



Writing with Power: No Fear Here

Deborah A. Watson
2016 CTI Fellow
Hopewell High School

This curriculum unit is recommended for:
Digital Art, Visual Art grades 9 - 12

Keywords: Critique, Photography, Visual Narrative, Personal Narrative, Essay

Teaching Standards: See Appendix 1 for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: What makes you smile? Everyday I watch the students walk through the halls at my high school, some loud and gregarious seemingly for attention and at the other end of the spectrum, many look straight ahead giving an appearance of indifference so as not to be noticed. They pass by the employees of the building, the custodians, cafeteria staff, security, teachers and administration. What do these students know about each other or the adults in the school? After all they spend almost 40 hours of each week passing by people who contribute to their personal experience and to the general culture of the school. This curriculum unit will hopefully start to bring understanding and appreciation for school and the various people, employees and students who make up the community of Hopewell High School.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 30+/- students in
Digital Art Intermediate and Proficient grades 9-12.

I give permission for the Institute to publish my curriculum unit and synopsis in print and online. I understand that I will be credited as the author of my work.

What Makes You Smile? More than 1000 Words

Deborah Watson 2016 CTI Fellow
Hopewell High School

Although a picture is worth 1000 words, there are times when a photo needs further explanation. Visual learners are the record-keepers of a culture, as well as their own daily life. Whether it is actually recorded in words or pictures, life is captured in their visual memory. I want to grab the interest of my students in their own lives in this curriculum unit and use it to polish photography techniques as well as writing skills.

Monica Shulman in an article written for the Huffington Post lists four reasons as to why people take photos. 1. Because it makes us feel something, 2. To hold onto memories, 3. To learn to see, and 4. To tell a story. What does writing do? Exactly the same thing.

Introduction

Brandon Stanton began the photographic project “Humans of New York” with the goal to photograph 10,000 New Yorkers he encountered on the street with the purpose of creating a catalogue of images. At some point he started to interview the people he was photographing and included quotes and short stories along with their portraits. This series of photos and stories has been shared on various social media platforms. My first view was on a Facebook page.

I teach digital art and photography in a high school where the students come from a variety of neighborhoods and backgrounds, different ethnicities and interests. They could be compared with the people Brandon Stanton met on the streets of New York as many of the students know only a handful of the other students, a few have a wider circle of friends, but mostly they are virtual strangers placed together for seven hours of the day. This curriculum unit will seek to unite and hopefully generate a knowledge and possible friendships when the students document the people in our school, other students, the teachers, staff, maintenance workers or bus drivers.

Demographics

Mecklenburg County is located in the south central portion of North Carolina and is bordered on the west by the Catawba River, on the north by Iredell County, on the east by Cabarrus and Union counties, and on the south by the state of South Carolina.

North Carolina consists of 48,711 square miles of land and over 5,000 square miles of inland water including large areas of Lake Norman. The total area of nearly 54,000 square miles ranks North Carolina 29th in area among the states. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Mecklenburg County contains a total area of 546 square miles, 526 square miles of which is comprised of land and the remaining 20 square miles is water.

Charlotte is a very large city located in the state of North Carolina. In 2014, Charlotte had an estimated population of 1,012,539, seven incorporated municipalities and 200 constituent neighborhoods. Charlotte is the largest community in North Carolina. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, with over 145,000 students enrolled, is the second-largest school district in North Carolina and the eighteenth-largest in the nation. There are 168 schools in the district; 95 elementary, 39 middle schools and 32 high schools and three special program schools. There were a total of 8,619 graduates in 2014. The average years of teaching experience in Charlotte Mecklenburg schools is 10.5 years. The overall ethnic distribution for the school system is 3 percent American Indian or multiracial, 5 percent Asian, 42 percent African-American, 18 percent Hispanic, and 32 percent White. There are 175 native languages spoken by students in CMS and 158 countries represented.

