

Using Film, Poetry, and Music to Learn About Social Issues Present during Hurricane Katrina

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Introduction

Looking back, I would say I had a very fortunate upbringing. I grew up in suburban neighborhood where the biggest concern was leaving the cat out at night. All of the families on the street got a long; my sister and I could play outside for all hours of the day without a worry. We knew when the street lights came on that was our signal to go in for the night. I lived with both my parents who have been happily married for 35 years. My sister and I were both sent to a private school for elementary school I didn't question anything or realize things were any different until I started 7th grade at Shue Medill Middle School.

Where I went to school from third to sixth grade, all of the students all had the same skin tone: white. They had the same luxuries I had growing: a nice, single-family home in a safe neighborhood. There was always food on the table. Families were able to go on yearly trips to different places. But at Shue Medill, the makeup of the study body was very different. There were whites students, but more prominent in the hallways were African American students, Latinos and Hispanics. As time went on, I learned I was attending school with notorious gang members; there were students living in a single-parent home. Some of my classmates claimed they lived in neighborhoods where gunshots at night were frequent. Some of the classmates I met qualified for free/reduce lunch since their parents didn't have the income to provide lunch. All off this was very different than what I was used to but it still didn't truly sink in how truly lucky I actually was. Not until I met my good friend Charles.

Charles was in my mother's class 8th grade English and Special Education class at Shue. Charles would opt to stay late after school for extra help and wait for the four o'clock bus to go home on. That way he would get home the same time as his mother, when he felt safe to be in his home. He claimed he didn't want to go home by himself since the young gang members would be lurking around causing trouble. He didn't want to get involved with that so he tried to avoid it as much as possible. Charles' neighborhood was similar to what I mentioned before where gun shots where frequent; the neighbor was run-down and disheveled. It wasn't safe for Charles to go out any play.

One strong memory comes to mind was one Friday afternoon, Charles, our friend Lindsey and myself went to mall afterschool to hang out and go to a movie. My mom dropped us off thirty minutes before the movie started so that we could go buy candy

from the CVS that was still in the mall. The three of us were walking down the aisles looking for the candy section when I noticed we were being watched by the manager of the store. I guess she had nothing else to do since but watch us since we were the only patrons in the store. I saw that she picked up the phone and made a call; id didn't pay any mind. She was probably making a call that was job related. We each found the candy bar we wanted for the movie theater and went to check out. The manager waited on Lindsey and myself first; as Charles' turn came to check out a mall security officer came into the store. He began to question Charles and where he got the money to buy the candy bar. Charles politely defended himself by saying his mother gave him some money for the candy and movie ticket. The officer told Charles he needed to put the candy back and leave the store. I was shocked to see him treated in such a way! He was an honest, paying customer! But Charles did as he was told and we left. I remembering leaving the store dumfounded and confused by what I just saw, enraged at the officer for making such a crazy assumption about my friend, upset and saddened that Charles felt humiliated. When I got home, I told my mom everything; she told me I just had my first lesson in empathy.

Growing up, I would say I was sheltered from the reality of the world. I didn't realize until I was in my teens and seeing how different life was for my African American peer how privileged I truly was. The world treated the two of us differently based on the color of our skin; they didn't see us a smart individuals that had a lot to offer the world. They just automatically ranked me as better due to my white skin. Fast forwarding to seventeen years later, social issues and injustices such as this are still prominent in our society today. And it makes me realize how much more we need to teach about acceptance and the need for change in order to gain equal opportunities for everyone

Rationale

In our curriculum, we focus on two natural disasters: the 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake/Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina. For this unit, we will focus on the disaster of Hurricane Katrina and the social injustices that became highly visible due to that storm. As a class, we will read and compare the tone, styles, and structures of two poems: "After the Hurricane" by Rita Williams Garcia and "Watcher After Katrina, 2005" by Natasha D. Trethewey. These two poems address the social injustices that survivors faced during the aftermath of Katrina, especially the African American community. There is a strong tone that speaks to the lack of help after the hurricane and how those stranded were left without food, water, clean clothes for days. It discusses the chaos that ensued with the looting, violence, and racial tensions in the aftermath. The government, both the federal and state, were criticized for their response or lack thereof. I want students to examine the tone of these two poems in order to draw conclusions as of why the speaker would feel this way.

Art is defined as a diverse range of human activities in creating visual, auditory or

performing artifacts or pieces of artworks that expresses the author's imaginative or technical skill, intended to be appreciated for their beauty or emotional power. Art and artistic expression is often regarded as method or tool to reach the masses, to teach them about various issues within our society. According to Edutopia.com:

“Years of research show that it's (art education) closely linked to almost everything that we as a nation say we want for our children and demand from our schools: academic achievement, social and emotional development, civic engagement, and equitable opportunity. Involvement in the arts is associated with gains in math, reading, cognitive ability, critical thinking, and verbal skill. Arts learning can also improve motivation, concentration, confidence, and teamwork. A 2005 report by the Rand Corporation about the visual arts argues that the intrinsic pleasures and stimulation of the art experience do more than sweeten an individual's life -- according to the report, they "can connect people more deeply to the world and open them to new ways of seeing," creating the foundation to forge social bonds and community cohesion.”¹

At Conrad Schools of Science, we do not offer any art instruction classes since we are a science magnet school that focuses on academic courses focused on science pathways. So by incorporating art education within my English Language Arts, I am able to help my students learn the necessary critical thinking skills they often lack but also learn how to empathize with hard realities that are often overlooked. Since my students were not born during the events of Hurricane Katrina, learning to empathize and building a deeper connection with the victims is vital piece of understanding the tone of these chosen poems. Which is why using artistic instruction as a tool to teach about these social issues surrounding Hurricane Katrina is the best way to help students understand the anger and devastation of the victims of Hurricane Katrina and how they were wrongly served by the federal government.

