



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2017 Volume II: Literature, Life-Writing, and Identity

Curating an identity: Exploration and Expression in the Elementary Art Room

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"It's a way - my way of communicating between human beings. Just one of the ways one can try to explain with full liberty. Some will do it with music, others with literature, I with painting."¹

Please reference the artwork titled *The Jungle*², which can be found at the Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) webpage. The above quotation from its creator, Wilfredo Lam, is placed here to set your mindset as the reader to one of intrigue and respect. Please note the painting and the quotation equally. I view art as a great communicator, a language where all can understand and express equally but individually.

Wilfredo Lam (1902-1982) was a Cuban painter. He was an active contributor to both the cubist and surrealist movements. The above quotation was documented as the artist was asked to reflect upon his work near the end of his life. Born in Cuba and of mixed race (Chinese, European, Indian, and African),³ Lam was an artist who used his work to communicate and express his story.

I interpret the painting as a representation of the effect of all the identities one is expected to be, and can be. In the piece, the figures are neither whole nor face the same direction at the same time, reminiscent of how one cannot be their true self while also subscribing to another's expectation. One can see *The Jungle* as a visualization of answering to different people's expectations of what they want you to be. The multitude of figures in the work alludes to the many directions we feel that we are pulled when we address and visualize our own identity. Our internal idea is skewed by social factors, society, and our environment. Is it required that a person have just one identity? The above work reflects on the artist's multicultural nature and the longing to find a whole among a library of parts. The figures stretched from the top to bottom of the canvas are being pulled in multiple directions. Packed into a small space, the amount of figures in the work is reminiscent of the number of expectations that are put upon us in our daily lives. Similarly, my students are living among multiple identities, being pulled in different directions as they shift through their daily lives.

Background

My school's official name is William B. Keene Elementary, but all of us who work there simply call it Keene. Keene is home to about 650 students ranging from kindergarten through fifth grade. My school is a title-1 school, meaning that a high percentage of our students come from minimal or unstable financial means. Part of our funding is allocated to help our families when they are in need; this is done through numerous programs, employees, and resources available to assist not just students but also their parents/guardians. The realities of an unstable outside life often carry over into classroom functions and needs. Apart from these real-world matters, my students burst through the doors each morning ready to get the day started. Keene is a bustling hive of discovery, education, socialization, and culture. The mix of heritages, interests, skill, and knowledge of each of my students makes teaching art a very exciting job.

As the art teacher, I have the exciting benefit of working with my students across multiple grade levels. Over the course of my four years at Keene, the relationships I have constructed with my students are certainly one of my favorite aspects of my career. My time on a weekly basis is minimal, only seeing students for one 45-minute class period a week, but looking back, it is my trans-grade level experience that is the most beneficial. I am amazed at how much my students remember from one grade to the next, as well as how much I remember about them.

In our 21st century world of selfies, snapchat, and Instagram students are very familiar with what they look like, and how they like to look. The self-portrait/portrait is mutating from a formal artwork to an impromptu happening. Watching my five-year-old kindergarteners struggle to manipulate a hand-crank pencil sharpener but succeed with great speed at snapping selfies on the class iPad has always intrigued me. My students today are better acclimated to working a screen than a physical object in front of them. To combat this occurrence, I work on building and attaining fine motor skills in my younger students through a variety of art making activities. Starting with drawing, then advancing to painting, collage, printmaking, and ultimately clay, I open my classroom up in stages to my students.

Rationale

Identity... take a moment to think about this idea... the idea of an identity or having an identity. Who created your identity? Was it a solemn and personal construct, or a community affair? I will describe later the many forms of identity and the story that they tell. Now think of a child, a small human, a person who is in a state of constant change. Most of this change is not in their personal control—whether it be physical, environmental, or social. Children are sometimes prescribed to an agenda that they may not particularly enjoy. Tested and compared to their peers, my students' individualism is very important to me. Having a strong sense of self is important for the mental and emotional health of my students.

It is a well-known human fact that self-confidence can boost performance in all aspects of our lives. In a study published in a journal by the American Psychological Society, groups of students were exposed to a mix of positive or negative stereotypes and their test scores were monitored. The study describes that when exposed to stereotypes "even children as young as 5 years old are susceptible to the activation of identities associated

with positive and negative stereotypes regarding quantitative performance.”⁴ We are all aware of the effects of a stereotype; however, the study documents their effects on a quantitative measure by looking at test scores of children who were prescribed either positive or negative stereotypes about themselves.

