



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2022 Volume III: The Social Struggles of Contemporary Black Art

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## **Struggle, Defiance, and Triumph: Black Photographers and Their Magic**

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### **Introduction**

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High school students across the country struggle with the concept of failure as part of the path to success. I live and work in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I've lived here for 8 years, and worked in the heart of the city for 6 of those years. As a New York City native, I've also taught in a large urban school system that is both very similar and different from the Philadelphia school system. The struggles of the students are similar, especially at the middle and high school age. Students question themselves, their identities, and their belonging. They test their limits, strengths, and boundaries. High schoolers are eager to show their successes and hide their failures. Part of my goal with this unit is to show my students that they don't need to conceal their failures, and in fact mistakes are something they should hold on to and celebrate. Instead, successful people use those failures to inform future decisions. I tell my students that failing is a part of the process and you can't be truly great without failing sometimes.

### **Rationale**

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The world of art is ever-changing with new art, artists, and exhibitions popping up every month. I've only taught art in high school for one year, and already I'm intrigued by what does and doesn't catch student attention in the studio in terms of looking at art. The National Core Art Standards give a fairly wide berth to accommodate all styles and media in the arts, including production, reflection, and analysis of art. My students are primarily Black, and not only do we not look at enough art depicting Black subjects, but we don't look at enough Black art that shows joy and triumph. My students often have little to no prior exposure to art, most of them have never been to a museum (and post-COVID, I intend to change that given the proximity of so many walkable galleries!) One of my primary goals with this unit and with my classes in general, is to expose my students to the art that's happening right now, the art that's being made in expression of, and as a reaction to the world as it is in the moment.

## Unit Content - An Overview

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The art that I'll be focusing on for Struggle, Defiance, and Triumph: Black Photographers and Their Magic is contemporary photography of Black photographers. I would teach this as a hybrid art history and creation course, 45 minutes of the class period exploring and analyzing the chosen photograph(s) by Black artists showing struggles, defiance, or triumph (or a combination of the above), and 45 minutes of the block in creating work inspired by or directly related to the art looked at during class. This would be a photography unit, encouraging students to use their phones as tools and not adding any filters or editing to their raw photos. The unit would cover four weeks, covering eight 90-minute class periods. The initial plan would be to address homophobia and transphobia, celebration of queer lives, police and/or domestic violence, inspiring change to global issues, and triumph over oppression, but I also want to leave it open to the experiences of my students.

I plan to start this unit in February during Black Lives Matter at School week and then continue through completion. February is the perfect time for this unit, as it's after we've already studied drawing, painting, sculpture, and textile craft, which leaves the students ready for a more digital approach with their phones and photography. That being said, this unit might also do well in December, when student energy is waning and families are beginning to ramp up for their winter celebrations.

The five artists, four photographers and one curator, I want to focus on for this unit are Hank Willis Thomas, Nicole Fleetwood, Zanele Muholi, Fabrice Monteiro, and Charles "Teenie" Harris. Thomas is a New York based artist<sup>1</sup>, son of Deborah Willis who is also a famous artist in her own right. Willis is a conceptual artist, and his work often deals with gender, race, and identity. Nicole Fleetwood is best known, not for her own photography, but for curating art of others. Her most famous curation is a work called "Marking Time," which documents the lives and visions of incarcerated people<sup>2</sup>. Zanele Muholi is a Johannesburg, South Africa based photographer. They do both self-portraiture, as well as photography to document and assert the presences of the LGBTI population in South Africa. Their<sup>3</sup> work shows queer people experiencing moments of joy, celebrating their identities, and being true to themselves. Fabrice Monteiro is a West African artist whose work focuses on issues of pollution and speaking to local populations on issues that face them<sup>4</sup>. His work combines African folklore with telling his own stories of warning to local peoples. Charles "Teenie" Harris was a Pittsburgh-born photographer who started photographing in the 1930s, and really encapsulated both Black joy and struggle in his work<sup>5</sup>. He photographed everyday occurrences and celebrations alike, such as children reading comic books, women graduating from university, and men in military uniform. His work captured memories of families, teams, folks at work, people at play, and people of all genders fighting for equal rights<sup>6</sup>.

