

Curriculum Packet

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For the exhibit- *We Make the Road by Walking*

Sama Alshaibi and Beth Krensky, on display at the Mizel Museum, October 11, 2007-
January 24, 2008.

This packet contains an introduction, a pre-visit lesson plan, questioning strategies for an exhibit tour, and post-visit suggestions for incorporating the themes explored through *We Make the Road by Walking* into classroom curriculum.

Introduction

The visual arts tell us stories. The way that artists tell us those stories happens in many different ways, just as the stories that we “see” vary depending on who we are, and what information that we have available to us.

Here are four examples of elements that could be combined to shape a story for you in an art gallery space-

- the title of the exhibit
- the materials that the artists uses to create the objects
- the themes present
- and gallery space itself

These are all clues or pieces to the visual story. In addition, you bring your own story to the space. The story that you leave with is a combination of what you already know and feel, and the new story you have just been told.

Class Discussion:

What is the difference between telling a story directly and telling one indirectly? How are visual stories told in indirect ways? A helpful way to think of this might be discussing the difference between how something can *suggest* a story instead of *tell* a story.

Why would an artist choose to suggest something, or communicate using metaphors and symbols instead of just saying something directly?

Think about how it feels different to you as a listener when someone tells you a story while you listen quietly vs. what it feels like to piece together a story with someone through an action or conversation. Consider stories that have multiple versions.

Pre-Visit Lesson Plan

For the exhibit- *We Make the Road by Walking*

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The title of this exhibit, *We Make the Road by Walking*, is borrowed from the book by Myles Horton and Paulo Freire. This book is a written conversation between two men who dedicated themselves to education and social justice, and believed that all people must be taught to actively participate in creating their realities and in sharing that experience.

This exhibit is a collaboration between Beth Krensky, a Jewish American artist and Sama Alshaibi, an Iraqi-Palestinian Muslim American artist. Krensky is a sculptor who uses themes of religion, immigration, family history and motherhood in her artwork. Alshaibi is a photographer who is interested in some of these same themes, but also what roles women have in a religious culture, living between two different types of cultures, and what happens when someone does not fit the expectations of their family legacy.

Class Discussion

What do you think is meant by the title of this exhibit?

Who is the “we?”

They made “the road by walking,” how else are roads made?

Why not by driving, or running, or stomping? What does it mean to walk? How fast does a road get made that way?

What are roads for?

What do roads symbolize?

Does their road actually exist?

Where do you think the road leads?

Can an imaginary road cross time? Space?

How can a road and a border be the same? How are they usually different?

What do you think it will feel like to “walk” the road that these two artists have created?

How do you maintain a road that has been made by walking?

Possible projects before visiting

- Have your students discuss instances from their personal lives of “divide,” a time of disagreement or misunderstanding that seemed very important to them. Ask them to think about how they could develop a symbol or visual narrative that represented the situation. If there was a reconciliation, ask them to also consider how they could represent that visually.
- Have your students discuss instances when they, or other people, have crossed a divide to create a connection in support of something they believed in, like peace, justice or reconciliation. Some examples of well-known people who have engaged in this process are: Nobel Laureates: Dr. Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandella, John Hume and David Trimble, Rigoberta Menchú Tum, to name just a few.
- Spend time discussing historical and contemporary cultural, racial, or religious divides that your students know something about. Ask them to think about ways that they see these divides. How are they personally connected? Do they have a belief about which side is right and which is wrong, or perhaps both sides being right and wrong? How did they come to this conclusion?
- Discuss ideas about barriers and borders, real and imaginary. How can they cross those barriers? What are ways that art and artists can be used to cross those divides?
- Discuss different kinds of artistic collaborations and how art objects can engage in “discussion” with each other and the audience.

Gallery Tour Questions

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How to use these teaching tools:

1. Conduct a visual inventory- work as a group to name what you see in each piece. What do you see? Can you identify the materials? What is in the photographs? Don't stop naming what you see until each element of the artwork has been located. Each ingredient of the piece has been carefully chosen by the artist to communicate part of the meaning.
2. Make some guesses about what the artwork might be about, based on what you see or feel while you look at the piece. There are no right or wrong answers here.
3. Then work as a group to answer the list of tour questions as you move through the gallery. Although each of the following sheets of questions can be seen as a separate storytelling layer for these artworks, combining all three will help you uncover as much information as possible while you are here viewing the exhibit.

