



***Art and Identity:  
Using Visual Art as a Means of Nonverbal Communication***

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

**Keywords:** Art, visual art, visual, identity, communication, nonverbal communication, discovery, journal, mixed media, collage, word cloud, fingerprint, writing.

**Teaching Standards:** See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

**Synopsis:** The curriculum unit will use visual art techniques and various writing activities to teach students how to use art as visual language. The students will learn about identity through journaling, writing prompts and by creating a culminating mixed media suitcase. Using found materials and creative writing, this curriculum unit will address three key questions: How does the world see you? How do you see yourself? How would you like to be seen by those around you? The discussion questions will be helpful in getting students to understand that identity is the way that we recognize and express ourselves. Uncontrollable factors of identity include, but not limited to, race or ethnic background, gender or physical characteristics.

Students will begin with an introduction to discovering self-identity by creating an altered book that will be used regularly as their visual diary or journal. Through different art and writing activities, students will make discoveries and connections that will help them discover more about themselves, their respective communities and the world. For the final writing assignment, students will learn how to write an artist statement and arrange an exhibition for their mixed media self-portraits. This unit can be adapted to fit any high school grade level, but it can also be easily adapted for younger grades.

*I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 50 students in Visual Art and Crafts, Beginning and Intermediate.*

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## **Art and Identity: Using Visual Art as a Means of Nonverbal Communication**

*Natalie C. Jones*

### **Introduction**

I do not have a single childhood memory that does not involve having a coloring book and a set of freshly sharpened crayons. My coloring book was my best friend and something that I turned to during the different stages in my preteen life. Being the youngest child, I was better at expressing myself visually than verbally. My life has taken many different twists and turns and art has always been an outlet for me. Art has simultaneously provided a way for me to work through moments of self-discovery and exploration. Ultimately helping me to find my voice during those moments of silence and reclusiveness.

As a high school visual arts and crafts teacher, students are familiar with art as a form of creative expression, but not as a method of discovery or as a tool for social change. In this curriculum unit, students will examine how art has been used as a platform for creating, developing and embracing self-discovery and social change issues that are plaguing our communities. This unit will interweave a combination of different activities such as drawing, journaling and poetry to create one culminating mixed media art piece. Most of my visual arts and crafts students are really into art even if they do not consider themselves good artists. I hope that this will encourage students to draw more and write creatively in their free time.

During the course of the CTI seminar, I have learned how to incorporate group discussions and how to use different activities that relate to self-identity. Creating the journals at the beginning of the seminar was very influential in creating the altered book project. I also loved the different themes of each seminar. The themes allows us to explore the multifaceted complexities surrounding identity.

The altered books will serve as the student's visual journal and sketchbook throughout the entire curriculum unit. The journals are a good way for students to create sketches, flush out ideas, write down any memories or feelings that they may be experiencing or to keep track of anything that may be of importance to them. This curriculum unit is for Visual Arts and Crafts students in grades 9-12; however, the unit can be adapted to fit most grade levels.

### **Rationale**

As a young child, I always use art as a tool for communication. Art has always been in my life and I am sure I inherited my talents from my dad. I knew that art would always be in my life in some capacity; however, I did not that know years later I would be a high school art teacher. My first teaching job was at an elementary school that was located in a small town in South Carolina. The town was so small all it had was one traffic light, general store and a Chinese restaurant.

When I graduated from graduate school at The Ohio State University, I knew I wanted to work in an urban school in a rural community. After I arrived at the elementary school, I realized being an art teacher would become secondary to the socioeconomic and racial issues within my school district. The school had been involved in a legal battle with the state over the neglect of South Carolina's rural school districts. Most of the low performing schools primarily housed African American students who were of low socioeconomic class and who could not afford to relocate to receive a better education.

The 58 minute documentary entitled "Corridor of Shame: The Neglect of South Carolina's Rural Schools" is a 58 minute documentary that is dedicated to the students of South Carolina's I-95 corridor. The film highlights the story of the struggle of seeking funding for a satisfactory education in rural South Carolina. Due to the state drastically reducing the funding to these schools, everyone who worked in the school district felt the impact. As the art teacher who needed supplies in order to do my job as an educator, I too felt the hit of the financial strains that were on the school. After looking through one empty cabinet after the other I wondered if I had any supplies.

After tracking down the principal, she informed me that all of the supplies were in the room and that the school did not have any money for additional supplies. I was starting to panic! What was I going to do as a first year teacher who would be teaching over 600 elementary school students without any art supplies? The principal finally decided that she could manage to find \$60 for supplies. I now have \$0.10 cents per student. This got my wheels turning and I immediately started to wonder how could I change this classroom experience for my new students? I knew they did not have much and were probably making the best with what little they had. Historically, this way of life has been a common theme in African American history. I called my undergraduate advisor Dr. Sean Warner and explained to him what was going on and he responded with "people want to help!"

I grew up upper middle class in a two parent home. Both of my parents were college graduates and my dad was the president of our local NAACP chapter for most of my childhood. I have always had countless resources and financial support available to me so initially it was difficult for me to mentally adjust to the conditions of the school and the socioeconomic state of the surrounding community. All I knew was that I was fresh out of graduate school and I wanted to make a difference in my student's lives like most first year teachers.

I started brainstorming about how I would be able to get my hands on art supplies without spending my entire first paycheck. I immediately started to write down all of the supplies I would need in order to create a successful art experience. I began to contact businesses in the closest neighboring city for any donations that people were willing to give. I used the \$60 on a ream of drawing paper and that lasted me for most of the school year. I had never asked for donations before, but I knew it was the only way. Once the school year started and I saw the little faces of the students I knew that

my purpose for being there had shifted greatly. I am very passionate about helping students realize and accept the value in being individuals and being proud of who they are and where they come from. Through creative writing and visual art, I am creating this curriculum unit to help my students discover who they are, who they would like to become and to help them change the narrative of how they are being viewed by their respective communities.

I would like students to be open to sharing their private thoughts and to open themselves up to the creative process. At the end of this unit, I hope that students will be more confident in having a voice, feeling comfortable about speaking up and seeing their work on public display. West Charlotte has many students who do not feel comfortable in being themselves. Charlotte, North Carolina overall has a high population of students who are homeless, who have been physically abused and who are simply misjudged because of the color of their skin. Whether it is someone who enjoys anime or they really like math, I want students to know it is acceptable for them to embrace their likes and dislikes and to take power in shifting their personal and cultural narratives.

## Demographics

For the 2017-2018 school year, West Charlotte Senior High School currently has roughly 1770 students that are in grades 9-12. There are 110 full time teachers with a teacher ratio of 16:1. At West Charlotte High School, there is an 18% participation rate for the students who take advantage of the AP classes that are offered. Students are also have the opportunity to take a variety of foreign language classes such as French, Spanish and German just to name a few.

The student body make up is 49% male and 51% female. The student diversity is broken down into three major ethnicities. 86% of West Charlotte students are African American, 7% of students are Hispanic and 5% of students are Asian (Source: Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools- 2017). The schools demographics are not reflective of the city of Charlotte as a whole. According to the 2014 census: White- 45%, African American- 35%, Hispanic- 13.1%, Asian- 5% and other- 1.8% Source: 2014 U.S. Census Bureau).

West Charlotte has a number of Hispanic students who are enrolled in the school but do not speak any English. This can be a bit challenging in art classes if there is not another Spanish-speaking student in the class to translate. Due to the lack of diversity in the school, a majority of the students are from urban inner city neighborhoods. Based on the socioeconomics of the school population in combination with West Charlotte being a Title I school all of the students are on the free lunch program.

Identity plays a major role with our students at West Charlotte because of the negative reputation of the school. Our principal, Dr. Timisha Branes-Jones, has diligently worked to change the culture of the school and to not let the 13% of students who are misbehaving define the rest of the student population. Our students need to know that

they are not defined by the stereotypes that are associated with being a student at West Charlotte High School.

## Unit Goals

This curriculum will use North Carolina Essential Standards for Beginning Visual Arts. The Essential Standards convey what students should know while also equipping them with the necessary skills to further their education for a possible career in the arts.

My goal for this unit is that other art teachers will incorporate lessons into their curriculums that are identity centered using teacher-led lesson plans and materials. It is my hope that students will embark on a visual journey while responding to journal prompts, creating artwork and through poetry.

The implementation of the North Carolina Essential Standards allows for teachers and students to be specific in the clarifying objectives. In Visual Arts, we usually start by teaching the Elements of Art followed by the Principles of Design. All art projects will be aligned to one or more Elements of Art. This unit will use the Elements of Art as a building block to art assignments. The Essential Standard B.V.1 is incorporated into multiple lessons in this curriculum unit. Students will use the language of visual arts to communicate effectively by using art vocabulary when discussing art. (NCpublicschools.org)

B.V.2 states that applying creative and critical thinking skills to artistic expression when creating artwork.<sup>1</sup> Through planning, writing and drawing students will use this standard when working through design issues when planning their pieces. Students will create different preliminary sketches before starting on their artwork and some students will have a difficult time with this process. This unit will be great for helping to assist those students by providing them with a number of small exercises and writing prompts so that the final large scale project will not be as intimidating.

Students will use prior knowledge of the Elements of Art and Principles of Design to create a new body of work. In addition to the Elements of Art and the art vocabulary, other unit goals include students having a collection of work that relates to their personal identity. Students will create four art pieces and one of the student-selected works will be on display in the school.