Reviewing various forms of data from standardized tests, classroom assessments and general student discussion, analyzing poetry is a major struggle for my students especially my special education and English Language Learners. Between understanding the format and decipher the figurative meaning behind the words, they need a lot of guidance to break down and understand poetry. In order to help my students understand figurative meaning of words and the use of imagery, we will use music to help understand words have figurative meaning and photographs of the conditions to help establish imagery as a way to better connect and comprehend these two poems. One form of art that is often used as an expressive way to share people's emotions on issues that are plaguing them is poetry. With this unit, I want my students to also examine the poems as a form of artistic expression that is sending message about a social injustice that was the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. For this unit, we will focus on analyzing the social issues discusses and emotions/opinions expressed in a series of poems.

To take this unit a step further, I want students to question whether these issues of division of races and poverty arose due to the storm or whether these issues were present before disaster struck and if these issues still persist today eleven years later. To address these questions and make a bigger connection to these social issues of poverty and race, students will not only read the poetry and examine photographs taken during the disaster to highlight the speakers' emotions and circumstances; we will examine other prominent social issues. Students to not only research poverty and race but other social issues as well including gender roles, environment conservation, political freedom, education, race, safety, disabilities, and discrimination to produce/create a form of artistic expression—either writing poetry, visual presentation using photographs, or a musical soundtrack—that speaks their particular tone or emotions on that social issue.

Demographics

Conrad Schools of Science (CSS) is a unique school in the Red Clay School District housing grades from sixth to twelfth. The school is considered a magnet school with a primary focus on mathematics, science and technology. The high school courses offered are meant to lead into various pathways: Allied Health, Sports Physical Therapy, Engineering and Biotechnology. All students now have to apply and interview in order to be accepted into the school. I am currently teaching 6th grade English/Language Arts and Special Education.

In the past couple years at CSS the Special-education component was served using the inclusion model. Since I am dual-certified in teaching special –education and middle school English/Language Arts, I would teach a group of regular education students with the special-education population in the same class. For the current 2016-2017 school year, I am teaching eighty-one students total in three classes throughout the day. We teach in a block schedule where we would have four blocks a day. Of those eighty-one students, four students receive special education services. I have three students classified as having learning disabilities where two female students cannot comprehend text above a second grade reading level and another male student who cannot comprehend content above a fourth grade reading level. My final student that receives special education services is classified with autism. She is highly functioning where she does not have any academic needs yet she needs behavior goals. This student has a Behavior Support Plan where behavior strategies are listed to help this student learn how to properly self-regulate her responses and behavior when a subtle shift in routine happens. This can act as a trigger for her where her behavior can escalate to meltdowns and aggression. I also have three students who are classified as monitor status English Language Learners (ELL). These students are able to comprehend the sixth grade content but need to be taught vocabulary acquisition skills, especially when learning new concepts from the curriculum.

For this curriculum unit, I will focus on my sixth grade English/Language Arts class. Since the classes will be an inclusion setting, the lesson will focus on differentiating instruction so that the gifted students as well as the classified special-education students and the ELL students in the class will be able to comprehend the material. So when creating my lessons for this unit, I have to keep the needs of these students in mind; lessons will be created with the sixth grade standards and curriculum goals in mind but optional modified versions of the lessons will be added to help accommodate students with special needs similar to the student that I have in my class room. This unit has been made to fit a block schedule of 90 minutes classes.

Essential Questions:

- What are different types of social issues?
- What social issues arise during natural disasters, in particular with Hurricane Katrina?
- How does the author use photographs, music and poetry to demonstrate their purpose or point of view on the natural disaster?

Objectives

- Students will understand what the concepts social issues and social injustice
- Students will understand how social injustice was prevalent in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina
- Students will use music to help identify the figurative meaning of words
- Students will use photographs to highlight the imagery created in poems
- Students will understand and create a form of art to express tone on a social issue

Content

What exactly are ‘social issues’? What is the difference between ‘social justice and injustice’? Why should we teach social justice through the arts? In order for my students and myself to begin to understand the turmoil behind the Hurricane Katrina disaster, we need to be able to answer those presented questions. First, I’ll summarize the Hurricane Katrina disaster and how the storm made all of the social issues and injustices flood to the surface with the levees breaking. Next, I’ll define what social issues are, decipher the difference between social justice and injustice, and discuss why schools should incorporate the teaching of both concepts to children using artistic expression.

The Natural and Human Disaster known as Katrina

What is still defined as the worst natural disaster to have struck the United States happened on August 29, 2005. Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast and created havoc in its wake. Cities were destroyed and families devastated as a result of her wrath.

Overall, at least 1,245 people died in the hurricane and subsequent floods, making it the deadliest United States hurricane since 1928. Total property damage was estimated at \$108 billion. The city of New Orleans was the most vulnerable and took the brunt of the storm. Even with all the warnings in place people still cannot fathom the magnitude of human crisis that presented itself when Hurricane Katrina struck. Nor, has the citizens of the United States planned on seeing a facet of American society that has either been mostly ignored or denied.

