

Lesson Plan
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Topic

Content Area or theme - Symbolic gestures of return or renewal

Content Statement – The class will gain comprehension in ways that artists have approached giving back something natural to the earth. The class will contemplate and discover ritual and non-ritual acts involving return and /or renewal. We will attempt to find out: What is ritual return? What are the histories, acts and outcomes of ritual return? Is renewal the same thing as return? How do contemporary artists view these subjects through their work?

Objectives/Expected Learner Outcomes

1. After the motivational activity, the class will view reproductions of the work of Erica Fielder. There will also be explorations of work by other artists with similar approaches. Students should examine Ms. Fielder's view of the place of humans in the environment as well as how her art pertains to her views, feelings, and consciousness. The geographical, social, and political history of the James River will be discussed to emphasize the need for knowledge of our local watershed. Discussion of the similarities and contrasts between her work, and the work of the other environmental artists we look at will also take place.
2. Students will review Erica Fielder's *Gesture of Return*. They will then perhaps read about examples of rituals involving nature. The students will be asked to discuss reason/s why these rituals were constructed. Are they still viable today?
3. After reviewing Fielder's work and discussing rituals of nature, the class will create their own symbolic ritual of return or renewal. First the students will write a short description of their project. Then, they will create it through sculpture, performance, illustration or photography, or video, etc.
4. In the last session of this lesson, students will take time to view and objectively critique the work of their fellow students. The individual students will have the chance to relate to the class what their symbolic gestures are supposed to convey. The critiquing students should be encouraged to answer the questions: What do you see? What does it mean? How do you know? How effectively was assignment criteria met?

SOL Criteria

National Standards for Visual Art

Content Standard #1: Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

Achievement Standard:

Students apply media techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.

Students conceive and create works of visual art that demonstrate an understanding of how the communication of their ideas relates to the media, techniques and processes they use.

Content Standard #2: Using knowledge of structures and functions

Achievement Standard:

Students demonstrate the ability to form and defend judgments about the characteristics and structures to accomplish commercial, personal, communal, or other purposes of art

Students evaluate the effectiveness of artworks in terms of organizational structures and functions

Students create artworks that use organizational principles and functions to solve specific visual arts problems

Content Standard #5: Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others.

Students identify intentions of those creating artworks, explore the implication of various purposes, and justify their analyses of purposes in particular works

Students describe meaning of artworks by analyzing how specific works are created and how they relate to historical and cultural contexts

Students reflect analytically on various interpretations as a means for understanding and evaluating works of visual art

Virginia Visual Arts Standards

AI.7 The student will use a variety of subject matter and symbols to express ideas in works of art.

AI.8 The student will create works of art that are original and represent personal expression.

AI.13 The student will describe works of art using appropriate art vocabulary.

AI.21 The student will analyze an original work of art by describing, responding, analyzing, interpreting, and judging or evaluating.

AI.31 The student will speculate on the intentions and choices of those who created a work of art.

Virginia English Standards

8.2 The student will develop and deliver oral presentations in groups and individually.

- a) Choose topic and purpose appropriate to the audience.
- b) Choose vocabulary and tone appropriate to the audience, topic, and purpose.
- c) Use appropriate verbal and nonverbal presentation skills.
- d) Respond to audience questions and comments.
- e) Use grammatically correct language.
- f) Critique oral presentations.

8.7 The student will write in a variety of forms, including narrative, expository, persuasive, and informational.

- a) Use prewriting strategies to generate and organize ideas
- b) Organize details to elaborate the central idea.
- c) Select specific vocabulary and information.

- d) Revise writing for work choice, sentence variety, and transitions among paragraphs.
- e) Use available technology.

Virginia History Standards

8.1 The student will describe early physical and cultural development of mankind from the Paleolithic Era to the revolution of agriculture with emphasis on

- a) the impact of geography on hunter-gatherer societies;
- b) characteristics of hunter-gatherer societies;
- c) toolmaking and use of fire;
- d) technological and social advancements that gave rise to stable communities; and
- e) how archeological discoveries are changing our knowledge of early peoples.