## Objectives

There are three overall objectives for this curriculum unit. My first curriculum objective is that students will be able to define what identity means in their own words. The second objective is for students to walk away from the identity unit knowing more about themselves while creating a mixed media art suitcase piece. As students become

more comfortable with combining art and writing, I hope the students will continue to work in their altered books after the class ends for the quarter. The last objective is that students will intertwine creative writing and art to create an art piece.

Ultimately, the students will have a series of mini projects that will lead up to the final identity suitcase project. Students can incorporate all or some of the things that we have created in class in order to better display their personal journeys. Students will have complete creative control on how they would like their suitcases to look aesthetically and what personal items they would like to share with the rest of the class and members of the school community. After the mixed media suitcases are completed, students will have a brief introduction on how to organize a gallery exhibition and how to write artist statements.

For the culminating event, students will create a mini exhibition to display their work in the gallery case that is centrally located in the school's Omni. I would like to have a small reception after the project is completed to give students a platform to share their experiences and artwork.

## **Content Research**

I was blown away when I saw pieces from Sonya Clark's Combs series on exhibit at the Southeaster Center for Contemporary Crafts in Winston Salem, NC. Textiles are a part of Clark's heritage and it is something that she has been familiar with since childhood. Her grandmother was a tailor and she recalls sewing with her as a child. In African American culture, sewing and quilting was a time for fellowship and storytelling within the community. I love the Combs series because Clark explores the complexities of black hair by using black plastic combs as both symbolism and as a tool. Clark says, "Being a black woman growing up in the '70s, doing your hair is just something you do."<sup>2</sup>

Clark uses the plastic combs as a means of storytelling through creating sculptural pieces or assemblage art. Clark's work with the plastic comb is multilayered. She likes to remove teeth from the combs although each comb is labeled as unbreakable. She also uses the combs to refer to gender identity since combs are usually gendered centered.<sup>3</sup> Although Clark's work is deeply rooted to her culturally, Nellie Workman's work helped her to recover physically.

Wortman's work has always related to music. Mostly because she views music as the window to her soul. She uses her altered book collages to bring her work to life. She identifies as a very giving person, which is why she started out making 50 cards a month to hand out at her local hospital to patients who did not receive visitors. Wortman states, "I might not have been able to actually meet the individuals that received my cards, but the stories of how it lifted their spirits and helped in their recovery were priceless."<sup>4</sup>

Wortman suffered from four years of health problems and losing most of her memory. Doctors told her there was nothing that could be done, but she refused to accept it. She recalls that the illness would not be her fate. It is interesting that Wortman now works as a successful artist making vessels for others to record memories when just a few short years ago she had no recollection of her own memories. “I want my art not to just be a reflection of my story, but to link us. We’re all connected.”<sup>5</sup>

Wortman makes her journals from found materials such as tattered fabrics, old books and antique lace. She uses these supplies because she wants people to still see the value and reverence in old discarded items. She also uses a lot of symbolism by incorporating historical items that are from different generations. “I listen to what I feel. When you teach yourself to be able to listen, and you’re not trying to figure it out in your head, you’re willing to constantly shift and allow that creativity to keep flowing and hear the message that wants to come out through your art piece,” recalls Wortman.<sup>6</sup> I will be referring back to this quote to remind students to plan their ideas, but to also trust the process and allow things to flow and develop organically. Both Wortman and Clark use utilitarian items in their artwork to convey stories while also encompassing historical references.

Clark alludes to the strength of the black plastic comb resembling a similar strength to that of Madame C.J. Walker who she sees as a phenomenal woman. In “Creating Narratives through Art as Self- Definition for Black Women” Snelgrove starts her article by referencing how Aunt Jemima is portrayed as a one-dimensional happy servant that is the epitome of a real southern cook. In contrast, referencing Faith Ringgold’s story quilts and how Ringgold has worked to change the narratives that we have previously seen of African American women in our society. Being able to understand the power of images to construe a social reality when pertaining to African American culture is important when trying to convey this culture more realistically.<sup>7</sup>

According to Snelgrove’s research, “there are two themes found in biographies of 25 of the most prominent Black women artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Artists reject stereotypes and used empowering images of self as a primary subject matter in her art.” The second theme is “artist’s intention is not only to portray herself, but to portray Black women at large in a positive light.”<sup>8</sup>

Many other cultures are trying to change their contemporary narratives from previous historical and societal misconceptions. Artist Favianna Rodriguez, co-founder of the immigrant rights organization Culture Strike, reflects on what it will take to make the necessary cultural shifts in today’s modern society. Rodriguez uses her creative voice to voyage the disconnect between art and culture and social justice. Through Culture Strike, she hopes to converge both art and culture and social justice by changing the dialogue to cultural organizing based on the principal that artists are central, not peripheral, to social change. Due to a lack of funding, artists who are passionate about being at the forefront of the art for social change movement have been reduced to community meetings and workshops. “While this is important, it also means

we move further away from giving artists the space, time and resources to create a body of work. Artists are immediately channeled into an action space because their contributions are viewed in transactional ways.”<sup>9</sup>

Rodriguez asks the question how we can conceive of artists’ roles in a more expansive way. Historically we have seen art being used on countless efforts pertaining to liberation and social change issues. The Black Panther Party, the Civil Rights Movement, the Chicano art movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s and the Women’s Movement are just a few examples of art intertwining with social justice issues. One of the rubrics Rodriguez mentions for creating cultural shifts are through infrastructure-building by using the public sector to start thinking about using creative strategies to mobilization and to further develop artist leadership in the field of cultural organizing.<sup>10</sup>

Gordon Parks was using his camera as a tool to not only make people see the reality and the grittiness of the cultural abnormalities within the African American communities, but he always was able to juxtapose the softer more delicate side of people in the same communities. As one of America’s most famous photographers, Parks was a photographer for LIFE magazine from the 1940’s to the 1970’s. Some of the issues he covered were poverty, religion and social justice issues. In 1963, he wrote an essay about Black Muslims. Parks was adamant about having more control over the tone and the writing of his story.

He spent three month working on his story and he wanted show Black Muslims in a variety of roles such as spokesperson, prayer leaders and amateur photographers. (Mason 2016) “In 1968, Parks’ editors challenged him to show them (and LIFE’s readers) the root of the anger and frustration that were then so evident in the African American community. In “A Harlem Family,” his subjects were the Fontenelles, a family whose lives were battered by menial jobs, poor school and wretched living conditions.”<sup>11</sup> I really admire the work of Parks and so many other artists who use their artistic gifts to give the silent a voice. After the students have learned about different artists and their creative tools, I hope it will empower some of the students to really dig deep during this curriculum unit and find their inner voices.



## Teaching Strategies

The students in my Crafts and Visual Arts classes will be working on the identity curriculum unit. The unit will begin with the students creating an altered book journal that they will keep and use daily throughout the discovery process. Each day students enter the classroom, on the board they will find a writing prompt to serve as a warm up exercise and to help get them in a creative mindset. There will be several teaching strategies used in this unit, however the focus will be journaling, independent practice and art making.

### Journaling

The students altered book journals will serve as the backbone to this unit. The daily writing prompts as well as any thoughts or sketches will take place in the student's journals. Having written documentation will be good for students to be able to expand on anything that they may have jotted down or if they want to use their journals to flush out any ideas. All written and artistic assignments will begin in the journal. I hope to get students in the habit of writing ideas and thoughts down so that it will be something that they can continue after the curriculum unit and class is over. I also would like this strategy to help students feel more comfortable with writing. Writing can also be used as a tool to help students work through any issues that they may be facing or as a place of refuge for their personal thoughts. What students elect to share is their decision.

Before creating the altered book journals, I will introduce the assignment by showing the work of artist Nellie Wortman. Nellie is a mixed media artist that has been making altered book journals for the last 20 years. She was an artist in her early life; however, a medical condition made her lose her memory for an extended period. During the process of trying to regain her memory, Nellie explored the art of bookmaking and discovered that she found a new love to help her with her recovery process.<sup>12</sup> I think the correlation between Nellie losing her memory and creating a tool or a vessel to write down and keep memories is a great parallel for students to connect with how much memories and writing influences who we are.

### Sketching/Art Making

Students will begin the visual art component by creating a few sketches for each assignment. Sketching will allow students to create a few different designs that they will use as creative inspiration for their final artwork. Sketching is also an important tool for the students to use when they are having trouble articulating or communicating verbally. Students will have a variety of materials accessible to them so that they can fully express themselves artistically. Each lesson will begin with students being introduced to a new art technique and artist.

## Independent Practice

Through independent practice, students will be able to use the Chromebooks to research different artists and techniques that pertain to the project we are creating. Since the unit is focusing on identity, I will be encouraging students to move in a direction that pertains to them personally. Although students will be working on the same assignment, each student may want to conduct their own research in order to flush out ideas and to see what other examples that are on the internet. Students will not be able to use the internet to copy artwork that has already been created.

## Classroom Lessons/Activities

### *Activity 1: Altered Book Journal (2-3 days)*

*Purpose:* This project will serve as a sketchbook and visual diary for the students throughout the curriculum unit. This lesson teaches students how to work with nontraditional materials and what it means to keep a journal. I also will push the students to let the materials speak to them with the hopes that they will end up in a different place than expected.

*Suggested Grade Level:* Ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades.

