

THEME
&
ANCHOR
WORKS

Come as you are:

**THE ART OF
BELONGING**

Reach for
my hand,



you belong
here.

2024-25 THEME & ANCHORWORKS GUIDE

Introduction

P.S. ARTS has chosen the theme “**Come As You Are: The Art of Belonging**” to amplify our commitment to fostering a culture of inclusion, community, and individual creative expression in our classrooms, community programs and educator development workshops.

Belonging is a big concept. We began our theme building process with equally big questions: **Can diversity, equity and inclusion exist if there is no sense of belonging? And what does it mean to belong in terms of arts education? How is belonging intrinsically tied to our values and mission?**

During our professional development session this past winter, we asked our Teaching Artists, Coaches, and staff these questions. What we discovered is that belonging is and has been an integral element to P.S. ARTS curriculum, instruction, and staff & faculty training.

In our classrooms specifically, we model and invite belonging by:

- ✿ Creating a welcoming classroom culture
- ✿ Celebrating identities: both collective and individual
- ✿ Providing “windows, mirrors, and sliding doors”*
- ✿ Addressing bias, stereotyping, or any behavior or language that is offensive
- ✿ Reflecting and making modifications

Research shows positive effects on student engagement in classrooms where belonging is made a guiding point of focus. Because of this, P.S. ARTS highlights the ways in which students connect to the varied communities to which they belong (including the classroom community) as well as their own unique individual identities. “Come As You Are” is a message to all of our students that they bring with them their cultures, histories, ancestry, differing abilities, as well as their creativity and all of the things that make them who they are. All truly are welcomed, affirmed and celebrated in P.S. ARTS classes.

*Bishop, R. S. (1990). *Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*,6(3).

Essential Questions for Teaching Artists & Students

What does it mean to belong?

How can we foster a sense of belonging through art-making?

For each of the four arts disciplines - Visual Arts, Dance, Music, Theater - we have selected an artist or artistic company and a featured work of art to serve as an inspirational anchor which can be incorporated into the curriculum either as a central focus or as supplemental connection.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE?

The Theme and Anchorworks guide was created to help interpret the P.S. ARTS perspective on the theme and anchorworks, provide background information on the artists and works, and spark ideas for use in the classroom. Some sections are written in child-friendly language, but the majority of the context is provided to help deepen understandings. Please read through all of the disciplines as we encourage cross-disciplinary use of the anchorworks. Every arts discipline is arranged similarly.



1. Essential Questions/Enduring Understandings: These tools are written in student-friendly language and are meant to be used to frame the curriculum. Essential questions and enduring understandings encourage students to engage more deeply with the work and connect the art to meaningful life experiences.
2. Introduction to the anchorwork and its connection to the concept of belonging.
3. Introduction to the artist/artists that created the work.
4. Historical context (if needed).
5. Sample ideas for how to introduce the artwork in the classroom and sample suggestions for multiple disciplines.

DANCE

INFINITE FLOW

#INFINITEINCLUSION FLASHMOB, 2016

Essential Questions

- ⌘ How do movement and dance strengthen social connections?
- ⌘ How does the inclusive dance and inclusive choreography work of companies like Infinite Flow make dance more accessible (and more enjoyable) for everyone?
- ⌘ How can dance artists convey the same message, and tell the same story, even when they may move in different and unique ways?

Enduring Understanding

- ⌘ There are many ways to express ideas and tell stories through movement. The possibilities are truly infinite.
- ⌘ Ephemeral, that is short-term or temporal, works of art can have a lasting impact on our feelings even after they are finished.



ABOUT INFINITE INCLUSION



CONNECTION TO THEME - THE ART OF BELONGING

The dancing in this piece is performed by dozens and dozens of dancers from many intersectional identities, including wheelchair-using and non-wheelchair-using performers, and other performers, each contributing their own unique dancing ability. The choreography and the ensemble itself embodies the name, Infinite Inclusion.

This piece connects to the P.S. ARTS theme, The Art of Belonging, because, while it showcases the dancing of many performers, it centers their dancing above anything else. Dance, and all the arts, are a human right, and this performing artwork celebrates that.

In 2016, the Infinite Flow dance company organized a choreographed “flash mob” in Venice Beach, CA. Set to the pop song, “Can’t Stop the Feeling” by Justin Timberlake.

This live work is also documented on film. Multiple cameras were used to film this dance performance. By capturing the live performance on film, of course it can be experienced again, in a different way on screen. It is temporally located in the 21st century. This also means the filmed dance experience lives on social media at #InfiniteInclusion.

This work is a flash mob dance. It was choreographed by the dance ensemble, Infinite Flow, who are a nonprofit professional dance company out of Los Angeles. Infinite Flow was started in 2015 by Marisa Hamamoto, and the dance company “employs disabled and nondisabled dancers with diverse, intersectional identities with a mission to advance disability inclusion, one dance at a time.”

The flash mob dance, Infinite Inclusion, is choreographed to the pop song “Can’t Stop the Feeling” by Justin Timberlake. It is an upbeat, uptempo song. [See lyrics on pages 13 - 14]. It showcases some partner work at the front of the ensemble, as well as group dancing, and some solo dance sequences towards the end of the dance. There are even some dogs who were choreographed into the performance!

The movements and steps incorporate striking poses, using mostly axial movements, some partner work that includes moves from salsa dance traditions, and lots of spins and turns. There are also steps from popping and locking traditions, and contemporary jazz dance. This is a multi-genre dance piece that has many points of access for all types of dancers.



THE ARTISTS

Infinite Flow is a nonprofit professional dance company that employs dancers from many intersectional identities and abilities. Infinite Flow was founded by Marisa Hamamoto in 2015. She is a dancer who experienced an ability-changing health event. That experience eventually led her to establish this dance company. (You can read more about her experience in [this article](#)).



Sample Ideas for the Classroom

EMBODY AN IDEA

In this activity, students will make choices about how to use movements that their bodies already know how to do, in order to express ideas about given concepts. Those concepts can (and should) include embodying shapes, letters, numbers, phenomena, feelings. This order is important.