Although the artists in this exhibit provide you with written information about their work in text panels and in the labels accompanying each piece, the art objects tell you stories in **indirect** ways. These tools provided to you are tour "questions", not tour "facts." They are not intended to tell you what the pieces are about, but instead to prompt you to think about how you can combine your own ideas about art making and communicating through art with the ideas of these two artists.

Storytelling through Materials

One of the ways that visual artists communicate is through their use of art materials, or the “stuff” the pieces are made out of. Look carefully at each piece- identify what the artist used to create it, and use these questions to figure out not only why they made these choices, but what they are saying through them

In photography, art materials can be seen in a different way. Some of the materials are obvious- paper, film, a camera. But a photographer also shows you evidence of other materials that they used, the materials that were available in the setting. These could be water, sand, plants, weather, people, and so on. So even though you are just seeing a picture of the materials, the artist still wants you to consider what those materials included in the picture can be communicating to you.

Beth Krensky-

Olive Wood

This olive wood was chosen by the artist for symbolic reasons. It is from olive trees from Bethlehem.

Where is Bethlehem? Why might a Jewish-American artist, exploring themes of Jewish migration and history use this material? What does wood symbolize? Think about the age of trees, family trees, using trees to identify specific landscapes.

Copper and Bronze

From the artist- “Copper has been used in religious ceremonies for millennia and is considered a medium between the spirit and physical worlds.” What does it mean for an artist to cast something in metal? Is it easy to do? Will the art piece last longer, does it become more precious? Are these traditional art materials?

Maps

How are maps used in this space? Are they presented in the way that you usually see maps? What do maps tell us about where we are going? Can they be used as a record of where we have been? How have these been altered? Why?

Hands and Feet

Look at the sculptures that use hands and feet as art materials or tools- stamps or forms to cast the art objects. How can hands be used as a symbol? Are handprints unique? How are feet or footprints used as a symbol?

Sama Alshaibi-

Photographs

Why might an artist choose to work as a photographer? How is a photograph different than a sculpture or a painting? How long do they last? Are they more real? Do they tell the truth? What kinds of stories are being told in these photographs- are they snapshots, formal posed pictures, documents of events, family portraits?

Location

Location or setting in a photograph can be considered one of the art materials. Which settings are being shown in these photos? What type of landscapes are these? Where in the world do you find these conditions, these plants and types of terrain? What is

the temperature of the location, the type of weather, what does it smell like, or sound like?

It was important to the artist to use “authentic” locations, to be in the actual places even though there are other places that she could have photographed that would look similar to us. Why do you think the real locations were important to her?

Figures

Some of these photographs include the figure of the artist. What does it mean to use your body as an art material? How might it be different if the artist had hired a model? Where is the figure looking in the photograph? What do you think the mood of the figure is? Do you use her facial expression to guess at the meaning of the photograph?

Storytelling with Themes

Beth Krensky and Sama Alshaibi are interested in similar themes in their artwork. This is partly due to the conditions they find themselves in, existing between differing cultures and trying to bridge those cultures. Use this discussion of themes in the work to unlock the information presented to you here.

Ritual-

What is a ritual? How can making art be a ritual? Where does ritual happen in your life or home? What is accomplished through ritual? How is creating your own ritual different than being taught a ritual? What objects in the space seem to involve a ritual or be about rituals?

Family History-

Both artists are interested in their family histories, and how these histories are always present in their lives. Look at the objects for clues for this theme. What is symbolic of ancestry- perhaps land/landscape, trees and branches? In what way might these objects be containers for memories of the artists' pasts?

Land-

Specific lands and landscapes are depicted here and important to the artists. What does the idea of "land" represent for a person? Homeland? How do familiar landscapes make you feel? Think of examples of contested land. How does displacement from a landscape affect people? How does a landscape define people? Do you get to behave differently in different landscapes?