*Objectives:* Students will create an altered journal by transforming a discarded book. Students will use a variety of materials and text to use the altered book as their daily journal.

*Reading Materials:* Freeman-Zachery, R. (2017). *Nellie Wortman: Dancing To the Music*. Somerset Studio, 10-19.

*Artist of focus:* Nellie Wortman

*Vocabulary:* Journal, sketchbook, mixed media, design, composition, form, function, three dimensional, Elements of Art, Principles of Design

*Content Standards:* B.V1.2 Apply the Elements of Art and Principles of Design to create art.

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

*Materials:* Old discarded books, paint, pencils, ink pens, sharpies, xacto knife, found materials, fabric scraps, buttons and scissors

*Procedure/Description:* In this project, students will create an altered book journal that will double as their sketchbook for the identity curriculum unit. Students will select from a variety of book sizes and they will use a variety of materials for the front cover. Students will explore identity by selecting colors, text and images that they identify with personally. This project requires students to think outside of the box when it

comes to using a traditional sketchbook and how to use symbolism that they may connect with or identify with. Students will learn about deconstruction and reconstruction.

Day 1: Introduce the students to the altered book project using a PowerPoint presentation and personal altered book examples. Students will be introduced to mixed media artist Nellie Wortman.

We will have a class discussion about what identity means and how students interpret the term identity. The students will also discuss journaling and the different materials that can be used to record and document ideas, thoughts and feeling. After the introduction, students will use the Chromebooks to research altered books and look at a variety of images before deciding on a creative direction they would like to create. Students will select the book size they would like to work with from a pile of discarded books. After the selections, students will decide what size and shape window they would like to cut from the front cover of their books. After drawing the shape of their window, students will then use an xacto knife to cut out the designated area. Lastly, students will paint the covers of their books before the end of class so they can dry overnight.

Day 2: Warm up: How do you usually record your feelings? Besides writing, what are other methods that can be used to document your thoughts and feelings? After spending ten minutes on the journal prompt, allow students share their responses and converse with their peers about the warm up questions. Today, the students will spend 30 minutes finishing drawing and decorating, their book covers. During the last 45 minutes of class, have the students paint a few of their book pages for sketching tomorrow. Acrylics or house paints will work better than a transparent paint like watercolors.

Day 3: Warm up: How would you describe yourself? List ten words that best describe who you are. After spending ten minutes on the journal prompt, allow students share their responses and converse with their peers about the warm up questions. Have students draw a heart on one of the pages they painted yesterday in class. Once the hearts are drawn, have the students divide the heart into ten different sections. The sections can be divided in any proportions the students see fit. Have the students fill in the sections of their hearts with each of the ten descriptive words they wrote down for the daily warm up. Students can also decorate each section of their heart if they would like. Spend the rest of the class period allowing students to finish putting the creative touches on their journals. Adding to the journals will be an ongoing project throughout the curriculum unit.

## Activity 2: Blackout Poem (3 days)

*Purpose:* This project will focus on upcycling and using recyclable materials to create something new. Students will also use the blackout method to create a piece that will combine poetry and art. This lesson will get students thinking about their word choices and the mood that they would like to convey through their poems. Students will learn about giving old books a new life.

*Suggested Grade Level:* Ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades.

*Content Standards:* B.V.2 Apply creative and critical thinking skills to artistic expression.

*Objectives:* Students will create a blackout poem by transforming a page from their discarded books. Students will use a variety of materials and text to create a poem that they identify with personally.

*Vocabulary:* Journal, sketchbook, mixed media, design, composition, form, function, three dimensional, Elements of Art, Principles of Design

*Materials:* Book pages from altered journal project, pencils, markers, colored pencils, paint pens

*Procedure/Description:* Students will use a page in their altered books to create a blackout poem. Students will use a sharpie to circle words that are a part of the poem and to black out words that are not a part of the poem. Once students have completed the poem, they can then doodle and add color using markers, colored pencils and ink pens.

Day 1: Students will be introduced to the lesson via PowerPoint presentation. The presentation will provide an overview of the lesson and start the discussion on poetry and identity. I will start the discussion by asking the students a series of questions: Does anyone write poetry? What do you like or dislike about poetry? What would you share with people if you were a poet? Do you have any favorite poems? If so, why? I will read off a list of ten words and ask the class what type of mood does the word convey? What tone does each individual word set? After the discussion, I will pass around my two examples of blackout poetry. To get started the students will briefly scan some pages in their altered journal books for anchor words or any words that have significance or meaning to them. After they have found words that they identify with, then they can read the page in its entirety. The next step is to circle words that are the anchor words or words that resonate with them personally. After all of the words have been lightly circled with a pencil, write them down on a plain sheet of white paper.

Day 2: Warm up: What is the mood of the word and color blue? When you think of where you see the color blue how does that make you feel? Have you ever heard of a style of music called the blues? Play “Nobody Knows When you’re Down and Out” by Sam Cooke. Have the students to reflect on how the song made them feel and the tone of the music. Students will start the class by turning to their blackout poems in their journals and by getting out the words, they wrote down on the white computer paper. Using the paper and without changing the order of the words, students can decide which words to keep and which words to blackout. After the final selection, students can now use the sharpies to circle and blackout words. The final step is for students to add drawings, sketches or illustrations to their blackout poems. The drawings should relate to the text that the students chose for their poems.

Day 3: Warm up: Ask the students if anyone would like to read a few lines from their poems. After a few students share a few lines of their poems, have students finish the artwork that is accompanying the poetry and to take it a step further with hand stitching or various embellishments. Once all of the projects are complete, students will put the poems on display in the room for a critique and for their classmates to view. The critique will be the students exit ticket and is a way to get students talking about their creative process and their artwork and less about what is right or wrong with the piece.

### Activity 3: Fingerprints & Identity (5 days)

*Purpose:* Students will use this project to recognize the uniqueness of their thumbprints and to follow the print pattern using different words that they identify with and words that describe who they are.

*Suggested Grade Level:* Ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades.

*Content Standards:* B.V.2 Apply creative and critical thinking skills to artistic expression.

*Objectives:* Students will create a work of art using an enlarge copy of their thumbprint while also incorporating text.

*Vocabulary:* Journal, sketchbook, mixed media, design, composition, form, function, three dimensional, Elements of Art, Principles of Design

*Materials:* Paper, Black ink, copier, ink pens, markers or sharpies.

*Procedure/Description:* Students will be using an enlargement of their thumbprint to create a word cloud using words that describe how they see themselves and how they would like others to see them. This project will touch on the history of fingerprints and some of the primary uses for fingerprints today. Discussion questions: What are some of the primary uses for collecting fingerprints today? Do you think it is an invasion of privacy to get someone's fingerprints? Why or why not? How do you feel about fingerprints? We will use this link <http://www.fingerprintamerica.com/fingerprinthistory.asp> for the three major types of fingerprint patterns.

Day 1: I will introduce the lesson via PowerPoint. I will start with a brief history of fingerprints and their many uses. We will view the three different types of fingerprints and discuss the differences and similarities of each type. This will be helpful to the students when they are examining their own fingerprints in class. After the project introduction, discussion and looking at examples of fingerprint portraits. Students will collaborate and write their names on the front of the notecard. While one student is getting their fingerprints printed from thumb to pinky finger, their partner is holding the index card for them so that it does not shift. After the first student has gone and thoroughly washed their hands the students switch positions. You can have the students label each print if for some reason they did not go in order as instructed.

Day 2: Warm up: Write in your journals one factor or condition (positive or negative) that has shaped your identity? How so? After spending ten minutes on the journal prompt, allow students share their responses and converse with their peers about the warm up questions. The students will get out their fingerprinted index card so we can go over the different types of fingerprints. This is a good way for the students to have their fingerprints right in front of them so that they can visually see what types of fingerprint patterns they have. Put the different patterns on the board or project on a screen for students to view and discuss. After we have identified the different types of fingerprints, the students will now print only their thumb on a new index card. Make sure that the students write their names on the side of the index card with the lines because the prints will all look very similar to one another. After this step, collect all of the thumbprints to blow up on the copier later. In the meantime students will use their altered book journals to create a list of 15 (five words for each topic) words that describe who they are, things that they like and how they would like to be seen.

Day 3: Warm up: What does the word identity mean to you? After spending ten minutes on the journal prompt and having students to share their responses, pass out large thumbprint copies. Students will use the list of 15 words that they created to help get them started on the next step. Using a pencil, have the students use a light box or the window to draw contour lines that follow the lines in their thumbprint. The pencil line will provide the students with a map of where their text will be written. Students will erase the pencil lines after the text has been written in ink or marker.

Day 4: Warm up: Do you think it is an invasion of privacy to fingerprint someone? Why or why not? After spending ten minutes on the journal prompt and having students to share their responses, have the students, in their own handwriting, compose a body of words that either tell a story or describe themselves while using the contour pencil lines as a guide.

Day 5: Warm up: What did you learn about yourself after creating the list of 15 words that describe who you are, things that you like and how you would like to be seen? After spending ten minutes on the journal prompt and having students to share their responses, students can now add more colors to their text using markers and colored pencils to further personalize their thumbprint self-portraits. Once completed the students will hang up for their classmates to see everyone's work.

