they honest and equitable or manifested from a system of dominance? How we choose to dress, act, love, and think are all aspects of our identity. They are political choices that reflect who we are and what we believe. Therefore, one can take these fixed and mutable social categories and be critical and conscientious. How one chooses to represent themselves is a choice that is unattached and free. Through exposure to the vast possibilities, opportunities, and experiences of life can we truly learn about ourselves. Through deep conversations that challenge our previous beliefs, ideas, and notions of that which is identity, can we truly learn to define ourselves, our values, our virtues, and hopes and dreams.

As much as our identity is a manifestation of our own political choices and instinctual practices, and as much as it is beneficial to be self-reflective and critically conscientious, there is a part of our identity that is pressed upon us by society. Labels of race, gender, class, and sexuality are all asked of us and inflicted upon us with and without our permission. Higginbotham writes, "Race is a highly contested representation of relations of power between social categories by which individuals are identified and identify themselves."⁷ This connection of identification by which one identifies is a superimposition of an ideal must be then agreed upon or resisted. These categories that divide and define individuals and groups within society by society is created out of a need for hierarchy to create a dominant power. As much as we may or may not agree with the identity placed upon us by society, there is a part of that identity that then is our identity that we must accept or reject.

Higginbotham argues that how we identify is both a choice and an imposition. As society categorizes us whether we agree or not, there is a part of us that does acknowledge these labels as a part of our identity. Whether we chose to acknowledge, embody, or contest these fabricated divisions is our choice. We can contest and demand for our rights for privacy, acceptance, and choice through law and cultural climate; however, the true means for dissolution of such impositions is by educating people for the removal of harmful labels and the need to superimpose; to increase acceptance that identity, appearance, and behavior is the way that it is without need to justify or explain within a label or category; and the removal of the hierarchy that requires and causes such divisions.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTS

Social constructs are beliefs about human actions and appearances that form from power relations of dominance and for the need of control and self-recognition. Social constructs are beliefs about how to define gender and sexuality, how to dress in a certain class, how women should act, how children should be raised, and how men should take care of their families. All of these ideas are contrived, not necessary, or accurate in contemporary culture for defining how people can behave and look in specific social categories. However, like socially imposed identity these social constructions make their way into our thought processes and require for us to make considerations about how we choose to conform or stray from their impressions. Daily thought processes that are influenced by social constructs are ideologies around beauty, fashion, education, politics, lifestyle, occupation, leisure, luxury, commodities, family, domesticity, business, healthcare, and interpersonal relationships. Social constructs contribute to healthy and unhealthy interpretations of the self and can impose false pressures on individuals to meet certain fictitious and artificially contrived standards. When examining oneself and one's identity, social constructs that can be detrimental are often deceiving as they are often established by popular persuasion and opinion.

Institutions within society, on a microscopic level: families, social gatherings, and friends; on a macroscopic level: schools, corporations, and media, all play a role in the construction and decimation of beliefs for etiquette around social categories that inform identity. Social constructions are projections, reflections, establishments, and reinforcements about what society under a white male heteronormative imperialist patriarchy "should" look like. Projecting images and defining language, using overt and covert subliminal reinforcements of persuasion to cultivate and establish how people think, feel, and act as individuals, groups, organizations, corporations, governments, nations, countries, and the world. Our exposure, absorption, and reflection of these culminating constructions are how society forces us to identify within their framework while they identify us within their social categorizations. Awareness of these social relations and institutional racialized discrepancies allow individuals and groups the ability to make political choices for how they allow themselves to be defined by society and determine where they stand on these injustices.

Higginbotham writes, "in societies where racial demarcation is endemic to their sociocultural fabric and heritage—to their laws and economy, to their institutionalized structures and discourses, and to their epistemologies and everyday customs—gender identity is inextricably linked to and even determined by racial identity."⁸ Higginbotham gives an example of a societal infrastructure that establishes a harmful racialized categorization that impedes upon the creation and identification of all additional social categorizations. This societal infrastructure is a product fabricated by society with the explicit intentions for establishing a hierarchy of power, creating domination for the institutions that create such an infrastructure. Before 1960s in the Jim Crow South, young black girls knew to recognize and occupy bathrooms labeled "black women" and not "white ladies." The language and connotations surrounding "women" versus "ladies" state clearly class distinctions that polarize and dichotomize strictly to demarcate gender and class within the determinant of

race. The social category, race, is fabricated and “artificially and arbitrarily contrived”—to produce and maintain relations of power and subordination” by systemic and institutionalized power relations.⁹ The fabrication of race is envisioned by the same patriarchy that fabricates gender, class, and sexuality. Racialization and race are located at the origin of social categorizing and a final determinant for the other categorical constructions. These forced labels must be recognized as false, fictitious, and invented facets for identity. Higginbotham writes, “To argue that race is a myth and that it is an ideological rather than a biological fact does not deny that ideology has real effects on people’s lives.”¹⁰ These bigoted denunciations, created by specific laws within the heritage of American society “historically rooted in the context of slavery,” continue to be challenged and change by law, activism, and cultural persuasion.¹¹ Human rights activism continues to speak and act to disseminate information and the acquisition of true moral and ethical knowledge for listeners of change, thus allowing individuals to create healthy interpretations, personas, and identities of the self. Fashion, film, art, literature, and music additionally challenging these false perceptions of “norms,” moving towards a more open-minded, accepting, diverse, creative, and unique society.