Immigration-

Both of the artists get to travel the path that their families have taken from different countries at different times. They get to do this directly, by going to different places, and also indirectly in their artwork. What is gained when someone immigrates to another country? What is lost? What are the ways that you can trace your family's journey?

Motherhood-

Both Beth Krensky and Sama Alshaibi have dedicated this exhibit to their children. Why do you think they have chosen to do this? How is making art like being a mother? What are the hopes that mothers have for their children? What are the hopes that artists have for their art pieces?

Journey-

Traveling between one world and the next, or between landscapes, or to the past or considering the future- these are all themes of journey represented here. Look for materials and imagery that hint at this type of movement. How can art be used to travel? How can you as the viewer accompany these women on their journeys?

Storytelling through Collaboration

This gallery space itself tells a story. On the surface it might just be a story about two women who happen to be displaying their artwork together. But the reasons why they are here together in this space go deeper than that. Use these questions to uncover information about their shared project.

- How does the artist Sama Alshaibi describe her ethnic/cultural heritage?
- How does the artist Beth Krensky describe her ethnic/cultural heritage?
- Why is it significant for an artist who explores her connections to Palestine and being Muslim in her work to be exhibiting with an artist who uses her artwork to explore her connections to Israel and being Jewish?
- How do you see the connections between their work just in how they look? How do you see the connections between their work in what they say about their interests and themes?
- Are there visual similarities in Alshaibi's and Krensky's artwork?
- How are they different?
- Are there differences in how directly they each tell their story?
- Are some of the pieces more personal than others?
- Do the artworks "talk to each other?"
- Does their artwork invite you into the conversation? If so, how?
- How does using visual art to engage in a discussion about difficult things help you talk about it? What are the risks involved in doing it this way?

Art Making Lesson Plans

Each of the following activities draws from different aspects of the exhibition, *We Make the Road by Walking*, as a source of inspiration.

Creating Icons

Objective- understanding the role of icons and personal iconography in visual art.

Have students work on creating their own iconography and developing an icon. By looking at examples of usage in the dictionary and discussing as a class, come up with a class definition of the word 'icon'.

Students can then develop an icon that is personal and can be incorporated into their artwork. These individual icons can then be assembled as a collective piece of art.

Questions to ask:

What is an icon? (come up with a class definition)

How are icons different from symbols?

Make a list of ways to describe your character.

Make a list of the things that are most important to your life.

Make a list of the important elements of your home.

Make a list of ways to describe your culture/and or community.

For each list make corresponding pictures. Use these lists of pictures to create a final icon.

History of Location

Objective- Students learn to utilize the five characteristics of geography in order to describe geographical locations that are vital to their family history, and then work out ways to represent this information in an indirect, visual manner.

Sama Alshaibi and Beth Krensky explore their family history as it is tied to different geographical locations, and as it changes over time. Discuss with your class how they use this topic-how they include land and geography as content in their artwork.

Each student should first work independently and write a summary of what places are important to their family, and why.

Discuss the five themes of geography-

- Location- Actual and relative location in the world, latitude and longitude and what other geographical features it borders
- Place- Physical and human characteristics
- Human/Environment interactions- How the people there provide for themselves in the environment, shelter themselves and feed themselves
- Movement- Migration of people, products and ideas in and out of the community

- Regions- Unifying characteristics- language, government, geographical, economic, or recreational

Then have students make a list of ways they could represent this importance of geography in the artwork. They should consider the tools that we use to understand and locate places, such as: directional signs, maps, topography diagrams, and other tools.

Documenting Homeland

Objective- To understand the importance of homeland and disputed land to historical and contemporary communities, and for students to identify their own connections to this concept.

Questions to ask:

What is a *homeland*?

How is this different than where someone happens to live?

Is your family or culture connected to a concept of homeland?

If not what, why do you think this is?

What things might happen to you or your family to create a strong tie to land or specific location?

Can you live anywhere you want in the United States? In the world?

Have you or your family crossed borders before?

Are there any borders that you would have difficulty crossing?

