

Americana: Word and Image

Getting to Know You: Building Community through Art Making

Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler: *Feed and Seed*

Mel Ziegler: *Flag Exchange*

Summary:

How well do you know the people who work in your school or live in your neighborhood? Do you understand what they contribute to the community and how they participate in that community? Can art be used as a way to explore and build community? Students will learn about community and diversity by selecting one non-educator who works at their school to highlight per month through traditional art techniques dealing with portraiture (painting, sculpture, photography) and contemporary art movements (Relational Aesthetics) by asking questions about who they are and what they do for the school and the students.

Curriculum Ties:

Visual Arts- Third:

Standard 1 Objective 1a, 1f, 1g. Objective 3a-d

Standard 3, Object 2a-e,

Standard 4, Objective 3a

Social Studies - Third:

Standard 3 Objective 1 Standard 3 Objective 3 Visual Arts- Fourth

Standard 1 Objective 1e, Objective 2a-e

Standard 2 Objective 1 & 2

Standard 3 Objective 1a

Social Studies – Fourth:

Standard 3 Objective 1e

Visual Arts- Fifth

Standard 1 Objective 1 , 2, & 3

Standard 3 Object 1 & 2a-b

Visual Arts- 6

Standard 1 Objective 1, Objective 2a, Objective 3

Standard 2 Objective 1, Objective 2

Standard 3 Objective 1, Objective 3a&b

Social Studies – Sixth:

Standard 4 Objective 2c
Social Studies – Seventh / Utah Studies: Standard 3 Objective 3
Visual Arts- Seven-Twelve
Painting
Sculpture
Photography

Time Frame:

15 minutes to develop, ask questions, and photograph the subject to use for the portraits. 1-2 hours for the students to create the portraits. 1 hour to decide how and where to install the artwork within the school.

Materials:

For Painting-

- Thick paper
- Paint, Pencils, markers or crayons
- Paintbrushes
- Optional: additional art materials as desired

For Sculpture-

- Modeling clay
- Carving tools
- Wire for armature
- Wood or insulation foam sheets for structure

For Photography:

- Digital Camera/ Film Camera
- Color printer
- Photo paper

Resources:

Website: Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler/ Mel Ziegler: Grandma's Cupboard
<http://www.utahmoca.org/portfolio/ericson-ziegler/>

During their prolific collaboration (1985-1995), Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler produced some of the most profound conceptual art projects of the late twentieth century. Ranging from socially engaged works and site-specific installations to drawings and mixed media sculptures, Ericson and Ziegler redefined public art in a way that was welcoming to a diverse set of communities.

Website: Galerie Perrotin
https://www.perrotin.com/artiste-Kate_Ericson_et_Mel_Ziegler-181.html

Website: Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relational_art

Relational art or **relational aesthetics** is a mode or tendency in fine art practice originally observed and highlighted by French art critic Nicolas Bourriaud. Bourriaud defined the approach as "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space." The artist can be more accurately viewed as the "catalyst" in relational art, rather than being at the center.

Website: Harrell Fletcher

Specific Projects: Lawn Sculptures, These Fine People, & Some People from Around Here
<http://www.harrellfletcher.com/2006/index3b.html>

Website: Museum of Modern Art: Rirkrit Tiravanija

http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/02/03/rirkrit-tiravanija-cooking-up-an-art-experience

Book: What We Want Is Free

<http://www.amazon.com/What-Want-Free-Generosity-Postmodern/dp/0791462900>

Background For Teachers:

Students should understand the following vocabulary for this activity:

Portrait- is a painting, photograph, sculpture, or other artistic representation of a person, in which the face and its expression is predominant. The intent is to display the likeness, personality, and even the mood of the person. For this reason, in photography a portrait is generally not a snapshot, but a composed image of a person in a still position. A portrait often shows a person looking directly at the painter or photographer, in order to most successfully engage the subject with the viewer.

Interview- is a conversation between two or more people where questions are asked by the interviewer to elicit facts or statements from the interviewee.^[1] Interviews are a standard part of qualitative research. They are also used in journalism and media reporting and in various employment-related contexts.

The qualitative research interview seeks to describe and the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say. Interviewing, when considered as a method for conducting qualitative research, is a technique used to understand the experiences of others.