We will study not only the photographs of others, but learn to take them ourselves. My students will learn how to use cameras, and not just the ones on their phones even though phone cameras will likely be the easiest way to do most of our work when students are not in class. We'll learn all about lenses and exposure and zooms, aperture, different photo modes, and lighting. We will have a full-on photography unit studying different modes of photography, including how to optimize cell phone photographs. We will explore perspective, which is one of my favorite things to use in photography to make it feel more magical, as well as composition and juxtaposition. Perspective in photography is where you place the subject(s) in relation to where you're taking the photo from. Taking a photo from above, or from a low angle is perspective. Putting an object further back to make it seem smaller and an object closer to make it seem bigger is perspective (like photos of people holding up the Leaning Tower of Pisa: the tower is further in the background to look smaller

as if the person in the foreground could actually hold it up.) Juxtaposition is what things are related to one another, what's in the shot versus what isn't. Having more than one subject/object in a photograph invites the viewer to make comparisons between those objects, whereas only one subject grabs the focus of the beholder. I want my students to understand that photography isn't just what you see, and that it can be played with in subtle ways with things like perspective and juxtaposition to make some things seem larger, smaller, and more or less important and visible.

Photographs are all about documentation, and it's up to the photographer to make that magic happen. The photographer and their camera have the control over what you get to see. The photographer controls what makes the shot and what doesn't. They determine the angles, lighting, and planes. The photographer holds a certain amount of power to control what is and isn't seen. I want to impart that to my students and make sure they're using their power to empower others, not just those who are usually in the spotlight. My students will learn to make magic, to make the unseen seen and the ignored heard, with just a camera and an open mind.

### **The Art - The Photographers**

The "official" history of Black photographers isn't as long as it ought to be. Author and curator Deborah Willis (mother of Hank Willis Thomas) wrote many books on the topic, one of which is titled *Reflections in Black: A History of Black photographers 1840 to the present*<sup>7</sup>. She talks about the art of James VanDerZee, Gordon Parks, and Carrie Mae Weems in addition to many others. There were no Black Artists in the history books of photography, so in 2002 this book was a revelation in the world of Black photography. She also discusses in interviews how she was told in her photography classes that she was "taking the space of a good man."<sup>8</sup> How strange that the women, who are often the designated memory-keepers<sup>9</sup> were being forced out of the very subject meant to document and keep memories. Gatekeeping and patriarchy in the world of professional and historical art is not new, and perhaps would make a great theme for a project under this unit, but is an entire curriculum unit in itself and can be addressed in a future unit plan. There's a reason we know about more white and male artists in history than anyone else, and it's not because those men were better artists than anyone else.

Then, in 2014, the documentary *Through a Lens, Darkly* arrived on the scene. Directed by filmmaker Thomas Allen Harris, the filmmaker discusses his relationship with Deborah Willis as a mentor and co-fighter in the battle to have Black photography seen as, real life, real joy, and making sure that the American audience of viewers saw that Black photography could show family life just like the photographs of white families that are more readily and publicly available.<sup>10</sup> We come to the concept of the family photo album, or rather come back to it, as not just private documentation but as more public historical and cultural information.

### **Zanele Muholi**

I intend to begin my unit with the most intense of these artists, Zanele Muholi. They are a non-binary artist based in South Africa. They describe themselves as a "visual activist," trying to remove the sensationalizing and trauma of art that depicts the LGBTQI community. Muholi often talks<sup>11</sup> about their photographs as a testimony or a strategy for survival, rather than as art. South African did legalize same-sex marriage in 2006, but social stigma remains strong more than 15 years later. The initial Faces and Phases project was dedicated to their friend who died of HIV-complications<sup>12</sup>.

Muholi speaks frankly about their experiences with photography: "Photography saved my life. It was the only thing that ever made sense to me. I use art as my own means of articulation. And it heals me. When I really

needed therapy and I wasn't willing to sit with a shrink, I started to take photographs.<sup>13</sup>"

Muholi openly admits that they are scared, and yet continue to make the work because it's so necessary. Their home has been broken into, and their work stolen. "The risk we take is on a daily basis," says Muholi, "just living, and thinking what might happen, not only to you but also your fellow activists and friends who are living their lives.<sup>14</sup>" And yet, they persist in making art of the LGBTQI community in South Africa as well as art documenting their own life as a queer person in a country where the law demands equality but that doesn't mean that there's real acceptance among the people as a whole.