Learning about identity and how to express it is a crucial experience for my young learners. There are several students whom I mentor with self-esteem or confidence issues. I work with these students on their studies and issues, but just as importantly, I listen to them. I give my students and mentees an opportunity to express themselves, their concerns, their joys, and to be open. This openness crafts a relationship of trust and equality between us and helps build my student sense of self through the validation of their ideas. By building a strong personal identity students can achieve more and learn better.

Goals

My goal for this curriculum unit is to dive into the essence of an identity in an elementary age student, focusing on the younger three grades in particular (kindergarten, first, and second). I want to work with my younger students to discover how they define themselves at such a young age, and at a stage in their life where they are often told to be or do things, rather than self-direct. I want my unit to make my students think about who they are as themselves, and as others perceive them. I then want to challenge my students to answer the topic of identity through art. I find that the stronger my relationship is with my students the harder they work. Strengthening our relationship of teacher and student will greatly affect the atmosphere of my classroom, the morale of my school, and the enjoyment of teaching and learning.

Identity

Every August I start my choice-based classroom off on the big idea of identity. I do this for several reasons: First, the topic of “me” or “what I like” is easily tangible for my students, as it allows for inward thinking, rather than the projection of ideas. I advance their thinking by asking questions about their past or future. Secondly, working with my students from year to year has stocked my brain with their personalities, families, hobbies, and interests. Identity as a starter topic is an easy way for me, as the teacher of 650 students, to rekindle my relationship with each student. To my new students in kindergarten and the several others throughout the school, this topic allows me to sincerely explain my artwork and examples to them, laying rails for their production of sincere and personal artwork, as well as a truth based relationship between us.

Identity is not one aspect of an individual, but rather all the parts that make that individual.

Our identity is every part of us, our experiences, desires, families, communities, cultures. As we go through life our identities change and develop. In the childhood years, our students are taking in new ideas and experiences, analyzing them into parts of themselves. In school my students exhibit several identities, sometimes all at once. The main facets of these multiple aspects of identity that I wish to focus on are: internal identity, external identity, narrative identity, and expression of identity.

I use the term internal identity to describe the idea we all have of ourselves. This identity is owned by the person, and is subject to change only as the owner wishes. Through this internal identity students express themselves in their true form, unhindered by others. External identity is a person's identity that is assigned to them by others. The external identity can match up with the internal, but the individual does not own the identity, as it is owned by others' interpretations and projections. When addressing our external identity, we are forced to consider how people view us and their expectations.

Both internal and external identities are parts of our narrative identity. A narrative identity is the story of ourselves, it is the assemblage of all we have gone through. This story of ourselves can be accepted or countered by others. The idea of a "counter story" surfaces as we experience backlash from the world. In the book, *Citizen: An American Lyric*, author Claudia Rankine discusses these same ideas, calling them the "historical-self" and the "self-self".⁵ Rankine's book is a collection of different writing styles, assembled together to express the agony of experiencing racism on a daily basis. The book continues to illustrate different forms of racism as experienced by Rankine and her peers, as well as public figures. The text weighs heavy on racial identity and raises the question of where to classify it. To use Rankine's categories, is racial identity part of the historical-self or the self-self? This question prompts me to ask who really owns my identity- myself, or the world in which I live? These questions are crucial to consider when thinking about my students.

The ownership of identity is interesting to consider in respect to students. In school, students are part of a community and subscribe, by choice or sometimes by force, to the expectations of society in respect to that community. When I witness my students change their behavior as they move from one class to another I wonder, what persona is their favorite? Which one is best for them to learn? In my classroom, I work hard to keep a relaxed and safe atmosphere. Upon another teacher entering my classroom, most likely their own, I sometimes see the actions and behavior of my students change. This instance of what we can call a *situational identity* is caused by our external identity gaining dominance over our internal identity as situations change. We all exhibit this type of behavior, bending ourselves into the shape of what is expected. To curate an authentic identity, students need to feel welcomed to express themselves and their ideas.

In children, the first true sense of individual identity is developing in the elementary years as they spend less time with their parents and more time in schools being socially and academically engaged. The process of generating an identity is a social process where the interactions have an impact on the individual.⁶ In school, children are exposed to a multitude of identities that they may or may not enjoy.