My School

Hopewell High School is ranked 28th within North Carolina. The total enrollment is 1725. The student body makeup is 53 percent male and 47 percent female, and the total minority enrollment is 65 percent. Hopewell High School is 1 of 32 high schools in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. The largest class is ninth grade with 500 enrolled.

Hopewell is part of the Cambridge Program, an innovative and accelerated method of academic study offered solely through the University of Cambridge International

Examinations (CIE), part of England's renowned University of Cambridge. One middle and four elementary schools feed into the program.

Students have the opportunity to take Advanced Placement coursework and exams. The Advanced Placement participation rate at Hopewell High School is 31 percent.

There are four art teachers at Hopewell; ceramics, visual art, crafts and digital art. I teach digital art. My classroom has 26 computers, all with Adobe Creative Suite 5, two scanners, an LCD projector, and a color printer. I teach four beginning digital art classes with 25 students in each, an intermediate digital course with 27 students and an Advanced Placement digital class with 2 students. The classes meet every other day on an A day, B day schedule for the entire school year. Students have a prerequisite of a beginning art class, which can be either a 2D or crafts class before taking digital art.

The student body makeup in my classes closely resembles the schools with more males than females and more minority students. The majority of my students have chosen this as their elective, for a few however, it was the only class that fit into their schedule. Typically the students are interested and engaged in the class. My assignments have included as many real world graphic design and digital art projects as possible. Projects have included creating logos, business cards, web pages, package design, illustration, animation, posters, T shirt design, advertisements, brochures, playbills, as well as creating artwork using the computer as they would paint or pencil.

Rationale

The school culture is fractured. Several years ago our boundaries changed, many students in close proximity to the school were reassigned to a newly built school. The opening of that school brought students in from neighborhoods that are in distance further from the school. This has altered the participation level in after school activities and sports. Attendance dropped for theatre performances as well as football games. Students have yet to take ownership of "their" school as in years prior.

My goal for this curriculum unit is to close that gap of ownership at least for the students in my classes. This unit will be three part: learning to critique artwork in order to produce higher quality work, using photography and Photoshop to take photos of the people the students interact with at school and lastly a personal narrative based on their

experiences at school. They will share in the narrative what they learned about the individuals who work, study and lead the community of Hopewell High School that they are part of for seven hours each day. When students see what they have in common with others, when they start to see the achievements, struggles, or background of the teachers, staff or fellow students in the school they will begin to see their school with new eyes.

My curriculum unit is based on the Charlotte Teacher Institute 2016 seminar *Writing with Power: No Fear Here* led by Dr. Brenda Flanagan at Davidson College. Typically our students have a fear of writing, as it seems most of their teachers also have. This seminar's purpose is to break through that fear, enabling our ability to teach our students to write without fear. Several of our preparation assignments before writing our unit was to read the essays of others. For example George Orwell's, *Shooting an Elephant* where the teachers in this seminar were given the task of composing their own essay defending the efficacy of some of the strategies Orwell presents.

I must admit to a fear of writing this essay, and although many attempts were made to complete the assignment, the task was not accomplished. As many of the students in our classroom, I did not present a paper to our seminar leader. Within the seminar group of 12 teachers, I am the only one who does not teach Literature, not a good excuse for one who purposely chose this seminar, since as an art teacher there are not many writing opportunities and my confidence level in writing ability wanes with each passing year.

Expecting my students to write in their art class might be a challenge for many of them as it is proving to be for me. As I have stated many times English is not my first language and to quote from a previous curriculum unit written for CTI, "My first language is not English; it is visual, artwork, pictures, drawings, paintings, picture storybooks, photographs". I live through pictures, images vivid and most often in color, some real, some imaginary as my eyes do not always see things as they appear to others. In the digital world, communication is with images. Students must use a visual language and become fluent in it in order to be literate in our image saturated culture. It is not enough to be fluent in the written word and the opposite also holds true as I have challenged myself to explore. This curriculum unit will seek to bring the two languages together with the outcome exhibit worthy works of art based on each student's life.