Students Group Targeted

Grade 8 – heterogeneous class

Students will need to understand basic concepts of conceptual art. Because so much of what the class will be dealing with is process or gesture oriented, an understanding and political view of the chosen piece is probably necessary. In essence, by strengthening the content of a piece, we can eliminate some of the formal aspects. Because the student will be called upon to decide if the piece has made the viewer think about environmental return or renewal, written descriptive skills are also needed, as well as the basic sketching abilities, photographic, or video skills to complete the piece. Drawing skills will be used to sketch the piece or to actually make the piece proposal. Standard 35mm, digital camera, or video camera will suffice for those actually documenting a site- specific work.

Time Required

Six 60 minute sessions

Materials and Resources

Depending on the resources of the school, students will need their own camera or video recorder to document their act of return. If the student chooses to illustrate his/her work by hand (drawing, painting), the materials necessary for this lesson will be provided. If necessary, the teacher will provide use of a video camera, and the students will use it under the supervision of the teacher.



Erica Fielder

Gesture of Return, since 1997

Cleaned salmon bones are returned them to the watershed where salmon swim



Ingrid Koivukangas
5 Circle Project, 2002
Installation at CBC Studios, Vancouver, Canada



Jackie Brookner

Prima Lingua, 1996-2002

Concrete, volcanic rock, mosses, ferns, wetland plants, fish, steel, rubber liner, tubing, pump

Itinerary and Strategies

Day One

1. After viewing the work of Jessica Fielder, the class will discuss why historical knowledge of a watershed is important. The class will be drawn into a topical debate on the issue of why specific knowledge leads to awareness and maybe effective change in the community. The teacher will pass this handout to all the class members:

The James River Before The White Man

The James' headwaters begin at Iron Gate where the Cowpasture and Bull rivers meet between the Mountains of the Alleghenies. It heads Southeastward through the great valley of Virginia past Buchanan knifing Northeast along the base of the Blue Ridge, going through Glasgow and downhill to Lynchburg, shooting Northeast to Scottsville then turning back South. The James continues to snake through Richmond and then heads oceanward to Hopewell, Jamestown Islands, opening into a mile-wide expanse at Newport News and Hampton Roads to the Chesapeake. The James is not geographically remarkable, but is known as one of the first rivers seen by first permanent settlers, and is also feared because of its unpredictable flooding.

Early Indians at the end of the last Ice Age didn't necessarily settle near the James because 10,000 years ago there were few fish in the River. These people instead hunted mammoths and mastodons. As the climate warmed, and more fish came upriver, the

majority of the Indians moved to the mouth of the River. During this period, the mammoths and mastodons died out but deer started to flourish.

As the Bay became saltier, shad, herring, and the sturgeon that is now nearly extinct in the James moved inland to escape the increasing salination. The ancient tribes relied on the fish spawning runs of March through June and they also relied on the wild grains during the potentially starving times of April when deer were hidden by spring foliage. The Indians knew that nuts were rotten and berries were still months away during early spring.

Above the fall Line in the Piedmont Plain were the Monacan Indians, people related to the Sioux who settled in small groups along the floodplain. They were family-oriented and rarely roamed in search of their food. They did no planting until around 1,000, C.E., meaning they foraged for food. Monacans had little political organization and were preyed upon from the West by the Iroquois Tribe.

On the other hand, the Powhatans learned to make dugout canoes early to use in their wide river region below the fall line. These peoples formed a confederacy of about 30 tribes managed by the chief. Their advanced vessel-making made trade between their people much easier because great stretches of river could be covered in large dugouts. This tribe had greater numbers than the Monacans.

The Indians believed in ancient water gods who were rarely named or described. These gods were shape-shifters and sometimes even had male *and* female characteristics. Water Gods could supposedly transform men into fountains or fish-men if they did not respect the river and sacrifice to it. One form of sacrifice consisted, according to a Jamestown settler, of the Indians bathing in the river carefully and completely, and then sprinkling tobacco on the water as a ceremonial rite.

The river was worshipped as being a bringer of life with huge potential to destroy (floods,) or nourish. The James' fertility is something that we should if not worship, at least try to restore.