RACE

Race is a social construct created as a tool for oppression. Throughout history, groups of people have intentionally created social constructs to establish norms that meet their beliefs and intentions to maintain a superior advantage. White male patriarchy is one example of relations of power towards women and race. These intentional social constructs were created to establish and maintain a hierarchy within society. During colonization, racist representations of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) through story, sermon, text, visual imagery, metaphor, and connections to literature, such as the Bible, were used to justify slavery and the assimilation of indigenous people.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality is the intersection and interweaving of all parts of one's identity: the characteristics created by the individual, the collective, those that are placed upon us within societal categorizations, those that we choose to accept, and those that are imposed. Each area layers and interconnects to create one unified identity filled with areas of advantage and disadvantage within the dominant social hierarchy.

VOICE

Through historical context, we will look at theorists to determine our own consciousness on topics of how race, gender, class, and sexuality impact our lives. We will apply these critical theories to our art-practice. Through intention and artistic language, we will narrate our own experiences, share our stories, and give respect to ourselves and our collective.

MYTHS AND FACILITIES

Students have many questions relating to definitions, beliefs, and imagery that are depicted as inaccurate due to false representations present within images of the media. Therefore, while continuing our analysis of race as a metalanguage for gender, sexuality, and class, we will separate representation and categorizations into fact and fiction.

Topics include

- Myth Science

- Essentialist biological and genetic explanations
- Chromosome research: falsities of genotypic and phenotypic difference
- Eugenics
- Manichean opposition: good versus evil
- Feminism: Homogeneous “Womanhood”
- Metaphoric and Metonymic Identification: Welfare & Drugs
- Census Bureau

SAFE SPACE

In the beginning of the school year, we will establish guidelines for cultivating a classroom that is inclusive, open-minded, supportive, and safe. Creating art, discussing art, and talking about topics that involve the mind, identity, and the self can be very vulnerable for all students. The creative process of making art can be very emotional and comes from an incredibly personal space. A critique or comment can shut a person down indefinitely. Therefore, establishing positive methods as a collective that we can continue to build on, when necessary, establishes a space that students can trust and know that it is okay to make mistakes and that we can grow and build from them if they arrive.

Starting guidelines that we will establish, exercise, reference, and reassure in the beginning of the school year.

1. Calling someone in instead of calling someone out.
2. Allowing personal space and choice for sharing about self, especially vulnerable topics.
3. Start the year by sharing pronouns, upfront and being open-minded for transitions and fluidity.
4. Aware of coping mechanisms, share ways to cope with emotions: meditation, exercise, nature, a friend, art, fresh air, new environment or change of space
5. Warn before possible triggering information. Follow all experiences with a debrief for thoughts, opinions, emotions, suggestions, and questions about content, context, and community support. Continue emotional check-ins with students throughout the day, week, month, and year.
6. Learn to be aware of emotions. It is okay to feel vulnerable emotions. It is healthy to notice and identify how one’s body is changing: from hot, cold, chaotic, dizzy, nauseous. It is good to alter others of how you are feeling. When our emotions change, others are not to blame. We chose how to think, act, alter and address our feelings. We can choice how we react. Letting a teacher, peers, or family member know how you feel can be helpful for both emotional catharsis and to navigate systems of support.
7. Whole body listening; patient and active listener.
8. Supportive questioning.
9. Acknowledging when wrong.

As some of the topics presented about race, gender, sexuality, and class may be triggering or send students off in an un navigated direction, setting up healthy boundaries and support systems in advance will create preventative measures to establish a setting that is open-minded, supportive, cathartic, nurturing, and a space to germinate self-discovery.

TEACHING STRATEGIES

In order to interpret and analyze “race as a metalanguage” for intersectionality, I will begin by talking about identity. We will begin the year with self-reflection: the things that we already know to be true about ourselves. I will have students create a vision board with all the aspects that they love about themselves, all the parts of who they are. From the smells they love, the memories they have, to favorite pastimes, activities, and future aspirations.