#### Activity 4: Identity in a Suitcase (7 days)

*Purpose:* The purpose of this project is for students to think about what it would be like to be uprooted from their homes or homeland with only the items they can grab in a hurry. Students will use this assignment to examine what the suitcase symbolizes both symbolically and figuratively.

*Suggested Grade Level:* Ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades.

*Reading Material:* "This Is Me: A Story of Who We Are & Where We Came From" (Curtis and Cornel 2016)

*Artists of Focus:* Gordon Parks, Sonya Clark, Jasper Johns and Jean-Michael Basquiat

*Content Standards:* B.V.3 Create art using a variety of tools, media, and processes, safely and appropriately.

B.V.3.2 Use a variety of media, including 2-D, 3-D, and digital, to produce art.

*Objectives:* Students will use a suitcase template to create a 3-D work of art. Students will use a variety of materials that will incorporate different layers of their identities by incorporating symbolism, art and text.

*Vocabulary:* perception, identity, stereotype, suitcase, refugee, displaced, mixed media, symbolism, layering, abstract

*Materials:* Suitcase template, pencils, paint, decorative papers, markers, glue, fabrics, found materials, magazines

*Procedure/Description:*

Day 1: Have the students empty their book bags pockets for contents to see what the items say about their identities. Have the students record the contents in their journals for a later reference. Ask the students to define perception, identity and what stereotypes.

Perception- the state of being or becoming aware of something

Identity- the distinguishing personality or character of an individual.

Stereotype- a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude or uncritical judgement.<sup>13</sup>

Read the book: “This Is Me: A Story of Who We Are & Where We Came From” (Curtis and Cornel 2016) and discuss as a class.

Day 2: Warm up: “I’ve known both misery and happiness; lived in so many different skins it is impossible for one skin to claim me. And I have felt like a wayfarer on an alien planet at times — walking, running, wondering about what brought me to this particular place, and why. But once I was here the dreams started moving in, and I went about devouring them as they devoured me.” - [\*Gordon Parks\*](#)<sup>14</sup>



### Discussion Questions:

What did Gordon mean by knowing both misery and happiness?  
Have you ever lived in more than one skin? If so, how?  
Have you ever found yourself in a particular place and wondered how you got there?  
What circumstances or experiences helped to shape your identity today?  
What things would you pack if you had to leave home in a hurry?

Pass out the “Where I’m From” worksheet. Go over the first three lines as a class then let the students spend the rest of the class time creating their poems. At the end of the class, ask the students if anyone would like to share their poems.

### Day 3: Sonya Clark/ Black Identity/ Black hair/ textiles

Warm up: Show the students one of Sonya Clark’s pieces from her Combs series. Why do you think the artist has chosen to work with black plastic combs? What do you think the combs symbolize? Students will use this warm up session to explore the different factors that shape a person’s identity. What do you think is the identity of the students at West Charlotte High School? Is there a way to shift the cultural dialogue that is associated with the students at West Charlotte? Discuss the work and questions as a class.

Once the poems are completed, have the students cut out their suitcase templates. They will add a base color as a foundation to get started. Have the students circle descriptive words from their poems that they may want to incorporate in their art piece. The rest of the day is spent brainstorming and sketching.

### Day 4- 5: Warm Up: Jean-Michael Basquiat/ Jasper Johns/ Layers/ symbolism

Warm up: Spend 10 minutes creating a flag that symbolizes your identity. Show students work by Basquiat and Jasper Johns. Have a class discussion on symbolism, John’s use of materials and Basquiat’s layering techniques.

Students will start to go full speed ahead with creating the suitcase. Students will spend the next three days art making. The suitcases will be made up of objects, imagery, text and symbols that represent key components of their personal identities. The poems need to be incorporated in the final piece.

Day 6: Warm up: Ask the students to think of a person either historically or in popular culture whose identity has been shaped by different factors. Based on the person that was selected, have the students list words that have contributed to this person’s identity such as race, gender, religion, age, lifestyle choices and experiences. Ask the students to list factors from most influential to least influential. Then have the students pick the top three factors and have them write a paragraph analyzing how the top three factors greatly affected the person’s identity. After the warm up, students can continue working on their suitcase projects.

Day 7: Critique/ artist statements/ select one piece from your body of work

Warm up: In their Ask students to respond to the question: Who am I? Select one body of work from this unit to have on display. We will write the artist statements together as a class. Anyone who needs to finish any work can do so. Students will use the artist statements to explain how the imagery, text and other object relate to their identity while also shedding light into their create thought process.

## **Assessments**

Students will be assessed using a variety of methods. Students will be assessed through weekly journal checks, through completed art assignments and through rubrics. This combination of assessments allows students to be assessed both informally and formally. The rubrics, art assignments and journal checks will be the informal assessment and the verbal components such as sharing during the warm ups and during the class critiques will be the informal component.

One other informal component will be the culminating portion that will include the students putting one of their works of art on display somewhere in the school. Students will also write an artist statement that will correspond with the piece that will be on display. This part will be factored into the student's last project grade. Students will receive credit upon completion of the art assignments and no credit will be giving for incomplete work. Students have been creating a series of mini assignments and projects that will help them when working on their final identity in a suitcase project.

Students have spent the last couple of months discovering what shapes their identity. By creating a several pieces of artwork, students excelled at using a variety of mediums, subjects, themes, symbols and found materials, students have all been working towards answering one question: Who am I? Students have demonstrated a great level of complexity and competence while using the Element of Art to create their identity pieces for public display.

### Assessment Rubric- Identity in a Suitcase

	Excellent	Good	Average	Needs Improvement	Rate Yourself	Teacher's Rating
Criteria 1- Wrote and incorporated the "Where I'm From" poem into your identity suitcase.	20	15	10	5		
Criteria 2- Added details, text and imagery about personal identity	20	15	10	5		
Criteria 3- Created a space that encompasses several layers	20	15	10	5		
Criteria 4- Incorporated a variety of mixed media and found materials	20	15	10	5		
Criteria 5- Wrote and completed an artist statement	20	15	10	5		

### Appendix 1: Teaching Standards

This unit will implement various Common Core North Carolina Essential Standards for Beginning Visual Arts, but can be adapted for all art levels. The North Carolina Essential Standards for Beginning Visual Arts that are being used in this identity unit are broken down into three categories: Visual Literacy, Contextual Relevancy and Critical Response.



## North Carolina Essential Standards Beginning Visual Arts

Note on Numbering:

**B**-Beginning High School Standards

Note on Strands:

**V** - Visual Literacy, **CX** – Contextual Relevancy, **CR** – Critical Response

Note: Students at the high school level will have the option of studying an individual arts discipline as an area of interest, or specializing or completing a concentration in studies to prepare them for further education and/or a career in the arts. The Essential Standards communicate what students should know and be able to do as a result of instruction at each proficiency level: beginning, intermediate, proficient, and advanced (9-12).

**Beginning High School Visual Arts** standards are designed for students with no or limited K-8 progression in Visual Arts education.

### Visual Literacy

	Essential Standard	Clarifying Objectives	
<b>B.V.1</b>	<b>Use the language of visual arts to communicate effectively.</b>	B.V.1.1	Use art vocabulary when discussing art and artistic styles.
		B.V.1.2	Apply the Elements of Art and Principles of Design to create art.
		B.V.1.3	Classify art according to specified styles.
		B.V.1.4	Recognize how Elements of Art and Principles of Design are used in art.
<b>B.V.2</b>	<b>Apply creative and critical thinking skills to artistic expression.</b>	B.V.2.1	Understand the role of planning in solving artistic problems.
		B.V.2.2	Understand the relationships between sensory awareness and artistic expression.
		B.V.2.3	Create personal, symbolic expression as a means of communication (original, visual language).
<b>B.V.3</b>	<b>Create art using a variety of tools, media, and processes, safely and appropriately.</b>	B.V.3.1	Understand the appropriate and safe use of tools, media, and equipment.
		B.V.3.2	Use a variety of media, including 2-D, 3-D, and digital, to produce art.
		B.V.3.3	Exemplify characteristics of different artistic processes.

