Engage! Teens, Art & Civic Participation

A guide to engaging young adult library audiences through visual art
The objective for these resources is to deepen participants’ knowledge and appreciation of American art and its relationship to American history and civic life, and to contribute to the development of informed and discerning voters.

Engage! Teens, Art and Civic Participation targets young adult audiences through dynamic discussions that utilize the visual arts as springboards to civic engagement. Project funding has been provided by the Searle Funds at the Chicago Community Trust and from the Terra Foundation for American Art.

This project builds on the National Endowment for the Humanities’ Picturing America art initiative by developing supplemental resources that utilize the visual arts as a springboard to civic engagement. Through the thematic selections of visual art, participants are led in facilitated discussions on and interactions with the depth and history of American civic life. Resources have been specifically designed for opt-in youth audiences in public library settings.

ALA thanks project consultants Sarah Alvarez, Associate Director of Teacher Programs, Department of Museum Education, The Art Institute of Chicago; Adam Davis, Director, Center for Civic Reflection; and independent art historians Wendy Greenhouse and Lisa Meyerowitz for their work in shaping the project.

Engage! Teens, Art and Civic Participation was implemented in cooperation with the Chicago Public Library, the North Suburban Library System, the Arlington Heights Public Library, and the Evanston Public Library.

Engage! was piloted in summer 2010 in eight Chicago Public Library branches and the YOUmedia center at Harold Washington Public Library; in fall 2010 by Arlington Heights (Ill.) Memorial Library; and in fall 2010 and spring 2011 at Evanston (Ill.) Public Library. Images and program models from many of these sites can be found in the following pages.
What gives rise to dreams? What would it take to realize them?

When it comes to language, food, clothes, manners, art, opportunities, and limits, what do you recognize as yours?

What did you most like to do when you were younger? What made these moments possible? What limited them?

How is it that some images are designed to represent and to have meaning? How do some images instruct us in what to feel and think?

What kind of change can we make, and how can we make it?

The images and related resources for Engage! have been organized into five thematic groupings:

These suggested themes are meant to take a participant through a five-part program series that starts with an examination of universal experiences of growing up and community, moving outward into aspirations and interpretation of imagery and symbols in art and everyday life, and then ending by looking at various ways teens may want to impact their communities through participation.
We hear a lot about the American Dream. In its standard form, it involves ascension from humble beginnings to glorious heights—from poverty to wealth, anonymity to fame, oppression to freedom.

But a deeper look reveals that American dreams do not always follow this trajectory, that our dreams are neither so simple nor simply American. And if we each have our own dreams, we also have shared dreams—about ourselves as a nation, about where we have come from and where we are headed. This group of images helps us consider all kinds of American dreams. What gives rise to these dreams? What would it take to realize them? And what, in any case, makes them so dreamy?
American Dreams

Hip Hop Project

Background Information

> This photograph is part of a project of photographer Nikki S. Lee in which she immersed herself in the culture of American hip hop, adopting the persona of urban youth.

> All three youths in this image stare at the camera, daring the viewer to engage or comment: Lee at the center with her hands on her hips and her elbows jutting out; the young man on the left with his arms crossed; and the young man on the right wearing reflective eyeglasses so you can’t see his eyes.

> Part performance artist and part anthropologist, Lee researches and then introduces herself to a community or group adopting its manners, dress, and pastimes. She spends several weeks participating in the group’s activities, blending seamlessly into her environment and convincingly becoming one of the group. She then asks a member of the group to take snapshots that document her performance.

> Lee adopts the dress of a specific subculture to expose the malleability of identity. Hip hop is only one of the many personas she has assumed for her artwork. She has immersed herself in the identity of a skater, a yuppy, a Hispanic girl, a schoolgirl, a lesbian, a punk, a senior citizen, and an exotic dancer—to name a few.


> She has noted one important cultural difference between East and West. “Identity in a Western society is more like, ‘I am myself,’” she says; “‘I think, therefore I exist.’ In Eastern cultures, it is more ‘we think about group.’” Lee's image, by showing how group identity is created by affiliation and choice, suggests that an integral part of the American Dream is the ability to create or re-create oneself.

Credits

Artist: Nikki S. Lee
Medium: Photographic print
Citation: Hip Hop Project (2), 2001. Nikki S. Lee (b. 1970). Photographic print, 21 1/5 x 28 1/5 inches (53.9 x 71.6 cm.). Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects Gallery, New York.

Due to copyright restrictions we aren’t able to include this image, but it can be found online.

Looking Questions

1. What do these three people want us to know about them? What are they telling us through their clothing, hair, and body language?

2. The girl in the center—who is also the artist—is wearing a T-shirt with an American flag and an eagle. As she stands in the street with these two guys, what do you think she is saying about American identity?

3. The artist believes that part of the American Dream is about becoming who you want to be rather than what a group or another person thinks you should be. This contrasts with the concept of identity in Korea, where she grew up. Based on your experience, do you share her understanding about America? What social cultures do you belong to? Do you feel you have the freedom to change this?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

Hip Hop Project is just one of many similar “performances” by this artist in which she embeds herself into a particular social culture for a time and documents the experience with photographs. She has also immersed herself in the culture of skaters, yuppies, Hispanic girls, lesbians, punks, and senior citizens, among others. What social cultures in America might you want to experience or join, if only for a few weeks?
American Dreams

Obama Hope Portrait

Background Information

> Graphic designer and illustrator Shepard Fairey is a self-proclaimed street artist, often borrowing images from popular culture and transforming them graphically as subversive comments about mass media and corporate marketing. He plays on the familiarity of images in order to express his political and social views. Fairey’s work is not confined to the fine-art museum, but is more often found on the Internet and on T-shirts, free posters, and stickers pasted guerilla-style all over a neighborhood or city.

> During the campaign leading up to the 2008 presidential election, Fairey wanted to use his art to support Democratic candidate Barack Obama. When he decided to produce a poster for Obama, he turned again to pre-existing imagery, this time searching on Google for a news photograph of the then-senator. He found an Associated Press picture taken of Obama and actor George Clooney at a 2006 panel discussion about the genocide in Darfur.

> Fairey did not obtain permission from the Obama campaign to produce the poster, which he disseminated in his usual grassroots fashion. Soon after its initial release, however, the campaign contacted Fairey and asked him to create an official campaign version of the poster, which was released in February 2008. Hundreds of thousands of versions of the image, on both the official and unofficial posters, stickers, T-shirts, and electronic media were disseminated over the course of the campaign.

> For the poster, Fairey cropped the original photo to focus in on Obama’s head and gaze, reduced the detail of lines and tones, and limited the colors to red, white, and blue, making it appear almost like a stencil. No longer is there any specific link to the context of the original photograph.

> Additionally, Fairey added the word “HOPE” at the bottom (he originally used “PROGRESS” but the Obama campaign asked him to change it to “HOPE”) creating a symbolic link between the word and the man. The candidate seems to gaze, determined but hopeful, beyond us toward the future.
Looking Questions

1. Explain to the group that many of us are already very familiar with this image and its historical context. We are going to try to break down our familiarity with the visual image itself and see what lies behind this iconic poster and our perceptions of it.

2. Spend some time looking at the image in silence. Write down an adjective or noun (besides “hope”) that you associate with the image. Set the word aside for the moment.

3. What can you say definitively about this man by looking at him in this portrait? Look at his pose and facial expression, his dress, and the space and colors that surround him. What evidence is available to you in the image alone?

4. Ask the group to share their words written earlier by saying them aloud. And, with each one, examine whether that word is specifically visible in the image. (For example, if someone says “presidential,” ask if there is any specific evidence of the American presidency in the image.)

5. Acknowledge that there is more meaning to this image than just what we see. It is hard to separate our additional knowledge of Obama and his presidency from a red, white, and blue portrait of a man with the word HOPE written below his image.

6. This poster can be understood as a campaign promise of a hopeful American future. If the word “HOPE” were not included in the image, how might you understand that message? Does the image effectively communicate the idea of hope? Why or why not? (As above, ask the group to consider the position and gaze of the figure, the background or space around him, and the colors.)

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

Like Gilbert Stuart’s Lansdowne portrait of George Washington, Shepard Fairey’s image of Obama was widely disseminated to suggest a particular vision for America’s future. In fact, Fairey shared Obama’s political and social ideals for the nation, although he initially preferred the word “PROGRESS” for the poster and was asked by the Obama campaign to change it to “HOPE.” What is a word (or phrase) that embodies your personal dream for America? What colors do you associate with this word or phrase? Select one thing from your life (a portrait of yourself or of a friend or family member, a personal possession, a building or location you know well) that is a part of that dream. Make a simple outline drawing of this person, place, or thing and fill in areas with the colors you selected. Include your word or phrase somewhere on the page and then write a brief description of your American Dream poster.

Shepard Fairey has gotten into trouble with the law on a number of occasions when pasting his posters and stickers on public or private property*—he was mimicking the way our consumer culture puts advertising brands and logos in our faces all the time in an effort to manipulate us. Can you think of examples of this kind of advertising? Fairey sees his work, and the legal troubles, as evidence of his civic engagement. Do you think this is civic engagement? Why or why not? How might you disseminate your American Dream poster or the message it embodies?

*Fairey was sued for copyright infringement over his use of an Associated Press photograph of Obama to create his iconic poster; the suit was settled out of court.
American Dreams

Retroactive 1

Background Information

> The central image of this painted and printed composition is a press photograph of John F. Kennedy taken at his presidential inauguration in 1961. JFK is surrounded by a combination of material culled from various printed sources and silk-screened onto the canvas.

> Pop artist Robert Rauschenberg was known for his innovative combinations of media and borrowings from popular imagery. The borrowings in this work, which combines silk-screen printing and oil painting, demonstrate the role media images play in defining a national identity or mood; here they appear to evoke the patriotic optimism that prevailed in America at Kennedy’s inauguration.

> For instance, Kennedy’s bold pledge that the United States would land a man on the moon within ten years is referenced in the top left image of an astronaut floating in space, and the theme of flight is echoed in the bird feathers suspended from the top of this work.

> Yet this work was made the year following JFK’s 1963 assassination and can also remind the viewer of the country’s deep sadness about the loss of a great leader. The moon landing didn’t occur until 1969, well after the president’s death. Nevertheless, his dream for space travel had been realized.

> On the lower left, Rauschenberg repeats the fragment of Kennedy’s pointing hand, emphasizing his gesture of presidential leadership that encouraged innovation and challenged Americans to do their best.

> In the lower right is a blurred fragment of what looks like an Italian Renaissance image of Adam and Eve being expelled from Eden. The yellowed fruit opposite it may symbolize American abundance—possibly extending the allegory to the president pointing or leading the country out of the Garden of Eden and into great and unknown frontiers.

> Pop Art is often seen as the bringing together of high art (such as Renaissance painting)—and popular culture (President Kennedy, the astronaut). Rauschenberg used popular imagery to reach beyond the art world elite and directly address a wide public, reflecting the populism of the rapidly changing 1960s era.

> The title, Retroactive, may signal how Rauschenberg’s thinking about the work itself changed while he was working on it. The work, which Rauschenberg began while Kennedy was still alive, calls to mind the barrage of images Americans encounter every day.

But after JFK’s assassination, Rauschenberg reconceived the image as an elegy to a lost president. Retroactive became a memorial to Kennedy after it was begun, laden with an air of nostalgia and mourning.
American Dreams

Retroactive 1

Looking Questions

1. President John F. Kennedy is portrayed in the center of this image and there is an astronaut just above him. Identify another part of this collage and think about what it says about the president. Share with the larger group.

2. The images in this collage largely come from popular culture and media and are connected to JFK’s dreams for the American people—the central photo shows him on his inauguration day. What images from popular culture would you use to demonstrate the hopes and dreams of America today?

3. It’s hard to make out what some of the details or specific elements in this collage represent. In addition to using images from popular culture and media, why do you think the artist chose to use this technique? What might it say about American culture in the 1960s?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

This work of art was begun when JFK was newly elected, but reworked following his assassination in 1963. Rauschenberg created a number of similar works, all with the title Retroactive—this one is Retroactive 1. Why do you think he used this title?

Compare Rauschenberg’s image to the Obama HOPE portrait and Gilbert Stuart’s portrait of Washington. What do Americans expect from our president? Our leaders? How do these leaders define or guide our shared dreams? Does a nation need strong leaders to define its dreams? What are your dreams for yourself, for your community, for your country? What dreams are held in common, and how do they come to be shared?

Create a collage using images from popular culture to demonstrate the hopes and dreams of America today. What dreams do you want to highlight? What images, people, or places help represent that dream?

