

Iowa Master Artists in the Twenty-first Century: Online Lesson

Goals: To introduce contemporary Iowa artists
To explore themes, ideas, topics, and media

Title: Addressing Social Issues through Art

Artists: Jane Gilmor

Concept: Jane Gilmor is an Iowa artist and art professor whose work addresses social issues. She has repeatedly collaborated with groups of people who have had their sense of control over daily life interrupted for some reason...perhaps out of work, or homeless, or coping with illness. She leads individuals in art activities that act as a cultural critique and as a survival tool for the maker. The art then becomes a voice for those who sometimes are not heard. In this lesson older students will extend their art exploration into the real world by establishing a relationship with a homeless shelter, nursing home or other group who would benefit from a shared art experience. Students may also consider the works of socially engaged artists Krzysztof Wodiczko and Mel Chin, both of whom mix media to communicate their messages in public spaces, and propose a public art project and consider the logistics of bringing it to life.

Level: Grades 9 – 12

Themes: Identity, Social Issues, Collaborative Working, and Values

NATIONAL STANDARDS:

1. Media, techniques & processes
2. Knowledge of structure and functions
3. Choosing and evaluating subject matter, symbols & ideas
4. Understanding visual arts in relation to history & cultures
5. Making connections between visual arts & other disciplines

IOWA STANDARDS:

1. Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes
2. Using knowledge of structures (art elements, principles of design) and functions
3. Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas
4. Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures
5. Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and work of others
6. Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

Objectives:

Students will explore the differences between working individually and working collaboratively.

Students will look at the creative processes of contemporary artists who work in

collaboration with others.

Students will work individually and collaboratively and compare and reflect upon

Their creative experiences.

Students will use a simple, unsophisticated art technique to record the thoughts and feelings of others, combining the many voices into a cohesive whole to be exhibited as a public art piece.

Materials and Resources

Iowa Master Artists DVD (IPTV Web Site, AEAs)

Jane Gilmor interview and clip - <http://www.iptv.org/video/detail.cfm/410>

Jane Gilmor and Friends web cast on IPTV website -

<http://www.iptv.org/video/detail.cfm/393>

<http://janegilmor.com/>

Additional Web Sites

Art: 21 Web Site

Krzysztof Wodiczko and Mel Chin interviews and clips

Classroom Materials

- Aluminum or other metal tooling foil
- Dull pencil or stylus
- India ink and brush
- Large support for mounting
- Fine steel wool
- Optional journals

Activities

1) Thinking Outside Your Own Box

View the Jane Gilmor video segment and the Jane Gilmor and Friends web cast. Often as appreciators or viewers of art we are unable to see the process of how the work was conceptualized and made. A longstanding cliché about artists is that they work alone, following their personal muse. Indeed, when a painter closes him or herself in a studio and confronts a blank canvas on an easel, there is the expectation that the resulting work will be driven solely by the inner vision of that artist. A viewing of the Jane Gilmor video reveals that some contemporary artists do not work alone in a studio but create their art with the cooperation or collaboration of many others who serve as collaborators, specialists, or participants.

Have students identify groups of individuals in the community who might benefit from an expressive art activity. Discuss the idea of collaboration. Role-play how students might

interact in a mutual respectful manner while art making with such a group. Ahead of time arrange to partner with a homeless shelter or a nursing home for a class field trip/art project. Nursing homes often have craft directors who would be happy to coordinate such a project. Homeless shelters might have similar staff. Explain to the students that they will be replicating Gilmore's Windows project by asking their collaborative partners, "If you could look at yourself from outside the windows of your life, what would you see." Then they will help their partner record words and drawings on paper, which they will then transfer to tooling foil.

(Two 45-minute sessions, one on location)

2) Many Voices Becoming Louder

Back in the classroom the students will refine the tooled foil words and drawings to add depth and dimension. Like Gilmore, they will coat the surface with ink, let dry, and remove ink in the high relief areas by buffing with fine steel wool. Arrange on a portable sturdy wall support, overlapping the individual works, and attaching with liquid nails. Wrap edges of support so that the whole looks like a metal bas-relief sculptured surface and display in a public space. If possible, arrange to have the work permanently installed where your collaborative partners can enjoy it.

(Two to three 45-minute sessions)

3) Collaborative versus Independent

Discuss the experience with the students. Did they enjoy taking a leadership role? Was it stressful? Is the work of an artist who creates independently more significant or valid than a work of art created by a team of collaborators? Can the process of making art or realizing a creative idea take many forms? What are the benefits of including as legitimate art a wide range of creative relationships as well as solitary efforts? What is the role of art and the artist in life? Option: Have students journal throughout the process. Journal notes could become resources for an individual work.

(Part of final session or one 45-minute session with guest staff from partnering facility.)

Critical Questions:

What are the most important skills an artist working today can have?

What is the role of an artist today?

What is the importance of originality and imagination in an artistic practice? In other fields and professions?

What are the benefits and drawbacks of collaboration?

What are the differences between collaboration, management, working alone, and dictating in the creative process?

In what aspects of daily life do we rely on cooperation, collaboration, individual initiative, or on someone else's orders?

What are the differences between creativity that is based on individual inspiration and creativity defined by group activity?

Where does inspiration come from?

Reflection and Evaluation:

- Did students review and discuss a range of artists who work collaboratively?

- Have students examined the differences between collaboration, management, dictation, and working alone in the creative process?

- Did students work individually and collaboratively and compare their creative experiences?

Have students presented and discussed the process and results of their individual and collaborative projects?

Credits:

Much of the above is taken from PBS.org Art 21 Educational Materials (<http://www.pbs.org/art21/education/naturalworld/lesson2.html>)