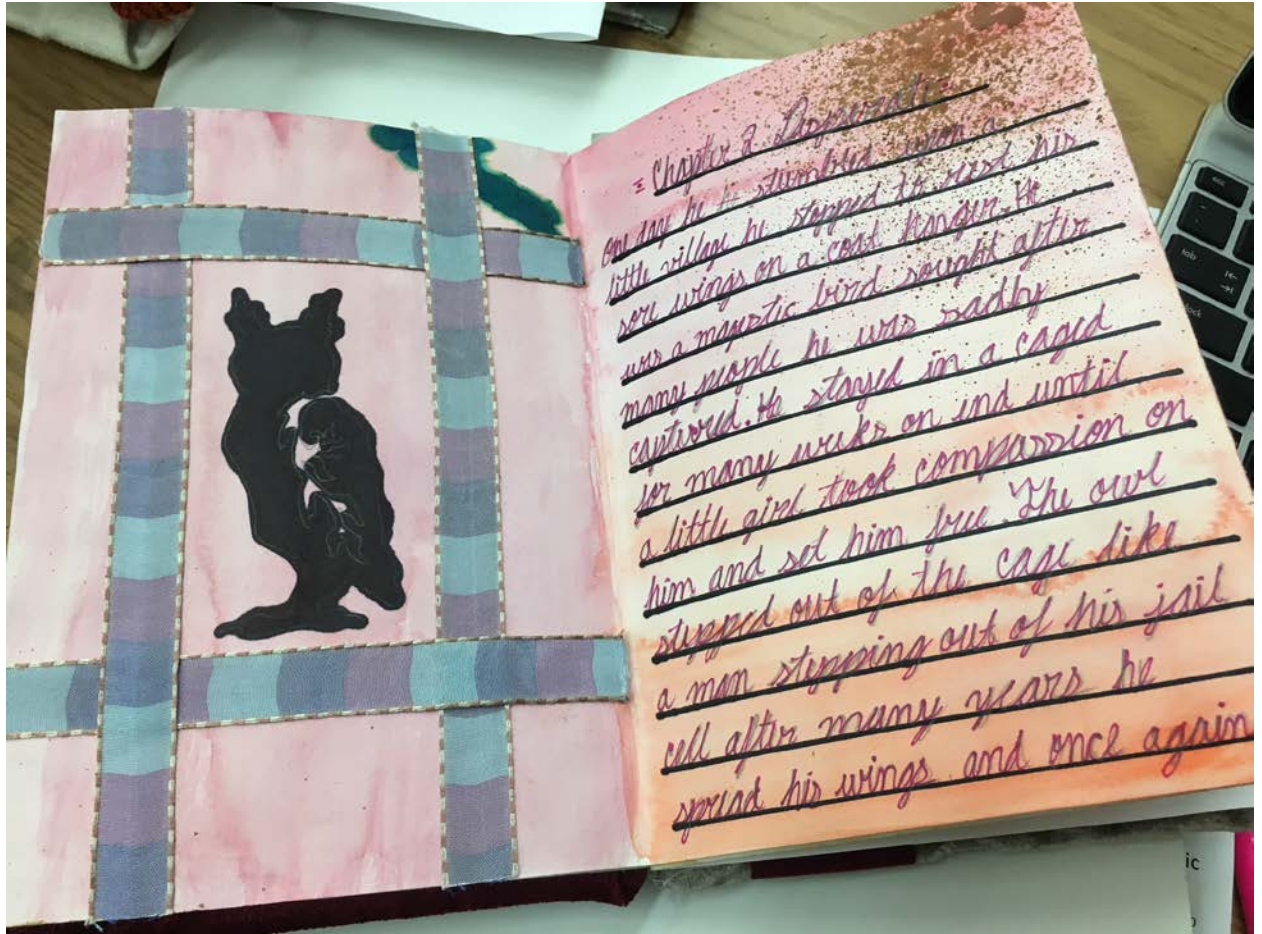
### Contextual Relevancy

	Essential Standard	Clarifying Objectives	
B.CX.1	Understand the global, historical, societal, and cultural contexts of the visual arts.	B.CX.1.1	Use visual arts to explore concepts in world history and relate them to significant events, ideas, and movements from a global context.
		B.CX.1.2	Explain how art influences historical perspectives on society.
		B.CX.1.3	Understand how art is used to document human experience.
		B.CX.1.4	Interpret art in terms of cultural and ethnic context.
		B.CX.1.5	Explain the effect of the geographic location and physical environment on the media and subject matter of art.
B.CX.2	Understand the interdisciplinary connections and life applications of the visual arts.	B.CX.2.1	Analyze the contribution of art to the design of consumable goods, products, and services, both historical and contemporary.
		B.CX.2.2	Recognize the interdisciplinary knowledge used in the creation of art.
		B.CX.2.3	Analyze the collaborative process in the creation of art.
		B.CX.2.4	Analyze the role of art in creating digital images, technological products, and design.

### Critical Response

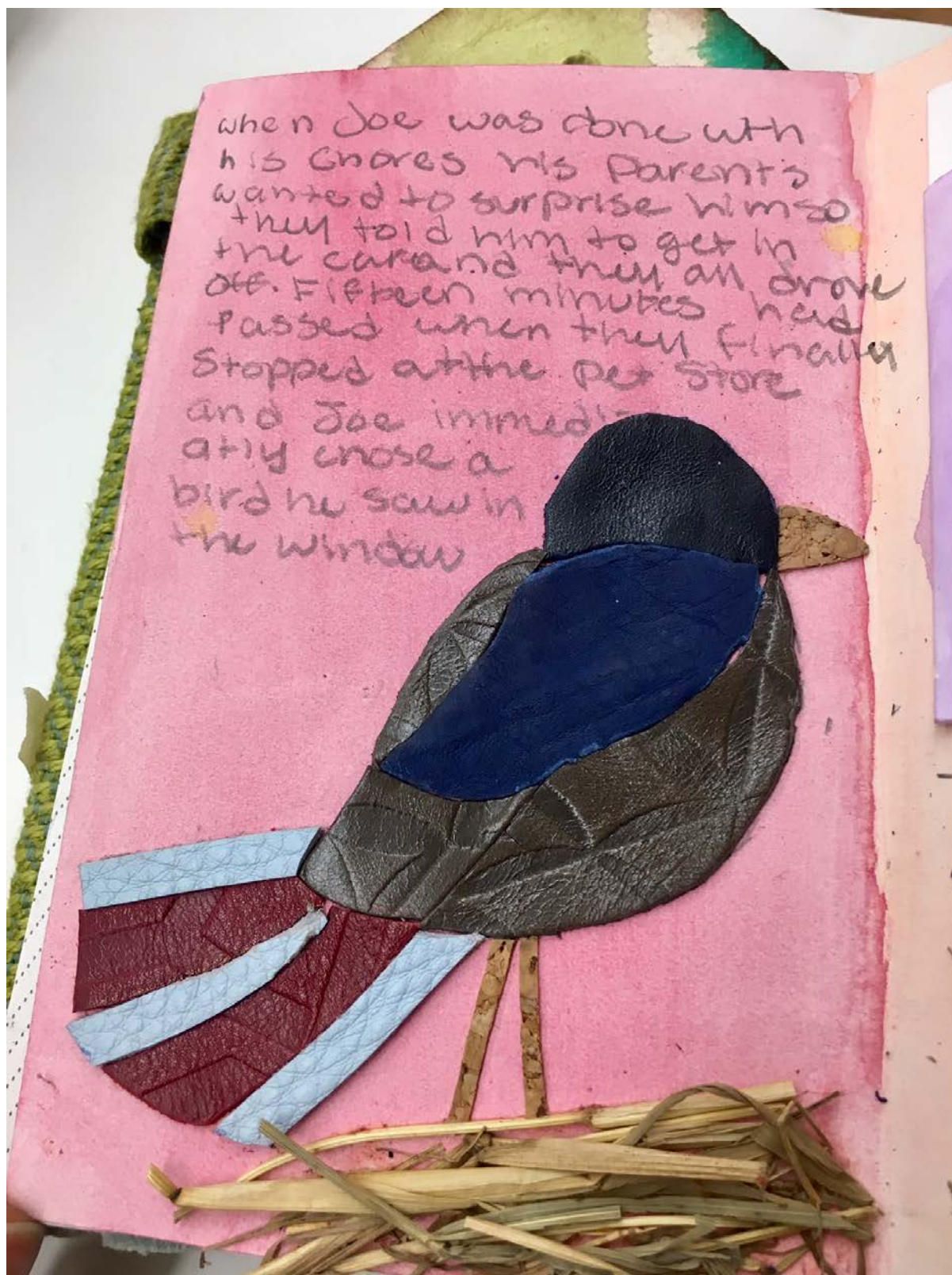
	Essential Standard	Clarifying Objectives	
B.CR.1	Use critical analysis to generate responses to a variety of prompts.	B.CR.1.1	Understand the art criticism process.
		B.CR.1.2	Use teacher-generated criteria to evaluate personal art.