“August 29, 2005, is a day that will be remembered by people all over the world and is now a part of history in the United States to be remembered in a way we remembered 9/11, or the days President Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. were assassinated...It’s winds and water devastated parts of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, but it was the scenes in the mostly black city of New Orleans that have contributed significantly to giving this storm its infamous status.”²

Public debate arose about the local, state and federal governments' role in the preparations before the storm struck and in response to the aftermath.

During 1965 Hurricane Betsy, there were rumors that the government allowed for the levees to be dynamited so that the water from the river would flood the Ninth Ward- the area known where the poorer citizens and black community resided. Though, it was never proven to be true but understood to be true- nothing was ever investigated. The government just ignored it and brushed the issue with the levees under the rug. John Barry, author of *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood and How it Changed America* wrote in his book that the government flood policy was deeply flawed and that the decision to explode the levees was not a race issue but a money issue. Rumor was that this was to purposely revert water to the Ninth Ward and away from damaging the Lakefront District and the French Quarter, which are the wealthier neighborhoods in the city and the big tourist hotspots that bring a lot of revenue into the city.³ In comparing the two storms, there are a lot of similarities between the outcome of Hurricane Betsy and Hurricane Katrina.

Even before the storm hit, analysts warned city and state officials of the weakened and substandard conditions of the levees. True to these predictions, the force of the storm caused the levees to break and the pumps fail to handle the amount of water flooding the city of New Orleans. Years before, FEMA Hurricane Study created Hurricane Pam which simulated a fictitious hurricane 5 storm to see what would happen if it hit New Orleans. The simulation showed that the city was completely flooded and the levees would not hold. Government officials ignored the warnings the organization and study presented.

In reality, Hurricane Katrina shifted and turned away from New Orleans so the brunt of the storm missed the city. Two-thirds of the deaths in Greater New Orleans were due

to levee and floodwall failure, not the storm. The federal government hired specific engineers to build protective barriers to keep the Mississippi water at bay if a large hurricane was to come towards New Orleans. The government hired the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to build levees that acted as blockade and made a drainage system that would pump excess water if necessary.

Over fifty breaches in the hurricane's surge protection is what caused the majority of death and destruction. Overall, 80% of the city's neighborhoods became flooded and the water remained weeks after the storm disappeared. The designers and builders claimed the levee system followed orders mandated by the Flood Control Act of 1965. With further inquiry, it was soon realized due to a decision to use shorter steel sheet pilings in an effort to save money was the main reason for the levees failing. USACE was taken to trial in January 2008; the Corps were proven not financially responsible by the U.S. District court for the disaster. Exactly ten years after Katrina, J. David Rogers, lead author of a new report in the official journal of the World Water Council, concluded that the flooding during Katrina could have been prevented had the USACE just found the manpower to double-check its flood-wall designs. So we see yet another example of a wealthy benefactor and the federal government collaborating together in their favor and ignoring the needs of the people most affected and those whom need the most help (the lower-class/poverty) in the city of New Orleans.

Many New Orleans residents did decide to ride out the storm even with the warning to evacuate August 26, 2005. Also, a large number of residents rely on public transportation; it was hard to remove over 127,000 people out of the city if they have no mode of transportation. People were given orders to report to the Superdome if they had no means of transportation. A mandatory evacuation was issued, but came less than 12 hours before the storm made landfall. The emergency evacuation call came too late and thousands of citizens were left with no way out and forced to endure the storm. It was said that there were lots of school buses parked; Mayor Ray Nagin claimed there was lack of insurance liability and shortage of bus drivers.

In the wake of the storm, citizens of New Orleans remained stranded in the city without food, clean water, and shelter. All over the news, pictures of predominantly black New Orleans citizens stranded on rooftops, stranded in the Superdome and Convention Center without food and water for days. The ugly truths relating to poverty and race in our government's response to its citizens became crystal clear; race seemed to be the most significant predictor of disparities that are tied to an existing system of privilege for some and discrimination against others.⁴

Ever since Katrina, two things have become unmistakable:

1. The physical devastation created by the disaster is enormous

2. The social divisions that were exposed and then rocked American society in the aftermath of the disaster are equally powerful⁵

We know in reality not all communities are created equal. If a community is poor, black, or even on the wrong side of town, it receives less protection than the suburbs inhabited by affluent whites. Generally, the rich and able take the best real estate offered leaving the poor and working class more vulnerable to environmental pestilence and hazards.⁶ This fact became quite clear with Hurricane Katrina, highlighting the severe gaps and incompetence we as a society have in disaster preparedness but in the differential treatment of those with higher needs, poverty stricken and black communities and complaints of purposely being left behind and discriminated against.

But we also see an ugly truth make its way to the surface: the social climate we believed to have been true in the United States as a whole where equality for everyone is prominent is not necessarily true and the government system that is built to serve its people only protects the wealthy and those who it deems worthy.

Using Spike Lee's Documentary to Introduce the Social Issues of Katrina

“(Lee) points to a complicated web of social, political, and environmental blind spots that led to Katrina and its catastrophic aftermath. These truths, which hovered just beneath national consciousness, constituted a disaster of racial and economic disenfranchisement that was exposed and further exacerbated by the levee breaches in August 2005. What apparently began as only a natural disaster soon revealed itself as something all-too-human, disproportionately striking those already existing on the edges of survival. Not only was it that the predominantly black poor who were abandoned to the drowning city, but it is also this same group that has faced the most obstacles to returning and reclaiming their homes.”⁷

Anna Hartnell quotes this in her article “When the Levees Broke: Inconvenient Truths and the Limits of National Identity” speaking of the truths that American filmmaker Spike Lee’s documentary *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* accomplished. The documentary testifies to the inconvenient truths that enabled the social disaster so spectacularly showcased by Hurricane Katrina. Lee creates the documentary by interviewing the victims and providing footage of events that happened before, during and after the storm. Its here students will see how disastrous the storm truly was. Lee talks with the people stranded, starving, and left for dead. He captures the dead bodies left in the street, meteorologists warning the city to take action sooner, President George W. Bush’s lack of response and the engineer group that was meant to make the city safe ultimately fail the citizens of New Orleans. As students watch the different Acts of Spike Lee’s documentary, they will be asked to keep a reflection journal. Journals are a very popular tool to use in the classroom as a way for students to process and reflect their own

thinking. I'll be providing prompts to help them start but I want them to be honest in their responses and really reflect on what they are seeing in the film footage.