My student's interests and future career plans range from graphic design, fashion design, photography, animation, to as far from an art career as one could possibly choose. They however have one thing in common, their own story. The first assignment they were given was a slide presentation titled *About Me*. I gave them six general categories based on their life and interests with the requirement to create six visual slides using the somewhat limited tools available in Google Slides. Most listed information about themselves however many surprisingly completed the task with very creative imagery.

With this curriculum unit my desire is to bridge together the two vehicles of communication, writing and picture, more specifically essays and photography. The subject for the photography and essay will be what they are most familiar with - their own life, to include family, friends as well as others they interact with each day. Over the course of the semester the students will learn photography techniques, use of the camera, special effects, and Photoshop. Students will write a creative photojournalistic essay on their photos as well as analyze their final artwork.

In my Digital Art classes my students range from 10th to 12th grade. The majority of their focus is on visual art, graphic design and photography. My students need instruction in the computer programs used for this class. Each lesson or unit is wrapped around acquiring or reinforcing skills in Photoshop or Illustrator. Each skill is scaffold and the outcome of each project should reflect prior possession of required skill and the use of new techniques.

It may prove to be a challenge for many of them to write about art. As to be expected with the range of ages in my classes and ability levels, differentiation will be required. I plan to enlist the help of the English department in my school as necessary, mostly as a resource. To help with crafting the essay portion of this curriculum unit, I have utilized a grant available to teachers in my district from the Arts & Science Council of Charlotte, NC to have Mimi Herman, a writer and author, lead a workshop for my students providing them the insight and techniques of writing a great essay. She has led workshops at Hopewell in the past and has inspired many of our students to love writing.

Content Objective

The overarching art education goal is for the students to gain an understanding of the importance of learning the language of art, the intent of an artist, to produce imagery that gives us a part of a story, one that through an essay will have a full and complete impact on the viewer.

Goal One:

Art Criticism/Written Critique Practice

One of the Standards in the National Visual Arts Standards under responding to art is: understand and evaluate how the arts convey meaning. An anchor standard under this heading is to interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. People gain insights into meanings of artworks by engaging in the process of art criticism. An essential question for this standard is how can the viewer “read” a work of art as text? What will we learn

from looking at the photos? What will the composition, color, or viewpoint tell us about the person in the picture?

Goal Two:

Photo documentary

The common factor for my students is the school and that will be the focus of this unit to document the people of Hopewell, students, bus drivers, staff, and teachers. They will photograph their daily life and the events related to the school day, especially the interactions they have with the various people they encounter during their day at school.

Students will be required to shoot photos on a daily basis. They will flip the questions asked about photography and instead ask themselves the following:

What do you see, feel, and think?

What sort of response do you want the viewer to have?

What group, event, issue, or community is shown?

What will the viewer learn about in the photo?

What story is the photograph telling?

What details in the photograph help to tell the story?

What can you add to the photo from the written essay?

How can you communicate your passion in documenting your life with your words and pictures?

Goal Three:

Essay

After interviewing their subject, students will write a personal narrative essay based on their own life which will include explanation of the interactions and personal stories of the individual they choose to focus on in their photographs and essay.

Teaching Strategies

Presentation/Gallery

This curriculum unit will be taught to my intermediate digital art students during the second half of their year-long A day/B day class schedule, as classes meet for 90 minutes every other day for the entire year. By this point in the year the beginning students have become familiar with working in Photoshop, so this will be the primary program used for this unit.

This unit will cover a time period of approximately sixteen classes with two classes for introduction of the topic, two for visual presentation of historical art and critique examples, four classes self-directed research, planning, journal and discussion. The remaining classes will focus on the creation of artwork and the essay.

Classroom Activities

Paintings and photographs, focusing on portraits, will be on a Google slideshow shared with the class. Beginning with a brief video to introduce why art has been created, students will then look at several individual works of art. Discussed will be how artists have been the visual record keepers of history.