The Faces and Phases portrait series, which I intend to show some of to my students, focuses on LGBTQI folks in South Africa, specifically how they have been given equal rights but not any protection from violence. I intend to use the teacher guide created by the Brooklyn Museum in New York to introduce this series to my students<sup>15</sup> as well as video, titled *Zanele Muholi, Visual Activist*<sup>16</sup> directed by Muholi herself about their own visual activism. Muholi's work isn't subtle, it hits you over the head with the point that everyone deserves joy. This is the photography I want my students to see, works of art that expose injustice, art that exploits the media right back after they've exploited minority populations, and photography that shows taking pride and joy in one's true self. I also want my students to see a non-binary artist in a place of power and fame, that someone who doesn't identify with binary gender can "make it" in the world as a successful artist.

### **Hank Willis Thomas**

After Zanele Muholi, I intend to switch gears and move to Hank Willis Thomas. Willis Thomas is an Black American artist with roots in the photographic community, his mother Deborah Willis is a famous pioneer in the field of Black photography and has written many books on the topic. Willis has a large body of work, including sculpture, immersive art and installation art, but I intend to focus on his photography for this unit in particular. There are several themes of photos that I want to address; his advertisements with all words removed (aptly called Unbranded), his juxtaposition of Black people and societal expectations, and his altered photos of quite literally branded black men.

Willis Thomas uses his "Unbranded" series to show the commodification and commercialization of ethnicity, gender and race as used to sell products<sup>17</sup>. Even this exhibit is broken into two distinct sections, one addressing white women and one giving attention to black men and women in commercial advertising. These photographs are very telling about advertising and the intended target of each advertisement and photograph. Having students guess what the advertised product is for a selection of photos from this exhibition seems like a great way to facilitate their engagement with the art. Thomas also addressed the stereotype of black men and sports, in his works like Basketball and Chain (2003,) Cotton Bowl (2011,) and Football and Chain (2011,) where he portrays big Black men as being tied to their sport and the histories therein. He goes even further in his "Branded" exhibit, where there are men with literal brands of the Nike "swoosh" on their bodies. Discussion here on commodification of black bodies and why black bodies are used in some contexts and not others would go well here with students.

This work does not embody joy or triumph in the traditional sense, but portrays more struggle and the battle to be seen as more than just a commodity to sell products or game tickets. These particular images of Thomas' show how far the Black body, and the spirit within it, has come within the art world, and how far it still has to go. Thomas' work is more conceptual and requires a little more inference than Muholi's photographs, and the comparison between the two could be a lively topic of conversation for students.

The images I plan to use with my classes are Cotton Bowl, Basketball and Chain, and Football and Chain. In Cotton Bowl, Thomas juxtaposes the football field and the cotton field, with two black men in the same crouched position, facing one another. The image explores the commodification of black men, in this particular case for sports and as slaves picking cotton. Thomas specifies the words “exploitation” and “spectacle” when he discusses this piece in interviews<sup>18</sup>. Both Basketball and Chain (2003) and Football and Chain (2011) specifically don’t show the faces of the athlete who’s been “chained” to their sport as a means of spectacle. You can see the leg of the basketball player, and the arm of the football player, so you can see enough to know that they are Black, but not much else about them as people. He also has a similar photograph with a soccer (futball) player, but I find that my students will relate more to football and basketball than soccer.

### **Nicole Fleetwood**

I also want to address Nicole Fleetwood’s project of “Marking Time: Art in an age of incarceration.” Fleetwood had an incarcerated cousin, and noticed that the photo studio in the prison was a lifeline to many of the incarcerated people and the photos gave them life and purpose<sup>19</sup>. Some of the photos taken in prison studios are not obviously in prison, and one needs to look more closely for Department of Corrections markings on the inmate’s clothing. Some of them bear no markings at all, and others are fairly obvious with DOC splashed across the shirt of the incarcerated person. There are intricate backdrops, mostly painted by incarcerated people, to make the space look less penal and more welcoming to families. These can be the most colorful spaces the incarcerated get to see inside the prison. Not only do I want to focus on her personal photos of her and her cousin in prison (in a fancy prison “studio” where photos were sold for \$2-\$3 dollars each,) but on the work of Keith Calhoun and Chandra McCormick, who had work in the Marking Time exhibit.

### **Keith Calhoun and Chandra McCormick**

Calhoun and McCormick are both from Louisiana, from the 9th ward of New Orleans. Among other photographic projects, the two have photographed people who are incarcerated at their local prison Angola. The majority of the prisoners there are Black men, and they are primarily photographed doing work for the prison. The project is called “Slavery: The Prison Industrial Complex,” which is fitting as these men are basically performing slave labor for the prison at minimal wages for their work<sup>20</sup>.