Community- is a social unit of any size that shares common values. Although embodied or face-to-face communities are usually small, larger or more extended communities such as a national community, international community and virtual community are also studied. In human communities, intent, belief, resources, preferences, needs, risks, and a number of other conditions may be present and common, affecting the identity of the participants and their degree of cohesiveness. The main realistic meaning of a community is a group of people who connect well together socially, mentally or sometimes economically

Cultural Diversity- the quality of diverse or different cultures, as opposed to monoculture, as in the global monoculture, or a homogenization of cultures, akin to cultural decay. The phrase cultural diversity can also refer to having different cultures respect each other's differences. The phrase "cultural diversity" is also sometimes used to mean the variety of human societies or cultures in a specific region, or in the world as a whole.

OPTIONAL:

Painting- A painting is typically a 2-dimensional surface covered in paint and often hung on a wall.

Sculpture- A sculpture is a 3-dimensional artwork, whether made of metal, wood, clay or found materials.

Photography- is the science, art and practice of creating durable images by recording light or other electromagnetic radiation, either electronically by means of an image sensor, or chemically by means of a light-sensitive material such as photographic film.

Emphasis- Emphasis is the area of the artwork that holds the most interest, or where your eye is drawn first.

Composition- Composition is the placement or arrangement of visual elements or ingredients in a work of art, as distinct from the subject of a work. It can also be thought of as the organization of the elements of art according to the principles of art. (Source: Wikipedia)

Elements of Art- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elements_of_art

Shape, form, color, line, value, space, texture

Principles of Art- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principles_of_art

Movement/rhythm, unity/harmony, variety, balance, proportion/scale, pattern, emphasis

Intended Learning Outcomes:

Understand what a community is, the different communities the students exist in, and the people who make up their various communities.

Understand their role in their community and how they can help shape it.

Understand cultural diversity.

Understand how people's lives are shaped by their experiences and interactions with others.

Understand similarities and differences between people.

Understand how to use conversation and questions as a way to get to know someone.

Understand how a portrait of an individual can be developed through art and through questions and answers.

Be able to use different materials and processes to produce a portrait that represents a particular individual.

Understand how artists can be makers and facilitators.

Understand that art is based on an exchange, either physical (through producing artworks) or psychological (through interactions and interventions.)

Instructional Procedures:

Starting with images of traditional and current portraits and techniques, ask the student to discuss who they think the people in the images are, what their background is, and what their relationship to the artist might be. Ask the students what type of questions they would ask of the model if they were the artist creating the portrait and how/ why those questions could affect the look of the final piece. Ask the students if they think it is important to know about the life of the model. Would the questions help decide the setting of the portrait or the clothes that the model is wearing or even the pose of the model?

Discuss what a community is, the different communities they exist in, and how the students fit within that community.

Next, using images of Harrell Fletcher's work, discuss the idea of an artist being a part of a community and how Fletcher's work differs from the traditional idea of what an artist is and how they produce work, but how that difference allows him to explore and highlight what a community is by creating work outside of a studio which typically separates an artist from the that community.

Finally, using images of the Mel Ziegler and Kate Erikson's works *Feed and Seed* and *Flag Exchange*, discuss how collected objects can become symbols or stand-ins for the people that the objects are collected from which can also be used a way to create a portrait of a person.

For *Feed and Seed*, Mel and Kate placed an ad in a Pennsylvania farming journal asking willing farmers to trade their empty seed bags used on the farm for 10% of the cost of the seeds. Erikson and Ziegler then interviewed each farmer that replied to the ad and asked them questions about themselves and their life on the farm. They used those interview questions as a way to determine which farmers to work with.

Each stack of bags was then sandwiched between plexi-glass in groups of ten and had the name of the farm and the number of acres planted with the seeds etched onto the plexi-glass. Once the piece sold to an art collector, Erikson and Ziegler would then pay the farmer the additional

90% of the seed cost. The bags become a portrait of the farmer and the community that the farmer exists in without being a direct representation of the farmer.

For Flag Exchange, Ziegler drives the backroads of the communities he visits looking for old tattered flags that are still flying in front of homes and businesses. When he sees one that fits this description, he approaches the owner of the flag and asks if he can trade a new flag for their old one. Again, the flag becomes a symbol not only of that particular person, but also of people of the United States and the communities that proudly fly the flag. Mel sees these flags as monuments to the people in these communities and to the history of the United States.