How do you think where you live, and where your family has lived shape you as a person?

Work on ways to represent the concept of homeland, either as a general concept, or a personal representation. Think of the role of photography, family history, maps and atlases.

Have students create a poster, divided in half, one side representing a place, and one side representing the same place as *homeland*.

Collaborative Spaces and Visual Conversations

Objective- For students to think of their artwork as operating in a larger conversational space and to experiment with developing a visual conversation with their classmates.

There are many different approaches to collaboration-

- Have your class work together to collaborate on an exhibit by working as a group to determine the theme of the exhibit. Everyone in the class must be in agreement on the theme.
- Another way to collaborate is on a group piece, presented as a single art object that everyone worked on, such as a collection of photographs, a mural, or a group sculpture.
- Divide the class in half and assign making the artwork to half, and writing the accompanying text to the other half. Experiment with which group works first and provides their information to the other half.
- Have students bring in short stories or current event newspaper articles and swap them. Then have each student create a visual representation of that article.
- Have students write short stories and have their classmates illustrate them.

- Choose a contemporary account of cultural conflict. Work as a class to investigate it and create an artwork that teaches about it or that envisions what could exist if the conflict was solved.
- Have students create an artwork and then swap those pieces and let their classmates complete them.
- Have students make artworks that represent a specific perspective in a cultural conflict, have other students represent the other half. Then have the teams work together to integrate their artworks into one piece.
- Make sure that the class articulates what the collaboration looks like and how it is functioning throughout the project.

Mask Making Symbol Portraits (4th-6th Grade)

Life Skills:

- Understanding Self
- Appreciating Diversity

Summary:

Students will create plaster masks that incorporate symbols to represent ideas and multiple meanings about themselves. Students will also be shown masks from different cultures as a way to understand how masks are and have been used in various cultures in order to appreciate similarities and differences among and between individuals and cultures.

Career Connections:

- Artist
- Anthropologist

Time Frame: 3 50-minute class periods

Group Size: Maximum of 30 students

Materials:

Teaching About Masks

Various masks or books, prints or slides of various masks

Making Masks

- Plastercraft plaster bandage
- Scissors
- Warm water and water containers (1 bowl or container for 2 students to share)
- Petroleum jelly
- Paper towels
- Table and floor coverings (optional)
- Plastic mask forms, clay or newspaper and tape (to make a form, if necessary)
- smocks

Decorating Masks

- Tempera or acrylic paints
- Paintbrushes
- Water containers
- Palettes
- Craft glue
- Raffia
- Feathers and other materials to decorate masks

Background for Teachers:

It is helpful for teachers to have a basic understanding of the various roles masks play in cultures throughout the world.

Student Prior Knowledge:

None.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

Students will 1) become aware of how symbols are used in art and cultural artifacts to represent ideas and multiple meanings; 2) explore how masks are and have been used in various cultures; 3) appreciate similarities and differences among and between individuals and cultures; 4) create a plaster mask that incorporates autobiographical symbols to communicate original meaning; 5) describe what is seen in a work of art; 6) choose subject matter, symbols and ideas that support the main idea of the work; 7) interpret the content of what is seen in a work of art; 8) utilize subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning in their artwork; and 9) analyze the ideas, meanings, and the mood reflected in the artwork.

Instructional Procedures:

1. In small groups, show students examples of masks from various cultures and have students work together to describe the mask, guess where the mask is from and what the purpose of the mask is/was. Have the students consider questions such as: What does the mask symbolize and why?; What materials is the mask made out of?; Why were these specific materials used?; Which part of the world is this mask from?; What is/was this mask used for?
2. As a whole group, have each group share their findings and provide information about each of the masks. Discuss what masks are used for in different cultures. What are the ways that masks are used in similar or different ways? You may ask the following questions (from the National Endowment for the Humanities Edsitement.net "What Masks Reveal" lesson plan) to help students figure out the cultural significance of a mask:
 - What region is the mask from?
 - What society or community made this mask?
 - When is the mask worn?
 - Who wears it?
 - What is its social function?
 - What does it represent to those who use it?
3. Show some examples of contemporary plaster masks to introduce this lesson on symbolic masks. Ask students to think about symbols of things that are important to them or that describe their lives. Have a few students share ideas. Have the students sketch ideas for a symbol mask, considering the form of the mask as well as the surface treatment.
4. Have the students get into pairs and cut plaster gauze into strips approximately 1" x 4" long. Once the plaster gauze is cut, students can get a container of warm water. The plaster gauze must be moved out of the way of dripping water. If water drips on the plaster, it will harden before it is used as part of the mask.
5. Have one student from the pair apply a generous amount of petroleum jelly to her/his face. Use extra petroleum jelly around the hairline and eyebrows. Please make sure that long hair is pulled back. This person should lean back in a chair and wear a smock or put paper towel around his/her neck. (Please note that for students who do