Resources

- Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, teacher resource.
- History of the Apollo mission on NASA’s Web site (with links to additional resources and a link to audio versions of JFK’s speeches about space exploration).
Tar Beach

Background Information

> This story quilt painting is part of a series of works about a young African American girl, Cassie Louise Lightfoot. In this scene, Cassie lies on a blanket with her brother on a rooftop in Harlem, which is ironically called “Tar Beach,” while her parents play cards with neighbors nearby.

> She imagines herself flying over the George Washington Bridge, taking possession of it. “Sleeping on Tar Beach was magical,” explains Cassie in the text on the quilt: “only eight years old and in the third grade, and I can fly. That means I am free to go wherever I want for the rest of my life.”

> In the narrative, Cassie describes her father’s struggles to find work and join a union. She flies above the city, escaping the problems of urban life below, dreaming about what it would be like to live in the city without the restrictions of prejudice and bigotry. Cassie’s journey evokes the African American trope of flying as a metaphor for escaping slavery; here, flying becomes a symbol of freedom and self-possession.

> Ringgold’s painting shows Cassie safely dreaming in the company of her extended family. Laundry dries on the clothesline, food covers the table, and adults socialize. The cityscape under twinkling stars both beckons and fades into background as if it were a blanket covering the rooftop picnic. The image itself is quilted and bordered with additional quilt squares. The patches of blanket reiterate the comforting and nurturing environment where dreams can grow.

> Ringgold was born and raised in New York and graduated from City College of New York with a master’s degree in 1959.

> Her mother was a fashion designer and sparked Ringgold’s interest in fabric. The story quilts combine the “high art” of painting with “craft work” of quiltmaking and are based on Buddhist thangkas, which were painted on fabric and rolled up for storage and transport. This story quilt is reproduced in her book Tar Beach, which was awarded the Coretta Scott King Award (given to African American authors and illustrators) in 1992.

Credits

Artist: Faith Ringgold
Medium: Acrylic on canvas with fabric borders
Citation: Faith Ringgold, Tar Beach, 1988, Series # 1, Woman on a Bridge. Acrylic on canvas with fabric borders, 74 x 69 in. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. © Faith Ringgold
Rights Holder: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. © Faith Ringgold
Tar Beach

Looking Questions

1. What is going on in the central scene? The artist called this image “Tar Beach”—what do you think she means by that?

2. The image is from a story about young Cassie, an African American girl growing up in Harlem, who imagines flying over the city below and all the struggles of urban life. What struggles are suggested in the image, or which ones might you imagine for Cassie? Where do you go to escape or feel free from life for a while? What do you do there?

3. The artist has actually added quilted cloth to the border of the painting and shows Cassie lying on a blanket, imagining herself flying overhead. In African American culture, quilts are strongly associated with storytelling. What objects from your childhood or from your family tradition might have the same function or associations? Think about the American Dream—what does that mean to you? What are your dreams for yourself? With whom do you share your dreams? Do you think that Cassie’s dream for herself might come true? Why or why not?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

What does the American flag symbolize to you? Does your answer change based on where you see the flag or how it is displayed/used? Are there flags or symbols to identify a community or group that you are a part of? If not, how might you develop and display such a symbol? Think about how that symbol would capture a sense of identity within that particular group.

We are again in a time of war. What ways have you seen people expressing their patriotism? How patriotic are you? Are there ways you outwardly display this patriotism? If not, how might you do so? What signs and symbols from American culture would you use and how would you use them? Design something that visually displays your patriotism (or lack of it, if that is the case).

Resources
> Gwendolyn Brooks, A Street in Bronzeville (1945), and We Real Cool (1966).
> Maya Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969).
Background Information

> In his life-size, full-length image of George Washington, Irish-born American portrait painter Gilbert Stuart gave symbolic expression to the aspirations of the newborn American nation as embodied in its Revolutionary hero and first president.

> The portrait is called the Lansdowne Portrait for the Marquis of Lansdowne, an English supporter of the American Revolution for whom the portrait was commissioned by grateful Americans. This representation drew on European aristocratic prototypes of state portraits in such features as Washington’s magnanimous gesture and the setting of richly elegant furniture, billowing drapery, and classical columns. Washington himself, however, is simply dressed in the generic garb of an American citizen, albeit clearly depicted as a member of the social elite.

> Other details proclaim the distinctive character of the new republic: the titles of the books on the table and floor, for example, affirm its basis in institutional, procedural, and legal foundations rather than the will of any individual leader. In the background, storm clouds yielding to blue sky and a rainbow in the upper right evince the nation’s hopes for a glorious future after the turmoil of its birth.

> Stuart’s elaborate, dignified portrait spoke to the anxieties of his countrymen that their young nation be granted due respect from established European powers, especially Great Britain.

> Stuart made numerous copies of his portraits of Washington, and these in turn were widely disseminated through inexpensive reproductive prints, making Stuart’s interpretation the standard image of Washington’s visage both for his contemporaries and in posterity.

> By associating himself with the nation’s most visible and important leader as the embodiment of national ideals and identity, Stuart laid claim to an important role for American artists in the new nation.

> Adopted for the dollar bill, Stuart’s iconic portrayal of Washington remains universally recognizable. Stuart, who was trained in the conventions of European aristocratic portraiture, made a virtual industry of painting portraits of the new nation’s most revered leader.

> The symbolic language of the Lansdowne portrait now seems foreign, yet Americans still invest likenesses of individual leaders and heroes with their dreams for their nation’s future.
Looking Questions

1. What kind of future do you think the artist was suggesting for the nation as led by this man? What do the setting—the furnishings, the sky beyond, and the architectural space he occupies—his pose, and his dress suggest?

2. Does this vision for America appeal to you? Why or why not?

3. The image of Washington relies on conventions of European portraiture well known to viewers in the late eighteenth century—especially the pose of the figure and setting of the portrait. Compare and contrast this portrait of Washington with Shepard Fairey’s HOPE portrait of Barack Obama, which is familiar to and understood by viewers today.

4. Based on the images themselves, do you think these two presidents have similar hopes for America?

If President Washington were replaced in this image by President Obama, would the message change? Why?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

American presidents set forth goals and dreams for the nation that often include innovations or new directions. For example, both George Washington and Barack Obama represent “firsts” in American politics—Washington was the first president and Obama is the first African American president—and we are reminded of these facts when we see images of them. Similarly, in Robert Rauschenberg’s collage, President John F. Kennedy is associated with space travel and the first man on the moon. What innovations or “firsts” would you like to see for this country?

What other ways can you think of to show leaders and the values they represent? Do you have pictures of heroes and leaders in your home/school/community? Which ones inspire you and why?
The people closest to us, those with whom we are most familiar and in some cases most comfortable, are often those we see least clearly. This group of images helps illuminate a range of communities, to highlight where they differ and to suggest what they may share.

When it comes to language, food, clothes, manners, art, opportunities, and limits, what do you recognize as yours? What strikes you as foreign, or belonging to someone else? Is there a certain logic to or reason for the various communities you belong to? When have you resisted joining new communities? When have you resisted accepting other people into yours? When have you felt yourself joining new communities and accepting others into yours?

Living together is an art.
–William Pickens

Sample Icebreakers and Opening Exercises

> Think of a group or community you belong to. How did you come to belong to this group? What’s good about belonging to it? Are there any challenges to this belonging?

> Have you ever tried to join a group that wouldn’t have you? Why did you want to join and why couldn’t you? Or, on the other side, have you ever been part of a group that kept someone out? Why?

Images and Discussion
The following pages contain the selected image (or image details, if the image is unavailable for this guide), background information, “Looking Questions,” further discussion questions, activity ideas, and resources.
Gay Pride Parade, New York City, June 28, 2009

Background Information

> This is a documentary photograph by James Estrin, a staff photographer for the *New York Times*. The photo, along with others of the parade depicting both its participants and spectators, accompanied an article about New York Governor David Patterson's support for legislation regarding gay marriage that was printed in the *Times* on June 29, 2009.

> Gay Pride began in response to the Stonewall Riots in New York’s Greenwich Village in June 1969. All along, Gay Pride has been characterized as a colorful and very public means of voicing and embracing one’s sexual orientation, as well as a venue for growing political activism around gay rights and the AIDS epidemic.

> The rainbow flag, designed by artist Gilbert Baker, appeared for the first time as the symbol of Gay Pride in San Francisco in 1978. Originally of eight colors (now six), each stood for a different element related to LGBT identity: hot pink for sexuality; red for life; orange for healing; yellow for the sun; green for nature; blue for art; indigo for harmony; and violet for spirit.

> In his photo, Estrin has captured the truly diverse nature of the Gay Pride community. It is not made up of all white men, a stereotype held by many. Rather, there are different races, ethnicities, genders, and ages participating in the parade, suggesting not only the diversity of the LGBT community but also of those who support their rights.
Gay Pride Parade, New York City, June 28, 2009

Looking Questions

1. How would you describe this crowd? In what ways do they identify as a group? In what ways are they different from one another?

2. What is the general mood of the crowd? Do you think this group is on the streets of New York for a protest march or a celebratory parade? Why? What is the difference in your mind between the two? What does each look like? Can they be one and the same?

3. Where is the photographer positioned? How does the angle of the photograph make you feel in relation to the crowd? This photograph was taken by a staff photographer at the New York Times to accompany a story about gay rights. How do you think he wanted the reader/viewer to feel about this parade?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

Despite the positive mood of the crowd in this photograph, this particular community—the LGBT community—has experienced a great deal of discrimination. The community is inclusive of anyone who supports LGBT rights, but tends to be made up of people excluded from other communities. They have come together on this particular occasion to publicly celebrate and demonstrate their support for their identity. What communities do you belong to? How do those communities identify themselves publicly? As part of a community, have you ever participated in a protest march or a celebratory parade? Get together and think about a cause you believe in, and decide whether a parade or a protest march would be more effective in getting your voice heard. Write a justification about your decision or design a flyer to announce the event to other members of your community.

This photograph was taken by a New York Times photographer to document the event and accompany a story in the newspaper. The parade itself is an act of civic engagement by a particular community. However, by virtue of publishing the photograph, is the photographer also complicit in an activist effort to promote gay rights? Why or why not? Think about a community that you believe in but may not belong to; how can you show your support for this community?

Resources

> New York City Pride—Heritage of Pride.
> PRIDEChicago—Chicago Annual Pride Parade.
The Home of the Red, White and Blue

Background Information

> The union of America’s disparate class and ethnic groups is a central theme of Lilly Martin Spencer’s painting, a hopeful allegory of the role of women in restoring the Union following the devastation of the Civil War.

> It pictures an extended family offering refreshment to a poor organ grinder and his shy barefoot daughter. Dominant at the composition’s center, the white-clad matron of the family is a self-portrait of Spencer, who was both a professional artist and the mother of thirteen.

> In the kindly gesture toward the organ grinder, rendered as a stereotypically Italian figure, and the inclusion, at the right, of what the artist’s contemporaries would have recognized as an Irish servant, Spencer indicates that women also can bridge the divides between America’s different ethnic groups and between the native-born and immigrants.

> Radical in its day for its relatively sympathetic portrayal of immigrants and its hopes for cross-cultural relations, Spencer’s image nonetheless affirms ideals of domestic femininity, notwithstanding the artist’s personal defiance of conventional prohibitions on women as professionals.

> In the foreground, a torn Stars and Stripes and a sewing box suggest that women, through their natural abilities to heal, will bind up the nation’s wounds at a time when American men, represented by the wounded Union veteran in the shadows on the left, are exhausted and incapacitated.

> Tying the figures together, the milk, in goblet and pitcher, further symbolizes the notion of feminine nurturing as the key to the future social health of the nation.

> Spencer’s painting presents a nineteenth-century view of American society, with a white, middle-class, native-born family as the foundation and poor European immigrants as intruders. The gracious welcome the mother and children offer them would have struck art consumers of Spencer’s day as generous rather than patronizing, and they would have been untroubled by the stereotyping of the Irish and Italian figures by their clothing, physiognomies, or occupations.
The Home of the Red, White and Blue

Looking Questions

1. Who are these women? Why are they together here and what are they doing? What different roles do the women have? How do they relate to the men in the image?

2. This was painted in the years immediately following the Civil War, when many men were returning home from battle and the nation felt beleaguered. How are the women responding to this? According to the painting, what roles can women play in repairing the divisions in American society?

3. What roles do women play in your community? How are they different from the roles women play in the painting?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

The artist has depicted a number of social classes and ethnicities in this scene; while most of the figures are middle class, the organ grinder is meant to be an Italian immigrant, and the redhead woman in the red dress is an Irish servant. To our twenty-first-century eyes, this doesn’t seem like a particularly diverse group. If you were to create an image of the American population, or even of just your neighborhood today, who would be included? And, like the women in this painting, who would you depict as trying to bridge the divide between different American communities?
The diverse, often contentious community of the American electorate is the implied subject of Horace Bonham’s painting. Ostensibly picturing the cross-class bonding of men through sport, the image is said to be a political allegory inspired by the close presidential race in 1876 between Samuel Tilden and Rutherford B. Hayes. At the time, intense political contests such as this were often compared to the brutal sport of cockfighting, which was widely outlawed in Bonham’s day.