## Appendix 2: Altered Books/ Journals- Student Examples

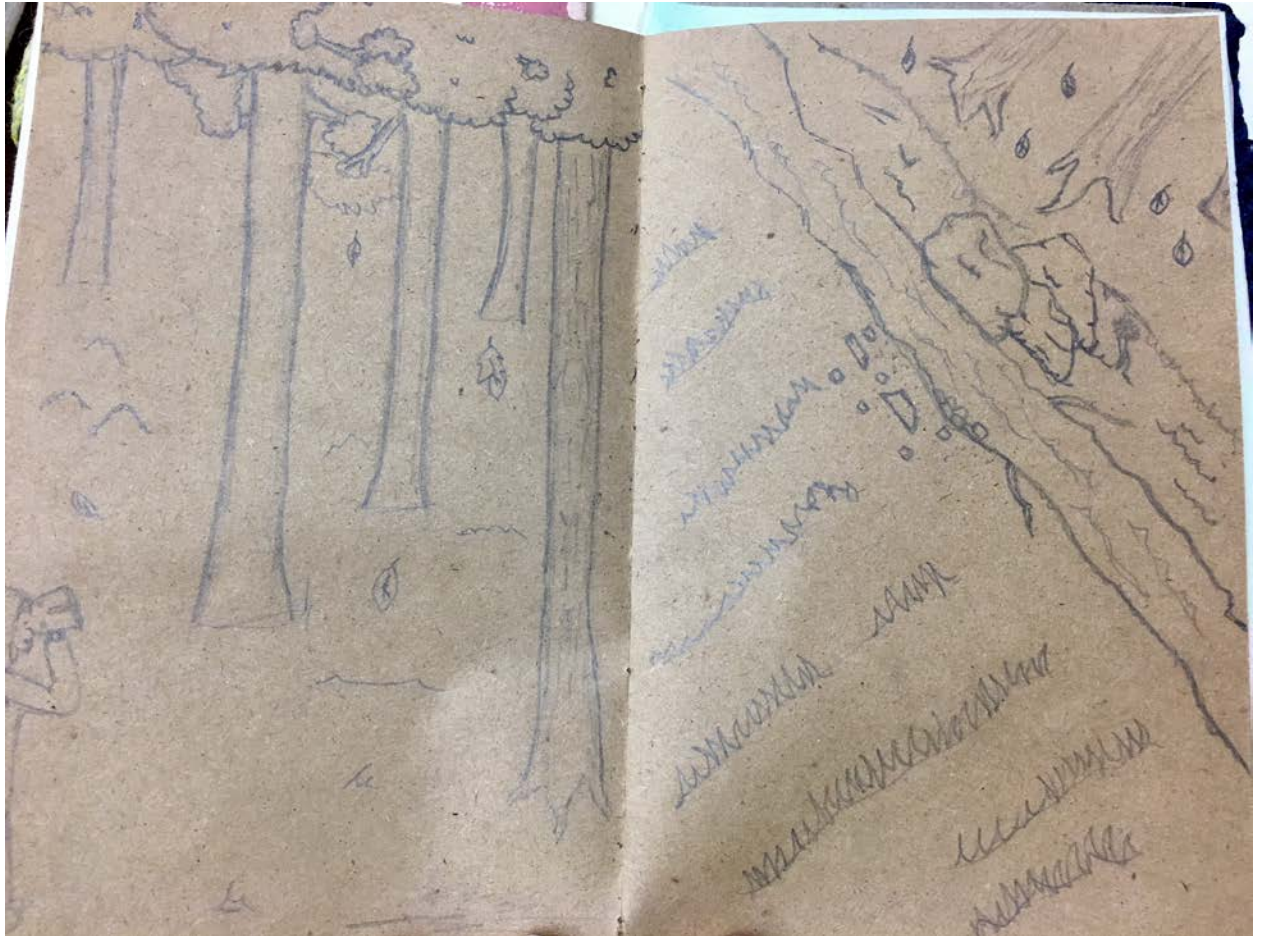




### Appendix 3: Altered Books/ Journals- Student Examples



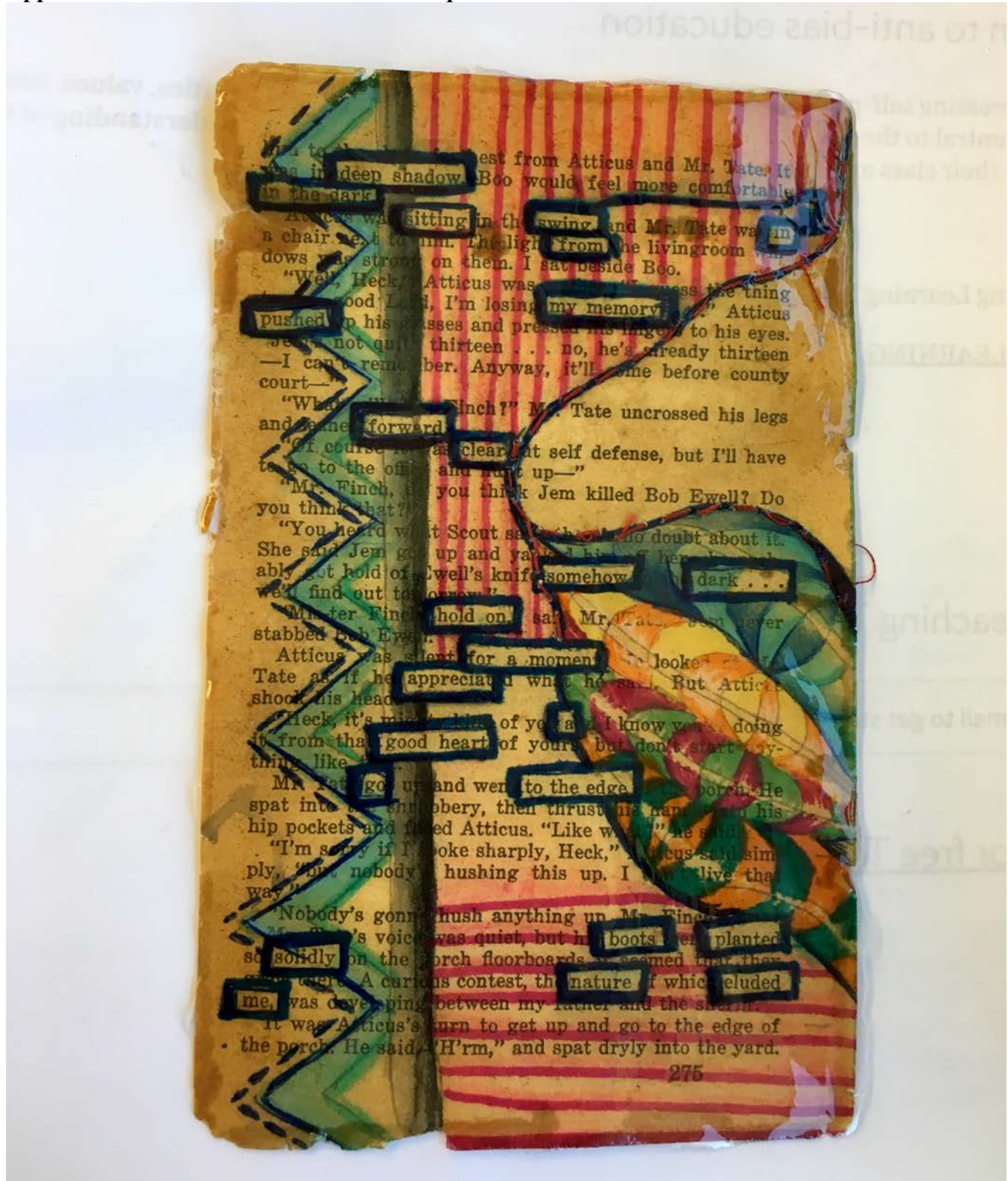
#### Appendix 4: Altered Books/ Journals- Student Examples





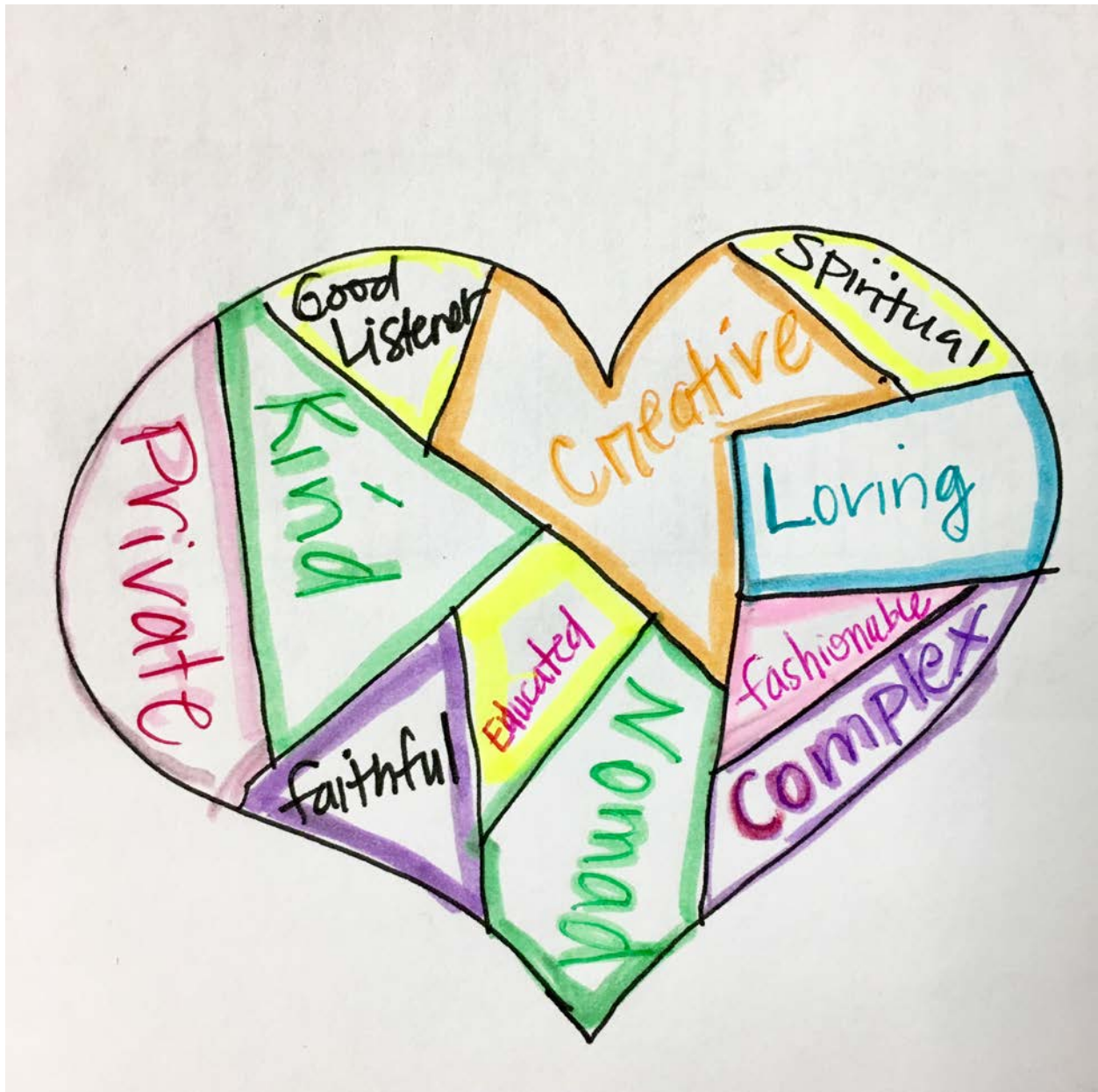
[illegible]