Getting students thinking about identity



The above image is the character Red, from Michael Hall's book *Red, A Crayon's Story*.⁷ The story introduces us to him as Red. To the viewer, he is clearly a blue crayon mislabeled with a red wrapper. As the story progresses Red is challenged by all the other art supplies as they only see him by his label. The character and story relate to identity in several ways: gender, being true to one's self, expected identity versus true identity, and more. The story continues to follow Red through his daily life, trying to do his job of coloring things red, or making orange with his friend Yellow. The constant pressure of others' expectations, and his failure to meet them, causes him much distress. This simple story is easily understood by young students, who can clearly see the issues the character faced, making a great introduction to talking about themselves and their identity.

Taking on the broad topic of identity can seem daunting to educators. I worry that I will not be able to cull the right type of identity definition from my students. To get authentic work from my students I first need to buttress their own ideas and definitions of identity and themselves. In the book *Identity Texts*, Cummins and Early with help from Stille, lay out a pedagogical approach to craft an idea of identity in their students. The authors break down how to create student engagement into several categories. *Scaffolding meaning* refers to providing temporary supports which allow learners to achieve at a greater level than they could without support. Supports can range from discussion, demonstrations, visual aids, dramatizations, and others. *Activating prior experience/build background knowledge* is described in the text as using the learner's previous knowledge as a comfortable starting point and building upon it. *Affirming identity*, the crucial process of ensuring that all student feel that their personal identity is validated and respected. Make certain students are comfortable in the situation. Share some commonalities with them, or allow students to take in small groups. *Extend language* as student progress through their understanding of identity it becomes time to increase the academic level of thinking about and discussing identity. This can be achieved by providing vocabulary and changing the way the subject is viewed in the classroom.⁸

The text largely discusses the idea of an *identity text* and focuses mainly on the use of literature in the classroom. However, in the book an identity text is defined as "describ[ing] the products of students' creative work or performances carried out within the pedagogical space orchestrated by the classroom teacher. Students invest their identities in the creation of these texts - which can be written, spoken, signed, visual, musical, dramatic, or combinations in multimodal form. The identity text holds a mirror up to students in which their identities are reflected back in a positive light."⁹ In definition, an identity text does not necessarily need to be a work of writing, just as an artwork does not need to adhere to a strictly visual form. Assimilating the multiple genres together allows for more comfort and choice within the challenge of responding to

identity.

Identity through art

Making Marks

I consider art-making to be an adventure of creating marks. Marks can be line, shapes, color, movements, affects, thoughts, or even accidents. My students and I make art by transforming materials and ideas into visual expressions that send a message. The creative process is like play, in that children are experimenting, imitating, and testing out what the world has presented to them. In my classroom students spread their time across brainstorming, sketching, art-making, and reflection.

I view art as the first language. From the early years in human history, as discovered in the Lascaux caves of France, pictures were used to communicate. The language of pictures spans the constraints of spoken and written language, allowing communication between people of different walks of life or cultures.

Creating images or objects allows my student to think visually, to express their thoughts, and to learn by making changes to the space around them. This can be drawing a line across the paper, or curating their own collection of artworks, sketches, and inspirations. Art is a class about an activity; by physically doing, art-making is appealing to a wide spectrum of learners. As artists, students are synthesizing the imagery and experiences they have before them into an understandable visual sentence or story.

The scribble

Every child in their early stages of development makes scribbles. I am talking about those chaotic and fast marks made on a drawing surface; whether they be circular or linear, the scribble is an important stage of development in children and has been the study of many theories. The benefit to allowing this stage to prosper in children has shown to be positive. In the book *Analyzing Children's Art*, Kellogg states, "Adults who encourage copywork and who forbid spontaneous scribbling may harm the child's development in learning as well as in art. My observations of children suggest that the child who has frequent opportunity to draw without adult interference learns faster and increases his cognitive ability more than he would if he were denied opportunity."¹⁰ I believe that the proper development and exploitation of this new ability is greatly beneficial to the development of the child as a learner and individual.

