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MAKING THEMATIC CONNECTIONS THROUGH HUMAN COMMONALITIES

Thematic Connections

The use of thematic connections across the curriculum offers invaluable opportunities for teacher collaboration for the development of holistic, meaningful learning experiences for students. This issue focuses on the themes encompassed in the human commonalities, eight universal cultural concepts. Providing a framework for teaching in a culturally diverse world, the human commonalities are derived from an article by Ernest Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Human Commonalities

In *Education in a Multicultural World*, Ernest Boyer defines true multicultural education as that which affirms the sacredness of the individual while recognizing the universal nature of all peoples. By locating a common ground between all humankind, Boyer suggests that a curriculum based upon cultural similarities encourages deeper understanding of subject matter. Boyer characterizes this common ground as "The Human Commonalities," eight universal cultural concepts shared by people throughout the world.

Why should we undertake the study of any discipline from the perspective of these human commonalities? Learning becomes more applicable when students are able to connect their own life experiences to the topic at hand. Boyer believes that students should learn about themselves and their relationships to a subject, rather than simply studying about a topic.

For example, what can a **Maya** wall panel "say" to a suburban fifth grade student? Unless the work of art and the student can make a long term connection, the value of the learning experience is quickly lost. Students are able to relate to difficult-to-decipher images and glyphs when they discover that the **Maya**, like the people of today, developed symbols. Contrasting and comparing ancient **Maya** writing and imagery to writing and imagery used by twentieth-century societies bridges the vast span between times and cultures.

Cultural pluralism, according to Boyer, is one of the standards of a democratic and free society. American society continues to evolve and change. Meeting the challenges of diversity is a central goal of quality teaching. The human commonalities provide a firm structure for this goal.

Using the Human Commonalities

Throughout this issue, look for lesson summaries, activities, and articles that relate to the use of the human commonalities as unifying themes. The focus of the centerfold lesson summary is John Biggers' *Starry Crown*, from the **Dallas Museum of Art**. Though the use of symbols may be the initial commonality that comes to mind when studying this work of art, a number of the other commonalities also may be applicable. A mask lesson based on individual interpretations of the human commonalities and aesthetic response activities are also included. We invite you to share with us your classroom explorations of the human commonalities

The Human Commonalities

1. All of us experience cycles of life.
2. All of us develop symbols.
3. All of us respond to the aesthetic.

4. All of us have the capacity to recall the past and anticipate the future.

5. All of us develop some forms of social bonding.

6. All of us are connected to the ecology of the planet.

7. All of us produce and consume.

8. All of us seek meaning and purpose.

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MASK-MAKING AND THE HUMAN COMMONALITIES

Introduction and Motivation

Materials:

- images of masks from a variety of cultures and times
- masking tape time line
- scissors, glue
- list of the human commonalities

Objective:

Students will explore and identify masks from a variety of cultures and times, relate the human commonalities to mask-making, and create a three-dimensional mask based upon one human commonality.

Part I:

Distribute images of masks to students. These images should encompass a variety of time and cultures. They can be in the form of postcards, posters, or pictures from magazines, books, or newspapers. Mask images should be from diverse cultures and different times. For example, utilitarian head coverings worn by modern day sports players offer a distinct contrast to ceremonial masks from the South Pacific. Ask students to carefully observe their image and decide if the mask is:

1. Functional (such as a welder's mask or a hockey mask)
2. Decorative (such as a Halloween costume mask)
3. Ceremonial (such as a tribal face covering)

Additionally, ask students to consider what culture created the mask, and when and why it was created.

Next, place a length of masking tape on the floor or table top. Divide the tape into appropriate time periods such as centuries or decades, depending on the time periods their mask images represent. Ask that students place mask images on the time line in the appropriate era and explain why that time was chosen.

Based upon clues found within the mask image, ask students to provide a likely culture and reason for which the mask was made. At this time students should be encouraged to question each other's decisions and to justify their own statement. Factual information about the masks should be provided by the teacher during the discussion. Leave the mask images in place on the time line.

Part II:

Introduce the human commonalities. Ask for examples that illustrate each of the commonalities. For example, experiencing life cycles can refer to birth, death, marriage, graduation, and other such milestones of life. Are any of the commonalities seen in any of the masks?

It is interesting to note that while discussing these eight concepts, students quickly discover that they share far more similarities than differences. Now ask students to select one concept from the

commonalities list. This selection is to be kept a secret from the rest of the class until the final stage of the lesson.