1. The instructor should begin with a simple, physical warm-up:

- ☼ First, ask students to notice where they are in the room, in relation to other students, and in relation to any furniture or other physical objects in the space. Guide them to make any necessary adjustments to

ensure that they can remain safe with their bodies and yet have enough room to move around a little bit.

- ☼ Next, ask them to move into a physically neutral position. This could be standing, sitting, or whatever is safe and comfortable for their individual bodies. Physical neutral means calm alert, ready but with ease. If standing, place feet about hip-width apart. In all positions, arms can be relaxed at the sides.
- ☼ Give students a few moments to notice their breath and then take 3 - 5 deep breaths together, slowly and gently.
- ☼ Follow with raising arms up and stretching

first to one side, and then to the other. Try to have students match their breath to the movements - breathe in, stretch to one side, hold, exhale as they return back upright. Then, repeat on the other side.

- ☼ You can follow this with a few other, simple, guided stretches.

2. After the warm-up, explain to students that they will be using their whole bodies to make shapes that express an idea. The process is that you:

- ☼ Ask a question.
- ☼ Listen to two or three student answers aloud.
- ☼ Have the students quickly choose one of those answers through guided consensus, for the whole group to work with.
- ☼ Next, direct students at the same time to choose whichever way seems best to them, to make the shape with their body that represents the concept in the answer, in whatever way is most available to them.

- ☼ Again, through quickly guided consensus, allow the group to choose one of the student's examples to do as a whole group. Practice the movement-shape several times

An example of this process is:

Question - "What are some shapes we could make with our bodies?"

Answer - "Rectangle, circle, triangle" (etc.)

"Great. What shape should we start with?" [Rectangle?]

"OK. Everyone, make a rectangle in whatever way you would like. You can use your arms, legs, feet, hands, and head."

Notice and highlight that students are each choosing individual, unique ways to make their rectangles. ("This student uses their whole body. That student used only their arms, and so on.")

Say, "Let's all try this student's way and practice it together." Do so.

3. Repeat and practice the above process above first with shapes, then with letters (from the alphabet) then numbers, followed by a regularly occurring phenomenon (such as a type of weather, bird landing on a tree branch, leaves falling from trees, and so on.) Lastly, move on to having students go through the process with a feeling or emotion.

4. Each time you repeat the question-to-movement process, add the chosen shape or movement to the one before it, creating a sequence. Have students practice the sequence at a moderate pace several times, until they can repeat it. You can set it to a steady beat, simple percussive sound or an instrumental song.

CREATE A MOVEMENT PHRASE

An extension or next level of the above activity is to create a movement phrase. In this process students will first get together in smaller groups of 4 - 6. They will work together to suggest and agree on different movements. Each student can suggest or offer a movement that they choose to the whole group. In this activity movements do not have to represent the same concepts from the activity above. Students have greater freedom to create a movement that they want, based on whatever appropriate ideas work for them.

As a group they will decide on a starting position and an ending position. After that they will collaboratively decide what order to place their movements in, and then think of ways to transition from one movement to the next.

After they have rehearsed several times, groups can share the movement phrases they have created with the whole class.

DANCE A CYCLE

Another activity that classes can work on is to select a cycle, event, or phenomenon that they may be learning about in another (potentially academic) subject, and create a movement phrase specifically intended to represent that cycle, event, or phenomenon. Examples could be things like the life cycle of a butterfly, traffic patterns over the course of a day, the passing of the seasons, growing up, etc.

Additional Resources:

"Can't Stop the Feeling." Song performed by Justin Timberlake. Lyrics written by Timberlake, Max Martin, and Shellback.

Lyrics:

I got this feelin' inside my bones
It goes electric, wavy when I turn it on
All through my city, all through my home
We're flyin' up, no ceilin', when we in our zone

I got that sunshine in my pocket
Got that good soul in my feet
I feel that hot blood in my body when it drops (ooh)
I can't take my eyes up off it, movin' so phenomenally
Room on lock, the way we rock it, so don't stop

And under the lights when everything goes
Nowhere to hide when I'm gettin' you close
When we move, well, you already know
So just imagine, just imagine, just imagine

Nothin' I can see but you when you dance,
dance, dance
Feel a good, good creepin' up on you
So just dance, dance, dance, come on
All those things I shouldn't do
But you dance, dance, dance
And ain't nobody leavin' soon, so keep dancin'
I can't stop the feelin'
So just dance, dance, dance
I can't stop the feelin'
So just dance, dance, dance, come on

Ooh, it's something magical
It's in the air, it's in my blood, it's rushin' on
(rushin' on)
I don't need no reason, don't need control
(don't need control)
I fly so high, no ceiling, when I'm in my zone

'Cause I got that sunshine in my pocket
Got that good soul in my feet
I feel that hot blood in my body when it drops (ooh)
I can't take my eyes up off it, moving so phenomenally
Room on lock, the way we rock it, so don't stop

Under the lights when everything goes
Nowhere to hide when I'm gettin' you close
When we move, well, you already know
So just imagine, just imagine, just imagine

Nothing I can see but you when you dance,
dance, dance
Feel a good, good creepin' up on you
So just dance, dance, dance, come on
All those things I shouldn't do
But you dance, dance, dance
And ain't nobody leavin' soon, so keep dancin'
I can't stop the feelin'
So just dance, dance, dance
I can't stop the feelin'
So just dance, dance, dance
I can't stop the feelin'
So just dance, dance, dance
I can't stop the feelin' (yeah)
So keep dancin', come on

Oh, yeah, oh
I can't stop the, I can't stop the
I can't stop the, I can't stop the
I can't stop the feelin'

Nothin' I can see but you when you dance, dance,
dance (I can't stop the feelin')
Feel a good, good creepin' up on you
So just dance, dance, dance, come on (I can't stop the feelin')
All those things I shouldn't do
But you dance, dance, dance (dance, dance, dance) (I can't stop the feelin')
And ain't nobody leavin' soon, so keep dancin' (I can't stop the feelin')

Everybody sing
Got this feeling in my body (I can't stop the feelin')
Got this feeling in my body (I can't stop the feelin')
Wanna see you move your body (I can't stop the feelin')
Got this feelin' in my body
Break it down
Got this feelin' in my body (can't stop the feelin')
Got this feelin' in my body, come on (ooh.)