Day 1 & 2

The project will be introduced with a video of Brandon Stanton. It is a short video housed on the humansofnewyork.com website under *About*. Brandon's narration explains how he started photographing people on the street of New York. The Humans of New York website will be linked to the class website and also in Canvas, both of which the students have access in class and at home.

The students will also look at the slide presentation *The People You Meet at McDonalds*, a series of photographs taken by Nolan Conway. Conway visited McDonald's in 22 states. The New York Times published his photographs in May of 2013 which will be shown to the class as they will also view a portion of a video interview featuring Conway.

Richard Sandler's book, published just this year, showcases his photos taken on the streets of New York City from 1977 to 1992. Images from the book will be shared and compared and contrasted to Brandon Stanton's. A TIME magazine interview will be read to the class for background knowledge.

The students will be given the assignment and the challenge and will photograph their own life, the people they encounter each day, family, friends, teachers, school staff, etc. In anticipation of writing an essay about their photography they will be encouraged to interview their subjects. My desire is for the students introduce themselves to the people in our school, the custodians, cafeteria workers, teaching assistants.

Students may work in pairs if desired to interview their subjects. The class will discuss possible interview questions which will be compiled for student use.

I will also briefly discuss with the students - composition, we will talk about what makes a good composition and why it is important to consider. A slideshare presentation on Portrait photography will be shown.

Day 3 & 4

Students will be led through a critique of a artwork

Art is a recorded memory of the time period in which it was created, it holds the memory of who we are as people. My objective is for the students to observe and critique a historical work of art to understand why it was made, what it tells us about the people pictured, what was the story behind its creation, and to gain knowledge of the artist and critique its value.

For example Romare Bearden's *Three Folk Musicians* (1967) would be analyzed using art terminology and the four step process:

1. **describe what you see,**
2. **analyze the elements the artist has used,**
3. **interpret what the artist is trying to say,**
4. **evaluate its importance.**

This is a brief sample from a web site.

(Three musicians, one with a guitar in hand, dominate this scene painted in rich browns and blues; Bearden's lavish use of the color blue, in fact, suggests the blues, the singular African-American folk music. Bearden was influenced by the Social Realists of the Great Depression, along with the Mexican Muralists such as Diego Rivera, who was well-established in New York City. Bearden has turned to the folk music and Southern folk culture that he knew from his youth. Bearden has flattened the pictorial space and rendered the figures with Cubist block-like forms that overlap and are compressed within the shallow space, enlarging the trio's hands to indicate their humble working origins. The brick wall behind the blues musicians serves to move them into our picture plane, so that we can more closely observe their faces and other details).

<http://www.theartstory.org/artist-bearden-romare.htm>

Students will pair up for the purpose of critiquing a painting, referring to a handout provided that will guide the students in partner discussions. Given time to analyze the work and then a whole class critique will occur.

Day 5 to 8

Covered will be the idea behind the photos. Students will gather information about the people in their photos. The keeping of a journal will be encouraged. The students will be asked to share ideas on interview questions to ask and discuss ways to approach people when asking if they could take their portrait. For the purpose of public display and possible publication photo releases will need to be utilized.

The students will need to research photo and fair usage releases. As a group they will confer on the language of their photo release and have them printed and ready when they interview and photograph their subjects.

A list of possible questions to get the interview to a good start will be another focus of the students. Professionalism before during and after the interview will be discussed. Students will confer with each other to create a set of possible interview questions which will be made available on Google Drive. Many of the students will be able to interview their subjects without use or reference to these questions. As they converse they will be able to pick up on cues and formulate questions based the conversation with the subject.

The students will submit an outline or first draft of their essay. This first draft will be based on the interview notes and will be written to include all important information. Spelling and grammar will not be as important in this first draft as its purpose is to put in writing all information that can be remembered and gained from the notes as possible while fresh in the memory.

Students will then reflect on their draft and rewrite with emphasis on developing complete paragraphs. The main emphasis of the essay will be determined, and the order of the information will be considered.