Bonham included thirteen individuals, a number that his contemporaries would have recognized as symbolic of the 13 original American colonies. Like the colonies, Bonham implies, the diverse American electorate must unite to function as one nation.

The diversity of the spectators reflects both contemporary debate over immigration (which had resulted in the first restrictive legislation, in 1870) and the recent ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, guaranteeing male residents the right to vote regardless of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” Women, who would not win the right to vote for several decades, are absent from the picture.

Bonham included three well-to-do onlookers (including the artist himself as the top-hatted gentleman on the left) are on the periphery of the crowd of working-class men, who include recent immigrants from Europe and Asia as well as newly enfranchised African Americans.

Contemporary observers note a Photoshop quality to some of the figures in the painting, probably the result of the artist’s dependence on photographs. In fact, it is doubtful that Bonham could have induced such a diverse group of men to actually pose together. Painters of his day would have used models dressed as they liked, rather than “real” types, for such composition; using photos of social types (real or costumed) was simply cheaper.

His image focuses not on the bloody fight but on a motley group of spectators whose common excitement in its “issue” (outcome) transcends their obvious differences of race, social standing, and ethnic origin. Three well-to-do onlookers (including the artist himself as the top-hatted gentleman on the left) are on the periphery of the crowd of working-class men, who include recent immigrants from Europe and Asia as well as newly enfranchised African Americans.

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Nearing the Issue at the Cockpit

Looking Questions

1. What do you think has captured the attention of all these men? Have you seen a group so captivated before? How do you think the men feel about what they see?

2. Who are these guys? Other than looking at the same thing, what connects them as a group? What differentiates them?

3. These men are gathered to await the outcome of the contentious presidential election in 1876. At the time, the intense political campaigns were often compared to cockfighting, an outlawed sport. The sign on the wall marked “Rules” is a further reminder of the metaphor. What important political or social issues of our own time might cause diverse Americans to unite like this?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

Women are conspicuously missing from this image. In 1878, the Fifteenth Amendment had only recently been ratified (1870), giving all male citizens, including African Americans, the right to vote. Women continued to fight for this privilege, ultimately achieving the vote in 1920 (see the Suffrage parade image, part of the Participation theme). What rights are still being fought for today? Select an issue that you know about or that is important to you and your community; research the issue from both sides—for and against. Prepare and conduct a debate with others in the group, making sure to set rules for the debate, like the rules that govern the electoral process referenced in the painting.

Resources

- Ask Art biography of Horace Bonham (available online in full to non-subscribers on Fridays).
**American Dreams**

**Many Mansions**

**Background Information**


- While public housing projects are often viewed as dangerous, crime-ridden communities, Marshall’s painting contradicts this perception, showing the dedicated residents of Stateway Gardens, dressed in their Sunday best for Easter, working to beautify their community.

- The public housing high-rises loom in the background as three well-dressed young black men in crisp white shirts and black pants tend to the public garden. They weed and rake, while animated bluebirds fly above and adorn the scene with a blue ribbon that reads, “Bless Our Happy Home.” Easter baskets rest at their feet and a phantom flowering tree grows out of the monogram “SG” (for Stateway Gardens).

- The brightly colored image, with its puzzling combination of real and artificial elements, highlights the contradictions of growing a garden in a public housing development. The emphatically black figures are intended to function as rhetorical devices that pridefully and powerfully reclaim blackness from the history of stereotype and degradation.

- Marshall was born in Birmingham, Alabama, and grew up in Los Angeles. Having lived in public housing projects in both cities, he knew the struggles of the civil rights movement firsthand, witnessing the 1969 Watts neighborhood riots from his Los Angeles home.

- The ironic title, *Many Mansions*, points to the unfulfilled promise of public housing to provide welcoming, safe homes, despite the “Welcome” sign and bucolic name of the housing project. The title comes from a biblical phrase inscribed in the red ribbon at the top: a variation on Jesus’ oft-quoted remark found in John [14:2]: “In my Father’s house there are many mansions.”

- The first public housing units in the United States were built in the 1930s as part of the New Deal. Under local government supervision, tenements were destroyed and low-income residents were displaced in order to create new housing that was intended to address urban problems, in specific areas.

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**Credits**

**Artist:** Kerry James Marshall

**Medium:** Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas.


Many Mansions

Looking Questions

1. Why do you think these three men in shirt and tie are digging around in a garden?

2. Where is their garden? There is a "Welcome" sign—what are we being welcomed to? Does the garden fit in this environment? What other ways are we being welcomed to this place?

3. The painting depicts Stateway Gardens, a public housing complex in Chicago. How does the artist’s representation of the place match or not match your understanding of public housing?

4. We might say the men are in their "Sunday best," and we see Easter baskets near them on the ground. Why do you think Marshall sets this painting on Easter?

5. The red banner across the top reads, "In my mother's home there are many mansions," which is a variation on a biblical quote. Where are the mansions here? Why do you think the artist has chosen to use this quote?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

Compare this painting to Grant Wood’s Tree Planting Group. How do the figures in each image relate to or belong to their environment? What connects the people to one another?

What is the role of a public garden? Who tends it? Who uses it? How does it help build community? Besides planting and tending a public garden, how else can members of a community come together to overcome or defy the negative? Discuss whether there is a visible space in your community that could benefit from beautification or some other project and create a plan to carry it out.

Resources

> Art Institute of Chicago Teacher's Resource (PDF).
> Biography of Kerry James Marshall, with interview and essays.
> Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (1952).
> National Public Housing Museum, in planning stage, to be located in Chicago.
The damas (maids of honor)

Background Information

> The damas, or maids of honor, event, often compared to the riding in this limousine are sweet sixteen, bat mitzvah, the attendants for Ruby, not or debutante ball as the shown, on the occasion of mark of a girl’s transition into her Quinceañera, the coming womanhood and coming of age celebration held on out into society, just as her fifteenth birthday.

> The damas wear shiny lavender event, often compared to the dresses and tiaras because, as Ruby explained, “I wanted my damas to look like little princesses, Cinderella-style … Every girl dreams about being a princess and being pampered. You want to grow into being pretty and loved.”

> The Quinceañera is a traditional Latin American event, often compared to the sweet sixteen, bat mitzvah, or debutante ball as the mark of a girl’s transition into womanhood and coming out into society, just as her wedding will mark her transition into society as a married woman. With or without religious affiliation, such affairs can be elaborate and costly. For example, Ruby’s parents had saved for five years to pay the $16,000 price tag for her Quinceañera.

> The image of the damas in this photograph is reflected in the roof of the limousine, as if to suggest there are twice as many of them, highlighting the importance of the perception of abundance in this celebration.

> Photographer Lauren Greenfield is interested in youth culture and its habits, especially related to money and self-image. She has taken countless photographs of young girls, capturing their fascination with their appearance, one another, and consumer culture.

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The damas (maids of honor)

Looking Questions

1. Who are these girls, all dressed the same? What do you notice about them?

2. Where do you think they are going in this limousine? Are they enjoying themselves?

3. They are attendants, or maids of honor, for fifteen-year-old Ruby on the occasion of her Quinceañera celebration. Ruby is not included in the photograph, but what do you know about her from this image? Who are her attendants and how do they reflect her identity? Why do you think the photographer decided not to include Ruby in the photo?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

What kinds of coming-of-age celebrations take place in your community? Have you ever been a part of them? How does such an event change someone’s role in the community?

Ruby, the Quinceañera celebrant, wanted all her maids of honor to look like princesses, “Cinderella-style.” However, she also said, “I have really mixed feelings about the story of Cinderella. Of course, it’s every girl’s dream to find Prince Charming and marry and have a nice life. But Cinderella can’t do anything for herself. She’s dependent on the fact that Prince Charming’s gonna come and take her, and if it weren’t for him, she would probably stay there.” Are there traditions or expectations in your community that have changed?

Interview women and girls in your community or family about what it means to them to “come of age” and what their expectations are for being a grown woman in the community. Share and discuss as a group what, if any, changes have taken place in perceptions from one generation to the next, and speculate as to why things have changed (or not).

Due to copyright restrictions we aren’t able to include this image, but it can be found online.

Lauren Greenfield, The Damas (Maids of Honor) go from the church to the reception in a Ford Explorer limousine at Ruby’s Quinceanera, Huntington Park, California, 2001. © Lauren Greenfield

www.fwaphoto.com/#!/2009-05-27/
We become what we are in no small part because of where we have been, where we come from. This group of images is intended to open up our various backgrounds for consideration and exploration.

What foods do you remember eating? What did you most like to do when you were younger? When were you working, when were you playing, and when did you become aware of the difference? Looking back on your own earlier years, what do you see most clearly, what do you want to see more clearly, and what, if anything, would you rather forget? How does your childhood resemble those of the other people? How does it differ? How much do the resemblances and differences affect your capacity to understand and work with one another?

The beginning is more than half.

—Aristotle
Migrant Mother and Children

Background Information

> Documentary photographer Dorothea Lange took this photograph of a poverty-stricken mother of thirty-two and three of her children in a migrant workers’ campsite in San Luis Obispo County, California, during the Dust Bowl of the Great Depression.

> Lange was commissioned by the Federal Farm Security Administration (FSA) to document the poverty of migrant workers and demonstrate the need for federal assistance; she was one of a group of FSA photographers whose mission was to “introduce America to Americans.”

> In fact, the image shocked Americans who saw it in their morning newspapers accompanying stories about the plight of the destitute pea pickers; many were astonished that farm workers might not have enough food. The federal government responded by shipping thousands of pounds of food to feed the migrants.

> Almost instantly, this particular portrait of a migrant family became an iconic image of the Great Depression. While none of the details of the pea pickers’ campsite beyond the mother and children are visible in the image, Lange has still captured elements of this family that suggest the arduousness of their lives, as well as their pride, strength, and spirit.

> Lange carefully constructed the image. A makeshift tent in the campsite creates a backdrop for the photo, and the lighting and pose draw attention to the woman, highlighting her worried expression and tattered dress. Lange coached her to pose with her right hand touching the side of her face, emphasizing her furrowed brow.

> Lange offered this background information about the woman (Florence Owens Thompson) and their encounter: “I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother, as if drawn by a magnet. I do not remember how I explained my presence or my camera to her, but I do remember she asked me no questions. I made five exposures, working closer and closer from the same direction. I did not ask her name or her history. She told me her age, that she was thirty-two. She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food. There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it.”—Dorothea Lange, “The Assignment I’ll Never Forget: Migrant Mother,” Popular Photography, February 1960.
Migrant Mother and Children

Looking Questions

1. Spend a moment looking at this woman and her three children. What can you say about their life?

2. Do you feel sympathy for this family? If yes, how has the artist created this feeling? If not, how do you feel toward the family? Why?

3. The photographer has left a great deal out of this image—we do not see any of the campsite in which the migrant workers’ makeshift tent stands. Why do you think the photographer cropped the image this way? What do you think she wanted us to think about?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas:

Do you have family photographs? How are they composed? What do they say about your family, about the place and time in which you live?

Lange’s photograph challenges the perception that a photograph represents unmediated truth. It demonstrates that photographs interpret a scene as paintings and drawings do. Compare this image to the other photographs Lange took that day and consider why Lange chose this image rather than any of the others to represent the story.

Resources

> Picturing America: (brief description, teacher resources).
> The Library of Congress prints and photographs collection includes all the shots Lange took that day as well as a discussion of Migrant Mother.
> Anne Whiston Spirn, Daring to Look: Dorothea Lange’s Photographs and Reports from the Field (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
> David C. King, Dorothea Lange: Photographer of the People (Armonk, NY: Sharpe Focus, 2008).
> Getty Museum Web site for the exhibition “About Life: The Photographs of Dorothea Lange” (with information, images, timeline, and lesson plans).
> John Steinbeck, Grapes of Wrath (1939), Of Mice and Men (1937).
Background Information

> African American artist Romare Bearden used the medium of collage to depict the fractured, syncopated rhythms of urban life in New York City. Made from cut-up newspapers, magazines, and colored paper glued to cardboard, *The Dove* shows the many faces and characters in a neighborhood in Harlem, the upper Manhattan enclave long known as a vital center of urban African American life and culture.

> The viewer’s eye moves all over the busy street scene, as the composition’s lack of a clear focal point replicates the experience of walking down the crowded sidewalk.

> Bearden’s urban landscape is filled with fragments of heads, hands, legs, and feet, joined but disjointed—and faces of people you may recognize but not necessarily know.

> The collage technique conveys the freedom of improvisation and the rhythms of jazz, resulting in an artistic style that evokes African American popular culture.