## Appendix 6: Blackout Poem Teacher Examples

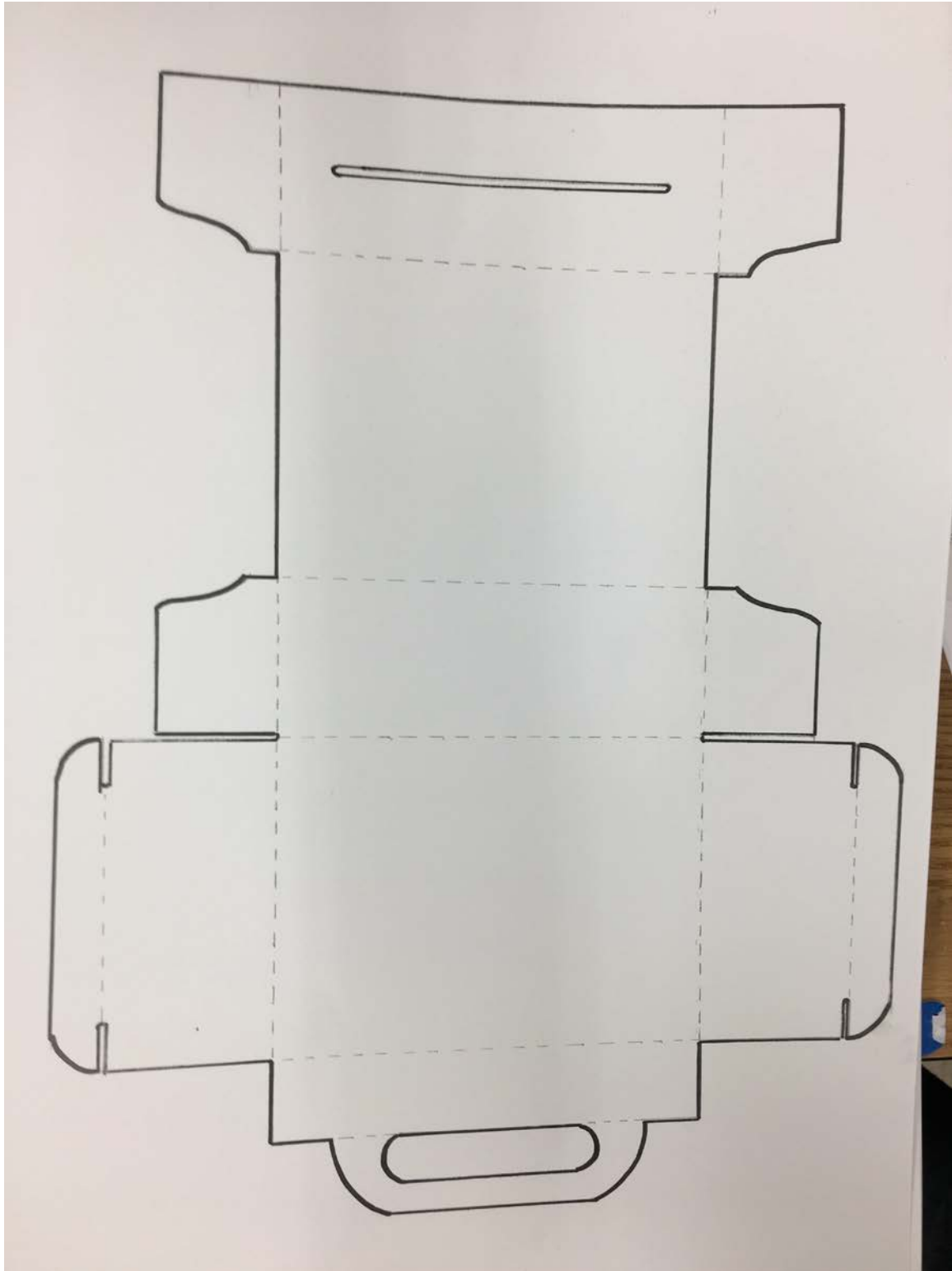




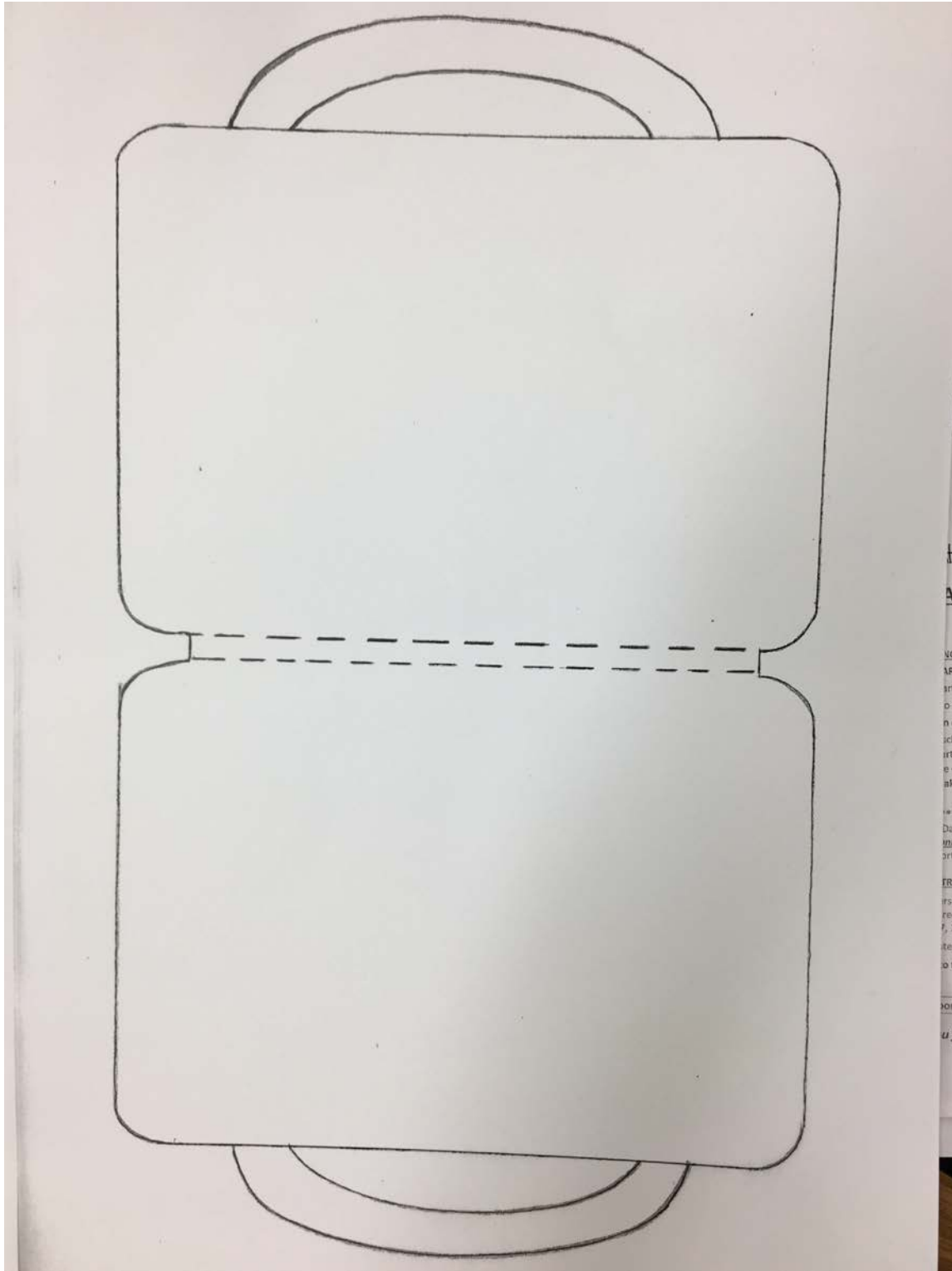
## Appendix 7: Heart Map Teacher Example



## Appendix 8: Suitcase Template (A)



## Appendix 9: Suitcase Template (B)



## Appendix 10- Where I'm From Poem Template

### I Am From Poem

*Use this template to draft your poem, and then write a final draft to share on blank paper.*

I am from \_\_\_\_\_  
(specific ordinary item)

From \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
(product name) (product name)

I am from the \_\_\_\_\_  
(home description)

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_  
(adjective) (adjective) (sensory detail)

I am from \_\_\_\_\_,  
(plant, flower, natural item)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(description of above item)

I'm from \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
(family tradition) (family trait)

From \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
(name of family member) (another family name)

I'm from the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
(description of family tendency) (another one)

From \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
(something you were told as a child) (another)

I'm from \_\_\_\_\_,  
(representation of religion or lack of), (further description)

I'm from \_\_\_\_\_  
(place of birth and family ancestry)

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_  
(a food item that represents your family) (another one)

From the \_\_\_\_\_  
(specific family story about a specific person and detail)

## **Resources**

### **Materials for Classroom Use**

Altered Journals- students will have an altered journal to document, brainstorm and to draw in throughout the unit. The journals are for the students to keep even after the curriculum unit has ended.