In Chapter 1 of *This Book Is Anti-Racist: 20 Lessons on How to Wake Up, Take Action, and Do the Work*, Tiffany Jewell starts the book off with an activity talking about herself through an identity map. Each chapter of the book builds on this map to Social Identities, Race, Ethnicity, Racism, Prejudice, Knowing Our History, Actions and Responses to Racism, Working in Solidarity Against Racism. Sequentially, this order will allow students to deconstruct and open-up to identity being more about themselves than they imagined before. That many things make up an identity, that all of the parts of us should not be things that we are afraid of but are who we are, our histories, to be acknowledged, celebrated, and parts of us to allow us to grow and develop from.

This Book Is Anti-Racist: 20 Lessons on How to Wake Up, Take Action, and Do the Work is a great introduction activity for identity that gives youth a moment to reflect on all aspects about themselves and to consider all the parts of who they are. Tiffany Jewell activates youths' ability to be conscientious and an active participant for positive change for liberation.

After looking at the parts of identity, I will reintroduce the concept of social categories and how the social constructs have been defined and transformed in the past to where they exist within the context of today. We will examine how social constructs are mythical and a fantasy that is fluid and ever changing. Their creation from power relations and domination. And how in a post-racial society gender, class, and sexuality are all but just constructs. Something created like an illusion or delusion. For historical reference of how the metalanguage of race has influenced social constructs for African Americans, I suggest reading Higginbotham's “African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race.” Higginbotham talks about how African American women experienced in the past homogenization within class, gender, race, and sexuality. This encompassing categorization is what makes conversations about sexism, feminism, womanism, and classism in context with past, present, and future different for all BIPOC. When beginning conversations about feminism it is important that this conversation not be absolute and universal. That experience for all BIPOC is different from white women. The conversations may have some common themes; however, the separation of experiences and experiences within the groups themselves in terms of class and sexuality is important to note as well. Further reading on the contributions for women that Evelyn references in her article, Sojourner Truth's contributions for women's identity and rights in Yona Zeldis McDonough's book, “*Who Was Sojourner Truth?*” The story is very informative for both students and adults.

Another aspect of identity and understanding racism and liberation is by going to the root and foundation for its origins. Events that took place addressed with a linear and thorough timeline, seen through a multi-BIPOC lens, and spoken through the perspective of historically absent voices will be a helpful schematic approach when understanding race. Why this dual conflicting view arose in the first place: from racism, established through slavery, reinforced through religion, and again through politics. Countered and redefined by subgroups, abolitionists, theorists, activists, lawyers, politicians, all amounting to our present-day issues of systemic and institutional racism countered by today's efforts of human rights activism. A book that is helpful for youth and adults when beginning to put these worldviews into perspective is Ibram X. Kendi and Jason

Reynolds book, *Stamped: Racism, Anti-racism, and You: A Remix of the National Book Award-winning Stamped from the Beginning*. This writing is accessible for youth and offers relatable insight about the past, present, and future of African American history in the United States of America.

African American achievement and anti-racist activism are important because they strongly inform the context and content of this unit. These pre-activities will support students as they contextualize their critical consciousness. Inquiry based-learning, paired with social-emotional based-practices, and community building will allow critical consciousness to expand to collective consciousness that is supported, heard, and loved.

Activity One: New Narrative

1. Artist: Faith Ringgold, *Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?*, 1983 Acrylic on canvas, dyed, painted, and pieced fabric

2. Objective: Create a new narrative for people represented in commercial advertising as profit and exploitation.

3. Narrative:

One way in which advertising reinforces derogatory narratives of BIPOC is by using their images for promoting slanderous stereotypes as their racist company branding. The images are defamatory and depict BIPOC as illegal representations of human rights within the United States of America and the globe.

In addition, this marketing practice compensates the individuals depicted with no monetary or apologetic form of reciprocity for the damaging effects of the imagery. The companies that use these derogatory branding methods are not owned by BIPOC. Therefore, the companies and advertisement corporations are making profits off of creating racist depictions of BIPOC.

Recently, a company decided to switch their name and remove their branding icon that depicted a black woman as a slave, illegal in the United States of America. This practice of profiting off of antiquated racist iconography still exists and needs to change.

One way to give hope, freedom, liberation, and justice to the BIPOC narrative and representation is to create a new narrative reflecting positivity, emergent strength, and autonomy. BIPOC in power of their own narrative.

One artist who creates a new narrative for BIPOC is Faith Ringgold. Through frustration, pain, and personal offense, Faith Ringgold created her first story quilt in 1983 called, "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?"

This narrative was to give Jemima a life she deserved.

One without prejudice, one without humiliation, one without demeaning representation.

One with truth, positivity, liberation, and freedom.

4. Activity:

In this activity, students will look at images in media and advertising that portray BIPOC in offensive representation. Students will create a new story for them.