The work embodies struggle, people fighting for themselves and their identities as human beings within the penal system that doesn’t often treat them as such<sup>21</sup>. Some of these photos call back to images of slaves working on plantations with white masters over them, on their literal high horses (*Who's that man on that horse, I don't know his name but they call him boss*, 1980), using their freedom as a weapon to enforce labor. These people are fighting and winning struggles big and small on a daily basis, and the world has no idea because most of America doesn’t care about the prison system and the people incarcerated within it.

What’s particularly intriguing about Calhoun and McCormick’s work is the photographs they take of inmates leaving Angola prison, whether temporarily or permanently. They photograph inmates on release for family funerals, and inmates as they are released to once again become human beings that are nothing like the humans they were when they entered<sup>22</sup>. The photographs invite the viewer to have conversations about the penal system of America, about mass incarceration, and labor practices among those who cannot fight for better conditions. When slavery was abolished in the United States, that right did not and does not apply to incarcerated persons.

## **Fabrice Monteiro**

The fourth artist I want to address with this unit was not even on my radar until Professor Roderick Ferguson brought him up in a lecture to the entire Yale National Initiative community, and I was instantly drawn in. Fabrice Monteiro is an artist originally from Belgium, raised in Benin, and his art intertwines ideas of animism and prophecy into awareness of the dangerous side effects of over-consumption. Basically, he shows “pollution monsters” that come alive to speak prophecy<sup>23</sup> about the harms that the global community is doing to the lands and waters of the world. He calls these images “djinn,” and holds that they were sent by the Mother Earth to deliver messages and warnings about the dangers of consumption culture<sup>24</sup>. Monteiro’s art speaks volumes to the effects that photography can have on the world, as well as the raw effect it can have on the viewer.

I want my students to be able to see the art of Monteiro both as being uncomfortable with the very things that give them comfort in their lives, and to bring them to the realization that art can make real change. A slaughterhouse in Africa actually stopped their ocean-dumping after the exhibition of this series.

## **Charles “Teenie” Harris**

Charles “Teenie” Harris got his beginnings as a photographer for the *The Pittsburgh Courier*, and continued as their staff photographer for over 40 years. He took many portraits in his hometown, and didn’t have much need to go beyond to find great photographs<sup>25</sup>. Harris was often called “One Shot,” as he rarely had his subjects retake a photo<sup>26</sup>. In the 1930s, 1940s, and the early 1950s, Harris had a photography studio that he worked from, in addition to freelancing for the *Courier*. In the 1940s and 1950s, he also photographed many famous actors and musicians who came through Philadelphia. Those artists include, but are not limited to: Harry Belafonte, Lena Horne, Fredi Washington, Leroy Brown, and Duke Ellington<sup>27</sup>. Deborah Willis, famous author, NYC photography professor, and mother of Hank Willis Thomas, credits Harris as the “photographer who helped preserve African-American culture from family life to social life.<sup>28</sup>” Harris’ work was not well known outside of Pittsburgh until after his passing in 1998.

The photographs from Teenie Harris are so numerous, but I chose a few as a starting point. I want students to look at *Two Young Women Eating Caramel Apples 1940-1945*, *Protestors with UNPC signs outside United Mine Safety Appliance, Braddock Avenue, October 1963*, and *Duke Ellington at a piano with dancer Honey Coles and Billy Strayhorn looking on, in the Stanley Theatre, 1942-1943*<sup>29</sup>. These three photographs are very different from one another, but all come back to the idea that everyday joy, struggle, and triumph are common occurrences in all communities. The first photograph of the women eating caramel apples shows unbridled joy at the small things, everyday moments that make people smile, moments that make people relatable. *Protestors with UNPC signs* show that not every part of life is rosy and bright, sometimes you have to stand up for what you believe in and take to the streets to fight with your feet. Lastly, the photograph with Duke Ellington is a candid photo during downtime. The musicians and dancer are relaxed and comfortable, enjoying a few moments backstage. Harris’ subjects were so comfortable with him that they were able to get shots like these to preserve the moments of joy in music<sup>30</sup>.

## **The Art - Taking Photographs**

We don’t have cameras in my studio (yet), and as we try to acquire them we’re going to keep our focus on cell phone based photography. Cell phones in 2022, and even a few years earlier, have come a long way in their ability to take high quality and high resolution photographs. Even an amateur can take beautiful photographs



with a phone, using some simple techniques and tricks.

