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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2012 Volume I: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Consumer Culture

The Stuff We Have: Ethnographies, Material Culture, and Art

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by Elizabeth Lasure

Does the "stuff" of our material culture give shape to our world ñ our ideas, beliefs, values, and norms? Or is it that our ideas, beliefs, values, and norms, are reflected in our Stuff?

This unit is divided into three ethnographic studies the first of which is intended to get students thinking about their own Stuff as it reflects their identity as a consumer, as well the larger conversation about of Stuff as a vehicle for social interaction. The second component - cultural studies - will expand student's perceptions about Stuff in other parts of the world. We will be researching cultural identity as narrated through Stuff in cultures. The third and final component to this unit will examine the works of contemporary artists who use the techniques of appropriation, specifically through found objects -Stuff.

Under the broader theme of art as social commentary, this unit will attempt to explore some of the following key questions: Do artists have a role in reflecting and commenting on the society in which they live? Should artists provoke divergent points of view about political, moral or other social issues? What are issues that our community/school/ nations/ world are currently confronting? How might an artist depict one of these current issues in order to promote constructive discussion?

(Developed for Art III Honor, grades 11-12; recommended for Visual Arts, grades 11-12)

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