A new story of liberation, freedom, and justice. By creating a new narrative, students will be empowered to create the representation that BIPOC deserve every day to be seen within mass media. The stories that deserve to be shared. The ones that are not taken for money making, profit, exploitation, and injustice.

Students have an option and choice with their creative outlet. They can construct a book, a story quilt, a story map, a video, a graphic novel, a song, a poem. Students' options are endless. Their choice will be that which is best to meet their creative liberation and that of the liberation of the representation of BIPOC from advertising.

Activity Two: Reconstructing Social Constructions

1. Artists: Clotilde Jimenez, Derek Webster, Jae Jarrell, Zanele Muholi, Amy Sherald, Glenn Ligon

2. Artwork:

- Clotilde Jimenez, *Toy Puncher*, 2020
- Derek Webster, *Bottle Creature*, 1934-2009
- Jae Jarrell, *Urban Wall Suit*, 1969
- Zanele Muholi, *Phila I, Parktown*, 2016; *Sebenzile, Parktown*, 2016; *Bakindile IV, The Square, Cape Town*, 2017; *Bester I, Mayotte*, 2015; *Bester V, Mayotte*, 2015; *Ntozakhe II, Parktown*, 2016
- Amy Sherald, *Sometimes the king is a woman*, 2019; *When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be (Self-imagined atlas)*, 2018
- Glenn Ligon, *Coloring Book Paintings*, 2000

3. Objective:

Students will analyze and interpret artwork to determine how artists are redefining social categories.

4. Activity:

This activity looks at how social constructs are challenged and contested by Contemporary Black Artists. Students will have their own opportunities to create and exhibit their own blending, blurring, deconstructing, and reconstructing of social categorizations and constructs.

This activity looks at how social constructs in the past separate physical and behavioral preference through a categorical lens of gender and sexuality and how race blurs the distinctions. Gender being a performance of actions that are created and decided by the individual allows for the removal of gender oppression and opens up all possibilities for exploration and expression. Laura Gehl and Joshua Heinsz book, *Except When They Don't*, is a great way to begin the lesson on social constructs. The story illustrates and opens up dialogue about how there are things that we enjoy doing and there are things that our friends enjoy doing. Nothing holds us back from doing any of the activities. We can all enjoy doing these activities individually and together. Some activities may require adaptations and accommodations. If we can believe it, we can do it. Behavioral and physical choice frees social categories from the construction of their categorization and allows for the interweaving, blending, abstracting, and deconstructing of these conceived fabrications of delusion and division. We can choose how we act, how we feel, how we dress, and how we communicate. We are not defined by the constructs of the past. Our critical conscience allows for choice when deciding to keep certain aspects of our mutable selves and those that we choose to alter, explore, and transform. The critical conscience of knowing that one does not have to subscribe to oppressive narratives and relations of power

creating constructs for domination and division. Thus, a harmonious blend of choice becomes a part of our identity and voice.

Part 1:

1. Look at the book, *Except When They Don't*, by Laura Gehl.
2. Highlight ways gender labels are placed on certain colors, activities, decorative adornments, and clothing.
3. Discuss social constructs.
4. Discuss intersectionality.
5. Discuss how race is a metalanguage for intersectionality.
6. Define terms nonbinary, gender nonconforming.

Questions:

- How does *Except When They Don't* challenge labels within social categories?
- How do we challenge these constructs every day?
- What are some examples in our class, our school, our community, our homes, and the world today of people or images that break, deconstruct, and redefine—blur, challenge, abstract, transform, and unite social categories?

Part 2:

1. Look at the artwork of Clotilde Jimenez, Derek Webster, and Zanele Muholi.
2. Have students examine, analyze, and interpret ways that social categories are defined, blurred, and transformed.

Questions:

- What do you see in the collage, sculpture, and photograph?
- What are the materials?
- What are the textures?
- What elements create contrast/unity? What is your interpretation of why the artist use these compositional artistic elements?
- What connections do you think the artists are making to the artistic choices and their connections to social constructs?
- What is the subject matter?
- What is the narrative?
- How do these elements contribute to the reconstruction of social constructions?
- How do these elements inform the viewer about the construction of race?

Part 3:

Glenn Ligon's *Coloring Book Paintings (Series)* reflects interpretations and intentions of children and their creative drawing and coloring choices and methods. The paintings reflect the children's open-minded, imaginative, and free-spirited interpretations of the images. The images came from coloring books drawn by black artists to educate black children about their history.

1. Look at Glenn Ligon's *Coloring Book Paintings (Series)*.

2. Give historical context to where the coloring books came from.
3. Have students examine, identify, and make inquiry about the ways that the children made personal choices to color the images.
4. Have students make connections to previous conversations about social constructs.
5. Have students interpret children's intentions.
6. Discuss how youth are less biased and less effected by social constructs.
7. Students will then watch Glenn Ligon discuss the inspiration, logic, and process for the art. Video (11:07-12:46)

Questions:

- What are the choices, methods, and ways that the children added color to the images?
- What is your interpretation for how each child interpreted each image?
- What connections can you make to our previous conversations about social constructs?