Article about Infinite Flow founder, Marisa Hamamoto:
<https://www.heart.org/en/news/2023/08/23/a-lifetime-of-challenges-including-a-spinal-stroke-leads-dancer-to-infinite-possibilities>



MUSIC

AMERICAN SYMPHONY

@ CARNEGIE HALL 2022
JON BATISTE

Essential Questions

- ✿ How can a single piece of music reflect a multitude of experiences and cultures?

Enduring Understanding

- ✿ Genres can be mixed, blended and created anew.
- ✿ Music can be a vehicle for sharing untold histories, bringing communities together, and visioning a better world.



American Symphony, Live at Carnegie Hall

On September 22, 2022, as part of the Perspectives series, composer and musician Jon Batiste presented “American Symphony” at Carnegie Hall in New York City. With over 200 musicians, artists and collaborators, the symphony included orchestral, symphonic, gospel, big band music, and at least 61 musicians joined Batiste on stage. Music that shapes New Orleans, a city close to Batiste’s heart.

He drew inspiration from music of the African diaspora including Yoruba, Brazilian, Haitian, Creole and Caribbean (styles of which are also present in the culture and music that shapes New Orleans).

The symphony consists of four conceptual movements: “Capitalism,” “Integrity,” “Globalism,” and “Majesty.” These concepts are responses to the question Batiste asked, “What if the symphony was invented today in America? Who would participate in the modern American orchestra? What would it sound like?”

In the creation of “American Symphony,” Batiste examines what it means to be Black in America. Classical American music, a space that historically did not include composers or musicians of color or provide entry into prestigious schools of music, often depicted racial stereotypes and prejudices. Orchestral music was “a gate-kept space” for Black musicians, composers, and audiences. Batiste says “I believe that there is such a strong tradition in

what we consider to be classical music that is overlooked, that has American descendants of slaves at the center of it. And an orchestra like this really speaks volumes. And I want to show that with a piece that involves not only the music, the notes and tones, of that tradition and lineage in a new way but spoken word.”

In composing his opus, Batiste drew inspiration from “spaces where people co-exist.” He looked to social music, places of worship and community spaces to examine the ways in which people connect life experiences through music.

The Perelman Stage, where Batiste premiered “American Symphony” had inspirational connections as it was graced by some of his deepest musical influences: Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, Nina Simone and Louis Armstrong. Carnegie Hall is a historic venue in New York City.

“As we stand on the shoulders of giants, I really want to take what they did and extend it. As artists, we should always be speaking to the times that we’re in and projecting what could be better.”

The performance was postponed due to Covid-19. During the show, the power went out. Batiste improvised in the moment, creating a dynamic moment that captured audiences and demonstrated his ability to create, compose, and play under any circumstance.

ABOUT THE ARTIST



Jon Batiste, born November 11, 1986 in Kenner, LA is a jazz pianist, bandleader, composer, and activist. Said to be a musical prodigy (first on the drums, then piano and his trademark melodica), Batiste comes from what he calls a New Orleans musical “dynasty” having deep connections to the city and his family through music.

At 17, he attended the Juilliard School in NYC. Batiste served as the Bandleader along with his band Stay Human for

the late night talk show: The Colbert Show from 2015-2022. He is the Creative Director of the National Jazz Museum in Harlem.

He is a Grammy, Oscar, BAFTA, and Golden Globe winner (along with collaborators Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross) for the soundtrack to the Pixar film *Soul*. Batiste’s albums have earned him a total of 5 Grammy wins and 20 nominations among many other accolades, honors and awards.

Batiste uses his platform to promote social justice initiatives and uses music as a vehicle for community, connection and activism.

A documentary featuring the making of “American Symphony” juxtaposed with the return of his wife, writer and artist Suleika Jaoud’s leukemia aired on Netflix in 2023.

“THE BEAUTY OF BEING CREATIVE IS THAT YOU CAN PULL FROM ALL OF THESE PLACES IN LIFE AND REALLY CREATE YOUR OWN FORM OF EXPRESSING YOUR OWN LANGUAGE. JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT DID THAT WITH PAINTING, AND THAT’S HOW I LOOK AT MAKING MUSIC.”



SAMPLE IDEAS FOR THE CLASSROOM

Objective: Using established genres or styles, students will collaborate to create an entirely new genre that is representative of their voices, stories, rhythms and collective creativity.

Music: A P.S. ARTS Symphony

Use Jon Batiste's idea of blending genres ("genre doesn't exist to me") to create a classroom symphony. As a class, students will use Orff instruments to demonstrate their understanding of key elements of each genre (as previously introduced throughout the unit or residency). They will then branch off into small groups, each assigned one of the genres. They will experiment, improvise, and compose a short musical motif. Each motif will have a turn to be played. Selected students may play "conductor" and experiment with pausing and cueing different groups to play.

Theater: Genre Game

"Using fairy tales - ideally a fable for younger grades and a more student-selected, appropriate scene for older grades - students will improvise by presenting the scene in different genres of theater such as comedy, drama, mystery, etc. After a few rounds, each actor in the scene will be assigned a genre, creating a blended genre that is all its own!

Dance: Across the Floor

Using a playlist of Jon Batiste ("Freedom") as well as Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday and New Orleans big band, students will explore improvisational dance. In small groups or individually, students will "cross the floor" moving from one side of the dance space to the other, improvising movements inspired by the music. Reflect on how the music informed the movements, the tempo, levels, etc.