> Bearden’s 1960s artwork was increasingly inspired by the civil rights movement. He and a number of other black artists formed the group Spiral in 1963 in order to highlight the role of black artists in American society at a time when most art critics and buyers did not treat black and white artists equally.

> The lack of focus on any one individual creates an image of a community of the street. Bearden depicts a crowded city block where everyone shares and helps shape the environment.

> Bearden was born in North Carolina, and moved with his family to Harlem in 1914. He grew up during the Harlem Renaissance—a literary, musical, and artistic flowering of African American culture centered in Harlem.
The Dove

Looking Questions

1. Describe this scene: What elements of urban life does Bearden choose to include? What does he leave out?

2. Is there a mood or particular energy in this image? Describe it. Where does it come from? How is this similar to or different from the mood or experience of your neighborhood?

3. Bearden has included a dove in the top left of this image of Harlem. The dove is a symbol of peace and safety. Does the rest of the image seem safe or peaceful to you? Why or why not? Are there any symbols of peace or safety in your neighborhood? Of chaos or danger?

4. Bearden has used symbolic animals and a collage of faces and people to show us this neighborhood. What symbols would you use to depict your neighborhood? Would it blend in, like Bearden’s dove, or be more prominent? Why or why not?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

Who are the people/faces in your neighborhood? What would a collage of the street where you live look like? How does your community move, sound, feel? Are there symbols (like the dove) that represent your block? Create a collage of your own neighborhood, using newspapers and magazines and other found elements.

Bearden was interested in music, jazz in particular. Do you connect jazz to this scene and the collage format? What other kinds of music do you think of? What music could provide the soundtrack to your neighborhood? Play some jazz—possibly John Coltrane’s “Blue Train”—and other types of music (like rap); does the music capture the tempo of urban life in Bearden’s image? How? Shoot a video or photo sequence to document your neighborhood (or the library’s neighborhood) and choose music to play in the background.

Resources

> Picturing America (brief description, teacher resources).
> Portal to a selection of Harlem Renaissance Web sites (also includes sites for Duke Ellington, Langston Hughes).
> Poetry by Langston Hughes, The Weary Blues (1926).
> Fiction by Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man; Richard Wright; and Ann Petry, The Street (1946) and “In Darkness and Confusion” (1947).
> Jazz by Duke Ellington, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Thelonius Monk.
Kalounna in Frogtown

Background Information

> In *Kalounna in Frogtown*, Jamie Wyeth explores the mingled longing and alienation of the outsider, conditions doubled for the immigrant who is also an adolescent.

> Frogtown is a small community in southeastern Pennsylvania not far from the artist’s farm; Kalounna was the eleven-year-old son of a newly arrived family of Laotian “boat people” (refugees who fled to the United States in the early 1970s as a result of their country’s civil war) who worked as caretakers on Wyeth’s farm.

> Stiffly, self-consciously posed, Kalounna dominates a flat landscape, his Asian features an incongruous complement to the quintessentially American red-shuttered wood-frame house in the left distance, the red Ford semitrailer truck on the right, and his own matching red T-shirt emblazoned with the logo of the television drama Dallas, the most popular such series at the time Wyeth painted this work. The tension between the boy and his surroundings, and between his desire to fit in and his discomfort in a strange setting, is suggested in his hands: one tightly clenched in a fist, the other open with fingers awkwardly splayed.

> Likewise, in the background, the starkly sheared tree branches contrast strangely with the material abundance implied by the large house and powerful truck.

> Framed against a pale but overcast sky, Kalounna is positioned as if slightly above the viewer, whom he fixes with a steady gaze, his expression both vulnerable and defensive, embodying the unease of one caught between worlds.

> Born into a distinguished family of artists, Jamie Wyeth follows the family tradition of realist painting but infuses his haunting depictions of everyday rural scenery, people, and animals with provocative juxtapositions and sly humor.
Kalounna in Frogtown

Looking Questions

1. Based on your first impressions, do you think this boy belongs or feels like he belongs in this setting? Why or why not? What does he share with his surroundings and what is different between them?

2. The boy depicted, Kalounna, was part of an immigrant family from Laos. They had come to rural Pennsylvania and worked on the artist’s farm. How does the artist tell us about how Kalounna is trying to fit into his new environment?

3. Have you ever felt like an outsider in the place you live—in your home, neighborhood, or city? What made you feel that way? Could you control those things? What do you do to belong?

4. What advice would you give Kalounna about adjusting to his new home?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

Interview someone in your family or your community who moved from one country to another, or one state to another, or even one city to another. Talk to them about their experiences. Some questions you might want to ask: What did they expect before they got here? What surprised them? How did they adjust to their new home? When did it begin to feel like home?

Ask students to bring in a photo of themselves, and cut out around the body like a paper doll. Next, paint a new background based on somewhere in their daily lives. It could be a school, a park, a friend's house, or even the local library. Ask participants to think about what connects (or disconnects) them to their community. Place the photo on top of the background—how does the figure belong or not belong? If there is still time, trade background settings with other participants—use your body on someone else's background. What do you notice? How easy is it to move from one setting to another? Are there things you would change to adjust to a new setting?

Create a neighborhood survival kit: what would a teenager coming to your neighborhood need to succeed in your community? Imagine that you are part of a welcoming committee and think of the clothing, music, books, or other accessories that most youth share. Create a list or a collage of the items that might help a newcomer understand your community.
Making Empanadas

Background Information

> Carmen Lomas Garza's image of her own multi-generational family gathered in her aunt and uncle's kitchen reflects the strong sense of family within the Chicano culture of Texas, where she grew up.

> The family is depicted making empanadas, a traditional Latin American pastry stuffed with various fillings. Other signs of Latino family culture include the small retablo, or altar, above the stove and the image of the Mayan temple hanging near the door.

> Lomas Garza recalls that every year her Aunt Paz and Uncle Beto—shown rolling the dough—would gather family and friends in their home to make the turnovers filled with sweet potato or squash from their own garden. Her memory of the small house was that it was filled with both people and empanadas—on literally every surface, as she has depicted in the painting. She includes her mother and father—drinking coffee—and even herself, in a blue dress.

> In this and many of her images, she employs a folk art style—reduced modeling, bold colors, and a somewhat flattened sense of space—to capture a broad range of subjects. This style calls on recognized traditional painting from Mexico but is also intended to appeal to a broad audience, reinforcing the hope that her images will educate and inform all Americans about Chicano culture.

> Lomas Garza's career as an artist began in the late 1960s, corresponding with a prolonged period of exploration of identity for the broader Chicano culture—mostly people of Mexican descent born in the United States. Her own family had come to the U.S. in the early twentieth century to escape the Mexican Revolution. Everyday traditions and memories of family, religion, and food were and continue to be celebrated by artists, writers, and other Chicanos.

> The notion of memory is very important to Lomas Garza's work. This and other images have been gathered together with written descriptions as picture books for children, to allow them to reflect on their own childhood memories and family experiences.
Making Empanadas

Looking Questions

1. What is going on in this scene? Did or does your family ever get together like this? Where? Why?

2. What about the kitchen itself? What might it tell us about this family?

3. This is an image of the artist’s family from her childhood—she is the girl in blue, a Chicana who grew up in south Texas. She portrays the scene—the space and the people—as somewhat flat. Why do you think she chose to depict this family moment this way?

4. How do you envision memories from your childhood? Are they crisp and clear or maybe a bit fuzzy or something else? What are the colors and spaces like? Do you feel as if you could step back into those spaces? Are there sounds or smells that you associate with your memories?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

Carmen Lomas Garza began her career as an artist at a time when the Chicano community sought to defend its cultural identity—characterized by a strong sense of family, traditional foods, religious practices, and other aspects of daily life. Many artists in the Chicano movement celebrated and defended this identity and used their work as a means to educate the broader American population; Lomas Garza’s clear and direct images illustrate the experience of growing up a Chicana.

What family or ethnic traditions from your childhood have influenced you the most? How have they contributed to who you are today? If you were going to create an image to educate others about these things, what would it look like? Would you want it to appear like a past memory, as Lomas Garza presents it, or would you depict it differently?

Resources

> Carmen Lomas Garza’s website: click on Research Links for further online information about the artist and her work

> Arte Latino: Treasures from the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Due to copyright restrictions we aren’t able to include this image, but it can be found online.

Carmen Lomas Garza, Making Empanadas, © Carmen Lomas Garza
http://carmenlomasgarza.com/artwork/paintings/
Tree Planting Group

Background Information

> In Grant Wood’s idyllic image, an Arbor Day celebration at a rural Iowa school links education of the young with the labor of planting a tree as investments that will yield rewards far into the future.

> Two older male students, wielding their shovels with concentrated attention, shoulder the grown-up work of digging the hole as the teacher and her younger charges look on. Two more boys, one also equipped with a shovel, stand ready to help.

> In the distance, the bare rolling hills are without shade, in contrast to the protection from the summer sun the newly planted sapling will one day afford.

> The expectant mood of Tree Planting Group underscores the importance of tree planting to the community and the importance of the boys’ labors not only for the planting itself, but as an example to their younger peers and a foundation for their own adult sense of responsibility.

> The studied perfection of the smoothly rounded forms, such as the perfectly conical mound of turned earth, mirrors the idealism of Wood’s image of respectful cooperation.

> Created during the Great Depression, the print reflects not the uncertainty and dislocations of that era but the artist’s childhood memories of close-knit rural communities and their one-room schoolhouses. Yet its message about the power of example, engagement, and investment retains its currency in American education.

> In the mid-1930s, Grant Wood was one of a number of artists from whom the New York-based publisher Associated American Artists commissioned prints of subjects that would appeal to a broad-based American public. Published typically in editions of 250 print impressions, these prints were sold by mailorder for $5 each (about $75 in today’s currency)—a modest price for a fine art print.
Tree Planting Group

Looking Questions

1. The boys in the foreground are digging a hole to plant a tree. Why do you think they are planting a tree?
2. Does the artist suggest to us who will benefit from the boys' work, in what ways, and when? How?
3. This image was printed in editions of 250 and available for purchase via mail order. It was intended to suggest certain American values in the 1930s, during the Great Depression. What values do you see represented?
4. We are again in a time of recession. Why might you want an image like this today? Where would you display it? Are there similar values important to us today?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

Have you ever been involved in a tree planting or in work on a family, neighborhood, or community garden? Have you ever taken part in a project that benefited your school, neighborhood, or community? Have you ever volunteered? What was that like?

What kinds of other projects can you imagine getting involved in with your family, neighborhood, or community that would have long-term benefits to all of you? As an activity, plan a project and figure out how you would carry it out.

What values would you want to symbolize from your family or community?
Sample Icebreakers and Opening Exercises

> Think of a group or think of someone who is involved in some meaningful way with your community. How is this person involved, what is he or she doing, and how did the involvement come about? How did you come to know about this person?

> Think of a time when you did something that felt “civic” or “participatory” in some way. What were you doing and why were you doing it? What felt “engaged” or “involved” or “civic” about it? How did it feel to be doing this?

Images and Discussion

The following pages contain the selected image (or image details, if the image is unavailable for this guide), background information, “Looking Questions,” further discussion questions, activity ideas, and resources.

Through it all there is the question of what we do. Whatever shapes our actions and whatever is done to us, always there is the question of what we do—and with that, the question of why we do it.

We can vote, protest, and serve. We can run, walk, and sit. We can fight and we can work and we can play. We can join up, drop out, and toil in fields of our own choosing. Which of our actions serve personal ends and which serve more community-oriented ends? What does it mean to participate, to engage? What kind of change can we make, and how can we make it?

The first duty of a human being is to assume the right functional relationship to society—more briefly, to find your real job, and do it.

—Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Participation Images
1. The County Election, 1852
2. The Migration of the Negro, Panel #59: In the North they had the freedom to vote
3. The “We Can Do It” Poster—War Production Coordinating Committee, 1942–1943
5. Suffrage parade, women march to win their right to vote in New York City, May 6, 1912
6. The Veteran in a New Field
The County Election, 1852

Background Information

> George Caleb Bingham's The County Election captures the triumphs and hazards of American participatory democracy and its founding principle that every voter is entitled to a single vote regardless of wealth, education, or influence.

> The painting shows a wide range of voters gathered to campaign, debate, cast their ballots, and even brawl in a local election taking place in a generic frontier town.

> The voters reflect the widening of the electorate in Jacksonian America to include poor laborers as well as prosperous gentlemen and even immigrants, represented by the red-shirted man at the top of the pyramid of figures, whose red hair and snub nose identify him as a stereotypical Irishman; he is shown taking an oath that he has not already cast a ballot in the race.

> Women are virtually absent from the scene, and the only African American is the servant marginalized behind a table at the far left.