2. The class will go back to "Gesture of Return," and I will explain the origin of this gesture in the practices of the natives of the Northwest. We will compare the fishing of Salmon in the West, to the importance of the fishing for Shad and Herring here.

3. Lastly, the students will be shown examples of Brookner's work along with the work of Koivukangas. I will give brief background of these artists and explain how they tie in with the work of Erica Fielder. Even though their work is involved with awareness and renewal rather than return, the pieces have many things in common. Both Koivukangas and Fielder use wildlife from specific areas in their art: Fielder uses the salmon of the Northwest country; and Koivukangas uses the flora living near the galleries she shows at. All three of these artists use mostly natural materials, although Brookner uses more man-made materials than the other two. The class will be introduced to site-specific work with importance to its specific locale.

Day Two

1. In a motivational activity the teacher will break the class into groups of two or three students each. Each group will select a secretary to record findings. The students will clear the table except the secretary of each group will have a writing implement. The teacher will hand one image or object/s to each group. The group will be asked to decide which single word best describes what they have been presented with. That

word must be related to environmental return or renewal. After the groups decide on their best word, they will write one sentence explaining their choice. The students will be urged to use input from each group member and to make their decision count. The individual groups will then share their findings with the class one at a time.

2. The students will be asked to start writing and/or drawing their proposals for their own act of return/renewal –or- they may research and report on an environmentally aware eco-artist of their choosing in a five- page paper with illustrations (photos.)

Day Three – Day Five

1. Students will continue plans for their pieces with encouragement/suggestions from me. A working piece is strongly recommended, but in lieu of perfect logistics, models or a series of sketches with written statements and explanations will suffice. Videos and photographs will also be accepted forms of documentation of pieces. Students choosing photography and video documentation will be urged to find a “partner” who is using the same documentation technique. This way, one student can enact the piece while the other photos/ tapes it. Safety instructions will be provided for any students using sharp or otherwise potentially dangerous tools. In this open-ended task, tool use is up to the user’s discretion with teacher supervision.

Day Six

1. The class will set up and display the finished works, one at a time, and, we may reserve another day for the viewing of site-specific works done on the school grounds with permission from the principal. Part of another class session may be required to finish this display- critiquing session. Students with papers on eco-artists will read them in front of the class, and pass them around so that other students can view their illustrations. Each student will be allotted three minutes for his comments on his/her own work including comments from other members of the class.

2. The student will write a 2-3 sentence critique of each student’s particular work, addressing how successful the student was in communicating the gesture of return or renewal. Visual qualities of design and art elements will also be addressed, as well as dislikes and likes of student works.

Evaluation Strategies

What the teacher will look for in these projects will be specific knowledge of our own local environment. The emphasis can be on wildlife, land use, deforestation, forestation, geography, and/or watersheds. Any of these subjects should be approached with attention to how you can make our local environment a better place through return or renewal, or a better understanding of it. For example, if the student is going to do a project on the loss of hardwood forestation, he should at least be prepared to show some examples of different hardwood trees. If the student is attempting to use extinction or endangerment, he/she should be prepared to tell us *why* the wildlife is endangered – loss of habitat and pollution being two possible causes. Conceptual work in this vein will be regarded much more highly if it has good use of design or art elements. Then again, if the student takes a ritual approach, there may not be much design to it at all, but it should have a sound philosophy or conviction to it. Spiritualism might be invoked by the student in this case. This philosophy will be revealed in the student’s talk about his work.

Work will be graded **Excellent, Good, Fair, and Poor** in the following areas:

1. Understanding of the Concept through his/her piece and critiquing of others' pieces
2. Craftsmanship, neatness
3. Uniqueness of approach, aesthetics
4. Work ethic

The students will receive grades for the following activities:

1. The amount of input and their cooperation with fellow students during motivational activities
2. Written or drawn proposals for their pieces or written projects
3. The actual artwork for the project or the written paper on the artist of their choosing
4. The students' spoken 3- minute assessments of their own works
5. Written critiques of the other students work

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