Part 4:

Look at artwork Amy Sherald.

1. Have students read the titles.
2. Have students make connections between the titles and the artwork.
3. Discuss how titles of art are as just as meaningful as the art.

Questions:

- How do the titles break social constructs?
- How the titles challenge white, male, heteronormative patriarchy?

5. Project:

- Students will consider all that they have learned from previous lessons about social constructs (i.e.. redefining social constructs, liberated biases through aesthetic choice, challenging logic through narrative titles.)
- Students will create art that breaks social constructs of past and present and recreates a new dimension that reflects a multitude of behavioral and physical, aesthetic, and functional choices.
- Students will have choice for art production and process: collages, videos, drawings, sculptures, performance.
- Students will present their work and give an artist talk about their intent and how their choices inform their art.

Activity Three: Why race matters: Redefining Race

1. Artists: Kerry James Marshall, Amiri Baraka, Elizabeth Catlett, Nelson Stevens, Betty Saar, Amy Sherald, Bisa Butler, Glenn Ligon

2. Artwork:

- Kerry James Marshall, *untitled (painter)*, 2009; *A Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of His Former Self*, 1980

- Amy Sherald, *Precious jewels by the sea*, 2019
- Bisa Butler, *The Storm, The Whirlwind, and the Earthquake*, 2020
- Nelson Stevens, *Primal Force*, 1975
- Elizabeth Catlett, *Homage to Young Black Sisters*, 1968
- Betty Saar, *Black Girl's Window*, 1969
- Glenn Ligon, *Warm Broad Glow*, 2005; *Coloring Book Paintings*, 2000
- Kehinde Wiley, *Randerson Romualdo Cordeiro*, 2008; *Anthony of Padua*, 2013

3. Objective:

Students will reflect on what defines race; how they identify within categories of race; interpret how Contemporary Black Artists navigate, acknowledge, and celebrate race; and construct self-portraits that contextualize their identity including race.

4. Narrative:

Wanting to identify as an artist regardless of gender, class, race, sexuality is controversial. Even as these identifier categories are created from social constructions, it becomes impossible to remove the artist's identity from the process and output of art itself. Whether understood by the artist and viewer or not, the artist's creative consciousness comes from experiences influenced by the constructions of our identity.

Sometimes there are misconceptions about race. To be "colorblind" is to ignore that anyone has a race, as if history and heritage have no implications to what makes a person. Race is part of our society and part of our identity. Race is celebrated and brings people together. Black artist and writers sometimes see individuals struggle with this concept as the construction of race has a rooted history in being harmful. Life has proven that it can overcome obstacles of hate and that the construction of race has become a unifying form of community, collectivity, and love. Higginbotham writes, "Race signified cultural identity and heritage, not biological inferiority."¹² Even if one tries, one cannot separate race from the creative process as the creative process is as much a part of our identity.

5. Activity

In this activity, students will explore their own perceptions of race, the ineffectiveness of ignoring race, and how artists represent the construction of race representationally and conceptually in their artwork.

1. Students will watch the Art 21 video, *Being an Artist, Kerry James Marshall*. Here Marshall refers to an excerpt of Langston Hughs. This is the initial topic for conversation.
2. Students will discuss what it means to be an artist identified by race: Black artist, Afro-Latinidad artist, Indigenous artist.
3. Students will watch Sherald talk about being a black artist. Discuss and build upon her perceptions and Marshalls.
4. Watch Bisa Butler video. What aesthetic choices does Butler use to connect to race?
5. Read except from Baraka & Catlett on defining Black Art and being a black artist. Students will discuss why and how Baraka and Catlett define the role of the Black Artist.
6. Students will look, analyze, and discuss how race connects to the artwork listed above.

Question:

- What is your perspective about race's connection to identity, creating art, and being an artist?
- How do the artists reflect race as a metalanguage for intersectionality by social categories of gender, class, and sexuality?
- What is the role of the Black Artist?
- How does discussing race contribute to the Black Arts Movement?

6. Project:

- Students will create self-portraits. The material, medium, and media they use is their choice.
- Students will exhibit their work and discuss their creative choices: how their art relates to being an artist defined by race, how their art relates to identity, how their art relates to social constructs and interpretations of society.