### **Focus**

Focus and theme are, in my opinion, the most important things in photography. Making a conscious choice of what you want to take a photo of is the first step, and then deciding what is in, or out, of focus is the next step. Deciding what to include, and specifically not to include, is key in using photography as expression and using photographs for a purpose beyond expression. Most phone cameras will auto-focus when you tap on the subject of the photo, which can be useful at times.

### **Rule of Thirds**

From there we move into the Rule of Thirds, which divides the photo plane into 9 equal parts using two horizontal and two vertical lines. By this rule, major focus points should be at the intersections of those lines. However, this is not a hard and fast rule, and once mastered can be played with and even intentionally defied and ignored.

### **Exposure and Light**

From there we move on to exposure, which is how much light is allowed into the photo lens. Exposure can be manually adjusted using basic camera phone apps, and phone cameras will often try to adjust the exposure for you based on what it perceives. It's easy enough to adjust exposure to create more or less light in a photo to get the mood and expression that's desired in any given photo. Students who are comfortable with the camera at this point can continue to explore aperture (the opening of the lens), ISO (which is the sensitivity measure of light for the camera) and shutter speed (how fast the shutter of the camera opens and closes).

### **Practice**

Once students have the basics down, the best thing they can do is practice. Take photos of people, places, people in places, one person, many people, people of varying closeness, lots of photos of a wide range of subjects and objects to practice all of these ideas. Allowing students to discover tips and tricks on their own and share them with their peers is a great idea for high schoolers, as they're often more receptive to ideas from their classmates than ideas from their teachers. They might figure out things like steadying the camera on a hard surface, using a tripod or other device to hold the phone, using the timer function, and even taking photos from other angles than straight on. If students haven't figured these out by halfway through the course, then they can be explicitly taught.

### **Using a Camera**

As we manage to slowly obtain cameras for our studio, thanks to grants and donations from kind strangers, we'll begin to look into camera features like aperture, how fast the shutter clicks, and optical zoom, when the camera lens itself zooms, as opposed to digital zoom which reduces image quality. We'll look at software to transfer photographs from the camera, and also from student phones, onto computers or even directly to printers if we can get such devices.

### **Curating the Final Pieces**

The last step of this unit will be having the students curate their own gallery of their photos. Students will learn to sort photos by theme, and look at other photo galleries for inspiration on how they might want to

arrange their gallery. Each class of students will create their own gallery space, meaning we will have between three and six galleries to show by the end of this unit.

## Teaching Strategies

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These teaching strategies not only create effective art lessons but allow connections between the students as well as between the teacher and students and the students and the material. Strategies allow students to interact with the materials, their classmates, and the world around them. These nine strategies were selected based on how well they lend themselves to interactions between students, teachers, and all the materials involved. The ten strategies I highlight in this unit are: anonymous questioning, check in and out, conferencing, cooperative learning, differentiation, First five-next five-last five, formative assessments, graphic organizers, inquiry-based learning, and sketchbooks.

### Anonymous Questioning

Anonymous questioning is a strategy that allows students to anonymously submit questions and concerns to be addressed in class. Equity in schools, especially for students who don't have the materials they need to succeed, can be a tough subject and students don't always want their peers to know about their personal concerns. Anonymous questioning not only lets students get their concerns across but has the potential to show students that they're not isolated in their concerns. Structured photography is new to most, if not all, of my students and the ability to be able to ask questions anonymously is a game-changer for confidence and questioning in the studio.

### Check In/Check Out

Check In/Check Out is a teaching strategy that allows teachers to figuratively take students' emotional temperatures when they arrive and when they leave the classroom. This can be done in a variety of ways, through entrance and exit tickets, warmups and wrap ups, or even verbal or eye contact as students enter and exit the classroom. Gauging where the students are both before and after class is important not only with this photography unit, but with high school students in general.

### Conferencing

Conferencing is exactly what it sounds like, both allowing students to conference with one another, and the teacher to conference with individual students or student groups. In person conferencing allows ideas to flow more openly than having written comments and allows the teacher and the students to better understand the concepts being discussed and assess the level of understanding. Conferencing is a great form of assessment that is low pressure for the student and allows the teacher to get a clear picture of what the students understand and what still needs to be ascertained. With this unit, conferencing is key as students will be creating their own images and photographs and will likely get easily frustrated without adequate individual and team guidance.

### Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning has students working together in pre-planned groups to investigate materials as a team.