Part III:

Students will now create a three-dimensional mask based upon the human commonality they have chosen. Depending on the age group of the class, demonstrate a variety of paper folding techniques for developing three-dimensional objects (for example, fan folds, springs, and hinges). Distribute colored construction paper, scissors, and glue.

Ask students to recall the human commonality that they selected earlier. Using this commonality, students will create a mask that conveys the same idea. Emphasize that the masks may be made to cover the entire head or only part of the head, and may be functional, decorative, or ceremonial. Emphasize that the commonality should *not* be revealed yet to the rest of the class.

Part IV:

When the masks are complete, individuals exchange masks. The viewer is then asked to interpret the maker's mask with a cinquain, a five line stanza. The viewer is asked to determine the represented commonality without assistance from the artist. Writers may need to refer back to the list of human commonalities before beginning the cinquain.

Formula for a Cinquain:

Line 1: one word that tells what the object is (noun)

This is the title of the cinquain.

Line 2: two words that describe the title (adjectives)

Line 3: three action words (verbs)

Line 4: four words that tell about the work (a phrase)

Line 5: one word that means the same as the title (synonym)

Conclusion:

When finished, the writers display the mask they have interpreted as they read aloud the cinquain they have written. Discussion may then follow between the artist and writer now connected to each work of art.

A certain magic fills the air as viewers translate the artist's intent, linking the viewer to the work of art as well as to the maker of the work. The joy of connecting to a work of art and to another person through the human commonalities is a bond that glues diverse student populations together.

Article by: *Pam Stevens*

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MARCUS FELLOWS ANNOUNCED FOR 1995-96

The selection committee for the **Marcus Fellows Program** has chosen four well-qualified individuals to receive fellowships during the first year of the program.

The candidates selected include **Mary Burke** currently employed as Director of Education for The Art Center in Waco; **Carolyn Johnson** a fourth grade, self-contained classroom teacher at Van Zandt Guinn Elementary in Fort Worth; **Cecilia Leach** an art teacher for grades 6-8 at Cunningham Middle School in Corpus Christi; and **Diane McClure** art teacher at M.H. Moore Elementary in Fort Worth.

The Fellows will begin their residencies with the 1995 NTIEVA Elementary Summer Institute. During the fifteen months of the Fellowship, the Fellows will take graduate courses at the **University of North Texas** and attend both the 1995 and 1996 Summer Institutes.

NTIEVA welcomes these deserving recipients of the first group of Marcus Fellowships. Their devotion to education and art, combined with their unique talents, experiences, and perceptions, will come together to produce exciting and innovative ways to improve visual arts education both in the classroom and in the museum setting.

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WENDY EWALD: RETRATOS Y SUEÑOS/PORTRAITS AND DREAMS, PHOTOGRAPHS BY MEXICAN CHILDREN

Wendy Ewald: Retratos y Sueños/Portraits and Dreams, Photographs by Mexican Children will be on display at the **Meadows Museum** at **Southern Methodist University** in Dallas from June 9 - August 6. The exhibit features photographs and written texts by children from two different communities in Mexico.

American photographer Wendy Ewald spent several months during 1991 working with children in Maya villages in Chiapas and in the nearby colonial city of San Cristóbal de las Casas. The Tzotzil Indians, descendants of the great Maya culture, and the Ladinos, descendants of the original Spanish explorers, have been living side by side in Chiapas, the southernmost state of Mexico, since the 1950s.

Eighty photographs in color and black-and-white, ranging from snapshot to mural size and accompanied by texts of the children's stories along with Ewald's commentaries, look at Indian and Ladino life in the rugged, mist-shrouded highlands of Chiapas.

The photographs, which include family portraits, self-portraits, landscapes, dreams and fantasies, record the children's personal and collective histories and combine stories with photographs in a manner inspired by Maya codices.

There is a powerful tension in *Retratos y Sueños/Portraits and Dreams* between the child as an individual, as a member of the community, and as a Mexican native. The photographs serve as both group and self-portraits; the audience comes to realize that personal histories are informed as much by collective experience as by individual thought.

Wendy Ewald: Retratos y Sueños/Portraits and Dreams is organized and circulated by Curatorial Assistance, Los Angeles. This exhibit has been sponsored by Polaroid Corporation. For more information on this exhibit, please call the Meadows Museum at (214) 768-2516 or 768-1674.

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GOALS 2000: STRATEGIES FOR THE ARTS

Carol Sterling, Director of Arts Education, American Council for the Arts, has issued a memo concerning Goals 2000 and arts education that includes strategies for strengthening school arts programs.