> In The County Election, Bingham celebrates American democracy even as he points up its pitfalls: a wily campaigner turns his charm on a country bumpkin; an intoxicated voter is hauled to the polls; and in the foreground, two boys play a dangerous knife-game of chance, a sly commentary on the election's outcome.

> This is one of a series of paintings Bingham made to show American democracy in action, based on his often-bitter direct experience as a Whig politician in Missouri in the 1840s.

> Both the American electorate and the electoral process itself have changed greatly since Bingham's day, yet the fundamental principles of democracy, as well as its practical shortcomings, persist.
The County Election, 1852

Looking Questions

1. In this image of a county election from 1852, what kinds of people have shown up to campaign, debate, or vote? Who is not here?

2. What is the overall tone of this election? Why do you think the artist included all these different men? What is he saying about elections at the time?

3. In the early- to mid-nineteenth century, the ideas of Jacksonian democracy prevailed, and white men of all sorts—regardless of wealth, education, or influence—had the right to vote. Previously, “universal male suffrage” had really applied only to educated men of a certain class. How have we extended this broader concept of universal suffrage today? Who else would we see in an image of a county election today?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

Consider what it means to have the right to vote. Is it a responsibility, an honor? Do we have to deserve the right or should it be inherently ours as Americans, no matter what? Are there groups that are still disenfranchised today? If so, should they be granted the right to vote? Why or why not?

Over the course of American history, various to vote: black males and all women, most notably, as well as any immigrant who becomes a citizen.

Find people from these groups in your community and interview them about what it means to have the right to vote in America.

Resources

> Picturing America (brief description, teacher resources).
> George Caleb Bingham (detailed biography, discussion of artworks including The County Election).
> George Caleb Bingham (artist biography, descriptive interpretation of artwork).
The Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution granted African Americans the right to vote in 1870. Yet, in practice, many African Americans in the South were stopped from voting by prohibitive poll taxes, literacy tests, and violence.

The Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South to northern urban centers in the early twentieth century was motivated by opportunities for political participation and economic advancement. Voting was one of the freedoms sought by the many African Americans who moved to the North.

In this the second-to-last panel in a series about the Great Migration by artist Jacob Lawrence, six African Americans line up to vote in front of a booth. The somber hues of the polling place contrast with a stern white policemen who may be present to maintain order or to intimidate. The tilted floor creates a perspective that puts the viewer next in line to vote—encouraging our vicarious participation in the electoral process.

Lawrence’s Great Migration series details the hardships and injustices African Americans faced in the South through images of barren cotton fields and a noose in a tree that evokes lynching. He shows African Americans boarding trains and arriving in industrial centers in the North—Chicago, New York, Detroit, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh—in search of employment and opportunity. In the North, they find jobs in steel and other industries, homes in high-rise apartments, and access to education. Lawrence also describes the downsides of urban life, depicting overcrowding and segregation.

The Great Migration series is comprised of sixty small boards painted with tempera colors straight from the jar. Lawrence worked with one hue at a time on all sixty panels to create a unified look and seamless narrative. He used bold shapes and solid color forms.

An African American, Lawrence was born in New Jersey and settled in Harlem at age 13. He grew up during the Harlem Renaissance, a flowering of African American culture centered in New York, and he directly witnessed the influx of blacks from the South. He collected family anecdotes and researched historical events in the library to piece together this epic story of blacks participating in civic and urban life.
The Migration of the Negro, Panel # 59: In the North they had the freedom to vote

Looking Questions

1. What do you think the experience of voting was like for the people lined up in this image? Why do they put up with the fearful and intimidating tone of the policeman?

2. This is one of sixty images in a series about the Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the North in the first half of the twentieth century. All the images in the series are quite small and, in this image, we look down on the scene from above and cannot see the faces of the people in line.

3. Why do you think the artist gave us this particular perspective? What do you think he is saying about the struggle to win African Americans the right to vote?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

The struggle to win the vote was just one of many that African Americans faced during the civil rights era. All the things that they (and their supporters) fought for concerned the ability to freely participate in American society. Think about the ways you are able to, or are restricted from, freely participating in society. If not a group to which you belong, do you know of a group or community whose rights are limited? Draft a letter to your local alderman, congressman, or any government official about the issue and what you would like to see done about it. By writing the letter, you are exercising an American right, like voting, that may feel insignificant on its own but is often most powerful when engaged in by many people. Refer to the discussion questions and activity ideas for George Caleb Bingham's The County Election for additional ideas.

Resources

> Picturing America (brief description, teacher resources).
> The Phillips Collection, Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series
> Fifteenth Amendment (1870)
Background Information

> J. Howard Miller produced this poster specifically for the recruitment efforts of the Westinghouse Airships Company in 1942. It was intended to be posted from February 15 through 28 and may have been intended for the company’s Midwest factories.

> This and many posters like it were commissioned by the U.S. War Production Coordinating Committee and were part of a large effort by the federal government between 1942 and 1944 to recruit women into the workforce. The women were needed because many men were drafted into military service during World War II, and American manufacturing companies were being called on to supply all manner of equipment for the war effort. The slogan “We Can Do It!” reminds the intended female viewer that joining the working world was seen as patriotic, as a way of contributing to the nation’s success in the conflict.

> Miller’s female factory worker directly appealed to this type of woman, both unused to and potentially uncomfortable with the prospect of working outside the home. Her feminine makeup and painted nails soften her red bandanna and blue coveralls with sleeves rolled up, ready for work.

> Miller has used bold colors and a tight composition to catch the viewer’s attention. His female figure with her direct stare seems to reach out into our space, her flexed arm pointing up toward her simple but powerful words.

> Though hard to make out, the button on her collar is likely another recruitment image, with a similar slogan of encouragement.

> This image is often thought of as representing the ideal female worker, Rosie the Riveter, popularized by a 1942 song and a Norman Rockwell cover illustration from the May 29, 1943, Saturday Evening Post. However, Miller did not specifically indicate that the woman in his Westinghouse poster was meant to be Rosie. Rather, following the popularity of the song and Rockwell image, the press highlighted the stories of many female factory workers (riveters and otherwise) named Rose from across the country, and any images working women contributing to the war effort were linked to Rosie.
The “We Can Do It” Poster—War Production Coordinating Committee, 1942–1943

Looking Questions

1. Who might this woman be, who looks right at us and flexes her arm muscles for us? What is the “It” that she says “We Can Do”? Are we a part of the “We” she is addressing?

2. Her message is directed to other women. Do you think she’s speaking to a specific type of woman? How might the women she’s appealing to see themselves in her?

3. This poster was made to recruit women during World War II to go to work in factories, to take the places of men who had been drafted to fight the war abroad. It was likely meant to appeal to women who were not used to having a job outside the home, encouraging them to participate in the war effort because it was patriotic. Would this image persuade you? If not, how would you change the image (but keep the words)?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

Although this image was not specifically meant to represent Rosie the Riveter, a popularized image of the hard-working, patriotic woman who helped build airplanes during the war, she embodies many of the same characteristics. A song, written and publicized around the time that this poster was produced, told the story of Rosie the Riveter and her work. Read the words of the song and think about how it corresponds to this poster (or look at Norman Rockwell’s image of Rosie from 1943). Think of a cause for which you would like to recruit help from your community. How would you appeal to your community? Write a song like “Rosie the Riveter” to help promote your cause.

More than six million women went to work for the first time in factories and other jobs during World War II, many of them filling jobs that men had left in order to go fight in the war, and specifically helping to manufacture airplanes and other war materials. What is going on today in our nation or in your community that might require people to participate in new ways? Besides working, what other means of participation can you think of?

Resources

-> Lyrics and music for “Rosie the Riveter”.
-> Rosie the Riveter: World War II/Homefront National Historical Park (Richmond, Calif.).
-> National Park Service online exhibit, “Rosie the Riveter: Women Working During World War II”.
-> Transcript of webcast by Sheridan Harvey, women’s studies specialist, Humanities and Social Science Division, Library of Congress.
Selma-to-Montgomery March for Voting Rights in 1965

Background Information

> In this photograph, individuals march from Selma to the state capital of Montgomery, Alabama, to demonstrate for access to political rights. Photographer James Karales covered the four-day march for voting rights along its 54-mile journey, illustrating the determination of civil rights workers.

> At the front, four figures march in step, setting a brisk pace for the rest of the line, which seems to have no end. As they traverse a grassy hill, a few wave American flags just above their heads—symbols of the freedom and equal rights they strive to claim.

> Yet, despite the group’s bold advance, two-thirds of the composition is filled with dark clouds and the great expanse of an impending storm, a metaphor for the threat of violence. Karales’s photograph documents the third attempt to hold this march, the first two having been halted by violence or the threat of violence.

> On the third attempt, 25,000 participants gathered at the Alabama state capitol on March 25, 1965. The march garnered national attention for its cause and helped push President Lyndon Johnson to sign the Voting Rights Act on August 7, 1965.

> Karales places the camera below and at an angle to the action so that the viewer looks up to the participants. This point of view emphasizes the drama of the marchers’ defiance of nature and prejudice to pursue their rights. The challenge of the long journey, as indicated in the endless line of marchers, also reminds viewers of the difficulties African Americans had to overcome to attain equal rights.

> Karales was born to Greek immigrants in Canton, Ohio, trained as a photojournalist, and in the 1960s worked for Look Magazine, where this photo was originally published. It quickly became an icon of the civil rights movement.

Credits

Artist: James Karales
Medium: Photographic print
Selma-to-Montgomery March for Voting Rights in 1965

Looking Questions

1. In one word, how would you describe this image? Share your word either with the person next to you or with the larger group and explain why you chose the word.

2. This photograph captures a moment during the four-day march for voting rights in 1965. The participants marched 54 miles from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. Where is the photographer in relation to the scene depicted? What do you think he is telling us about this event?

3. The photograph was meant to document the event—it was eventually published in Look magazine—but it is not totally unbiased. The photographer suggests to us his perspective—literally and figuratively—of the event, but invites our consideration of it as well. Do you feel drawn into this image or kept at a distance? Why?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

Why do people choose to make a political statement by marching? How and why is it effective? Is there a difference between a protest and a parade? Compare Karales’s photograph to other images in the Engage! set depicting parades—the Gay Pride parade and the Suffrage parade. All three images suggest that parades and marches are peaceful, yet we know that’s not always the case. In fact, the march from Selma to Montgomery was halted twice due to violence or the threat of violence. Think about the role of aggression in being civically engaged. Is there a place for it?

How would your reaction to these three iconic images—all reflecting major social and political struggles for equality in America—change if aggression were depicted?

Resources

> Picturing America (brief description of image, teacher resources).
> 1965 Voting Rights Act
> National Voting Rights Museum and Institute, Selma, Alabama.
Suffrage parade, women march to win their right to vote in New York City, May 6, 1912

Background Information

> This photograph depicts women marching in New York City in May 1912 for the right to vote—a campaign known as the suffrage movement. The parade was one of many around the country leading up to the final approval and 1920 adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. American women had been organizing and appealing to lawmakers for voting rights since the mid-nineteenth century.

> The women are all dressed in white and carry pennants that bear the phrase “Votes for Women” and feature a series of stars. It is likely that the pennants were gold with nine stars. Gold had been the recognized color of the women’s suffrage movement since the post-Civil War years, and the imagery (in flags, pins, and broadsides) of the suffrage movement in 1912 often included nine stars, for the nine states that had already granted voting rights to women.

> The women’s white attire is related both to the overall color scheme used by the suffrage movement—purple, white, and gold, with white suggesting purity—and to the iconic, classically dressed female goddess who heralds the dawning of a new day with women’s right to vote. This type of figure had been a familiar one in American culture since the Revolution, representing everything from America itself to freedom, democracy, justice, liberty, and other civic virtues.

> The overall scene is restrained. The parade participants, with their children in tow, march peacefully, even chatting with each other as they walk. Similarly, the brief glimpse of the crowd gathered on the curb alongside the parade route shows that a calm demeanor prevailed. However, there were instances when suffrage parades were not received so civilly—most notably, a parade in Washington, D.C., in March 1913.

> The inclusion of children in the parade was more than a sign of the civility of the event. It served as a call to uncommitted mothers, as well a reminder of one of the main political positions of the movement: that, as nurturing mothers and homemakers, women were inherently “social housekeepers” and needed the vote to fulfill that role in the larger society.
Looking Questions

1. Spend a minute looking at this group of women participating in a march for the right to vote. What do you notice about them as a group? How do they visually identify themselves as a group?

2. Now, focus in on a few of the individuals. In what ways are they individualized?

3. Let’s think about how civic participation works. When you think about participation in something, is it as an individual or as part of group? Why? Give some examples from your life experience.

4. Based on the women’s appearance and actions, to whom do you think they are sending their message? Is it the crowd gathered on the curb or someone else? Why?

5. Taking a photograph of this event and printing it in newspapers or other media spread the ideals and symbolic imagery of the suffrage movement widely in American culture. Why do you think the photographer chose to capture this moment for such a purpose?