This allows students to learn from one another and use each other's strengths to create the work that they're dreaming about and aren't sure about the technical creation process. Students will look at photographs and galleries together, explore and observe, and make design choices about their own work in conversation with classmates.

## **Differentiation**

Differentiation is one of the most important strategies used in the classroom, allowing all students to succeed to their maximum potential. Differentiation is designing lessons, work, and assessments for students to address their individual needs. Having multiple options for how students can organize themselves or complete work allows students to create work that can show what they know without being confined by restrictions that might impede their ability to get across the knowledge and information they've gained during the lessons. The assignments and assessments in this unit are open-ended, allowing students to take them in any number of directions and still be successful.

## **First Five, Next Five, Last Five**

First five, next five, last five is a strategy I developed for looking at art. Students get one minute to write down the first five things that come to mind when they first look at the art work. They then get another two minutes to write the next five things they see/notice. Then students share their answers, each student deciding whether or not they want to share which section their answer came up in. Finally, students will choose five words that they feel best encapsulate the art in their opinion. They can use the words they wrote, words other students said during share out, or words that they've come up with in the interim. There are no right or wrong answers, so this encourages students to let their minds take over and just go with gut feelings on what a piece of art says to their subconscious mind before really delving into the art.

## **Formative Assessment**

Formative assessment is using markers along the way to assess student learning, not just using the final product at the end of the unit. It often includes using student notes, student-teacher conferences, graphic organizers (see below,) and student observation to give student feedback (or grades in some cases) on the work they're doing and insight into how they might proceed. Final products are still important with formative assessment styles, but the process is deemed the more worthy and weightier focus for the unit.

## **Graphic Organizers**

Graphic Organizers are often at the heart of my instruction, giving students a concrete place to pull their thoughts and ideas together before beginning an assignment. Graphic organizers go hand in hand with sketchbooks (see below.) For students who have trouble focusing their ideas, graphic organizers are one of the best things they can do to get everything down on paper before embarking on a large project. New topics can be challenging for anyone, and having a structured way to take notes and keep all the new information sorted out is important to understanding and memory. Even for students who are skilled at organization, graphic organizers allow all group members, and the teacher, to see what students are thinking and where their assignments are headed so specific conversations can be had to address any potential concerns before any work is completed on the project. This unit will have teacher-generated graphic organizers for students to use, as well as options for students to create their own.

## **Inquiry-Based Learning**

Inquiry-based learning is when students research, conference, and create to solve problems that they have posed. This strategy brings high-level thinking and real-world problem solving into the studio, and allows students to be more creative than simply recreating art technique. Not to say that making expressive art doesn't have its place, which of course it's a huge deal and a major focus in my studio, but there is also a place in the studio for inquisitive and curious students who want more critical thinking skills than mixing colors and refining skills they already have. This leaves space for the activist students, the ones who want to make a statement with their art. Inquiry based learning allows these students to pose their own issue they want to represent in their photos, and experiment with different techniques until they can get their point across in the desired manner.

## **Sketchbooks**

Sketchbooks are going to be one of the most heavily used items in the studio during this unit, as a key strategy to taking notes and keeping track of thoughts and feelings on a daily basis. Students would be creating sketches of objects in the classroom at the beginning of each class, as well as making sketches of their work at each step of the process. This allows students to look back and reflect on their work as the unit progresses, as well as in the future. Students will draw thumbnail sketches of photographs they've taken in their sketchbook for reference, and will be able to tape actual printed photographs into their sketchbooks as materials allow.

## **Classroom Activities**

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### **Lesson: One - Subject and Theme**

Time: 90 Minutes

Lesson Objective:

Students will be able to define subject and theme as applied to photography, in order to begin designing their own photography project.

National Core Art Standards:

#VA:Cn10.1 Anchor Standard: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

#VA:Re8.1 Anchor Standard: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Related Artwork: Zanele Muholi's Faces and Phases project

Lesson Activities:

Analyzing the Art: Students will view images from Zanele Muholi's Faces and Phases project, and use the 5-5-5 strategy to keep track of what they notice while looking at the photographs.

The teacher will show Muholi's video on their project, and then continue the conversation about subject and theme in photographs.

**Making Art:** Students will use their sketchbooks to draw thumbnails of some photography ideas. Students will be encouraged to pick a subject (person, place, or thing) that has significance to them and/or a subject they want to use to make a statement. Students will practice taking photographs of their classmates using their phones, focusing on capturing facial expressions. (Teacher will clearly review all policies on social media and posting photos taken in class online.) Students will upload all photos taken to the classroom on Google Drive.