To the parents of my students I explain to them that the scribble is an essential step to take. I would like to see scribbling phased out by the time students come to me in kindergarten but this is not always the case. Children should naturally be done with their scribbling stage towards their fourth birthday if given enough opportunity to experiment and create. When a parent is concerned with the amount of scribbling their child does at age five or six, I explain to them that it is my interpretation that each child has a pre-set amount of scribbling that must come out. Some students may scribble from age two to four, gradually upping their artistic ability as they become more aware of the world around them, while others might get over the scribble quite quickly. I phrase it in hours for my students' parents; some students need 100 hours, while some need 500. To help the phase along I suggest providing their child with different art materials and drawing surfaces.

The scribbling stage begins as an amazing discovery for the child. The child discovers that they have the

ability to make a mark, or to change their world. This amazement can be argued to burn eternally in artists for a whole career as they pursue their craft. Using their newfound techniques, the child may explore different scribbling directions, amounts, and surfaces. Sometimes this exploration leads children to draw on other objects like books, the walls, and themselves, in their testing of their new ability. The enlightened scribbler now has an idea of the effect they have on their environment and the ability to change it.

Collecting

Children of all ages collect and save a variety of, what may seem to the outside eye, random and assorted stuff. From trading cards to rocks, children are naturally born collectors. Why do we collect things? We are all guilty of acquiring items that for one reason or another mean something to us. From a psychological point of view collecting has been described as "...[a] quest, in some cases a life-long pursuit that is never complete. Additional collector motivations include psychological security, filling a void in a sense of self. Or it could be to claim a means to distinction, much as uniforms make the 'man. 'Collections could be a means to immortality or fame..."¹¹ There are a number of reasons we all begin collecting. I consider my collections of random findings to be a great part of myself. As an artist, I often visit my collection when I need to focus or adjust my thought. Being around my personal narrative of items creates a great sense of comfort and familiarity. I have a growing collection of artwork, objects, and visual memories from places I visit or people I know. This personal curation is loaded with my individual aesthetic and creative interest. This desire to collect things of personal interest can be seen in the story of Chris Sanderson.

Born Christian Carmack Sanderson in 1881, Sanderson was a lifelong collector and curator. Sanderson grew up in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, and spent most of his life in the area. Sanderson was interested in history and devoted a great amount of time and energy in making history live.¹² Sanderson started collecting objects that interested him at an early age. Collecting for 75 years, each of his objects was accompanied by personal annotations of their history or his relationship with them. Being an educator himself he naturally invited visitors into his home to experience and learn from the assemblage. Sanderson's home in Chester county, Pennsylvania has been turned into a museum where patrons can come to experience his collection of art and artifacts. Almost every item in the museum is accompanied by Sanderson's personal annotation of its significance or history.

Curating

A curator is a collector who organizes their collection into order and groups. The job of a museum curator is to assemble a collection of works or artifacts relevant to each other, an agenda or idea. Curating on a personal scale is intrinsically motivated and gives joy to the organizer. "For some, the satisfaction comes from experimenting with arranging, re-arranging, and classifying parts of a-big-world-out-there, which can serve as a means of control to elicit a comfort zone in one's life, e.g., calming fears, erasing insecurity. The motives are not mutually exclusive, as certainly many motives can combine to create a collector - one does not eat just because of hunger."¹³ The previous is an excerpt from a psychological analysis of the practice of collecting. The difference between curating and collecting is the thought that goes into the selection. Anyone can assemble a pile of items, but crafting a meaning and a story to these artifacts of life calls for higher level thinking. Curating and presenting artwork is recognized by the national art standards and core standard: *Anchor Standard #4. Analyze, interpret, and select artistic work for presentation. Anchor Standard #6. Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.*¹⁴

Children as collectors

I want to look at children as collectors. We all collect things, even if we do not mean to. I personally have a terrible habit of saving any usable material, hence... art teacher. My classroom is loaded with things I've found that I think might be good for something, even if I don't know what that something is yet. I have a shelf in my basement full of stuff, just random stuff that I have collected because upon seeing the object I felt compelled to keep it. Sometimes I race downstairs to reclaim an object in my catalog and bring to fruition the reason for this collecting, and other times I walk by the shelf and toss a few objects. It's not hoarding by any means, believe me I am all about the cleanse. My students also exhibit similar behavior, as I'm sure most humans do. I remember as a child collecting objects I would find as we hiked through the forest at my family's cabin. These objects ranged from bird feathers, strange seeds, animal bones, interesting rocks, and other random things; a habit that reigns true to this day.