Social Issues and Injustices Defined and the Importance of Teaching at School

In reading Samuel Totten's book *The Importance of Teaching Social Issues in Schools*, he claims that one constant that remains in any society is the impingement of social issues and that ridding the world of social issues is impossible.⁸ Technology and the ways we live our lives may have evolved over time, but as long as people have the ability to think and develop their own opinions, conflicting viewpoints come as a result. Thus, social issues remaining a constant factor in our society.⁹ A *social issue* is a problem that influences a considerable number of the individuals within a society; they generally revolve around conflicting viewpoints as a result of various factors. For example, poverty, racism, gender, political beliefs, religion, bullying can all be seen as examples as social issues.

Social justice is classified as "equitable redistribution of resources and as recognition of culture and identity for those who are marginalized and subjugated in society."¹⁰ Without these stated resources, *Social injustice* prevails and people are easily disregarded (as seen in the Hurricane Katrina disaster). Thus, we see these groups that are wrongly marginalized and oppressed demonstrate opposition as a way to make themselves visible to those who cannot or will not acknowledge their presence or make their situations equal.

Totten claims that it is vital for U.S. citizens, especially within the school systems, to teach children about social issues. "The fact that social issues can, and often do, rip asunder the fabric of society"¹¹ has induced the critical need for schools to be more proactive in preparing our children—the future voters and decision makers—to be informed and how to logically deal with such issues civilly, constructively, and officiously.

"And yet, through it all, many educators have stood firm in the belief that, in a democracy such as ours, it is imperative for the young *to be prepared* to take an active part in societal debates, discussions, and decisions, and that the best way to do that is to engage them in the study of social issues while they are still in school. Only in this way, they believe, are we, society as a whole, likely to nurture in our society and impact the lives of both groups and individuals."¹²

So then going back to our original question: why should schools want to include social justice in their school systems and curriculum? Within the 21st century, the mass media (images, television, news outlets, and social media) have been playing a major role of shedding light on different social issues that arise. This can be a blessing but also playing

devil's advocate. Billy Ivey stated: "If children don't shape images, images will shape them."¹³ Many social justice issues are based around our own personal awareness or lack thereof. As of late, the mass media play a big role in social justice issues; unfortunately, our students not take everything at face value and do not question credibility of sources. They assume that if it is reported on social media or the news, there is no bias or falsification in play. Hence, why we as educators need to teach that the concept of social justice seems to stem from some notion of social equity: perceptions of equal access, equal opportunities, fair treatment and respect. It becomes a power issue, periphery versus mainstream, both physical and personal. We need to teach our children how to critically think, analyze, and evaluate the issues from multiple perspectives so that they are able to have an open mind and effectively address them. Art can be this solution to developing critical thinking needed to address social issues. Through the study of art, we can help develop tolerance of differences, which is an important social justice lesson that has to be learned in society and schools today.

Using Art as Pedagogy for Schools to Teach about Social Issues and Social Injustice

Throughout time, people have used different forms of art as a way to express themselves. These pieces of art were meant to memorialize individuals, events and movements. Some pieces were created to influence and move their audience; for others their purpose is to express their opinions on a topic. Another way people use art, as University of Delaware Professor Lynette Overby states that, "The arts become a venue for exploring and providing insight into important social issues."

Painter Barbara Beyerbach stated: "Art allows for me to take some things in deeper, imagine the consequences, and dream of alternatives. It allows me to make a statement in ways that words do not, to emphasize with strangers, to struggle with my role in issues of social injustice."¹⁴ Art allows students to feel a part of something bigger than themselves; it allows for you to express yourself freely, to feel comfortable about taking risks and demonstrate how you see your world or what you want to change. But art not only allows for artist to express their struggles, emotions, and thoughts about the situation/social issue but for the audience to reflect more about their privileges, choices, and ignorance. This is why many people, activists, artists, and educators turn to artistic expression to discuss and share social issues and injustices. There are three aspects in which art helps establish a connection to social issues: agency, imagination, and creativity.

Agency, imagination and creativity are three aspects of art that generate a relationship with social justices. "Imagination is the capacity to think of possibilities beyond what exists and creativity is the mental and physical process of decision making, risk taking, and changed used in the development of novel ideas and products."¹⁵ Imagination and creativity is the human way to transform the world into what we imagine (whether good or bad). Agency is "the cognitive process that drives creativity"¹⁶ or the reason the artists/activists makes decisions about what they create. John Dewey—an American

philosopher and psychologists—suggests that humans make forms like the arts to make sense of the chaos in our lives and circumstances. “We create representations of our world to better understand it, express our understanding, and engage in the human conversation of being.”¹⁷

So by using these three capacities—creativity, imagination, and agency—can be empowering and are strong, positive outlets for people who are oppressed to demonstrate opposition.