Visual Art: The Music of Los Angeles

Inspired by Jon Batiste's deep love for and influence of New Orleans, create a visual exploration of the music of Los Angeles (or whatever city in which your school is located). Introduce students to murals honoring musicians. Assign pairs or small groups of students to focus on a single panel or section of a mural for analysis, or to design an area of a mural that the whole class will create together. Demonstrate using a grid or plotting on a graph to design a mural panel. Then, assemble each group's individual panels together, noting the grid that connects them, into one large artwork.

Additional Resources:

<https://www.carnegiehall.org/Calendar/2022/09/22/Jon-Batiste-0800PM#watch>
<https://www.grammy.com/news/jon-batiste-american-symphony-carnegie-hall-world-premiere-debut-recap-performance>

“A CULMINATION OF MORE THAN A CENTURY OF BLACK BRILLIANCE... IN AMERICAN SYMPHONY, THE OSCAR-WINNING COMPOSER SALUTES MUSICAL VISIONARIES-- SUCH AS DUKE ELLINGTON, JAMES REESE EUROPE, MAHLIA JACKSON, AND NINA SIMONE- WHO ONCE STOOD ON THE VERY STAGE UPON WHICH HE CONCLUDES HIS PERSPECTIVES SERIES.” - CARNEGIE HALL

VISUAL ARTS

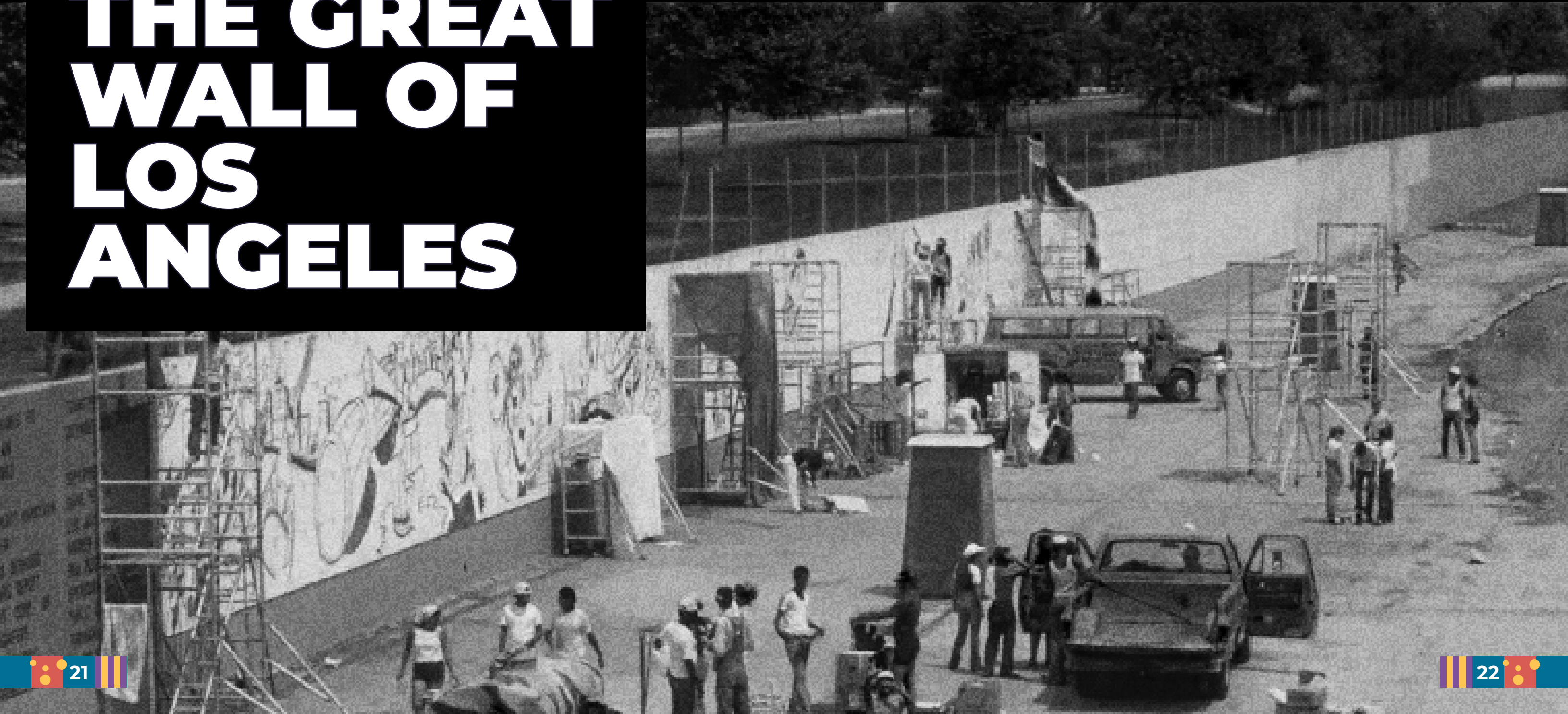
JUDITH BACA: THE GREAT WALL OF LOS ANGELES

Essential Questions

- ✿ Where does art “belong” and who decides?
- ✿ How can public art be used as a tool to create and affirm communities?

Enduring Understanding

- ✿ Public art, such as murals, can offer access for communities to tell their stories, reflect on less frequently told histories, and foster a sense of belonging.



ABOUT THE GREAT WALL OF LOS ANGELES

Spanning half a mile along the L.A. River, *The Great Wall* of Los Angeles depicts a visual narrative of the history of California from prehistoric times to the 1950s. There is an emphasis on the aspects of history that have been intentionally left out of textbooks - stories of marginalized communities such as Native Americans, African Americans, Latinos, and women. This work was completed over several years starting in 1976 (through 1983), the mural is considered a landmark in public art and a testament to Baca's commitment to social justice.

Over 400 community members contributed to this work including youth artists from across Los Angeles, 80 of which were in the juvenile justice system. Its development was the result of years of "academic research, pop cultural imagery, lived experience, and collected metaphors."