Goals 2000: Educate America Act, signed by President Clinton on March 31, 1994, provides resources to states and communities to develop and implement comprehensive reforms which are designed to help all students reach challenging academic and occupational skill standards.

Especially important for the arts is the fact that they are included as part of Goal #3, which states, "By the year 2000, all students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography, an every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so that they may be prepare for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our nation's modern economy."

Because the arts have been included in the National Education Goals, there is the promise of unprecedented opportunities to show how the arts can contribute to overall systemic school reform efforts. To best ensure the inclusion of arts education programs in state and local Goals 2000 efforts, Sterling stresses the importance of documenting and evaluating the success and effectiveness of school arts programs and making this information visible.

Suggested Strategies

- Articulate the competencies your program develops in your students, how the arts are forms of understanding, and how the arts are about artistic learning - knowledge, skills, and attitudes that young people develop.
- Make connections between arts learning and student competencies that involve acts of intelligence, require problem solving, critical thinking, and teamwork.
- Show how your program is developing skills in critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, learning how to learn, collaboration, and self-management.
- Emphasize the power of the arts to help prepare citizens who will strengthen America, culturally and economically.
- Show how your program develops tomorrow's audiences and supporters of artistic and cultural achievements; those who will be tomorrow's artists who make us feel and be human.
- Explain how your program is developing tomorrow's transmitters and communicators of our cultural heritage; that they will be the glue that binds one generation of Americans to the next and to Western and Non-Western civilization.
- Tell your story in different ways; sometimes in human interest stories in the local press and sometimes in formal reports to the school board and sometimes in short, colorful brochures or newsletters to parents, business people, civic leaders, and the community at large.

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ROY LICHTENSTEIN PRINT SHOW AT THE DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART

An exhibition of images from 40 years of printmaking by pop artist **Roy Lichtenstein** is on display in the Dallas Museum of Art's J.E.R. Chilton Galleries from May 28 - August 20. *The Prints of Roy Lichtenstein* is the first comprehensive survey of prints by the artist in almost 20 years.

With his bold images and oversized dots, Lichtenstein's prints are easily identifiable, even to people who do not know his name. His prints are characterized by a sense of ironic wit, whimsical subject matter, and primary colors. References to familiar objects and ideas, whether American currency, comic strips, or fine art by Monet or Picasso, make his work accessible and understandable to people of all ages.

The 90 works in the exhibition include a variety of printing techniques: lithographs, etchings, screenprints, woodcuts, and works that combine several processes. Also included are related edition sculptures made concurrently with the prints. The images are taken from a variety of sources, from comic strips to telephone directory ads to impressionist paintings.

The Prints of Roy Lichtenstein includes the first pop image created in any medium, *Ten Dollar Bill* (1956), as well as some of the artist's latest prints, such as *The Oval Office* (1992). Among works from the 1960s and 1970s are pop images such as *Crying Girl* (1963) and *Reverie* (1965).

Also included are four images from *Ten Landscapes* (1967), based on Monet's painting of Rouen Cathedral: the bronze relief *Peace through Chemistry Bronze* (1970); and *Bull I - IV* (1973), which refers to a series by Picasso.

The Prints of Roy Lichtenstein is free to the public. The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington. Substantial local exhibition sponsorship is provided by Kimberly-Clark Corporation. The **Dallas Museum of Art** is supported, in part, by the City of Dallas. For more information on *The Prints of Roy Lichtenstein*, please call (214) 922-1200.

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QUESTIONING THE NATURE OF ART WITH STUDENTS

Introduction:

Aesthetic responses to works of art and the accompanying discussions offer classroom opportunities for critical thinking while teaching respect for the opinions of others. As one of eight human commonalities Ernest Boyer suggests that we all "respond to the aesthetic." This activity and the activity in the adjacent column were developed for use in the classroom to explore the nature of aesthetics and aesthetic response.

Objectives:

Through this activity students will:

- make decisions based upon reasoning/rationales.
- develop criteria for evaluating works of art.
- compare and contrast similarities and differences.

Materials:

Bring to class an assortment of objects considered to be works of art. Suggestions include original paintings, prints, or sculptures, original handmade crafts, textiles, and/or artifacts.

Procedure:

Organize students into collaborative groups. Distribute three art objects to each group. Ask the groups to work together to make decisions about their objects.

Questions to Consider during Small Group Discussions:

- What characteristics or qualities do the objects share in common? (*original, creative idea, handmade, natural materials, well-crafted, expresses idea or emotion, etc.*)
- What characteristics or qualities are different?
- Based on the objects, who do you think the artists were? (*young, old, man, woman, different culture, etc.*)
- Where do you think the objects were made?
- What materials were used to create the objects?
- Do you think your objects are "beautiful"? Does all art have to be beautiful? Why or why not?