## **Lesson: Two - Balance and Juxtaposition**

Time: 90 Minutes

Lesson Objective:

Students will be able to define balance and juxtaposition as it applies to photography, in order to continue work on their independent photography assignment.

National Core Art Standards:

#VA:Cn10.1 Anchor Standard: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

#VA:Re8.1 Anchor Standard: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Related Artwork: Hank Willis Thomas' Cotton Bowl

Lesson Procedure:

**Analyzing the Art:** Students will analyze Thomas' Cotton Bowl using the 5-5-5 strategy, and then discuss as a class what they think it means. Once students have gotten their ideas down on paper, the teacher will discuss Thomas' original plan for the image and what it means. Teacher will lead a discussion on balancing photographs, with students slowly taking over and running the conversation.

**Making Art:** Students will look at their sketchbook thumbnails from the previous class and determine if they are balanced or unbalanced (which is not necessarily a bad thing,) and look at what they included and specifically didn't include. Students will create new thumbnail sketches, using the concepts of balance and juxtaposition (or purposefully ignoring them.) Students will take photographs in the classroom, specifically looking for balance and juxtaposition for at least one photo, and at least one photo that shows a lack of balance. Students will upload all photographs to Google Drive.

## **Lesson: Three - Composition and Perspective**

Time: 90 Minutes

Lesson Objective:

Students will be able to define composition and perspective as it applies to photography, in order to compose and think about the specific photographs in their projects.

National Core Art Standards:

#VA:Cn10.1 Anchor Standard: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

#VA:Re8.1 Anchor Standard: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Related Artwork: Nicole Fleetwood's Marking Time, Keith Calhoun and Shaundra McCormick's Angola Prison Series

Lesson Procedure:

Analyzing the Art: Students will look at a collection of photos from Marking Time and Angola, composed of photos that are both obviously prison photos and some that don't make it clear where they're taken. Students will write about photographs that are most important to them in their own lives, and compare them to the photos they're looking at on the screen.

Making Art: Students will look at the photos they've taken so far, as well as their classmates' photos, and analyze the composition and perspective of at least 2 of their own and 2 photographs of classmates. Then students will continue to refine their ideas on what they want their project to look like. The teacher will individually conference with each student to establish a plan and timeline for their project.

### **Lesson: Four - Inference and Hidden Meaning**

Time: 90 Minutes

Lesson Objective:

Students will be able to infer meaning from loaded photography, in order to interpret the photographs of others.

National Core Art Standards:

#VA:Re8.1 Anchor Standard: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

#VA:Cr3.1 Anchor Standard: Refine and complete artistic work.

Related Artwork: Hank Willis Thomas' Football and Chain, Basketball and Chain

Lesson Procedure:

Analyzing the Art: Students will compare the two images of Football and Chain, and Basketball and Chain. Then they will think-pair-share on what they think the photographs mean and what gives them those ideas. They'll use what they know already about the pieces of the images to piece together a meaning.

Making Art: Students will each present a photo they have taken (for the class or otherwise), and the class will try to determine the intention before the photographer explains the photo. Students will be released from the studio as needed to take photographs around the school (only entering offices and classrooms with prior approval.) Bathrooms and locker rooms are off-limits, and will be explicitly explained to students. Students must submit 5 new photographs taken in school that day to receive credit for the class period.

## **Lesson: Five - Candid vs. Posed**

Time: 90 Minutes

Lesson Objective:

Students will be able to analyze the difference between candid and posed photos, in order to have variety in their photographs.

National Core Art Standards:

#VA:Re8.1 Anchor Standard: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

#VA:Cr3.1 Anchor Standard: Refine and complete artistic work.

Related Artwork: Charles Harris' Two Young Women Eating Caramel Apples, Duke Ellington etc.

Lesson Procedure:

Analyzing the Art: Students will compare the two Harris images, noting the similarities and differences. Students will then discuss the difference between candid and posed photos, and suggest situations in which each might be appropriate.

Making Art: With prior approval from teachers, students will break into teams and photograph in other classrooms. At this point, students who feel comfortable can begin using digital cameras that are not their phones (pending availability.) Three candid and three posed photos will be required to complete this lesson, all submitted to Google Drive.

## **Lesson: Six - Making a Statement**

Time: 90 Minutes

Lesson Objective:

Students will be able to interpret statements made without words in artwork, in order to prepare to make their own statements using photography.