In the spring of 2024, Baca began a residency at Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) to complete new panels for *The Great Wall*. This new half mile expansion will include depictions of Los Angeles in the 1960s "including the Chicano Movement and the Watts Renaissance." The two new panels are being created by Baca and members of SPARC as part of plans to continue the visual history through the 21st century. The museum studio offers the artists the ability to work under safe and consistent conditions. The L.A. River site can be subject to flooding, artists are limited to painting during daytime hours and other environmental uncertainties.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Judith (Judy) Baca is a Chicana artist, muralist, activist, and educator. A first generation Mexican-American, Judy was born on September 20, 1946, in Los Angeles, California. She studied at California State University, Northridge, where she earned her BA in art education in 1969 and her MA in painting in 1979.

In the early 1970s, Baca co-founded the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) in Venice, California. SPARC's mission is "to produce, preserve, and promote activist and socially relevant artwork; to devise and innovate excellent art pieces through participatory processes; and ultimately, to foster artistic collaborations that empower communities who face marginalization or discrimination".

Throughout her career, Baca has been a vocal advocate for the role of public art in promoting social change and community empowerment. She has received numerous awards and honors for her work, including the Hispanic Heritage Award for Education in 1996 and the Guggenheim Fellowship in 2003.

Judy Baca's legacy extends beyond her own artworks; she has also mentored countless artists and activists, inspiring future generations to use art as a tool for activism and social justice. Her work continues to influence public art movements worldwide, demonstrating the power of art to create dialogue and effect meaningful social change.



Discover the insights of Judith Baca as she delves into the process, intention, and impact of her monumental mural project, "The Great Wall." Initiated in 1976, this expansive work has evolved to encompass the contributions of over 400 youth painters, making it one of the largest murals globally. Located in Los Angeles, part of the process and history of "The Great Wall" has been beautifully documented by the LA Times. View this documentary short, produced by the LA Times, to hear Baca discuss her artistic journey, see behind-the-scenes footage of the creative process, and explore the advocacy efforts that Baca and her collaborators have championed.

Click to watch video:
<https://www.latimes.com/shortdocs/0000018e-528f-dfc2-a1ce-7eafcbdf0000-123>

SAMPLE IDEAS FOR THE CLASSROOM:

Objective: Students will explore the concept of public art through collaborative activities inspired by Judy Baca's "The Great Wall of Los Angeles."

Visual Arts: Mural Project

Students will learn about Judy Baca as well as other mural artists including "The Care We Create" by Audrey Chan and "Home is Little Tokyo" by Tony Osumi. Students will collectively create a mural inspired by the theme "Come As You Are: The Art of Belonging" to be installed on the school campus if possible or in the P.S. ARTS classroom. They will work in small groups on "panels" to then be connected to tell a story. Students will learn to use a grid to design their panels. Materials can be differentiated by grade level.

Theater: Collaborative Performance Art

Students will begin by sharing a word, phrase, or gesture representing what is needed for them to feel a sense of belonging. In small groups, these phrases will be combined into a spoken word performance piece. The small group pieces will then form one larger performance art piece. Play with changing the tempo, blocking and order of the sections to further explore the collaborative nature of building the performance as an ensemble.

Dance: Moving histories

Students will identify key moments in history and in small groups create a movement phrase to represent their era. They will each contribute a choreographed 8-count to create their phrase.

Music: Pass/Share the Beat

Students will create an orchestra of belonging. They will each contribute a short 2-count musical motif on an Orff instrument and teach it to a partner creating 4- counts. Each pair will rehearse together and then join another pair, creating an 8-count musical phrase.

THEATER

DEAF WEST

SHEL STORIES

Essential Questions

- ⌘ How can art serve as a means of communication to overcome language barriers?
- ⌘ How can methodologies, like Deaf West's approach to creating theater, help us understand the importance of inclusion and acceptance in our communities?
- ⌘ In what ways can theater and performance be used to promote empathy and understanding among people from diverse backgrounds?

Enduring Understanding

- ⌘ Language should not be a barrier to communication.
- ⌘ By embracing our authentic selves, we can forge genuine connections and find belonging with those who accept us for who we are.
- ⌘ The creation and sharing of art is a universal language that transcends linguistic differences.



STORIES DEAF WEST, SHEL STORIES DEAF WEST, SHEL STORIES

This year, our focus at P.S. ARTS is to dive into the methodology of Deaf West and its unwavering dedication to advocating for the Deaf community. Rather than centering on a single production or narrative, we aim to expose students to diverse approaches to language justice and inclusive communication methods. By engaging with various stories such as stories by Shel Silverstein and other authors, and creating story plays and dramatizations that resonate with students in age-appropriate ways, we emphasize the importance of bridging differences and celebrating the creative potential of every individual. Through this exploration, students learn that belonging encompasses embracing our unique voices and talents while fostering empathy, understanding, and unity within our communities.



ABOUT DEAF WEST



ABOUT DEAF WEST

Deaf West serves as a compelling testament to the transformative power of creativity, innovation, and resilience in challenging societal norms and advocating for inclusivity in the arts. Deaf West unites the hearing and deaf communities through the art of performance and storytelling. By pushing against the historical exclusions within American theater, Deaf West underscores the importance of ensuring that all voices are included and represented in the American theatrical landscape.

Established in 1991 by Deaf actor and visionary leader Ed Waterstreet, Deaf West made history as the first regional theater company in the United States to be led by a Deaf Artistic Director. Over nearly three decades, Deaf West has emerged as a trailblazing force in the L.A. theater scene, as well as on Broadway and in Hollywood. Deaf West has been nominated for numerous Tony, Ovation, and other awards, and has won many including receiving the Tony Awards Honor for Excellence.

Deaf West's productions poignantly explore the intersections of the Deaf and Hearing worlds, offering bold, innovative, and inspiring interpretations of classical, modern, and musical works. As Deaf West alum Daniel Durant eloquently expresses, "Communication does not have to be a barrier." Through the seamless integration of American Sign Language, spoken word, visual aids, and Protactile—a groundbreaking language utilized by the Deafblind community—Deaf West expands the boundaries of traditional theatrical expression.