“The capacities of imagination, creativity, and agency, are ways of knowing and doing that belie the powerlessness of the oppressed; subjugated people, whether because of race, national origin, class, gender, language, age, or sexual orientation, have in their hands and minds the power to create like those with privilege because all humans create culture.”¹⁸

As we know, the need to create is powerful. Many adolescents are insecure and often low in self-esteem. Art or the ability to create makes an even playing field for everyone to express their thoughts, feelings, and emotions about their current circumstances. This is why arts education is a valuable resource for all children and adults; it is a way to have equitable resources, recognition of culture and identity, and creating social justice.

One pedagogical model recommended to teach art integration and as a way to focus on the instruction of social justice within the classroom is the model of CRAE. Created as an extension of a literature review made by Mary Stone Hanley and George Noblit, the pedagogy incorporates six pedagogical models, three of which focus on arts and three that focus on the non-arts. The three art pedagogies are: production, integration, and aesthetics.

1. Production: learn necessary skills to express ideas and emotions through art media
2. Integration: Involves the use of art to teach and learn non-art subjects
3. Aesthetics: Immersion in the experiences and perspective of the artists

The best way to learn involves all three art pedagogies where not only are you learning about the art form, you are attempting to understand the experiences of the artists to understand their choices in creativity and you are also using the elements of the arts. So for my unit, I will have students incorporating all three of these pedagogical elements where they are integrating art by studying and analyzing the chosen Free Verse and Traditional poems; students will learn the aesthetics where they will learn about the experiences of the Hurricane Katrina victims of Hurricane through film, poetry, and photographs and read biographies of the artists/speakers/writers of the poems; they will produce pieces of artistic expression by creating pieces of poetry, photographs, and/or soundtrack that embodies their chosen social issue.

Using Poetry to Understand the Social Injustices of Hurricane Katrina

In our seminar on September 26, 2016, this week's topic was dedicated to the learning and usage of poetry in the classrooms. At the start of the seminar, Professor Overby took a poll and asked what the teachers thought of using poetry in the classroom. All around, the teachers stated that poetry is the hardest concept to teach and as well as for the students to understand. It's hard for a student to grasp since its structure is drastically different than stories and other readings they are used to visually seeing. Students are also under the assumption that poetry has to rhyme so when they are given a non-traditional or free verse style poem, they don't know how to begin breaking it down and decoding the meaning. ¹⁹Along with difficulty with the structure, students do not realize that the words are carefully chosen by the speaker and serve a purpose. The words used often carry figurative or alternative meaning that what the dictionary states. This is often the difficulty my students have is that they cannot determine what the figurative meaning of the word/phrases are to comprehend the speakers intentions.

Teaching poetry in the classroom is best accomplished and done successfully if through imagery. Poetry helps create the sense of language through visual mediums. In the book *The Word in Play*, Susan Katz and Judith Thomas say this is where "you are defining a relationship between the image and the art is key in explaining how the everyday words can be patterned to create memorable life experiences."²⁰ In other words, poems begin with words that are developed into language patterns that are meant to create imagery. This means that each word is carefully chosen and hold monumental importance to decipher the speaker's intentions.

Music and Photography as a Bridge to Understand Poetry

Photography

In world that is becoming more dependent on technology and the use of imagery as a method for creativity and innovation, it is vital that we teach our students how those technologies use visual images and how those images affect their lives. This means, we have to evolve the meaning of being literate is not just limited to words on a page. Students today now embody a visual culture where 'visual literacy' is applicable. This is where you learn "the ability to interpret, negotiate, and make meaning from information presented in the form of an image."²¹ Thus, 'visual literacy' is where we go beyond the words on a page to realms that are 'visual' such as still and moving images such as photographs, television, and film as well as understanding wikis, digital media and other emerging technologies. All of these forms of visual literacy converge to potentially influence citizens about social issues.

Along with reading the two poems, students are going to be finding images that correlate with the imagery generated by the poem itself. This way we are able to incorporate the 'visual literacy' my special education students often need and what is

becoming the norm to most of my other students in a visual, technology dependent group. Using their access to Google Slides, students will compose a presentation with a partner where they will highlight lines/stanzas from each poem and pair them with images capture of the destruction. This way they demonstrate if they are able to identify the imagery as well as the tone the speaker is setting up in the poem.

Music

“A defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience. It is our position that the creation and observation of artistic forms of representation serve to shape our experiences and mediate “a way of knowing” of self and the world around us.”²²

Music has always served as a vital component in the ways various cultures and people preserve their way of life or act as an outlet to express their personal identity. It helps us define the world around us, especially if we do not have to words to express our thoughts ourselves. Music has the ability to imprint in our mind and helps us understand the meaning of our existence. My students love music. They can easily find/name a song that reaches them, one they know all the words to. Most of my students can find a song they relate to, explain how it has personal significance to them, and enjoy the rhythm and beat of. However, they do not realize the similarities that music has to poetry.

Musicians often use figurative language in their songs to help relay a deeper meaning within their lyrics. Words are carefully chosen so that meaning is evident and rhythm is established much like poetry. This creates an efficient bridge to a topic that is often difficult for students to master.

In our seminar on September 19, 2016, we had a guest lecturer Yael A. Haislip visit and she presented on the topic “Music for Social Justice”. One of the activities she had the group complete was to go through their music/song library on their phones and we had to find two songs that answered the following questions:

1. Song that encapsulates the essence of your musical taste
2. Song that encapsulates the essence of your human identity

I really enjoyed the activity and found that it can be an easy activity that I can use within my unit to help create a connection and introduce the study of poetry. In order to use in my classroom, I would revise the wording of the questions to be something along these lines:

1. What is a song that defines who you are as a person or your human identity?
2. What is a song that carries meaning or shares a message with you?