This psychological desire of children to collect things defines the activity as inherently personal, but it can also be a social act. In a study of the social aspect of collecting from 1932, the author states "...there is further evidence that collection activity is not something isolated from all contacts with other children but in many cases may be a social or cooperative venture. It even may be the result of group pressure..."¹⁵ The idea of socially collecting can be considered natural among children. I remember as a child, before I truly nailed down my interest, looking for something to collect. I was intrinsically driven to acquire objects and form a personal reliquary. In today's society both social and individual collecting can be seen in the practice of buying or finding souvenirs when traveling. It is common practice to distribute gifts after returning from a trip.

Durost's study goes on to explore the role of authority figures in children's collecting. Asking several teachers to fill out a questionnaire and interviewing children about the influence of their parents on collection, he published a list of "Collections Teachers Report Having Instigated".¹⁶ Originally published in 1932, the availability of such an old study on the activity of collecting goes to show the inherent and timeless drive that is exhibited in children. Even more so, I find it interesting the number of commonalities of collected objects between an eighty-five-year-old study and that of which I witness in myself in my students (rocks, stamps/stickers, marbles, etc.). Whether the motivation for the collection is social or individual, to satisfy a desire or to own a physical representation of a memory, collecting can be looked at as a curation of a narrative identity.

Identity in collecting

In the summer of 2015 I participated in a workshop at The Delaware Center of Contemporary Art, now named The Delaware Contemporary. Led by Italian artist Patrizio Travagli the workshop was on gilding, the practice of covering an object or surface with gold leaf. I learned the very basics of gilding. *The Golden Touch* was displayed installation style, taking over an entire space. The walls were adorned with Travagli's personal gilded works, framing a table of gilded object on a central table. The objects on the table were gilded by participants in the workshop. When an object is gilded it take on new meaning, adding value and reflectiveness. It is these qualities that the artist mentions in his statement which can be found below the artwork.

students that big ideas cannot be touched or put in your pocket and exist only in your brain. Some big ideas that we regularly discuss and create about are identity, transformation, family, nightmares and dreams (figurative/literal), power, beauty, nature, time, and more. These ideas are usually the focus for a month or two, and after we are done they move to a big idea bank. The big idea bank allows students to revisit any past big idea when they are so inclined. There is no due date or expiration for an artwork inspired by a certain big idea, and very commonly, artworks span across a few.

Centers

New materials are introduced in a center, a home base or spot where those materials will live for the remainder of the school year. These centers can be tables, drawers, baskets, or even a binder of information. Using this organizational technique allows me to run my classroom the only way I see fit: as learner-directed. New ideas are introduced to students through a variety of ways, such as, presentation, challenge days, light readings, and art criticism talks.

The use of centers allows students free access to all material in the classroom. I release materials in stages throughout the year as students are ready to receive them. I begin the school with the entire room being the drawing center. At every table I stock a variety of drawing materials: markers, colored pencils, crayons. Standard pencils are readily available at another location, next to sketch paper and other permanent materials. As the year progresses and student understanding and skills develop, more advanced material are released in this order: painting (cakes then liquid), collage, sculpture, printmaking, clay, weaving. Alongside materials-based centers I also open content based centers. Still life is a center that resides in a container; it is set up and broken down as the artist/student needs. Continuing through their mastering of the art room, students will have access to an upload center where they photograph their own artwork and submit it for publishing on the class website, as well as more information based centers where they can go to brainstorm and analyze information to craft new ideas. These information style centers often include technology and a hall pass to leave the room and venture to the library across the hall.

Choice-based art education

The choice-based, or learner-directed, art room is one where students oversee the designing of their own lesson. In my art class I will never tell a class what we are making; that's just not right and it for certain isn't artistic. Instead I teach my students about techniques, process, artists, history, cultures, and materials. Once loaded with their new information for the day, I set my class free to use the lesson or techniques anyway they want. I encourage experimentation and celebrate the failures equally to the successes as opportunities to learn. Everything is relevant to my young artists, and will be used in the creative process.