In addition to its groundbreaking productions, Deaf West cultivates a supportive community of artists and fosters the next generation of talent. This commitment is exemplified by initiatives such as the adaptation of child-friendly American Sign Language music videos of beloved Disney songs and youth productions, including the enchanting dramatization of Shel Silverstein's timeless tales in "The Giving Tree; Stories by Shel."

SAMPLE IDEAS FOR THE CLASSROOM

SAMPLE IDEAS FOR THE CLASSROOM

Objective: Cultivate empathy, understanding, and appreciation for the various ways humans communicate: verbally, physically, emotionally, artistically, pictorially, and editorially.

Introduce Deaf West and the concept of Language Justice for all disciplines.

Non-Verbal Greeting:

- ☿ Begin by greeting students nonverbally using visual aids, physical gestures, or American Sign Language (ASL).
- ☿ The goal is to show that communication can transcend verbal language, demonstrating that it doesn't have to be a barrier to connection and understanding.

Engage the Class:

- ☿ Call the class's attention and gather them in a meeting area, such as the carpet.
- ☿ Explain that you will communicate without verbal language and invite them to interpret what you say.

Example Activity:

- ☿ Stand in front of the students.
- ☿ Wave with a smile and use American Sign Language (ASL) to say, "Today I feel _____."
- ☿ Mouth the words to see if any students are able to lip-read.
- ☿ Ask students what part of your non-verbal communication they understood (e.g., exact sign language, emotions).
- ☿ Discuss how they understood you: ASL knowledge, facial recognition, or lip-reading.

Explain Language Justice:

- ☿ Explain language justice as a commitment to ensuring all voices are recognized and understood in community engagement. It creates inclusive and equitable spaces in schools so that families, students, and staff can participate in their preferred languages (Source: Stand for Children Colorado).
- ☿ Explain that over the next few weeks, you will find ways to create a more inclusive classroom by highlighting various languages including ASL.
- ☿ Describe and explain the connections between how language justice will help to foster belonging in the classroom.
- ☿ Invite students to share a greeting in any languages they speak.

IDEAS FOR USE WITHIN EACH SUBJECT AREA

Theater

Encourage students to remember that a core aspect of Deaf West's theatrical approach involves blending communication styles to bridge the gap between the hearing and deaf communities. Their performances often center around American Sign Language (ASL), showcasing a prime example of fostering inclusivity within the theater community while advocating for language justice for Deaf performers in entertainment.

Select a literary passage or poem that celebrates inclusivity and belonging. Consider Shel Silverstein's "The Voice" as an option, and explore dramatizing and reciting it using ASL. Additionally, encourage students to explore other non-verbal communication forms such as gestures, pictures, signs, or artwork to interpret the passage.

This project should span multiple days to ensure students are proficient in their presentations. Utilize available resources, including ASL tutorials and connections within the community, such as colleagues, students, or family members proficient in ASL, or local ASL organizations or professionals.

Rehearse the poem, to enhance the student proficiency of the ASL and non-verbal presentation. After several days of rehearsal, consider inviting students' families to observe a poetry performance showcasing the selected poem.

Spend time discussing with guests the importance of language justice as an integral aspect for fostering belonging and inclusivity within the classroom and communities.

Visual Arts

Materials:

- ✿ Copies of Shel Silverstein's poem "The Voice"
- ✿ Plain paper
- ✿ Markers, crayons, colored pencils, watercolors, oil pastels
- ✿ ASL alphabet sign language charts
- ✿ Scissors
- ✿ Glue
- ✿ (Optional for upper grades) Tracing paper and card stock

Visual Arts Activity Steps:

Discussion on Expression

- ✿ Engage students in a brief discussion on different ways to express voice, thoughts, and feelings.
- ✿ Ask questions like:
 - Does the voice always have to be audible?
 - How can we express thoughts through art?
 - Can we express ideas, thoughts, and feelings through pictures, signs, and gestures?

Reading and Discussion of "The Voice":

- ✿ Read Shel Silverstein's poem "The Voice" aloud.
- ✿ Discuss the themes of the poem, focusing on the inner voice versus external messages from society.

Sharing Personal Interests and Dreams:

- ✿ Ask students to share things they like or their hopes, wishes, and dreams.
- ✿ For younger students, focus on things they enjoy (games, toys, food, animals).
- ✿ For older students, focus on qualities that describe them (morals, values, beliefs, dreams).

Creating a Personal Background

- ✿ Give students plain paper and various art supplies.
- ✿ Instruct them to create a background that represents their interests and identity.
- ✿ For example:
 - A student who loves nature might draw a meadow with wildflowers.
 - A student who loves sports might draw a tennis court.

Incorporating ASL

- ✿ Provide each student with an ASL alphabet chart.
- ✿ Explain Deaf West's mission to bridge spoken and non-verbal communication and how visual art can help bridge these worlds.
- ✿ Ask students to identify the initials of their first, middle, and last names.
- ✿ Have students cut out their initials from the ASL chart.
- ✿ (Optional for older students) Allow them to trace the initials onto tracing paper, transfer to card stock, and cut out.

Assembling the Art Project

- ✿ Students will glue their ASL initials onto the foreground of their decorated background.
- ✿ The final product will be a self-portrait that highlights their identity and incorporates ASL.

Gallery Walk or Wall

- ✿ Display all the students' artwork in a gallery walk or on a gallery wall.
- ✿ Lead students through a reflection on the messages communicated in the artwork.
- ✿ Discuss how the artwork expresses the voice of the artist's likes, values, and ideas.

Reflection

- ✿ Encourage students to share their thoughts on the project.
- ✿ Discuss the importance of different forms of communication and how art and ASL can foster inclusivity and belonging.

Dance

Materials:

- ✿ A copy of the poem "The Voice"
- ✿ Music (suggested but optional - instrumental background music can enhance the experience)
- ✿ Open space for dancing/movement

Warm-Up

- ✿ Start with basic stretches to warm up the body.
- ✿ Mindfulness activity: Practice a short breathing activity to prime students to be ready to interpret the message of the poem. Something as simple as three deep belly breaths will work.