not want to make a cast of their own face for various reasons, plastic mask forms or newspaper and masking tape can be used instead.)

6. The other student in the pair should dip strips of the plaster gauze in water and gently apply them on the face of the other student. There should be 2-3 overlapping layers of plaster gauze. Either the mouth or end of nose should be left free of plaster gauze so that the student can breathe. It is important for the person having the mask made to be very still. Talking or laughing will prevent the mask from hardening correctly. It will take approximately 15 minutes for the plaster gauze to dry.
7. Once dry, the mask should be gently removed and the person should wash her/his face. The process should be repeated with the other student. The mask can be set upon wadded up newspaper to dry for 24 hours.
8. After the plaster mask is dry, students can add ears, snouts, horns, etc. by using toilet paper rolls, wadded up pieces of paper, sticks, etc. by using more plaster gauze, staples or hot glue. The masks can then be decorated using acrylic or tempera paint, raffia, feathers, elements from the natural world, magazine or newspaper images or print, etc. If creating a collage on the mask, you can use acrylic gel medium to attach the paper as well as to seal it in.
9. Assessment

Have students answer the following questions:

- Write a short description of your mask with a symbol key.
- Explain why you chose the symbols you did and what the symbols represent.
- What does this mask mean to you?
- What does this mask make you think about?
- What mood does this mask create?
- What is something you learned about yourself from making this mask?
- What is something you learned about others from making masks?

Extensions:

Students can research the cultural significance of masks in various cultures. Students can be assigned a specific region of the world to research the different roles and functions that masks play.

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Additional Resources

Teaching Tolerance

The “Teaching Tolerance” website < www.tolerance.org > has numerous resources for teachers, including free kits and handbooks, classroom activities and grants. To access lesson plans and resources about tolerance, please go to the website and click on “for Teachers.”

Following are just a few examples of lesson plans that tie in with the topics found in *We Make the Road by Walking*:

Family Ties and Fabric Tales, first published by Teaching Tolerance in 2002, uses literature, art and family interviews to explore and celebrate students' immigration histories. Written for early grades classrooms, the lesson includes recommended adaptations for middle and upper grades.

In *Learning Through Mutual Conversation*, early grades educator Sally Ryan shares her classroom's exploration of naturalization — and what it means to be an "American" — through its dialogue with immigrant, and now citizen, Sam Khazai.

In *Boundary Crossings* students will draw conclusions about boundary crossing from history and literature....[and] will identify boundaries in their classroom or school, cross those boundaries, report back and reflect on what they learned. (Teaching Tolerance, <http://www.tolerance.org/teach/activities>)

Art:21

The Art:21 website <www.pbs.org/art21> has numerous lesson plans that address issues in contemporary art. These lesson plans are intended for secondary students, typically for high school age. For art making lessons that focus on “Individuals & Collectives,” please go to <www.pbs.org/art21/education/individuals/>.

The Museum of Modern Art

The Museum of Modern Art's website has numerous lesson plans that use the museum's extensive collection as a foundation for investigating themes that relate to *We Make the Road by Walking*. The website gives educators access to images, educator guides and lesson plans.

There are multiple lesson plans about “identity” and others about “social commentary. To access these lesson plans, please go to <<http://www.moma.org/modernteachers/index.html>> and click on “lessons,” then “themes” and then “identity” or “social commentary.”