National Core Art Standards:

#VA:Re8.1 Anchor Standard: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

#VA:Cr3.1 Anchor Standard: Refine and complete artistic work.

Related Artwork: Fabrice Monteiro's Prophecy Series

Lesson Procedure:

Analyzing the Art: Students will choose one of the several photos being displayed, and apply the 5-5-5 strategy to it. Students will then get into groups based on the photo they chose and discuss. Each group will then choose a representative to talk about their chosen photo and explain their interpretation. Ideally, all the photos will be chosen by students. If this isn't the case, the teacher will summarize the photos not discussed

by the class.

**Making Art:** Students will analyze all the photos they've taken so far, and pick a few that make their point. Each student will take their chosen photos and ask at least three other classmates what statement the photos make. Students will conference with one another to determine what photos they should still take, and then conference with the teacher to make sure they're on track with their timeline.

### **Lesson: Seven - Bringing Artists Together in One Show**

Time: 90 Minutes

Lesson Objective:

Students will be able to identify the components of an art exhibition, in order to prepare to exhibit their own work.

National Core Art Standards:

#VA:Re8.1 Anchor Standard: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

#VA:Cr3.1 Anchor Standard: Refine and complete artistic work.

#VA:Pr.4.1 Anchor Standard: Select, analyze and interpret artistic work for presentation.

Related Artwork: POOL Exhibit - Various artists

Lesson Procedure:

**Analyzing the Art:** Students will work in small groups, pairs, or individually to explore the POOL exhibit online (<http://www.poolphl.com/>) and complete a reflection worksheet (either on paper or via Google Forms) that asks students which photographs or other media stuck with them most, which photographers they liked best, and common threads through the different areas of the exhibit.

**Making Art:** Students who have already completed their portion of the gallery will begin to print their photographs. Those students will get a lesson on how to use the different photo printers, while the other students complete their photo galleries. Students will have a minimum of 6 photographs and a maximum of 10 photographs for their gallery installation. Once work is printed, students will begin determining which installations work well juxtaposed together.

### **Lesson: Eight - Preparing Photographs for Exhibition**

Time: 90 Minutes

Lesson Objective:

Students will be able to identify and follow through with printing and preparing photos for exhibition, in order to set up a gallery to display their photos.

National Core Art Standards:



#VA:Cr3.1 Anchor Standard: Refine and complete artistic work.

#VA:Pr.4.1 Anchor Standard: Select, analyze and interpret artistic work for presentation.

Lesson Procedure:

Making Art: Students who have not yet printed their photos will do so. Once photos are printed, students will decide how they want to display them. They can choose to frame, mat, mount, or all of the above. Students will choose the color of the frame/mat/mounting board that compliments the theme and statement of their piece. Students will decide on the composition of their work, and complete their work. Students and teacher will install the artwork, as determined by the students, in a designated space in the school building along with a brief explanation of what the exhibit is.

## Appendix on Implementing District Standards

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Visual Arts/Connecting #VA:Cn10.1

Anchor Standard: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Enduring Understanding: Through art-making, people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge, and experiences.

Essential Question: How does engaging in creating art enrich people's lives? How does making art attune people to their surroundings? How do people contribute to awareness and understanding of their lives and the lives of their communities through art-making?

Visual Arts/Creating #VA:Cr3.1

Anchor Standard: Refine and complete artistic work.

Enduring Understanding: Artist and designers develop excellence through practice and constructive critique, reflecting on, revising, and refining work over time.

Essential Question: What role does persistence play in revising, refining, and developing work? How do artists grow and become accomplished in art forms? How does collaboratively reflecting on a work help us experience it more completely?

Visual Arts/Presenting #VA:Pr.4.1

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

Enduring Understanding: Artists and other presenters consider various techniques, methods, venues, and criteria when analyzing, selecting, and curating objects, artifacts, and artworks for preservation and presentation.

Essential Question: How are artworks cared for and by whom? What criteria, methods, and processes are used

to select work for preservation or presentation? Why do people value objects, artifacts, and artworks, and select them for presentation?

Visual Arts/Responding #VA:Re8.1

Anchor Standard: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Enduring Understanding: People gain insights into meanings of artworks by engaging in the process of art criticism.

Essential Question: What is the value of engaging in the process of art criticism? How can the viewer "read" a work of art as text? How does knowing and using visual art vocabularies help us understand and interpret works of art?

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