Introduce the Poem

- ✿ Read the Poem: "The Voice" aloud to the students.
- ✿ Briefly talk about what the poem means. Emphasize the importance of listening to your own inner voice and how unique each person's voice can be.

Dance/movement Activity

- ✿ Interpret and/or dramatize the Poem with Movement: Break down the poem into sections and create simple movements for each line. Demonstrate each movement and have the students follow along. Such as:

Line 1: There is a voice inside of you.

Action: Place a hand over your heart and close your eyes, then slowly open your eyes and extend your hand outwards as if the voice is emerging.

Line 2: That whispers all day long,

Action: Turn bodies at a 45 degree angle, place your hand towards lips as if whispering.

Line 3: I feel that this is right for me,

Action: Point to yourself with both thumbs, then step forward confidently.



Line 4: I know that this is wrong.

Action: Shake your head and wave your hands in front of you as if saying "no."

Line 5: No teacher, preacher, parent, friend

Action: Make poses with gestures to represent each figure mentioned. Change directions for each figure.

Line 6: Or wise man can decide

Action: Stand confidently, legs together and point to the sky as if making a declarative statement.

Line 7: What's right for you - just listen to:

Action: Place your hand over your heart again and close your eyes.

Line 8: The voice that speaks inside.

Action: Extend your hands outward again, then bring them back to your heart.

Practice the Sequence:

- ✿ Practice the sequence several times with the students. Encourage them to feel the emotions behind the words and express them through their movements. Practice until students have gained a strong grasp of the movements, pacing and rhythm of speaking as a group.

Reflection:

- ✿ Sit in a circle and ask the students how they felt expressing the poem through dance. What did they learn about listening to their inner voice? How did the movements communicate the message of the poem?

Music

Materials:

- ✿ A copy of the poem “The Voice”
- ✿ Musical instruments (or any classroom instruments)
- ✿ If you do not have access to instruments consider using the body movements such as clapping, snapping, foot patterns etc.

Warm-Up

Vocal Warm-Up: Start with simple vocal exercises to warm up students' voices and creativity.

Introduction

- ✿ Read the poem “The Voice” aloud to the students.
- ✿ Briefly talk about what the poem means. Emphasize the importance of listening to your own inner voice.
- ✿ Ask students how the poem makes them feel and what kinds of sounds or music come to mind when they hear the poem. Track answers on the whiteboard, chart paper, etc.

Music Activity

- ✿ Split the class into small groups (3-4 students per group).
- ✿ Or stay as a whole group and work the poem in sections together with all students.
- ✿ Assign each group a section of the poem to create a musical interpretation.

Group 1: “There is a voice inside of you / that whispers all day long,”

Group 2: “I feel that this is right for me, / I know that this is wrong.”

Group 3: “No teacher, preacher, parent, friend / or wise man can decide”

Group 4: “What’s right for you - just listen to / the voice that speaks inside.”

Creating the Musical Interpretation

Explain to students that because poems have rhythm, cadence, and rhyme schemes, they can often be turned into songs. The transition between poetry and music is common, and music is a great way to enhance a poetic selection. Additionally, music is often considered a

“universal language” because the emotions, tones, moods, and even vibrations of music can be understood and felt by many people regardless of linguistic barriers. By adding music to this poem, students are honoring language justice by using art to communicate with others.

Activity Steps

Step 1: Create Rhythms:

Have each group create a rhythm that matches the flow of their assigned lines. They can use clapping, tapping, or percussion instruments.

Step 2 (optional/upper grade) Create Melodies:

Ask each group to come up with a simple melody for their lines. They can sing it or play it on instruments or in rhythm with the percussive beats they make with their bodies.

Step 3: Incorporate Dynamics:

Encourage students to think about how loud or soft, and fast or slow, they want their music to be to reflect the meaning of the lines.

Step 4: Practice:

Give the groups time to practice their rhythms and melodies.

Step 5: Performance and Reflection:

Have each group perform their musical interpretation of their lines in order. After each performance, give positive feedback and highlight what each group did well. Highlighting how they infused music, percussive vibrations etc as a way to communicate the message of the poem.

Class Reflection:

Discuss as a class how the different musical elements (rhythm, melody, dynamics) helped express the poem’s meaning. Ask students how creating music helped them understand the poem better. Discuss how the inclusion of music honors the theme of belonging and creating inclusive environments.

Helpful links:

Deaf West alumni and actor, Daniel Durant explains why “Communication does not have to be a barrier” [here](#).

To learn more about Protactile visit [this link](#) from the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

To Learn more about Deaf West visit [this link](#).

To learn more about American Sign Language visit [this link](#).

LITERATURE K-2

ISABEL AND HER COLORES GO TO SCHOOL

ALEXANDRA ALLESANDRI

Essential Questions

- ✿ How can art serve as a means of communication to overcome language barriers?
- ✿ In what ways can theater and performance be used to promote empathy and understanding among people from diverse backgrounds?

Enduring Understanding

- ✿ There are many ways to communicate.
- ✿ By embracing our authentic selves, we can forge genuine connections and find belonging with those who accept us for who we are.
- ✿ The creation and sharing of art is a universal language.



ABOUT “ISABEL AND HER COLORES GO TO SCHOOL”

In the enchanting bilingual tale of “Isabel and Her Colores go to School” by Alexandra Alessandri, we embark on a courageous journey alongside young Isabel. Not only does she conquer her apprehension of the first day of school, but she also confronts the fear that her language might hinder her ability to forge friendships. Isabel, who expresses herself in Spanish, finds herself in a school where English holds prominence—a language she likens to the chilly, tempestuous shades of her blue and white crayons.

As a lover of drawing and coloring, Isabel gravitates toward the warm, inviting hues of pinks, yellows, and purples, which she associates with her cherished Spanish language. Through each turn of the page, we witness Isabel’s transformation from anxious outsider to joyful participant, as she discovers that language does not have to be a barrier to forming connections. This delightful narrative celebrates the essence of belonging, underscoring themes of connection, empathy, acceptance, and authenticity.