Questions to be asked during the discussion:

- Is the image a painting, sculpture or photograph?
- What is the painting, sculpture, or photograph of?
- Who do you think this person in the portrait is and what makes you think that?
- Do you think the artist knows the subject?
- What kind of community do you think the subject is a part of and why?
- Does the way the artist chose to represent the subject give you a clue to who they are?
- Does the way the artist chose to represent the subject give you any information about what their personality might be?
- How does the artist use color in the portrait and how does that use of color affect your understanding of the subject?
- How does the artist use clothing or setting in the portrait?
- Does the artist use a particular technique that helps to describe more about the subject and who they might be?
- How many different communities do the students think they are a part of?
- What do they do to participate in those communities?

Questions to be asked while viewing Harrell Fletcher's work:

- What techniques does Fletcher use to represent his subjects?
- How does Fletcher make himself a part of the community that he is making work about?
- How does the way he installs his work affect how you understand it?
- If you were driving along the highway or walking through a neighborhood, what would you think about the paintings and sculptures of people in that community? Would you start to think about whom they might be and why there are giant paintings of them on the road or sculptures of them in someone's front yard?
- How do you think Fletcher approached the subjects?
- What kind of questions do you think he used to get to know them?
- Do you think it was important for Fletcher to get to know his subjects before making paintings or the ceramic figures?
- Do you think the subjects also became acquainted with each other through Fletcher's interventions and art works?
- Do you think the works help to strengthen and build that communities understanding of each other?

Do you think it's important for an artist to insert themselves into a community?
What is an artist role in building community?

Questions to ask while viewing Kate Erikson and Mel Ziegler's work?

How does their work engage community?

How does their work affect community?

Can objects be used as a stand-in or surrogate for a person? Can they be used to create a portrait of a person? Why or why not?

What ways do they use objects collected from those communities to give you an understanding of that community?

Why do you think their work often focuses on rural communities as opposed to large cities? What do you think about those types of communities and the people that live there?

Why do you think it was important for Erikson and Ziegler to interview the farmers?

Why do you think it's important for Ziegler to approach the person flying the flags rather than making his own?

What do you think about artists being facilitators as opposed to producers?

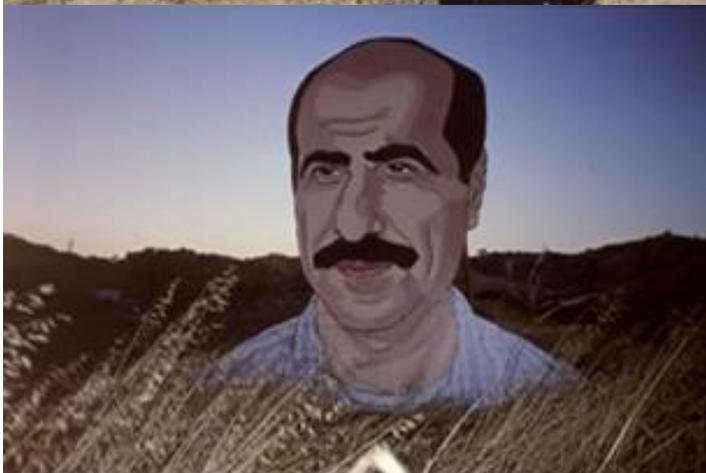
Students should use the class discussion as inspiration for the questions they want to ask their subject and the medium they would like to use to create the portrait. You will most likely have to take a picture of the subject and use that for the basis of the portrait, as the subject might not have the time to model for the class. Encourage them to think about how they want to represent their subject. Do they photograph them against a blank wall or in the context of their job? Do they include the tools that the subject need for their job? How do these decisions affect the feel and understanding of the subject of the portrait? How do the questions they ask influence the way the portrait is produced?

Once the portraits are finished, they should be hung with the questions the students asked along with the subject's answers in a common area so the rest of the school can also get to know the people in their school community and what they do for the students on a daily basis.

Extensions:

For older students, you could have them try the same process with their neighbors and neighborhoods. They could produce a book about their neighborhood, or have an art opening at their house or in the neighborhood. They could choose to use objects rather than portraits.

Example Images:



Harrell Fletcher and John Rubins
Some People From Around Here
1997

Interstate Highway 80



Harrell Fletcher & Michelle Clary-Gallagher
Lawn Sculptures
2002



Kate Erikson and Mel Ziegler

Feed and Seed (Gelsinger Farm, Buckwheat)

1989

Paper seed bags, Plexi-glass



Mel Ziegler

Flag Exchange

2012 (ongoing)

US Flags