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Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

The act of marching in a parade is symbolic of the suffrage movement in the early twentieth century. The earliest suffrage parade was in California in 1906. Suffragists had been inspired by the political parades of nineteenth-century presidential campaigns and adopted the practice to serve their social and political goals. How does marching work as a form of civic participation? What cause would you march for? How would you visually communicate your beliefs?

Do further research about the suffrage movement using the resources listed above. Working in small teams, create a dialogue between the two women at the front left of this photograph. What might they be saying to each other about suffrage? Why is suffrage important to them as individuals? Why are they choosing to participate in a march? Use your research and the evidence in the photograph to write the dialogue. If time permits, each team should perform its dialogue for the rest of the group, with time for discussion afterward.

Resources

- National Women's History Museum online exhibit, “Motherhood, Social Service, and Political Reform: Political Culture and Imagery of American Woman Suffrage”.
- Library of Congress: Women's Suffrage Primary Source Set for Teachers.
- Women's Rights National Historical Park, Seneca Falls, N.Y.
The Veteran in a New Field

Background Information

> Painted at the close of the Civil War, Winslow Homer’s *The Veteran in a New Field* shows one kind of service to the nation—military—exchanged for another, the cultivation of food.

> Homer portrays the solitary man as if having just cast off his uniform to resume the farm work he abandoned at the start of the war. The brass buttons on his discarded coat at the lower right identify it as his army uniform; his particular affiliation with the Union cause is shown by the red cloverleaf, the mark of a New York volunteer corps, on his canteen nearby. With his back turned to the viewer, the featureless man is anonymous, an “everyman” who might stand in for any discharged veteran returning to his civilian life.

> Ever since George Washington’s example, Americans had honored the ancient Roman ideal of the soldier who voluntarily lays down his arms to go back to the farm. Here, the veteran harvests a bountiful crop.

> By showing this harvester using a single-bladed scythe rather than the more usual so-called cradle scythe, Homer also subtly evokes the conventional personification of death as the “grim reaper.” The association was all the more potent at the time the painting was made because news of a record harvest was colored both by oft-invoked wartime metaphors of corpse-strewn battlefields as “harvests of death” and by Lincoln’s recent assassination. Haunted by the specter of war, Homer’s ostensibly peaceful image suggests that the sacrifices made in military service are psychic as well as physical, individual as well as national.

> A northerner who began his career as an artist-reporter during the Civil War, Homer made numerous images of camp life among the Union forces. Launching his career as a painter of Civil War scenes, he focused with nonpartisan realism on the generic lot of ordinary soldiers and the universal costs of the conflict.
The Veteran in a New Field

Looking Questions

1. Who is this man cutting wheat at harvest time? Do we have any clues?

2. The brass buttons on his coat on the ground indicate that it is part of a military uniform. In fact, the man was a soldier in the Civil War and has returned to his farm after the war. Do you know returning veterans? What’s it like for them to go back to their old lives?

3. The artist has depicted the man turned away from us, giving us no individual identity; his form almost mirrors the tall wheat blowing in the wind. Why do you think the artist does this?

4. What do you think the soldier’s return to his farm work after the war suggests about America’s future?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

There are many Americans today who have served in the military and fought in wars. Find out how you can contact local veterans and interview them about their experiences and what it means to them to “participate” by serving their country. If they will allow it, photograph them and create an exhibition in the library, or even a set of videos or podcasts of the interviews.

Resources

> Picturing America (brief description of image, teacher resources).
> Steven Conn, “Narrative Trauma and Civil War History Painting, or Why Are These Pictures so Terrible?” History and Theory 41 (Dec., 2002), pp. 21–22, 35–37, 40–41.
The American flag: three colors, thirteen horizontal stripes, a small blue rectangle containing fifty five-pointed stars. Also a symbol that by law cannot be desecrated. An image that represents a country of approximately 300 million people.

The flag and the other images presented in this theme have come to mean a wide range of things to a wide range of people. They are intended to mean some of these things, and they have come to mean a number of other things. How do some images instruct us in what to feel and think? When are we able to confer different meanings on these images? How do we design symbolic images of our own?

“Shoot, if you must, this old gray head, But spare your country's flag,” she said.
—John Greenleaf

Sample Icebreakers and Opening Exercises

> Think of an instance when you looked at or saw an image—a symbol, picture, advertisement, poster, whatever—that moved you in some way—moved you to do something or caused you to feel something strongly. What was the image, and what did it move you to do or cause you to feel? How did it do this, how did it work on you?

> Take a few minutes and sketch out a picture that symbolizes something that matters to you. Don’t worry about the quality of the picture—consider it a rough sketch, like an outline, but pay attention to what you want it to say and how you think the picture will explain it. Once you’re set, pair up with the person next to you, share, and explain.

Images and Discussion

The following links contain the selected image (or image details, if the image is unavailable for this guide), background information, “Looking Questions,” further discussion questions, activity ideas, and resources.
In subverting the high-minded patriotism of Emanuel Leutze’s famous Washington Crossing the Delaware (1851), African American artist Robert Colescott challenges our conventional “textbook” view of the American past as embodied in fossilized icons of historical memory.

Building on the irony that America’s first prominent African American scientist, born a slave, was named after a slave-holding son of Virginia’s elite, Colescott substitutes George Washington Carver for his namesake at the helm of a boat loaded with such racist stereotypes as a cook, a “mammy,” a barefoot fishermen, and a cigar-smoking minstrel strumming a banjo.

The glaring offensiveness of the figures brings into question the fictive nature of Leutze’s “typical” revolutionaries, a motley bunch of thirteen men intended to represent the diversity of the founding colonies that united under Washington’s leadership to found a single nation.

An abolitionist himself, Leutze did include one black figure, an oarsman all but hidden just to Washington’s right, but Colescott’s parody highlights by contrast the dominant tradition of American historical interpretation by white males.

Where Leutze’s gargantuan painting is notorious for sacrificing historical accuracy to heroic bombast, Colescott presents an equally distorted representation of his own African American cultural legacy, embodied in racist symbols of black identity imposed from without.

Provocative and discomforting, Colescott’s painting underscores the subjectivity of the historical “record,” the political nature of its messaging, and the contest for its ownership.

In 1975, Robert Colescott (1925–2009) created a painting titled George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware: Page from an American History Textbook. The painting features a boat filled with racist stereotypes, including a cook, a “mammy,” a barefoot fishermen, and a cigarsmoking minstrel strumming a banjo. This artwork challenges the conventional view of American history and highlights the political nature of historical interpretation. The painting is an example of how art can be used to question and critique the dominant narratives of history.
George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware: Page from an American History Textbook

Looking Questions

1. Look at the Leutze painting, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, for a few minutes. Now, look at another version of the scene. What similarities and differences do you notice?

2. Both of these paintings depict a uniformed leader in a small boat packed with people in rough water, looking ahead to the opposite shore. Yet one of them was painted in 1851 and the other in 1975. In both cases, they are making either direct or indirect reference to an important moment from the past—General George Washington’s famous crossing of the Delaware River in December 1776. The later painting, by Colescott, is a parody of the earlier one, relying on the viewer’s familiarity with the earlier image. How do you think Leutze wanted you to feel about America’s past? How about Colescott?

3. Colescott’s image is subtitled “Page from an American History Textbook,” suggesting that we assume what we read and see in our school textbooks is the only version of history. He replaces the symbolic figures of the thirteen American colonies in Leutze’s image with thirteen racial stereotypes of African Americans. Why do you think he did this? Why is it important to question the way we interpret and present the past?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

If you were to create another version of this image today, who would be in the boat? How would they be represented and why? What other examples have you seen of recognizable symbols of America, or something else, parodied? What does it mean to parody something? Think of a well-known image in your community or American culture and what it symbolizes—do you agree with that message? If not, how would you create a parody of the symbol to suggest alternate meanings or points of view?
Puerto Rican Flag

Background Information

> This image by documentary photographer Joseph Rodriguez is from a series called “Spanish Harlem,” begun in the mid-1980s.

> Spanish Harlem, also referred to as El Barrio (“the neighborhood”) or East Harlem, is in the northeast corner of New York’s borough of Manhattan. It has been home to immigrant communities for much of its history, including Germans, Irish, Italians, and Russians. Beginning in the 1960s, residents of Puerto Rican origin began to dominate the neighborhood’s population. Today, the area is largely Latino (not just Puerto Rican) and African American.

> Rodriguez’s photograph served as the cover image for his 1995 book, Spanish Harlem, which reveals “the capital of Hispanic America” from the inside, documenting traditional activities such as dancing and religious festivals and the joys as well as struggles of everyday life. Of the neighborhood in the mid-1990s, the publishers wrote, “To live in Spanish Harlem is to confront some of the city’s worst problems: crime, drug abuse, AIDS, chronic unemployment.”

> In the photo, Rodriguez captures a view of the poverty and resulting dilapidation of the neighborhood’s structures. A young girl with her head down and hands clasped stands on a stoop amid peeling paint, layers of grime, and boarded-up doors.

> The strong sunlight reveals the blight of this building, and also casts a shadow on the face of the girl, one of the few sign of life in this image, making it difficult to read her expression.

> The Puerto Rican flag, painted onto the building within an outline of the main island of the Commonwealth, is clear and crisp; the paint is not chipping and the white is still bright, not yet covered by the dirt of the city. It serves as a reminder of the vibrant presence of the neighborhood’s large Puerto Rican population.

Credits

Artist: Joseph Rodriguez
Medium: Chromogenic photograph on paper

Puerto Rican Flag

Looking Questions

1. Who is the girl in this photograph? What do you notice about her?
2. Why do you think the photographer included her in this street scene? Do you think she belongs here? What is her connection to the space—physically, emotionally?
3. What do you notice about the flag? How does the artist draw our attention to it? Do you think it belongs here? Why or why not?
4. The photographer included this on the cover of a book of his photos called “Spanish Harlem.” The image on the front of a book can also be seen as a symbol or sign of what we might find inside the book. What might you expect to see inside the book with this image on the cover? Why do you think the photographer included the girl and the flag in this image? What might the cover image of a book about your neighborhood look like?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

Walk around your neighborhood or community and think about what things are most symbolic of its character. If possible, photograph some of these things and put the photos together in book format. Write a description for each image and talk about what the element in the photo symbolize to you and to the larger community.

Resources

- Joseph Rodriguez’s website.
- Smithsonian American Art Museum: Artestino website.
- Information about Spanish Harlem; East Harlem History.

>
I Want You for U.S. Army

Background Information

> Graphic designer and illustrator James Montgomery Flagg designed this image originally for the July 16, 1916, cover of Leslie’s Illustrated Weekly Newspaper and it bore the title “What Are You Doing for Preparedness?” Aware of the possibility of U.S. involvement in what was then called the European War, the newspaper’s editors were hoping to inspire patriotic Americans to get ready to serve their country.

> In designing the cover illustration, Flagg had likely been looking at a British recruitment poster from 1914, which depicted Lord Kitchener, the secretary of war and chief of military recruitment, proclaiming, “Your Country Needs You.” Less than a year later, in spring 1917 and after the U.S. had officially entered what we now call World War I, Flagg’s image was appropriated by the government for the U.S. Army recruitment campaign with the caption so recognized today: “I Want You for U.S. Army.” By the time of the Armistice in 1919, more than four million posters had been printed. So popular during World War I, the image re-emerged for recruitment purposes during World War II, and continues to resonate in the minds of Americans as a direct call to action.

> Flagg claims that owing to a tight deadline and a thin wallet, he used himself as the model for the figure of Uncle Sam. The persona of Uncle Sam was not a new one to the American viewer, dating to at least the nineteenth century and likely originating with a Troy, N.Y., merchant named Samuel Wilson, who supplied beef to the armies during the War of 1812. Illustrations of him as a tall, lanky, bushy-haired, older man regularly included his top hat, striped pants, and overall red, white, and blue attire. Flagg’s physical features seemed to make him well suited to model for this symbol of American identity.

> Whether the image was used as magazine cover or independent poster, Flagg was aware that he had a mass audience for it, and knew that it needed to catch the viewer’s eye and communicate clearly. Uncle Sam looks straight out at the viewer with a stern gaze, and his pointing finger leaves no doubt about who is the target of his emphatic message, “I WANT YOU.” Flagg adds no extraneous details to the figure of Uncle Sam or the background, underscoring the direct message of an image that was seen literally everywhere. And he uses bold colors like red (in the bow tie) to connect the figure and his exhortation.

Credits

Artist: Unknown

Medium: Chromolithograph on paper


Looking Questions

1. The caption on this image states, “I WANT YOU”; just looking at the gesture and facial expression of the figure, what does he want from you? What’s your reaction to him and his message?