Isabel’s unwavering authenticity becomes her greatest asset. Initially daunted by her inability to comprehend English, she employs alternative forms of communication—gesture, expression, and ultimately, her art—to dissolve linguistic barriers. This tale resonates with learners of all backgrounds, as we’ve all experienced moments where our differences seemed isolating. Yet, as Isabel learns, it’s these very distinctions that make us extraordinary and enable profound connections with others who value our uniqueness.

Through this inspiring story, students are encouraged to transcend linguistic divides, embrace cultural diversity, and foster inclusive communities. “Isabel and Her Colores go to School” serves as a beacon of empowerment, highlighting the transformative power of belonging and reminding us that embracing our individuality is the key to building bridges that unite and uplift us all.



ABOUT ALEXANDRA ALESSANDRI

Alexandra Alessandri is an author known for her works in children's literature, particularly focusing on picture books. Her writing often explores themes of identity, language, and cultural diversity. Alessandri is also a professor of English at Broward College, where she teaches writing and literature. She is passionate about promoting literacy and multicultural awareness through her stories. Alessandri's debut picture book, “Feliz New Year, Ava Gabriela!” celebrates cultural traditions and the richness of bilingualism. Her writing is praised for its warmth, accessibility, and positive representation of diverse characters.





SAMPLE IDEAS FOR THE CLASSROOM

Objective

- ☞ Foster a sense of belonging by encouraging students to find connections & similarities through artistic expression.
- ☞ Cultivate an understanding and appreciation of both the unique qualities and shared experiences with ourselves and others to develop inclusive classroom communities.

Introducing the Story

- ☞ Begin by asking students to give you an emotional weather forecast of how they feel for the day.
 - Provide brief examples such as:
 - You might be a bright sunny day
 - Or a cold rainy afternoon
 - Ask students to briefly explain what feeling is associated with their weather forecast.
 - Is a sunny day equatable to happy, excited, energetic, etc

- Next ask students to assign a color to this feeling and weather forecast
 - Example: A neon yellow, sunny day
- Allow some students to share their color and weather forecast.
- ☞ Introduce the book “Isabel and her Colores go to School” and its author Alexandra Alessandri.
- ☞ Explain that this is a story about a young girl who felt that her differences would cause her to be alone in her school community. But through her love for colors and art, she learns to connect with others.
- ☞ Read the book aloud in English and/or Spanish. Stop to discuss any unfamiliar words.
- ☞ Discuss the cultural elements depicted in the book and examine how Isabel utilizes color and art as tools to express her emotions and form connections with others.
- ☞ Discuss the themes of belonging presented in the story such as: authenticity, acceptance and friendship.

Theater

Ask students if they’ve ever created an entire play. Tell them that they’re about to create a play telling the story of the book. Break students into small groups. Assign groups to create tableaus from the beginning, middle and end and/or selected scenes from the book. Next, write a short synopsis that corresponds and describes each tableau/scene. Or pull lines directly from the story. Assign 2-3 students to be narrators of each tableau/scene. Perform each moment of the story being led by the narrators.

For example: Scene 1 -

Narrator 1:

The night before the first day of school, Isabel sat crossed-legged on her bed coloreando with her favorite crayons.

Action/Tableau:

Isabel is on her bed pantomiming drawing actions –then freeze in a tableau.

Call up the next group and the next narrator. Follow this format dramatizing each scene/moment of the entire story. It might be helpful to pre-determine the narrations for each scene to allow for more time for students to read the selected text and create scenes accordingly.

Visual Arts

Revisit the opening discussion with the weather forecast and selected color. Pass out drawing/coloring materials of choice: crayons, watercolors, markers etc. Ask students to draw a picture that represents their weather forecast. After completing their pictures ask them to add words that describe their personality, likes, hobbies, and/or characteristics. For example: Fun, soccer player, pizza, and dancing might be words someone adds to their picture. Next, create a gallery wall or gallery table displaying

all the photos. Line students up and have them peruse the gallery, observing every photo. Invite them to find things about the art they connect with. Maybe it’s another person’s hobby, a similar weather forecast, a favorite food etc. After the gallery walk has finished, ask students to share any connections they found with someone else’s art.

Dance

Note: you will need to preselect and build a playlist of instrumental songs.

Revisit the weather forecast from the opening discussion. Chart a list of students’ responses on the board or large paper. Explain to students that you are going to call out each weather forecast and they are to explore creative movements that communicate that forecast. For example: What movements and levels represent a stormy, rainy night? After everyone has explored all of the various weather forecasts, play a list of instrumental songs that represent various emotions. Tell students that you will play music for about 20-30 seconds until you switch songs. Each time a song comes on, they have to dance according to the music as one of the weather forecasts on the board. For example: For a bright sunny day, you might play instrumental music to the song “Happy” by Pharrell. Then switch to something slow tempo and brooding for a stormy, rainy night, etc.

Music

Revisit the weather forecast from the opening discussion. Chart a list of students' responses on the board or large paper. Explain to students that you are going to call out each weather forecast and they are to create creative beats/music that communicate that forecast, with the appropriate instrument. For example, you can use drums or the floor to create percussive beats that match a "thunderous morning".

If you don't have access to instruments:

Create a playlist of instrumental music of various instruments. Play each song for 20-30 seconds and ask students to explore how to best imitate the sounds with their bodies, voices, and/or found objects such as desks, chairs and pencils etc. After this round, ask students to assign each music track to a specific weather forecast as presented on the board. For example: Ask "from this playlist of instruments, which track best fits the mood of a chilly afternoon."

Reflection and Closing:

- ✿ Gather students and have a brief reflection discussion:
 - After exploring art to communicate the story and/or feelings/emotions, how do you feel?
 - Did you find any connections between you and another student and/or another student's art? How so?
 - How did you use art to communicate in today's class?
 - What does Isabel's story teach us about accepting yourself and others?



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