I decided to "teach" in this manner after studying the level, or lack of, creativity in my students. As the teacher in the learner directed classroom I look at myself as a facilitator. I am there to prep students and materials for self-directed discovery and art-making. When put in charge of a project students are not just deciding what color to paint their artwork, but rather working on a deeper level of how they want to communicate. Students in the choice based art room are thinking critically about what they want to create and how they will accomplish that. I challenge my students to think creatively about materials and techniques.

The learner directed classroom is a place where students think critically about choices, strengthen their visualization skills, and develop collaboration techniques. Every student in my classroom must present me with their idea before a project can begin. Like a mini sales pitch, students must express how this project will be completed, what the significance is to them, and what the viewer will experience.

Restorative practices

“I was benevolently good, it was misery that made fiendish” -The Creature

The above quotation is from Shelley's classic novel *Frankenstein*. It is spoken by the creature who is known commonly today as Frankenstein, but who in fact remains nameless throughout the book. He is talking about a point in his life when he could no longer bear the misery of being alone and misunderstood. At this point in the story the creature commits some of the most violent acts in the novel. This occurrence when an individual turns to violence due to their identity being challenged or disregarded is not only native to 19th century literary monsters, but also to my students.

At the beginning of last school year, Keene began a new course of disciplinary action. Our first action is now to use restorative practices, instead of the outdated scolding/punishment model of discipline. The main idea of restorative practice in school is to repair the relationships harmed during a time of wrong. When an incident occurs that disrupts the classroom relationship I focus my teaching on repairing the relationship(s) between the offending/offended parties. Assuming the role of a facilitator, I bring together all students or classes involved in an incident to voice, in a safe place, how we all felt before, during, and after the incident.

The book *Better Than Carrots or Sticks: Restorative Practices for Positive Classroom Management* lays out the framework for facilitating “circles”.¹⁸ In our circles we take equal time to speak, listen, and understand how all the involved parties feel. The focus of these circles is not to decide a punishment for the offender but to bring the victim and the offender together to come to equal terms of understanding; to move forward.

To hold an effective and meaningful circle, my student's identities need to be active. I need my student to know that I hear them, that the community hears them. In seminar, we discussed the need to feel validated, the need for our voice to be heard so we can continue existing. We looked at this need to be heard through the eyes of Frankenstein's creature. In Shelley's novel, the creature perpetually longs to be heard. The creature is constantly judged by his looks, described as so grotesque one cannot bear to look at him. Only being able to communicate with a blind man, after years of solitude, the creature has his first chance to have a voice. Never feeling whole, physically being made of parts different human bodies, he is seeking validation. Being part human he exhibits the same desires. “it's defining of humans that we need to be address and be seen”.¹⁹

Upon finally being heard, but not seen, the creature is ever so close to finally having his internal identity of an intellectual who is able to read, write, desire, and reflect; overpower his external identity of a horrid non-human creature. The blind man in the novel is part of a family that the creature has watched for a great time. Through the family, unbeknownst to them, he has learned to speak, read, and write. Observing the family all day, and secretly refilling their firewood stock at night, the creature waited for the sighted members of the cottage to leave to speak with the blind man. Hiding being the man's blindness the creature tells the story of a lost soul in the world to the blind man. Talking about himself, the creature is seeking the blind man's comfort and love. Eventually the blind man's family returned to the cottage, and upon first sight, the blind man's son beats the creature out of the home. Infuriated and depressed, the creature reflects on his decision to contact the family, putting himself down. Eventually he talks himself out of his recent depression and in a fit of rage lights fire to the family's cottage. The actions and reaction of the creature raises the question, is he human?

I have witnessed the creatures turn to violence in my students. In seminar, we discussed how when our core beliefs are challenged and we can no longer commit to words, we turn to violence. Having our identity challenged causes great turmoil in our being. We as humans need to tell our story. When a child feels as if their belief/identity is being threatened and they cannot bring themselves to words, they thusly react in the instinctual manner of physical action. The goal of using restorative practices in my classroom is to create an environment where there is no need for physical action because every student feels they have sufficient time to explain their story.

Word Clouds

A word cloud is a visual representation of text. A generator can be found online through a quick internet search. I use these images to actually see, not read, an overview of a text. To create a word cloud, I input a document, list, or other text into the generator. The generator will then analyze the text. Based on the number of times a word is used, it will appear larger and more central. The less a word is repeated the smaller it is.