Recycled books- Students will be using recycled book for the poetry assignment.

Map Your Heart worksheet- students will use this worksheet as an icebreaker in the curriculum unit. This worksheet will help students to ease into starting to look at themselves more closely.

Chromebooks- students will have access to laptop computers in order for students to conduct research on various art assignments, artists and to research different symbols.

[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)- students will use YouTube when researching different art techniques.

Photo copier- I will be enlarging the students fingerprints for their fingerprint art project.

Ink pad- to capture the students fingerprints.

Pencils- students will use pencils for writing and drawing.

Drawing paper- students will be using 110 lb. drawing paper in a number of different sizes.

Suitcase template- students will trace the suitcase template on a piece of white heavy cardstock. Students will also use the template to create the “Identity in a Suitcase” project.

Magazines- students will use magazines for both the collage project and the word cloud project.

Project examples- I will provide all project examples for students in addition to some supplemental images of similar project from the internet.

Paint- students will use paint for their mixed media self-portraits.

Paint Pens- students will use paint pens on the altered book project, blackout poetry and the mixed media self-portraits.

Scissors- Students will be using scissors throughout the course of the identity curriculum unit.

Found materials- Students will be using found materials while creating the collage, altered journal and the mixed media portraits.

Glue- Students will be using glue throughout the course of the identity curriculum unit.

Mod podge- students will use mod podge to protect the paper and collages before adding resin to the ceramic tiles.

Foam brushes- students will use disposable foam brushes to apply the mod podge to their artwork.

Sharpies- students will have access to a wide variety of sharpies to use on the poetry project.

## **Reading List for Students**

Cheng, Scarlet. 2013. "Artist Sonya Clark weaves tales with textiles, hair at CAFAM." *Los Angeles Times*. July 7. Accessed November 20, 2017. [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com).

Curtis, Jamie Lee, and Laura Cornel. 2016. *This Is Me: A Story of Who We Are & Where We Came From*. Workman Publishing Company.

2010. *Jean-Michael Basquiat: The Radiant Child*. Directed by Tamra Davis.

Freeman-Zachery, Rice. 2017. "Nellie Wortman: Dancing To The Music." *Somerset Studio* 10-19.

Jocson, Korina. 2013. *cultural transformations: youth and pedagogies of possibility*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.

Mason, John Edwin. 2016. "TIME." *time.com*. April 08. Accessed November 20, 2017. <http://time.com/4200148/gordon-parks-photographs-black-humanity/>.

McCollum, Kristen Paige. 2013. "The Art of Collective Identity: How an Art from the Streets Program Fosters a Sense of Community Among the Homeless." *The Journal for Undergraduate Ethnography* 1-17.

2000. *Half Past Autumn: The Life and Works of Gordon Parks*. Directed by Craig Rice.



## Reading List for Teachers

Cheng, Scarlet. 2013. "Artist Sonya Clark weaves tales with textiles, hair at CAFAM." *Los Angeles Times*. July 7. Accessed November 20, 2017. [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com).

Curtis, Jamie Lee, and Laura Cornel. 2016. *This Is Me: A Story of Who We Are & Where We Came From*. Workman Publishing Company.

2010. *Jean-Michael Basquiat: The Radiant Child*. Directed by Tamra Davis.

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Jocson, Korina. 2013. *cultural transformations: youth and pedagogies of possibility*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.

Laura Gardner, Ph.D. 2016. "Creating Narratives through Art as Self-Definition for Black Women." *The Winthrop McNair Research Bulletin* 51-55.

Mason, John Edwin. 2016. "TIME." *time.com*. April 08. Accessed November 20, 2017. <http://time.com/4200148/gordon-parks-photographs-black-humanity/>.

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Rodriguez, Favianna. 2013. "Change the Culture, Change the World." *Creative Timer Reports*. April 1. Accessed November 20, 2017. <http://creativetimerreports.org>.

Thompson, Nato. 2015. *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21st Century*. Brooklyn: Melville House Publishing.

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Cheng, Scarlet. 2013. "Artist Sonya Clark weaves tales with textiles, hair at CAFAM." *Los Angeles Times*. July 7. Accessed November 20, 2017. [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com).

This article focuses on Clark's exhibition "Sonya Clark: Material Reflex" at the Craft Folk Art Museum.

Curtis, Jamie Lee, and Laura Cornel. 2016. *This Is Me: A Story of Who We Are & Where We Came From*. Workman Publishing Company.

This book tells a story about migration and the idea of having to relocate to a new country. It also forces students to examine the things that they value in life.

2010. *Jean-Michael Basquiat: The Radiant Child*. Directed by Tamra Davis.

This documentary does a great job of really diving into Basquiat's identity as both a person and as a talented but struggling artist.

Freeman-Zachery, Rice. 2017. "Nellie Wortman: Dancing To The Music." *Somerset Studio* 10-19.

This article had a calming and encouraging tone with discussing the work of Wortman and her life journey. I thought the article was very relatable, as we all know someone who has been fighting to overcome an illness and who comes out on the other side of the battle with a refreshed outlook on life.

Laura Gardner, Ph.D. 2016. "Creating Narratives through Art as Self-Definition for Black Women." *The Winthrop McNair Research Bulletin* 51-55.

This article was more of a study on contemporary African American artists who are focusing at least a portion of their body of work on changing the cultural narratives.

Mason, John Edwin. 2016. "TIME." *time.com*. April 08. Accessed November 20, 2017. <http://time.com/4200148/gordon-parks-photographs-black-humanity/>.

This article closely examines some of the most important photographs of Gordon Parks' career. Having a backstory to the stories that were featured in LIFE magazine really helps to put into perspective the severity of the complex issues pertaining to social injustices in this country.

n.d. "NC Public Schools." *Department of Public Instruction*. Accessed November 20, 2017. <http://dpi.state.nc.us>.

North Carolina teaching standards for beginners.

2000. *Half Past Autumn: The Life and Works of Gordon Parks*. Directed by Craig Rice.

This documentary allows us to hear directly from Parks himself about his work and why he chose the assignments that he did throughout the course of his career. It was very important to him to

not only view people as subjects, but to get to know everyone on a more personal level through relationship building.

Rodriguez, Favianna. 2013. "Change the Culture, Change the World." *Creative Timer Reports*. April 1. Accessed November 20, 2017. <http://creativetimerreports.org>.

This article really dives into the heart of a breakdown in communication when trying to converge social change and the arts.

(Davis 2010, Cheng 2013, Delpit 1993, Thompson 2015, Jocson 2013, Laura Gardner 2016, Rodriguez 2013, McCollum 2013, NC Public Schools n.d.)

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<sup>1</sup> North Carolina Beginning Visual Arts Standard B.V.2- Apply creative and critical thinking skills to artistic expression. [www.ncpublicschools.org](http://www.ncpublicschools.org)

<sup>2</sup> Cheng, Scarlet. 2013. "Artist Sonya Clark weaves tales with textiles, hair at CAFAM." Los Angeles Times. July 7. Accessed November 20, 2017. [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com).

<sup>3</sup> Cheng, Scarlet. 2013. "Artist Sonya Clark weaves tales with textiles, hair at CAFAM." Los Angeles Times. July 7. Accessed November 20, 2017. [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com).

<sup>4</sup> Freeman-Zachery, Rice. 2017. "Nellie Wortman: Dancing To The Music." Somerset Studio 10.

<sup>5</sup> Freeman-Zachery, Rice. 2017. "Nellie Wortman: Dancing To The Music." Somerset Studio 15.

<sup>6</sup> Freeman-Zachery, Rice. 2017. "Nellie Wortman: Dancing To The Music." Somerset Studio 16-17.

<sup>7</sup> Laura Gardner, Ph.D. 2016. "Creating Narratives through Art as Self-Definition for Black Women." The Winthrop McNair Research Bulletin 51.

<sup>8</sup> Laura Gardner, Ph.D. 2016. "Creating Narratives through Art as Self-Definition for Black Women." The Winthrop McNair Research Bulletin 54.

<sup>9</sup> Rodriguez, Favianna. 2013. "Change the Culture, Change the World." *Creative Timer Reports*. April 1. Accessed November 20, 2017. <http://creativetimerreports.org>.

<sup>10</sup> Rodriguez, Favianna. 2013. "Change the Culture, Change the World." *Creative Timer Reports*. April 1. Accessed November 20, 2017. <http://creativetimerreports.org>.

<sup>11</sup> Mason, John Edwin. 2016. "TIME." *time.com*. April 08. Accessed November 20, 2017. <http://time.com/4200148/gordon-parks-photographs-black-humanity/>.

<sup>12</sup> Freeman-Zachery, Rice. 2017. "Nellie Wortman: Dancing To The Music." Somerset Studio 11-12.

<sup>13</sup> The Art Gallery, University of Maryland, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon Parks Quote from the book *Choice of Weapons*  
<http://www.photoquotes.com/ShowQuotes.aspx?id=485&name=Parks,Gordon#ixzz4zbI51mUA>