2. This figure is identified as Uncle Sam, an iconic American symbol. What do you associate with Uncle Sam? Who is he? What is his role? Why do you think we call him “Uncle”? Does he look like your uncle?

3. Other than his red, white, and blue attire, what else about the figure of Uncle Sam in this poster symbolizes America? Why would we trust or listen to his message?

4. The artist used himself as the model for Uncle Sam in 1916, and the persona of Uncle Sam is likely based on Samuel Wilson, a beef merchant who supplied the armies during the War of 1812. This reminds us that signs and symbols can be based on real people or elements of our experience. Based on your American experience, how would you envision Uncle Sam today? Is there someone in your life or broader American culture who you think embodies the same ideas?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

This image was used in military recruitment efforts during World War I and again during World War II. Today, we are at war again, and although we may see this image of Uncle Sam in popular culture, it is not used by the U.S. military to recruit new soldiers. Why not? What might be an effective image for military recruitment in America today? What slogan would go with that image?

Despite the fact that this image is not being used now for military recruitment, it’s very familiar to us because it has been appropriated for other causes. The image and its “I WANT YOU” command convey the powerful message that our government, or some authority, is imploring us to step up, to contribute, or even to make a sacrifice for the good of the nation or a particular organization or community. What is something that you want to promote or direct people to do in your community? How would you appropriate either this image of Uncle Sam or the phrase “I want you” to communicate your message?
Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Background Information

> Chinese American, Ohio-born architect Maya Lin was a Yale undergraduate when she won the design competition for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1981. Her design was selected from over 1,420 other applicants.

> The V-shaped wall is made of black granite and inscribed with the names of 58,261 soldiers who died during the Vietnam conflict (1961–75). The wall points to the Washington Monument on one side and the Lincoln Memorial on the other. Lin has called it “a wound in the earth that is slowly healing.”

> The wall is 493 feet, 6 inches long. At the entrance, it is only 8 inches high, but it gradually dips at the center to a depth of 10 feet, 3 inches below ground level. As they move along the wall, visitors sink below grade and then return to ground level, as if walking into and out of a grave.

> By including names, rather than faces, of lost veterans, Lin quantifies loss. The only faces that visitors see are their own reflections, as they come to embody lost soldiers. The multitude of names are listed in chronological, not alphabetical, order; visitors often take pencil to paper to make a rubbing of a loved one’s name.

> Lin’s sculpture is minimalist—art that is stripped down to its most basic forms. Criticized by some veterans as a “black gash of shame” and “nihilistic slab of stone,” Lin’s design conveys the absolute finality of loss and death. It does so on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., amid monuments that commemorate America’s great leaders and triumphs and museums that celebrate American history and innovation.

Credits

Artist: Maya Lin
Medium: Black cut-stone masonry wall
Citation: Vietnam Veterans Memorial, 1982. Maya Lin (b. 1959). Black cut-stone masonry wall. 246 feet 9 inches x 10 feet 1 inch (75 x 3 meters). Washington, D.C. Groundbreaking: March 26, 1982; dedication: November 13, 1982.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Looking Questions

1. The criteria of the design competition stipulated that the monument was to: (1) be reflective and contemplative in character; (2) harmonize with its surroundings; (3) contain the names of those who died in conflict or were still missing; and (4) make no political statement about the war. How did Lin’s design address these criteria?

2. Prior to Vietnam, V stood for victory. What does the V shape stand for here? Is victory glorified?

3. What do we communicate about America through our memorials? What parts of history should be remembered and why?

4. Do you know any soldiers? Why did they become soldiers? Is it important to remember their service to the country?

5. How would you want to be remembered?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

Look at additional images of the monument (search Google Images or Flickr). Find photographs that show people interacting with the memorial wall. What kind of space does this monument create? How do visitors move through it? What activities take place there?

Compare the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to a local war memorial and consider how the artist envisioned the viewer’s relationship to it. How does the relationship between either memorial and its viewer reflect the relationship of citizen to fallen veteran? What signs and symbols are used to memorialize lost veterans and honor the dead in the local example and in Lin’s memorial?

Resources

Whirligig, entitled “America”

Background Information

> Whirligigs are wind-powered constructions characterized by the spinning or “whirling” motion of figures, flags, or other details made of painted metal or wood. Whimsical animals and human figures are often depicted, animated further by their moving parts.

> Whirligigs come in many sizes and are typically found in gardens or yards, atop poles or even rooftops. While they can serve as weather vanes, their primary function is one of visual entertainment rather than utility.

> First recorded in Europe in the fifteenth century and seen as children’s toys, whirligigs became popular in Revolutionary America as amusement for all ages.

> Frank Memkus’s Whirligig, entitled “America” is over six feet tall and includes two dozen American flags, with the red, white, and blue palette continued in the decoration of the entire contraption. The seaman at the top, whose arms rotate with the wind, stands on an airplane with multiple propellers—again, free to spin with the encouragement of the wind.

> Memkus, a Lithuanian immigrant who lived in Tomahawk, Wisconsin, began building his whirligig in 1938 as a sign of his patriotism for his new home. It took him four years to construct the whirligig. Once completed—when the United States was fully engaged in World War II—he displayed it in his yard at special times of the year, such as the Fourth of July.

> Whirligig, entitled “America” is the only known work of art by Frank Memkus, who was not formally trained as an artist but rather worked in a tannery. Such art is often referred to as folk art and often expresses popular interests, ideals, and values of the American population.

> Many immigrants coming to the United States in the early twentieth century embraced their new home—the land of the free—and expressed this patriotism through various signs and symbols. For Memkus, the American flag and its colors, as well as the image of the airplane with propellers, all moving freely with the wind, suggest the possibilities and promise of living in the United States.
Whirligig, entitled “America”

Looking Questions

1. What do you think this is? Does it have a function? How can you tell?

2. This is a whirligig—a playful contraption that moves with the wind—and it was made by a Lithuanian immigrant, Frank Memkus. Though he had no formal art training, he still wanted to express himself and his patriotism creatively. This is an example of what’s called folk art, which often uses recognizable symbols or imagery to reflect popular sentiment or tastes within a culture.

3. Does it look like other art you have seen? Based on this definition, what kind of folk art have you seen in your community? Does it reflect, or symbolize, patriotism or some other community idea or belief? How?

4. It took Memkus four years to build the whirligig, completing it during World War II (1939–45), and he displayed the finished product on his lawn at certain times of the year, such as the Fourth of July. Why do you think that Memkus, as a recent immigrant to the United States, might have chosen to demonstrate his patriotism this particular way? How exactly does his creation reflect a sense of patriotism?

Further Discussion Questions and Activity Ideas

What does the American flag symbolize to you? Does your answer change based on where you see the flag or how it is displayed/used? Are there flags or symbols to identify a community or group that you are a part of? If not, how might you develop and display such a symbol? Think about how that symbol would capture a sense of identity within that particular group.

We are again in a time of war. What ways have you seen people expressing their patriotism? How patriotic are you? Are there ways you outwardly display this patriotism? If not, how might you do so? What signs and symbols from American culture would you use and how would you use them? Design something that visually displays your patriotism (or lack of it, if that is the case).
Engage! was piloted in summer 2010 in eight Chicago Public Library branches and the YOUmedia center at Harold Washington Public Library; in fall 2010 by Arlington Heights (Ill.) Memorial Library; and in fall 2010 and spring 2011 at Evanston (Ill.) Public Library. Links to images and program models from many of these sites can be found in the navigation on the right. All of the participating libraries planned series with the program format template provided in this guide and adapted it to best work in for their teens. Many layered questions with background information and asked teens to create their own questions, bring in other media, present the images to their peers, or view and react to all the images from a theme in a gallery-style display before discussion. Check out the pilot site pages and related webinars to see how project directors adapted the program model to fit the needs of their teen participants.
Participants discussed all five themes in four meetings. The teens participated in two public art projects, the first being the prayer flags and the second the urban totem pole. Both were displayed in a community garden to serve as inspiration for other teens. See the Austin branch’s supplemental Engage! reading list (PDF).

Who the Teens Were
Participating teens were part of a summer program through Youth Guidance that prepares them for employment and/or college. All of the teens were part of an at-risk program at Frederick Douglass High School that includes job-readiness, counseling, group therapy, conflict management, and field trips. This program is treated much like a job itself, with teens attending from 9 to 5. The teens involved in the Engage! program were chosen for their interest in art as recognized by their art teacher at Douglass High School.

Leadership Opportunities
The most significant leadership opportunity afforded the teens in the Austin Branch program focused on the teens taking initiative in the collective creative process. The teens had control of every aspect of the urban totem pole; they collectively determined the direction of its creation, including its overall message, design, and materials used for embellishment. During each Engage! session, teens brainstormed a list of inspirational words and phrases that resulted from each meeting’s discussion; those words and phrases were then carefully selected for use in the final design of the totem pole by the students themselves.

Tangible Opportunities to Engage! with Ideas or Materials
The Austin Branch determined that the over arching goals of the Engage! project were to:

> inspire teens to think about the importance of civic engagement in their lives through discussion, reflection, and project-based activities; deepen the teens’ knowledge and appreciation of American art and its relation to American history and civic life; and contribute to the development of informed and discerning voters.

Each of the Engage! sessions featured a hands-on project that enabled the teens to tangibly exercise the ideas discussed in each meeting. Some of the more successful projects included:

> Sidewalk chalk drawing, where the teens had the opportunity to express themselves in a public setting by creating artwork with an inspirational theme behind it.

> Free-form self portraits centered around the theme of growing up, where teens could explore the notion of their own identities and purpose within American society.

> Creation of prayer flags for the community garden. These consisted of illustrated banners that the teens created containing messages to send out to the community. The banners were strung on a rope and erected in the community garden. The final project was the creation of the urban totem pole, which teens designed collectively and erected in the community garden as a symbol of community unity and pride.
Participants discussed all five themes in four meetings. For the final meeting the teens participated in a public awareness campaign that highlighted the humane treatment of animals.

**Who the Teens Were**
Librarian Brandy Morrill contacted teens that had previously attended book discussions and other library programs for the Engage! program. She also introduced the program to their junior volunteer group. Librarian Caleb Nolan visited the local eighth graders at a local elementary school in order to encourage participation. The majority of the students involved were teens who regularly attended teen programs at the library.

**Leadership Opportunities**
- Brandy moderated and presented the artists for the discussions while allowing the teens to direct which images they wanted to focus on. Teens utilized stickers of varying colors to participate in a gallery walk and judge which images resonated most with them.
- All of the students were very involved in researching their group project regarding the humane treatment of animals within their community. Each session the teens were asked to do some work on the final project. They began with a brainstorming session, and the following week moved on to discussion of their plans. Finally, each participant had the opportunity to report back to the group on their ideas and findings for the collective project.
- Teens participated in a collage activity where Brandy had provided printed images of the library’s community. Teens also brought in pictures of the neighborhoods and communities they lived in to share with the group. All of the images as well as copies of the Engage! images were then used as material for the teens’ collages.
- Another hands-on activity the teens participated in was stamp making. They were provided foam shapes and symbols and asked to create a stamp that was an expression of who they are.
- For the final project, teens worked together to gather information and materials regarding public awareness of humane treatment of animals. Two teens volunteered to contact a local animal shelter and procure information and materials. Teens also created materials of their own by designing posters and artwork focusing on the humane treatment of animals. A table was then set up in front of the library during a community function, and the teens were able to interact with their community and promote public awareness of their issue.
Participants discussed all five themes in six meetings.

Who the Teens Were
Librarian Nanette Freeman recruited teens by talking about the program to various teens who utilize the library. She recruited participants based on their enthusiasm and likelihood to commit. She continued her outreach by personally telephoning interested teens to remind them of upcoming Engage! meetings. The result was a group of teens who hailed from Chicago public schools around the city. The age group was also varied, combining to create a group of teens from a multitude of backgrounds and with a variety of different experiences.

Leadership Opportunities
> One week’s teens were asked to present a piece of art and/or information about the artist. Student volunteers researched and presented one of the images to the group of teens for discussion. The teens chose the “I Can Do It” image of Rosie the Riveter and gave detailed information regarding the time period of the image and the changing role of women during wartime. The teens went so far as to even prepare their own discussion questions for the group and helped facilitate discussion.

> Teens were given the opportunity to create their own personal art at each session. One ongoing project was decorating cigar boxes that could then be used to showcase the teens’ individual style and hold items that held meaning for them. This project was introduced by the visit of a local artist, who presented a collection of her own cigar boxes and spoke to the teens about the importance of expressing oneself artistically. Teens gathered one hour prior to the regularly scheduled Engage! meeting and listened to music while decorating their boxes. It was a continued chance for teens to talk about their creations and art itself without adult interjection. The freedom inherent in this type of creative process was popular with the teens, and Nanette noticed a rise in attendance numbers as teens seemed eager to share with one another in a safe space while making art.