Activity Four: Emotive: Process and Conceptualism

1. Artist: Melvin Edwards, Jack Wittman, Zanele Muholi

2. Artwork:

- Melvin Edwards, *Curtain for Williams and Peter*, 1969-1970
- Jack Whitten, *Prime Mover*, 1974
- Zanele Muholi, *Kwanele, Parktown*, 2016
- Glenn Ligon, *Double America*, 2012; *Ruckenfigur*, 2009; *Warm Broad Glow*, 2005; *Stranger #20*, 2004; *Stranger #43*, 2011

3. Objective: Students will interpret and relate to art through a social-emotional lens. Students will create emotive conceptual art that connects experience to process.

4. Activity:

Day 1:

1. Talk about the relevance of emotion in art. Use Elizabeth Catlett quote and AfriCOBRA quote.
2. Look at the art of Melvin Edwards and Jack Whitten.
3. Discuss how the artworks make you feel, emotions that surface, empathy of what the artist might be feeling.
4. Talk about how the materials, composition, process, and exhibition creates emotion and feelings for the viewer. Students can talk about the process and what emotions come from the thought processes.
5. Have students relate how these feelings, emotions, and connections relate to the artist's possible intent relating to the time period and the history of African Americans and art.

Questions:

- What elements of the art make you have this reaction: material, composition, process?
- How can material convey emotion?
- How can the process reflect feeling and experience?
- How can composition make the viewer feel emotions towards the subject?
- Knowing these are created by black artists, how do you think their art speaks about being Black in

America?

Day 2:

1. Look at *Kwanele, Parktown*, by Zanele Muholi.
2. Have students examine the work using DeBono's thinking hats.
3. Have students talk about the feelings and emotions that surface for them when they look at this photograph.
4. Students will analyze what their meaning of the art is through their interpretive lens.
5. Share the story that relates to the photograph. **This is a good example for when to give a warning before the story as it might be something similar someone has experienced and may stir similar feelings.*

Questions:

- How do the compositional elements create emotion?
- How does art allow us to say what we want to say?
- How does art allow us to feel what we want to feel?

5. Project:

- Have students come up with a nonrepresentational, metaphorical, conceptual art piece to relate to a personal experience that created emotion for them.
- What is their background story?
- How does their process and material inform the emotions of their experience?
- This Project is designed as a Social-Emotional Lesson to give students more opportunities to connecting with their social-emotional side on topics of race and identity.

Activity Five: New Art: Black Art: Black Arts Movement

1. Artists: Nelson Stevens, James Phillips, Alma Thomas, Bisa Butler, Mary Lee Bendolph, Loretta Pettway

2. Artwork:

- Nelson Stevens, *Primal Force*, 1975
- James Phillips, *Homage to Murry DePillars*, 2010
- Alma Thomas, *Untitled (Music Series)*, 1978
- Bisa Butler, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 2019; *The Storm, The Whirlwind, and the Earthquake*, 2020
- Mary Lee Bendolph, *Workclothes Quilt; Housetop Variation; Mama's Song*
- Loretta Pettway, *Bricklayer; Blocks and Strips*

3. Objective: Students will make personal connections to artist text. Students will create artwork from analysis and connections. Students will look at the *AfriCOBRA Manifesto*, connect philosophies to Contemporary Black Art, and create art using the principles that inspire them.

4. Activity:

Part 1:

1. Students will get copies of the *AfriCOBRA Manifesto (a)-(z)*.
2. Students will highlight words, phrases, sentences, sections that stand out to them.
3. Students will get into groups and share what stood out to them.

Questions:

- When reading *AfriCOBRA Manifesto*, what words, phrases, sentences, parts stood out to you?
- What parts of the text did you connect with?
- What parts of the text did you find confusing?
- Why do you think Jeff Donaldson chose these elements to represent AfriCOBRA and the Black Arts Movement?
- How do you think these principles relate to the Black Arts Movement?
- How do these elements connect to Emancipation, Civil Rights Movement, Black Lives Matter, and African American liberation?

Part 2:

When sharing artwork, paying attention to the date is necessary. Some of these artists are directly influenced and involved in the AfriCOBRA Black Art Movement.

1. Students will look at slides of the Contemporary Black Artist's artwork.
2. Students will make connections to the aesthetic ideas within the *AfriCOBRA Manifesto* to the contemporary black artwork.

Questions:

- What artistic and aesthetic elements within the *AfriCOBRA Manifesto* are present within these artist's artwork?
- Do you think that these artists read, heard, and were influence by the *AfriCOBRA Manifesto*?
- How do you think these artists were influenced, interpreted, and connected the text within their own art practice?
- How do these connections create a Black Arts Movement?