From here, I can introduce music as a way to introduce social issues. I'll carefully choose various songs such as Tupac's “Changes” or the Black Eyed Peas “What I call Life” as

two forms of music that discuss and highlight social issues and injustices that are still constant in our society. As a class we will examine the lyrics and decipher the speaker's tone and message and determine what issue they are trying to bring to light. From here, we will go into studying the necessary background knowledge of Hurricane Katrina and two poems.

In the end, after we have examined film footage, viewed documentaries, analyzed poetry, music and photographs, I want students to attempt to apply and try to create one of these art forms about a social issue they see within their current community as the culminating project. Students will select one of the social issues outlined to research and are responsible for producing their chosen art form that reflects that particular social issue.

Strategies

Cornell Notes

The Cornell method provides a systematic format for condensing and organizing notes. The student divides the paper into two columns: the note-taking column (usually on the right) is twice the size of the questions/key word column (on the left). The student should leave five to seven lines, or about two inches, at the bottom of the page. Notes from a lecture or teaching are written in the note-taking column; notes usually consist of the main ideas of the text or lecture, and long ideas are paraphrased. Long sentences are avoided; symbols or abbreviations are used instead. To assist with future reviews, relevant questions (which should be recorded as soon as possible so that the lecture and questions will be fresh in the student's mind) or key words are written in the key word column. These notes can be taken from any source of information, such as fiction and nonfiction books, DVDs, lectures, textbooks, etc. Within 24 hours of taking the notes, the student must revise and write questions and then write a brief summary in the bottom five to seven lines of the page. This helps to increase understanding of the topic. When studying for either a test or quiz, the student has a concise but detailed and relevant record of previous classes.

This is the template I use in my classes to take notes. Often, I have a computer template where I will type in the terminology and questions that students will need to know. For special-education students, you can manipulate the template to make it more 'fill-in-the-blank' to assist them in writing definitions. We will use Cornell Notes to keep track of facts learned about Hurricane Katrina and the vocabulary associated with the poetry.

Journal Entries

Journaling is a method of instruction often used in classrooms to help students improve their writing but also learn how to be reflective and critical thinkers by documenting their thought process and emotions/feelings on a prescribed topic. Teachers can use journal writing to meet specific goals, or the purpose can be wide open. Some teachers check journal writing and work on polishing skills; others use journals as the one "uncorrected" form of writing that students produce. Some teachers provide prompts to help students begin their writing while some leave the topic as student choice.

For my unit, students will be keeping a reflective journal where I will give prompts/questions based on activities learned and discussed in class about Hurricane Katrina. For instance, students will respond or describe what they felt in watching Spike Lee's documentary *When the Levees Broke*

Collaborative Groups

Collaborative learning can occur peer-to-peer or in larger groups. Peer learning, or peer instruction, is a type of collaborative learning that involves students working in pairs or small groups to discuss concepts, or find solutions to problems.

Students will be working together in groups of 2 to 4 to discuss, analyze, and interpret the tone of the poems. Each group will be required to make the groups and share results with the rest of the class in a power point presentation.

Think Pair Share

Think-Pair-Share is a specific type of responding to questions strategy. It allows for collaborative learning in that students think and generate their own conclusions about a prompt or question. They then pair up with their assigned partner (or a peer of their choice) and share the conclusions they each came up with. The Think-Pair- Share strategy will be implemented to allow the students to collaborate and share their ideas on the author's intentions and use of persuasive techniques. We will use this technique when students share their thoughts on the discussion forum on Schoology.

Schoology

Schoology is a learning management system that acts as an online classroom. This system allows teachers to create and manage lessons for our academic courses that that is geared towards technology advancement.

Red Clay School District is a 1:1 technology school district where each student will have access to their own laptop; the middle school students and older are able to take this technology home with them to use as a tool to assist with their learning process in the classroom and teachers are able to develop online lessons using Schoology. For the

purpose of this unit, I will be using Schoology as a way for my classes to discuss the topics at hand in an online discussion forums of essential questions for activities, journaling, online assignments incorporating the use of Google Docs and Slides, use of media folders for images regarding Hurricane Katrina, and online research for their culminating activity.

Google Docs/Presentations

Google Docs is a free Web-based application in which documents and spreadsheets can be created, edited and stored online. Files can be accessed from any computer with an Internet connection and a full-featured Web browser.

We are a 1:1 technology school where students will be each getting their own Google Chrome book to use at home and in classes. With this added feature in the classroom, I want students to use Google Docs and Presentation to collaborate and work in groups. Google is unique in that multiple students can work on the same document, at the same time, and from different computers. Students will work together using Google Docs when identifying images that match the tone/narrate the speaker's experiences in the poems.

Teacher Resources

Spike Lee's Documentary When the Levees Broke: Requiem in Four Acts
Student Laptops or access to laptops
NOVA Video: "Hurricane Katrina: The Storm That Drowned A City"
Journal/Notebooks for students (require students to have one)
Copies of lyrics for Tupac "Changes" and Black Eye Peas "What I Call Life"
Copies of songs Tupac "Changes" and Black Eye Peas "What I Call Life"

Classroom Activities

In my school, our administrators require all classroom teachers to have the following pieces in our lessons each day: Do Now (activation activity), Objectives, Essential Questions, and Activities. I'm going to follow this approach in arranging the activities for this curriculum unit.