Class Discussion:

After groups finish individual discussion, have a spokesperson from each group share the group's objects and decisions with the rest of the class. Stress the importance of stating reasons for opinions and respecting others' opinions. Place emphasis on the quality of the discussion and the reasons for decisions. As students present criteria, the teacher should write them on the chalk

board. When all groups have presented, further discussion could be centered on the resulting list of criteria.

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INVESTIGATING ART

Investing Art is an aesthetics and art criticism activity designed to engage students in (1) examining, exploring, evaluating, and questioning the nature, significance, and purposes of art in general, and (2) interpreting the meaning of individual works of art. Through ***Investing Art***, students explore works of art and the questions that arise as we approach works of art from our own unique experiences and perspectives.

Objectives:

Through this activity students will:

- express personal responses to art.
- question the nature, significance, and purposes of art in general.
- interpret the meaning of individual works of art.
- support responses with substantiated reasons.

Materials and Preparation:

- Art objects or reproductions (such as large study prints)
- A set of the cards on the opposite page for each student

Directions for Activity:

Display a number of large reproductions around the classroom, allowing for access and student movement around the room. Distribute a set of ***Investigating Art*** activity cards (copy from facing page) to each student. Briefly review the statements on the cards with the students.

Students carefully examine all works on display, then place activity cards under the work that best expresses the statements on the card (or cards can be placed in envelopes in front of each production).

After participants have made their decisions and placed their activity cards, discuss the responses as a group. Examine and discuss the variety of ways in which students have responded to the same work of art. Encourage discussion by explaining that each person's opinion is valuable if the opinion can be substantiated with reasons.

Possible Questions to Generate Group Discussion:

- Which works received similar responses?
- Which work had the most variety of responses? Why?
- Why did some works generate such opposite responses?
- Why were some works not chosen at all?

Note:

Not all cards need to be used each time the game is played. Fewer cards could be distributed to students. Alternately, distribute all the cards to each student, but ask each to choose just three or four which to respond. This activity could also take place in a museum setting. Ask permission from the museum first!

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NCAMSC HIGHLIGHTS TEACHER RESOURCES AT NORTH TEXAS MUSEUMS

Looking for new ways to present visual arts curricula? Need ideas for lesson plans, videos or slide programs? Don't forget about teacher resources at art museums. Education Departments lend teaching packets, films and videos to aid in bringing art into the classroom. In the North Texas area, the **Dallas Museum of Art**, Amon Carter Museum, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Kimbell Art Museum, and Meadows Museum all have such materials for educators.

The DMA's Education Resource Center is divided into different centers and libraries. The Collections Information Center offers a computer information system to view digital images of DMA artworks and read accompanying educational text. Color printouts of images may be purchased. The Visual Resource Library provides access to visual materials relating to the DMA's permanent collection. The Teaching Resources Room houses art education support materials for primary and secondary school teachers. Ken Kelsey, Assistant, Teaching Resources, suggests calling the Visual Resource Library for more information at (214)922-1314.

The Carter lends multi-disciplinary packets relating to both the permanent collection as well as selected exhibitions. These include slides with descriptions, instructional guidelines, worksheets and suggested curriculum connections. They also have videos available to check out as well as slides from their Slide Library. 30,000 volumes on American art, history, and photography are available to study in their Library. School Programs Coordinator Libby Cluett suggests calling the education department to request materials at (817)738-1933.

The Kimbell has programs available for loan including slide programs on art elements and principles, multicultural topics, sculpture, and more. Curator of Education Marilyn Ingram suggests teachers call for a catalog of teacher materials available, as well as to request materials at (817)332-8451. The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth also has slide packets and videos. Contact the Museum for more information at (817)738-9215. The Meadows Museum at SMU has study prints and slide packets on special exhibitions available for loan as well as extensive files on artists for educators to study. Education Director María Teresa García Pedroche suggests teachers call in advance for materials at (214)768-3272.

Resource materials such as these are provided at no or little cost to educators. The museum education staffs are more than willing to assist in making selections to fit specific educational needs. Planning the next school year may be easier than one thinks with these valuable offerings.

Article by: *Cullen Clark*

The National Center for Art Museum and School Collaborations (NCAMSC) is the National Specialty Program of NTIEVA. Its purpose is to define the roles of art museums and schools in a comprehensive approach to art education.