Tangible Opportunities to Engage! with Ideas or Materials
At every single Engage! session, teens were offered some type of reflective and hands-on activity. Some stand-out projects included:

> A successful session focused on the Romare Bearden image The Dove, a collage piece. Nanette was aware of the artist’s personal love of jazz and used this session to introduce the teens to some jazz while discussing the image and how it related to the style and tone of the music. Nanette shared supplemental images from artists also working in the collage medium, and teens discussed the disjointedness of the two art forms. In order to further the teens’ understanding of the collage medium, they participated in a game of Exquisite Corpse, which is a method by which a collection of words or images is collectively assembled. Each collaborator adds to a composition in sequence, either by following a rule (for example, the sequence “adjective noun adverb verb adjective noun”) or by being allowed to see the end of what the previous person contributed.

> The teens were then given the opportunity to create their own collage images using actual pictures of themselves. The results reflected the same theme of disjointedness or collection. Having the ability to actually insert their own images into their creations was an especially effective tool for personalizing their creations.

> Another interesting activity that occurred as a result of the Engage! program was triggered by a piece of promotional material Nanette had displayed in the window of the library. She was inspired by a project by artists from the Art Institute of Chicago, where members of the community donated old dolls that were then transformed by the artists into works of art. The artist’s doll in the window had been converted into a bug, and the students, after weeks

of art discussion and activity in the program, were so inspired that they initiated a project themselves by asking Nanette if they too could try their hand at turning a doll into a work of art.

After members of the library community donated dolls, Nanette let the teens decide what direction they would take their own transformations in. Teens worked on their creations in their free time and brought them into sessions to share with the group. One girl in the Engage! sessions was so inspired that she created a doll a week. The girl’s mother claimed that she had not recognized any artistic talent or interest in the teen prior to the project. Teens utilized a multitude of materials to personalize their creations, and the dolls were displayed throughout the library for the duration of the Engage! program.
Participants discussed all five themes in three meetings. In addition to these meetings, teens went on a tour of local art in their neighborhood and met with a local stained glass artist who spoke to them about his charity.

Who the Teens Were
Most of the participants were summer reading program volunteers who learned of the Engage! program from the children’s librarians during training sessions at the beginning of summer. There were also teens who participated because they were intrigued by displays set up in the library and some school-year volunteers who were notified of the program directly by librarians.

Leadership Opportunities
> Teens chose all of the specific content for their art projects and were encouraged to voice their opinions on the art being discussed at each meeting.

> During service learning projects, teens demonstrated leadership by being responsible for choosing the areas where they wanted to help during two large neighborhood events. They assisted in the kids’ events tent and conducted surveys during the Folk and Roots Festival. Teens also helped to monitor an inflatable slide for kids at the Lincoln Square Block Party. In both cases, teens were actively involved in civic engagement and were personally thanked by the neighborhood institutions, the Old Town School of Music, and the Lincoln Square Chamber of Commerce for their efforts.

Tangible Opportunities to Engage! with Ideas or Materials
> At the beginning of each Engage! session librarians led icebreakers in order to engage the teens with the artwork. One activity focused on the teens writing about their community and choosing symbols that could be used to represent themselves.

> At the final meeting, librarians taped an Engage! image to the teens’ backs and had each guess which image it was by asking only yes or no questions of the other teens.

> Teens participated in a several different hands-on art projects and utilized a variety of art materials. They colored and created Shrinky Dinks, made collages, and designed mosaics.

> Teens were also introduced to the idea of volunteering at community events, and did so at two large neighborhood festivals.

> At one session, teens were taken to meet with a local artist in his workshop. They had the opportunity to learn about his stained glass making as well as the charity the artist supports.

> Finally teens were taken on a guided tour of local art in their community and given the opportunity to experience public art first-hand and discuss it in the moment.
In addition to the five discussion meetings, students were treated to a visit to the Art Institute of Chicago. The visit served as an excellent springboard into conversations about art and was an appropriate introduction to the Engage! program. The experience was photographed and videoed by students. The program culminated in a final project of the students’ choosing.

Prior to the teen group trips to the Art Institute, the librarians were able to visit the museum and talk directly with the professionals on strategies for how to describe art and get teens engaged in critical discussion. Marcus found this very helpful during the later Engage! sessions. Instead of simply repeating what they’d previously been told to think about art, the teens were able embrace their own space and reflect on the power behind the art and what it means to them individually.

Teens really got to set the tempo of their programs at YouMedia. A Show & Tell program and a remixing project were very successful. The Show & Tell had teens find a work of art that they love and discuss it with the group. Some selected images already included in the Engage! project and others selected items such as the “Exit Through the Gift Shop” documentary by the street artist Banksy. In the remixing project teens had the opportunity to remake a version of a famous work of art by putting their own spin on it. Teens participated in another program that focused on creating poetry based around a chosen image. The YouMedia center publishes an online YouLit magazine that features poetry like what was created during the programs.

Librarian Marcus Lumpkin was dedicated to making each program into an individual workshop that could stand alone, but that was powerful and could build off of the others. Overall teens got the message that art has power behind it and can be taken back to their communities and turned into something useful.

During the final set of Engage! sessions teens worked on larger art projects that were influenced by the images and experiences during the Engage! sessions. The projects completed during the end of the Engage! were smaller scale and more concentrated projects that drew from discussion and experiments that were done during the sessions.
Who the Teens Were
Teens were recruited through the library’s junior volunteer program.

Leadership Opportunities
The two biggest leadership opportunities the teens were given were:

> PSA Project: Teens selected a subject they deemed important for the community to know about. Then they wrote a short PSA and recorded it. The teens were responsible for the content of their recordings, as well as the style and manner of delivery. PSAs were then played on Vocalo.

> Mural Project: As a group the teens brainstormed different themes for the mural and were then given a week to sketch a mural based on the selected theme. Teens presented their ideas to the collective group and voted to select the one they liked best. The artist of the selected design then worked with the other teens on color scheme and layout.

Tangible Opportunities to Engage! with Ideas or Materials
At every single Engage session, teens were offered some type of reflective and hands-on activity. List of offerings for each program:

> Growing Up
  Reflective Writing: After looking at Making Empanadas and reading a passage from House on Mango Street, teens were asked to take a few minutes to write in their journals about their own family traditions. And if they had to portray these traditions in an art form of any kind, how would they do so? Hands-On Activity: Migrant Worker was the last image we looked at for this session. The teens then built pinhole cameras and were given the assignment to document images of their childhood.

> Community
  Reflective Writing: Read Not Americans by Mara Testa and asked the teens to think about and write about how they are connected to their communities.

They were asked to consider how it would feel to be placed in a new community and how they would go about to fitting in. Reflective Group Activity: Participants did a group brainstorming word map about their community, and included places and themes they might want featured in the mural project. Hands-on Activity: After looking at Tar Beach the teens were give fabric squares and markers to create their own quilt block based on their community.

> American Dreams
  Reflective Writing: Participants were asked to answer the following questions in a journal entry: What is the American Dream? What are your dreams for yourself? Reflective Activity: A monograph of Shepard Fairey’s artwork was explored and his early guerilla art was discussed. Teens were given paper and colored pencils and asked to design a sticker like Fairey that could be used to promote some cause or message they wanted to make people aware of. Hands-on Activity: Participants created Animoto videos based on their “American Dream.”

> Signs and Symbols
  Reflective Writing: Participants were asked to think about symbols and how images can be used to relay information without using text. Then they were asked to sketch out a symbol that would represent themselves or a group they belong to. Hands-On Activity: Participants chose a topic they felt passionate about and wrote a PSA, that was then recorded at YouMedia and played on Vocalo Radio.

> Participation
  Hands-on Activity: The group participated in a brainstorming activity to determine a theme for the mural in the children’s department. Participants then created sketches of potential designs and shared them with the group. Teens voted on which design they would like to pursue for their mural. It took three addition meetings to complete the mural.
Participants discussed all five themes in six meetings. Completed projects for each theme were displayed in the library for the general public.

Who the Teens Were
Most of the participants were generated from outreach that librarian Tom Spicer did with five different area schools.

Tangible Opportunities to Engage! with Ideas or Materials
> The teens were taught about the technique of a value drawing. An artist, Tricia Fuglestad, guided the participants in their projects. Using a play on the word “value,” the teens were then asked to collage and use mixed media to put text in the background of their projects that reflected what they valued in their lives.

> Another artist, Violet Jaffe, created a unique program based on Ladder For Booker T. Washington by Martin Puryear. She included a very interesting background presentation on Puryear, including a video of him interviewed about Ladder For Booker T. Washington. The teens utilized balsa and bass wood, wood glue, and various other materials to create a model based on a symbol of something meaningful in their lives.

> In a creative writing program, a novelist, Charles Dickinson, spoke about his short story writing and then read an original piece he wrote based on County Election, 1892. They had five preselected images printed off on sturdy stock paper that the teens took home and then wrote short stories on. Those stories were then posted as blog entries on the teen website.

> Each teen was given disposable cameras after the program. Rolling Meadows High School photography teacher Amanda Thomas examined six of the photographs in the Engage! and Picturing America resources (focusing on photographs from the Signs and Symbols theme) and also gave tips on how to take effective pictures. Each participating teen had their best three photos blown up into 8” x 10” images for display in the library.
This program was unique in that it was divided into two parts. In the fall, Christie facilitated thirteen programs, with the majority of these initial programs being attended by a core group of six teens. The second half of the program took place in the spring and included the photography programming. There were three separate exhibits of the photographs, and the teens will be present at each “exhibit opening” to talk about their experience. One of the exhibits was at the Evanston Mayor’s Summer Youth Safety Summit.

**Who the Teens Were**

Participants for the first half of the Engage! program were recruited from the senior studies group from Evanston Township High School (ETHS). Christie Chandler-Stahl also recruited students she knew to the program, and had some participants from outreach she conducted through Youth Organization Umbrella, a youth-serving social service agency in Evanston, the city’s Youth Coordinator, and Latino Quest at ETHS.

**Leadership Opportunities**

- Teens each researched an artist for the Growing Up theme, then presented on that artist and image to the rest of the group.
- Teens helped create the list of questions for the senior citizens home visit.
- One teen drew a picture of a falcon that served as the “Flat Stanley” for one of the public Engage! sessions on photography. This teen also helped to generate the questions for the first Growing Up project.
- Teens created the designs for the trash can painting on their own.
- At one of the sessions, a teen brought all of the refreshments. One of the teens set up and managed a Facebook group page.
- One of the participants organized an impromptu gathering on a Saturday that we were not scheduled to meet (due to spring break). The teens got together and took pictures all around Evanston, then everyone met for pizza.
- Another teen helped with the photography exhibit, the mounting of photographs, and the set-up for the display. She is also did the posters for the exhibit.
- One teen led a discussion on civic participation and agreed to be a liaison with the community service program at the high school.
- Another teen served as the tech assistance for creating instructions for uploading videos and helped out with anyone who had any technology questions.

**Tangible Opportunities to Engage! with Ideas or Materials**

- We created a “community” sculpture in the Loft using objects present while exploring the theme Community.
- Three groups of Evanston teens painted trash cans for the ninth ward. They created the designs after looking at the images from the Community theme, then painted them using spray and other paint.
- In the first Growing Up program, students shared photographs they took the week before. Another student worked with Christie on the questions for the teens’ photography assignment. Some of the questions were: “Take a picture of a place where you love connecting with people”; “Take a ‘looking back photo,’ such as an oblique shot—if you loved the beach as a child, you could have someone take a distance picture of the beach with you at the end of the shot.”
- During the Signs and Symbols theme and while looking at the I Want You for the US Army picture, we stood in a circle, caught a ball and responded to the prompt: “someone telling you, perhaps sternly, that they want you to do something right now. Give an example.”
- After the Signs and Symbols program, students started working on a graphic design to integrate the theme of PeaceAble Cities Evanston.
- In response to the Gay Pride photo, participants wrote narratives from the perspective of a young man in the parade/photo.
- Every teen participant in the program received a camera to keep so that they could actively engage with ideas every week, not just while they were in the class. They all took many pictures during the week also.
- In session four, all of the participants wrote poems about one of their photographs.
- In the final session, all of the participants wrote poems of their photographs that had been selected for the exhibit.
- During two of the sessions, we went out to take pictures and we shared tips of good composition, camera settings, lighting, etc.
- Each week the photographer reviewed the pictures that the teens had taken throughout the week. Everyone uploaded their work to Picasa so they could comment on each other’s photos and be inspired by each other’s perspectives.
- A Tribune staff photographer came to present pictures and movies to the group of her experiences working with teenagers from Altgeld Gardens and from visiting young adults in a prison.
For more information about Engage! Teens, Art and Civic participation, visit www.ala.org/programming/engage-picturing-america-through-civic-engagement.