Published essays and the photos that accompany the written word will be displayed in an appropriate place in the school as well as possibly published on a website or blog.

Days 9 to Completion

Students will continue to photograph their subjects and select their images. Based on the information from each subject, the student will choose photos to accompany their essay. After careful reflection and critique it will be decided what is important in the essay what will be emphasized and how to best show that in the chosen photos.

In Photoshop, the students will prepare their images for printing, by cropping, enhancing color, etc. These photos should be considered a work of art not just a photo to accompany an essay as if it were to be just used for identification. The actual environment or work that each participant does in the school can be considered and the subject could be photographed in that environment.

As time permits and with permission granted, students may include videotaped versions of their essay. This could be a video of the participant as they are being interviewed or it could be filmed as the participant is telling a story about their life or work. This work could also be displayed with the photographs.

Appendix 1: Implementing Teaching Standards

One of the National Core Arts Standards for Media Arts encourages the conception of artistic ideas and work. An essential question is how do media artist generate ideas? How are these ideas formed and developed to be effective and original? As a result of showing the videos of the photographers Brandon Stanton, Norm Conley and Richard Sandler a better understanding of how artists generate their ideas may be revealed. At least it might serve to create a spark.

Essential Standards to be considered:

I.V.1 Use the language of visual arts to communicate effectively.

- I.V.1.1 Use art vocabulary to critique art.
- I.V.1.2 Understand how design influences artistic expression.
- I.V.1.3 Understand the use of global themes, symbols, and subject matter in art.
- I.V.1.4 Analyze images through the process of deconstruction (the components of the image and its meaning).

I.V.2 Apply creative and critical thinking skills to artistic expression.

- I.V.2.1 Generate innovative solutions to artistic problems.
- I.V.2.2 Use experiences and observations to create content for art.

I.V.3 Create art using a variety of tools, media, and processes, safely and appropriately.

- I.V.3.1 Understand the role of emotion, imagination, and creativity in producing content for original art.
- I.V.3.2 Understand the function of tools in creating art.
- I.V.3.3 Select media appropriate for communicating content.

I.CR.1 Use critical analysis to generate

- I.CR.1.1 Critique art based on personal and formal criteria. responses to a variety of prompts.

I.CR.1.2 Critique personal art using personal or teacher-generated criteria.

Resources

Materials/Technology Needed

Adobe Photoshop, individual jump drive, scanner, computer for every student, iPad, Google slides, paper, pencils. Pre-Activities Google slides, examples of portrait photography, Modifications as needed for individual students, modified assignments could include decreased number of photos and length of essay.

Pre-Activities

Photographs and artwork for critique.

List of interview questions

Professional conduct requirements

Modifications

As needed for individual students, modified assignment for example fewer photographs required as well as shortened essay length

Critical Vocabulary

Elements and Principles of Art for Critique

<http://www.theartstory.org/artist-bearden-romare.htm>

Reading List for Students

<http://www.theartstory.org/artist-bearden-romare.htm>

humansofnewyork.com

nolanconway.com

<http://www.complex.com/style/2013/12/nolan-conway-photographs-portfolio-review/>

<http://time.com/4513534/street-photographer-new-york/>

<http://www.slideshare.net/PeoGhoMin/portrait-photography-6088360>

www.monicalshulman.com

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/monica-shulman/why-we-take-pictures_b_6009434.html

Bibliography for Teachers

www.monicalshulman.com

MonicalShulman.com is a photographers website. Monica recalls on her About me page how as a young child she watched her father take a photo of her sister. It was such a memorable part of her past that she even remembers how the carpet felt under her bare feet and how the sun lit the room. She writes a blog and one of her blog entries on Ciao, Chessa! talks about how to write a narrative with your photos. Always tell the story, and always ask yourself that when you are taking the picture.

Theartstory.org/artist-bearden.htm is a website featuring artists, their work and their bibliography. The students will view it as the class is discussing the photographic critique and will read the biography of Romare as an example. The information on this site is well written, easily understood by high school age students.