



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
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Art Through the Eyes of Youth

Guide for Curriculum Unit 92.04.09
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Working with seventh and eighth grade students is no easy task. They are coping with many changes and choices. This can be very confusing considering the types of choices available to them. In the New Haven Public Schools, students are dealing with a number of problems that can make adolescence more difficult. They see crime, drugs, prostitution, murders, victims of teenage pregnancy, and AIDS. And they still have to deal with physical and psychological changes as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood. Another confusing element that makes adolescence even more difficult is having no sense of self and how one fits into the “scheme of things.”

As a teacher of drama and dance in the New Haven Public Middle Schools, I believe that the Arts can help facilitate changes in youth from childhood to adulthood. Through the arts youth learn to appreciate who they are and how they fit into society. The reason this is possible is because art reflects so many aspects of human life. It is a reflection of culture and history. A useful way to use the Arts in education is to get students to identify with historical figures of their culture who have contributed significantly to American culture. By exposing students to positive historical figures of their own race—in my case African-Americans and Puerto Rican Americans—who are poets, dancers, actors, and artists—they are given something visual in which they can identify and have pride.

Here is how I intend to use visual and written art as a means to get students to this point. Art is the springboard because students are visual. They will first learn art vocabulary, art styles, interpretation, art appreciation, and history. Next they will visit local art galleries, i.e. Ikenga Art Gallery on College Street and the Yale Art Gallery on York Street. Lessons will be developed to reinforce previous lessons on analysis, art terms, vocabulary, style, and historical significance. I would try to get access to slides of art work by artists of various ethnic backgrounds.

To complement the art instruction students will become familiar with literature that coincides with the time and the “flavor” of the art they are viewing. They will also become familiar with famous dancers, actors and singers from the Harlem Renaissance era.

The final product will be writing, dance, a mural, songs, and skits developed by the students based on their experiencing this unit. The students will have a better understanding of self and how one fits into society.

(Recommended for Art, grades 7-8)

Key Words

Art Afro-American African Puerto Rican General Harlem Renaissance History

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