Lesson One: Introduction to Hurricane Katrina

Objectives

- Understand the facts about the hurricane
- Define what it means for a society to be just
- How art throughout the years has found

Essential Question

- What does it mean when a society is just? Do the circumstances of Hurricane Katrina match our definition of what is just?
- Why is Hurricane Katrina defined more as a human disaster rather than a natural one?
- What divisions/faults do we see in our society as a result of the storm?

Activities

Part A: Storm Background

Do Now: To open the lesson, students will be presented with the online discussion question “What does it mean when society is just?” Students will first compose their responses in the online discussion on Schoology then will complete a Think-Pair-Share with a partner to discuss their definitions.

As a class, we will watch a video from NOVA: “Hurricane Katrina The Storm That Drowned A City”. As they watch the video, students need to take notes on five facts they considered to be ‘shocking’ or something they couldn’t believe happened.

Cornell Notes: as a class, we will take notes the storm’s background using the teacher-made power point. For their final assessment, students will be asked to answer the first set of journal questions:

1. What shocked you most about seeing the aftermath of the storm?
2. Was right for the government to wait over a week to respond/help the people of New Orleans?

Part B: Victim Testimonies in Spike Lee’s

In class, we will watch Act I and Act II of Spike Lee’s documentary *When the Levees Broke*. After the completion of each Act, students are responsible for writing a personal reflection in their journal highlighting the comments that two victims stated in the film

After completing Act II, students will need to write their own personal reflection of the events as well as answer this prompt: “What social inequalities did you notice throughout the documentary?”

Lesson Two: What Are Social Issues and How Art Sheds Light

Objectives

- Define what social issues are
- How art can serve as a way to highlight and educate about social issues
- Analyze, interpret, and select artistic work for presentation

Essential Question

- Why do people create art?
- What are social issues? What social issues were prominent during Hurricane Katrina?
- How does art highlight/make these social issues known?
- What is tone? Can you determine the speaker's tone in song and in poetry?

Activities

Part A: Examples of Social Issues through Art

Do Now: Think-Pair-Share

Students will discuss the prompt: “What purpose do you think art serves? In other words, why do you think people create art?” Students will compose their response and share with a partner. After a couple minutes we will come together as a class to discuss. Overall, I want students to come to the conclusions that art does act as a tool for entertainment but can also be an outlet to educate people about larger social issues prominent in society.

I will demonstrate/ present a power point that highlights different examples of how artists have used different forms of artistic expressions to serve as a way to educate the masses about the social issue at hand (i.e.-wall murals, photographs, dance, paintings, music)

Part B: Music is meant to talk about Social Issues

To practice examining forms of artistic expression as a way to educate on social issues, we will first examine music. As a class, we will listen to TuPac “Changes” and Black Eye Peas “What I Call Life”. For each song, students will answer the following questions:

1. What words or phrases stand out to you? Why?
2. What is the tone of the speaker?
3. What issues of society are they trying to tell you about?
4. What is your reaction to the lyrics?

Students will each record their responses. We will regroup as class to discuss their responses as a whole.

In their journal, students need to answer these two prompts:

1. What is a song that defines who you are as a person or your human identity?
2. What is a song that carries meaning or shares a message with you?

Part C: Poetry as a way to discuss social issues

As a class, we will read and compare the tone, styles, and structures of two poems: “After the Hurricane” by Rita Williams Garcia and “Watcher After Katrina, 2005” by Natasha D. Trethewey. These two poems address the social injustices that survivors faced during the aftermath of Katrina, especially the African American community. There is a strong tone that speaks to the lack of help after the hurricane and how those stranded were left without food, water, clean clothes for days.

To help determine the strong tone of the speaker, especially for After the Hurricane, students will create a visual presentation of each poem capturing the imagery presented. Students will collaborate with a partner or small group to illustrate the stanzas of the poem. On one side of the slide students will rewrite the stanza as seen; on the other side of the slide they need to find an image from the online or from the online classroom in a media library that captures the image brought forth by the words/phrases of the speaker. In presenting their slides to the class, they need to explain why they chose that photo and how it captures the speaker’s tone.

Lesson Three: Final/Culminating Activity

Objectives

- Summarize their chosen social issue by citing evidence from research conducted
- Produce an art form discussed that highlights a social issue that accurately reflects their tone on the topic

Essential Questions

- Are you able to create a piece of art that demonstrates your stance/tone on a current social issue?

Activities

Students will select one of the following social issues to address in their art: race, poverty, bullying, gun violence, drugs and alcohol.

Each student will pick two of the activities to complete about their chosen social issue:

Write Three Poems that Target their Social Issue

- Write a brief 3-5 paragraph summary that summarizes their social issue
- Compose three poems that highlight their tone on their social issue
- Have to write one free verse poem and one traditional poem

Soundtrack that Inspires Hope

- Write a 3-5 paragraph summary that summarizes their social issue
- Student creates a sound track that is meant to inspire hope and explain why those songs were chosen

Photo collage

- Write a brief 3-5 paragraph summary that summarizes their social issue
- Collect or take 10 to 12 photos to include in their slide show
- Explain why they chose these particular images to highlight their tone and their social issue

Design a memorial/statue or wall mural

- Write a brief 3-5 paragraph summary that summarizes their social issue
- Design a memorial on a smaller scale elaborate on the materials that will be used
- Explain why they chose their design and how it speaks their tone on the topic

Video/documentary/PSA:

- Write a brief 3-5 paragraph summary that summarizes their social issue
- Make a 5-7 minute PSA about their social issue and why it's a major issue

Bibliography

Bates, Kristin A. , and Richelle S. Swan. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press , 2007.