Connect:

1. Bisa Butler was a student of Jeff Donaldson. Watch her video and talk about her connection to AfriCOBRA; and the process she chooses to connect art influences of the past, present, and future.
2. The quilts of the Gee's Bend Quiltmakers are also included in the artworks. This is an opportunity to talk about quilting in African American history. These quilters had no connection through academic education or institutional exposure to art history. The Gee's Bend Quilters artistry is instinctual, personal, and created through their own traditions, ancestry, and philosophy. Compare the artistry of the Gee's Bend Quiltmakers to the philosophies in the *AfriCOBRA Manifesto Conversations* on art aesthetic, composition, and their connection to liberation. Access to a list of Gee's Bend Quiltmakers and their quilts are found on the website, Souls Grown Deep.org.

5. Project:

- Students will create artwork that reflects and connects their new learning. The art can be figurative, representational, or abstract: however, students interpret *AfriCOBRA Manifesto*; however, they respond creatively.
- Students will then share their work and discuss their relationship to the text.

Activity Six: New Narrative II

1. Artists: Elizabeth Catlett, Wadsworth Jarrell, Emory Douglas, Faith Ringgold, Kerry James Marshall, Amy Sherald, Bisa Butler

2. Artwork:

- Gerald Williams, *I am Somebody*, 1969
- Elizabeth Catlett, *Homage to Young Black Sisters*, 1968
- Wadsworth Jarrell, *Boss Couple*, 1970
- Emory Douglas, (*ink drawing of person sitting reading paper*), September 15, 1973
- Faith Ringgold, *Woman on a Bridge #1 of 5: Tar Beach*, 1988
- Kerry James Marshall, *School of Beauty, School of Culture*, 2012
- Amy Sherald, *Precious jewels by the sea*, 2019; *A Midsummer Afternoon Dream*, 2020; *An Ocean Away*, 2020; *There is no charm equal to tenderness of heart*, 2019
- Bisa Butler, *The Safety Patrol*, 2018; *Black Star Family, First Class Tickets to Liberia*, 2018

3. Objective: Students will use interpretation skills to decode narrative.

4. Activity:

Part 1:

1. Look at the artworks of these artists.
2. Discuss what narratives are present in each artwork.
3. Using the De Bono's Six Talking Hats, students will respond to the art.

Questions:

- How do the images define social constructs?
- What do the images say about race as a metalanguage?
- What are the narratives in these paintings?
- What do you see, who do you see, what is happening?
- As Jeff Donaldson writes in *AfriCOBRA Manifesto*, how do these images offer “positive and feasible solutions to our individual, local, national, international, and cosmic problems?”¹³
- Gaiter writes about how the Black Panthers “revolutionary activity was visualizing alternative aspirational standards for African Americans in the United States after the Civil Rights Movement.” Gaiter continues that the *Black Panther* newspaper “provided detailed and unprecedented visual instructions for Black people in the United States on constructing a liberated life.” How do these images create “alternative aspirational standards for African Americans” and “unprecedented visual instructions for” “constructing a liberated life?”¹⁴
- If you were to create your own narrative painting, what would it be of? Who would be in it? What would

they be doing?

5. Project:

- Have students plan, organize, and create a narrative artwork.
- While considering the narratives of the art examined and the Jeff Donaldson quote, have students create their own narrative concept for a painting, photograph, drawing, or collage. These can be completed in a series.
- Give students time to take notes, draw sketches, talk with a peer to strategize their visual representation.

Activity Seven: The Future of Race

1. Artists: Wanuri Kahiu, Wangechi Mutu, Fabrice Monteiro, Jah Gal, Alitha E. Martinez, Roxane Gay

2. Artwork:

- African Folktale, *A Man Who Could Transform Himself*
- Wangechi Mutu, *Once upon a time she said, I'm not afraid and her enemies began to fear her The End*, 2013
- Wanuri Kahiu, *Pumzi*, video, 2020
- Toni Morrison, *Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation*, 1984
- Fabrice Monteiro & Jah Gal, *The Prophecy*, photography & documentary, 2013-2015
- Alitha E. Martinez & Roxane Gay, *Black Panther: World of Wakanda*, 2017

3. Objective

Students will observe and interpret elements of Afrofuturism through text, two-dimensional, and three-dimensional art: film, video, sculpture, installation, drawing, graphic novels, and photography. Students will create art reflective of their own creative perceptions of the future and race.

Question: What would the world look like in a post-racial society?

4. Activity:

This activity on Afrofuturism will take place over a course of three classes.

Day 1:

- Students will focus on Afrofuturism, make connections to science-fiction within African tradition, relate the role of the future as an oracle for talking about the present, and examine the metaphor of transformations, the mother, and ancestors.
- Students will discuss science fiction, the role of the future, the relationship to the present.
- Students will look at the African Folktale, *The Man Who Could Transform*. Students will look at the artwork of Wangechi Mutu. Students will make connections to *The Man Who Could Transform*. Students will make connections to the text and art that relate to Afrofuturism.
- Students will look at the film short, *Pumzi*. Students will use the six thinking hats to reflect, discuss, and interpret the film. Students make connections to Afrofuturism. Students will discuss the role of the ancestor, the mother, the seed, and the future.