Activities

Group word cloud on identity

To start the discussion of identity I will hold a group brainstorm. First students will participate in small groups by thinking about their identities. Each table will have drawing/writing material and scrap paper. Then students will talk with their groups to draft a list of descriptive words and phrases. After a few minutes of this initial small group session we will discuss the topic of identity as a class. A student from each table will read the group's answers and I will record them in a word document projected on the screen. I will prompt students with questions to deepen their responses. Who are you? what is your job here? What do you want to be? Where did you come from? As a class we will publish our brainstorm session answers into a word cloud. Below is a word cloud of this unit. Word clouds will be created in all my class where we discuss our identity, printed, and display in the classroom for inspiration and reflection.

Identity focused art project

After learning about identity, art, and curating, students will have to opportunity to reflect on their new knowledge visually. Using the art centers, students will create a work of art to express their identity. To start each student must sketch their idea for their project. After their visual rough draft is complete each student will conference with me individually about their idea. Together we will discuss their project, what materials they will use, and how long they think it will take. After a project has been approved students are free to use the classroom and materials to complete their artwork.

Once completed the student will draft an artist statement, and submit it for approval. After the artwork and artist statement are approved and recorded the student may choose where to display their artwork.

Resources

Artist, Artworks, and Artifacts

The following artworks and museum resources can be used to understand and discuss how artists' express identity visually

The Golden Touch by Patrizio Travalgi (2015), installation.²¹ This installation is a collection of objects brought to the artist by participants of his workshop. I was a participant of the workshop. We were asked to bring a small object that we felt a connection with, a representation of ourselves. The object I brought was a jaw bone of a white-tailed deer. The bone was part of my personal collection of natural things that I find in my travels and life. *The Golden Touch* is a representation of all the participants' identity. The gold leafing adds value and reflectiveness, changing each object by increasing its worth and by causing the viewer to see themselves in each object.

The Jungle by Wilfredo Lam (1943), gouache on paper.²² This work can be interpreted as a display of the multiple identities a single person may exhibit. The figures are emerging from a dark and busy background.

MoMA Learning,²³ an educational section of the Museum of Modern Art's website that is devoted to identity in art can be found at www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/themes/investigating-identity. The page is collection of artists and artworks focused on the different aspects of identity and the way it is expressed.

"Red" the illustration and character from the book *Red, A Crayon's Story*.²⁴ In the book the character is introduced to us at Red. A crayon who is actually blue but wrapped in a red label. Throughout the book the character is challenged with what others expect of him versus what he truly is.

The Sanderson Museum²⁵ in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, is a personal collection of items. Almost all of the items displayed have some sort of explanation written by the curator himself, Chris Sanderson. The museum is a representation of how objects can be an expression of identity.

Self-Portrait at 5,224,667, Jonathan Borofsky (1993), ink on paper.²⁶ At one point in his career Borofsky decided to start counting from one to infinity on paper.²⁷ This work is the artist representation of himself at the number 5,224,667. The work is not a traditional self-portrait, but rather a scribble of lined filled in with

pattern, drawing, and shading. I interpret this work as how the artist felt after counting to such a high number. Use this piece to discuss the more abstract ways of thinking about identity with students.

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Appendix A

The National Core Art Standards are used for this unit.

*Anchor Standard 4: Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.*²⁸

Students will meet this standard as we look at and discuss what a curator does. Looking at art exhibits and The Sanderson museum will illustrate the role of a curator for students. In the use of the community museum center students will compare the value of objects/artworks, categorized objects/artworks based on a theme for their display (identity).

*Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.*²⁹To meet this standard, students will brainstorm and practice different ideas for their display in the community museum center. If students are not assembling an entire exhibit, but rather displaying a single artwork they will have the task of deciding where to display it at why.

Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work. After learning about Chris Sanderson and his collection, students will analyze their own possessions/collections to assemble a curation of objects that tells the story of their identity. Students may focus on one part of their identity or their entire self. This will be assessed communally through the peer review process in the community museum.

Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. My students will be meeting this standard when they reflect upon their own art work and that of their peers. In the community museum review students will be challenged to interpret the meaning of their peer's exhibit. When reflecting on their own artwork students will determine how successful the message of the artwork is communicated.

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. In order to communicate their identity, students will need to reflect upon themselves, their experiences, and their knowledge. When sketching for an identity focused choice-art project, student will be looking into themselves for inspiration, instead of the world around them.

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