Kristin Bates and Richelle Swan write a riveting book about the social injustices that became highly visible after Hurricane Katrina hit in New Orleans in 2005. They write about how those social injustices have been present all along; they give the history of how social injustices came to be in the city which helps explain the major social issues that became prominent after the storm. I really enjoyed reading it and gaining more background knowledge about the social issues.

Beyerbach, Barbara Ed., and R. Deborah Ed. Davis. *Activist Art in Social Justice Pedagogy: Engaging Students in Global Issues Through the Arts. Counterpoints: Studies in the Postmodern Theory of Education. Volume 403.* New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2011.

This book focuses on giving teachers different ways to teach about social issues in the classroom using artistic expression. They gave me some useful ideas on how to use music and poetry, which is the highlight of my unit.

Bullard, Robert D., and Beverly Wright. *Race, place, and environmental justice after*

Hurricane Katrina: struggles to reclaim, rebuild, and revitalize New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009.

Another valuable text to use to seek background knowledge on the social issues that were prominent before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005. I used it for some more of my personal background knowledge on the topic.

Hanley, Mary Stone, George W. Noblit, Gilda L. Sheppard, Tom Barone, and Lee Anne Bell. *Culturally relevant arts education for social justice: a way out of no way.* New York, NY: Routledge, 2013.

This book discusses how culturally relevant art can be used in the modern day classroom teach help teach about current social issues that students often face. It was a good resource to help me gain ideas on how to approach teaching the social issues of class and race during the disaster of Hurricane Katrina

Hartnell, Anna. "When the Levees Broke: Inconvenient Truths and the Limits of National Identity." *African American Review* 45, no. 1-2 (2012): 17-31. Accessed December 14, 2016. doi:10.1353/afa.2012.0010.

Anna Hartnell writes a review of filmmaker Spike Lee's documentary When the Levees Broke and how the documentary perfectly captures the social injustices of how the storm was managed. I found it very useful in determine my use of the documentary for activities in my classroom.

Katz, Susan A., Judith A. Thomas, and Susan A. Katz. *The word in play: language, music, and movement in the classroom.* Baltimore, MD: P.H. Brookes Pub., 2004.

The collaborators of this book crate this book to help teachers and others understand how to use language, music, and movement within the classroom. I plan on using music in my class room to help students understand tone and how lyrics of music is often poetry; both outlets are used to express feelings and emotions, often about social issues.

Smith, Fran. "Why Arts Education Is Crucial, and Who's Doing It Best." www.edutopia.org. January 28, 2009. Accessed December 15, 2016. <https://www.edutopia.org/arts-music-curriculum-child-development>.

Edutopia is a website sponsored by the George Lucas Education Foundation where articles are written featuring different educational issues, tips for k-12 classroom instruction, and research-based topics on what can benefit classroom instruction. Fran Smith wrote this article stressing the benefits of and why more schools need to adopt art

education back into the classroom.

Why the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts. Directed by Spike Lee. United States: HBO, 2006. DVD.

Spike Lee made this documentary in 2006 highlighting the devastation and massive social issues that defined Hurricane Katrina as the nation's worst disaster. I will be using pieces of the documentary to help my students gain more background knowledge on the social issues.

Appendices

Appendix A: Common Core Standards

1. *CCR5: Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.*
2. *CCR4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in text, including figurative and connotative meaning; analyze the specific impact of word choice on meaning and tone.*
3. *CCR2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.*
4. *CCR6: Determine author's tone or point of view*

Appendix B: Art Standards Addressed

Anchor Standard #1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard #2. Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard #4. Analyze, interpret, and select artistic work for presentation

Anchor Standard #6. Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Notes

¹ www.wedutopia.com, Fran Smith "Why Arts Education Is Crucial, and Who's Doing It Best" January, 28, 2009

² Kristin Bates, "Through the Eyes of Katrina: Social Justice in the United States", pg. 1

³ Spike Lee Documentary, *When the Levees Broke, Act I*

⁴ Robert D. Bullard and Beverly Wright, "Race, Place, and Environmental Justice after Hurricane Katrina", xix

⁵ Kristin Bates, "Through the Eye of Katrina: Social Justice in the United States"

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- ⁶ Robert Bullard, "Race, Place, and Environmental Justice After Hurricane Katrina, pg. 1
- ⁷ Anna Hartnell, *African American Review*, "When the Levees Broke: Inconvenient Truths and the Limits of National Identity"
- ⁸ Samuel Totten, "The Importance of Teaching Social Issues", xvii
- ⁹ *ibid*, xvii
- ¹⁰ Mary Stone Hanley, "Culturally Relevant Arts Education for Social Justice", 2
- ¹¹ *ibid*, xviii
- ¹² *ibid*, xxxi
- ¹³ Barabara Beyerbach and R. Deborah Davis, "Activists Art and Social Justice Pedagogy," 51
- ¹⁴ *ibid*, 3
- ¹⁵ Mary Stone Hanley, "Culturally Relevant Arts Education for Social Justice", 3
- ¹⁶ *ibid*, 3
- ¹⁷ *ibid*, 4
- ¹⁸ *ibid*, 3-4
- ¹⁹ seminar, September 26, 2016
- ²⁰ Susan Katz and Judith A. Thomas, "The Words in Play", 5
- ²¹ Beyerbach, 51
- ²² Susan Katz, "The Words in Play: Language, Music, and Movement in the classroom." Pg. 45