- Students will read an excerpt from the text by Toni Morrison, *Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation*. Students will compare the text of Toni Morrison to the film short, *Pumzi*.
- Students will analyze and discuss Kahiū's depiction of social constructs of the future: race, class, gender, sexuality.

Questions:

- What elements make up Afrofuturism?
- How did Kahiū compare Afrofuturism, science fiction, to African folktale traditions?

Day 2:

1. Students will look at the film, *The Prophecy*.
2. Students will talk about the relationship between the future and the environment.
3. Students will brainstorm ideas in groups of how our environment shapes our identity, how our identity shapes our environment, how our environment is a reflection of our identity, and defines how we perceive constructions of our reality.

Questions:

- What is the relationship between the environment and our identity?
- What is the relationship between the environment and the future?

Day 3:

1. Students will look at the graphic novel, *World of Wakanda*.
2. Students will analyze how the author and illustrator create Afrofuturism.
3. Students will talk about the future and how the world will redefine social constructions.
4. To conclude, we will also look at the film, *Black Panther*. Students will analyze how race is created within Afrofuturism. Students will compare their analysis to *Pumzi* and *The Prophecy*.

Questions:

- What would the world look like in a post-racial society?
- If you were to create your own graphic novel based in the future, what would it look like, how would you create it?
- Gaiter writes that the Black Panther, Huey Newton, "believed that people would be motivated to action by seeing images more than by reading words."¹⁵ If activism can be in the form of images, what would you show for active change for today, tomorrow, and the future? How are graphic novels an effective form of educating and disseminating information.

5. Project:

- Students will collect all of their insights from previous artists, discussions, and analysis of Afrofuturism.
- Students will create art that depicts their perceptions, ideas, and fantasies about the future for race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Activity Eight: Field Trip to the Studio Museum in Harlem

Students will examine, connect, analyze, and interpret artwork at the Studio Museum in Harlem. As a conclusion to our extensive analysis of Contemporary Black Art, students will have the dimensionality, vocabulary, multi-perspective layers, and empowered voice to articulate their connections and interpretations of art with content and context to African American History and Contemporary Black Art. A final project will comprise of students choosing an artist or art from the museum and creating a presentation. Students will have the opportunity to make art inspired by the artist and artwork, curate their own exhibit, or create a video or animation documenting an artist and their motivations and connections to all they have learned throughout the unit.

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APPENDIX on Implementing District Standards

CREATE

Artists will...

- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- Document their early stages of their creative processes' visually and verbally in traditional or new media
- Collaboratively shape and artistic investigation of an aspect of present-day life using a contemporary practice of art and design.
- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
- Demonstrate willingness to experiment, innovate, and take risks to pursue ideas, forms, and meanings that emerge in the process of artmaking and designing.
- Demonstrate awareness of practices, issues, and ethics of appropriation, fair use, copyright, open source, and creative commons as they apply to creating works of art and design.
- Select, organize, and design images and words to make visually clear and compelling presentations.
- Refine and complete artistic work.
- Apply relevant criteria to examine, reflect on, and plan revisions for a work of art or design in progress.

PRESENTING

Artists will...

- Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.
- Develop and apply criteria for evaluating a collection of artworks for presentation.
- Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.
- Collaboratively prepare and present selected theme-based artwork for display and formulate exhibition narratives for the viewer.
- Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
- Analyze why and how an exhibition or collection may influence ideas, beliefs, and experiences.

RESPONDING

Artists will...

- Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- Explain how a person's aesthetic choices are influenced by culture and environment and impact the

visual image that one conveys to others.

- Compare and contrast contexts and media in which viewers encounter images that influence ideas, emotions, and actions.
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- Interpret art by analyzing how the interaction of subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, use of media, art-making approaches, and relevant contextual information contributes to understanding messages or ideas and mood conveyed.
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.
- Create a convincing and logical argument to support an evaluation of art.

CONNECTING

Artists will...

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
- Make art collaboratively to reflect on and reinforce positive aspects of group identity.
- Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.
- Distinguish different ways art is used to represent, establish, reinforce, and reflect group identity.

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¹ Baraka, *The Black Arts Movement: Its Meaning and Potential*, 28.

² B. Higginbotham, *African American Women's History and The Metalanguage of Race*, 3.

³ B. Higginbotham, *African American Women's History and The Metalanguage of Race*, 13.

⁴ Gaiter, *The Art of Liberation*. 567.

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¹³ R. Donaldson, AfriCOBRA Manifesto? “Ten in Search of a Nation.” 81.

¹⁴ Gaiter, The Art of Liberation. 567.

¹⁵ C. Gaiter, The Art of Liberation. 568.

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