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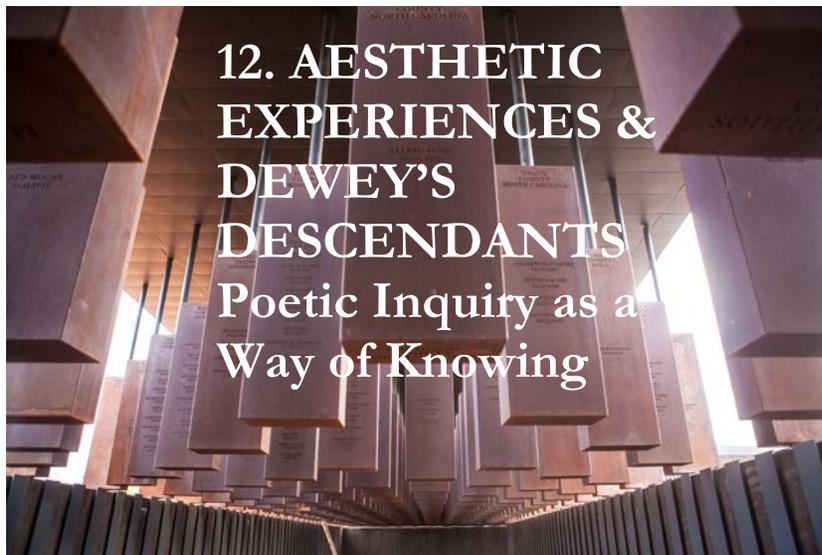


Figure 12.1. Bryan Stevenson, *Equal Justice Initiative*, MASS Design Group. (2018, designed by). *Lynching memorial*. [Hanging Corten steel]. *National Memorial for Peace and Justice*. Soniakapadia. (2018). [Digital Photo].

Abstract: This chapter examines the influence of John Dewey's *Art as Experience* on 21st Century urban teacher education by tracing its themes related to the importance of engagement with works of art in educational contexts through the work of Maxine Greene and Louise Rosenblatt and applying the teachings of these three philosophers in English Education teaching methods courses. As Dewey speaks of the nature of perception in the context of having an aesthetic experience, he addresses the need for active engagement in response to works of art. Both Greene and Rosenblatt take up this concept—Greene through art-making as a kind of apprenticeship that opens up learners' imaginations and allows them to understand the process artists undergo in bringing ideas into the world of concrete reality; and Rosenblatt, through her discussion of the transactional nature of reading literature (which can be extrapolated to other art forms).

The chapter specifically addresses the use of ekphrastic poetry in a graduate English class taken by first and second year middle and high school English teachers in a graduate program in English Education, and includes examples of students' poems and their reflections on their processes and implications for their own teaching practices. The chapter also discusses the process of developing experiences with an intention to help teachers enhance both their content knowledge and their ability to engage their middle and high school students by offering opportunities for creative expression that fosters voice and a sense of agency.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will examine the practice of writing poetry as a form of inquiry integral to aesthetic experiences and the roots of that approach in Dewey's *Art as Experience*¹. When Dewey speaks of having an aesthetic experience with works of art he points to the transactional qualities of the experience of perception. "Perception is an act of the going-out of energy in order to receive," he says. Effort is required to learn how to see, comparable to the apprenticeship required "to see through a microscope or telescope" (p. 55). Maxine Greene (2001) also speaks of the investment required in order to fully understand works of art as "something that can only be grasped by those who attend, something that opens vistas on what lies beyond" (p. 15). Greene goes on to say that these aesthetic experiences "lead to transformations" (p. 37). Perception, then, is the key to learning. It is the informed seeing, hearing, and feeling that leads to knowing. For Dewey, perception and the aesthetic experience are one and the same. Perceiving with trained eyes and ears allows us to fully grasp what texts and works of art have to tell us. Central to the development of the ability to perceive is hands-on experience in the creative process. In order to truly perceive, he states, "a beholder must *create* his own experience" (p. 56). When Dewey refers to creating one's own experience, he is moving beyond the view that had previously separated the work of art from the viewer as an object to be admired from a respectful distance. For Dewey, an aesthetic experience necessitates full engagement with the art. Part of this process requires opportunities for learners to make art themselves—not so that they can become professional artists, but so that they can apprehend the problem solving process undergone by the artist who created the work being studied.

CURATING AESTHETIC EXPERIENCES

Curating aesthetic experiences in the classroom involves carefully organized steps that include observation, questioning, hands-on artmaking, then deepening the inquiry through further questioning and analysis. This process in itself is transformative, teaching learners to look and respond to the world in new ways.

Prolonged encounters with works of art can awaken deeply personal and powerful responses, awakening in the perceiver a drive to engage in creative expression. These encounters that include active inquiry through dialogue, questioning, and hands-on art making or research are a path through which to introduce creativity and imagination into education. When teachers can create a classroom environment that fosters creative inquiry, students become engaged and invested in the work of school. In order to effectively create these kinds of aesthetic experiences for students, teachers must have first-hand knowledge of aesthetic experiences that incorporate inquiry and creativity themselves. There is little talk of creativity or imagination in teacher education programs beyond early childhood, and inquiry is a term most often used in

these settings in the context of analysis of testing data; but more creativity in later school years could mean more engagement with the world both inside and outside of school. Adolescents are expected to have a serious focus on academics, looking towards careers and higher education, but they are also creating themselves and expressing their emerging identities. Creative expression in many forms- music, poetry, drawing, acting, dancing, and others help us understand and express who we are. They help us find our voice. For many teenagers, art is an essential outlet, but there is often little connection between school and opportunities to develop and use their creative voice. Dewey has “spoken of the esthetic quality that rounds out an experience into completeness as emotional” (p. 43). In order to fully engage young people, we must consider their emotional as well as their cognitive development.

Creativity occurs when the imagination is awakened, and this awakening often occurs at points at which the perceiver experiences a work of art that speaks to an aspect of his or her own lived experience. These unique, individual moments of connections may be thought of as “transactions” (Dewey, p. 305). Louise Rosenblatt, (1978) who, building on Dewey’s work, described the act of reading as a transaction, said, “The ‘poem’ comes into being in the live circuit set up between the reader and the text” (p. 14). Such transactions would not be possible were it not for the active imagination of the reader, able to give voice and layers of meaning to words on a page. Rosenblatt sees imagination as “the essence of language, which enables us to deal with things and events that are not present or may not have occurred” (p. 32). As people interact with more texts, films, and works of art over time, they become interwoven with our own unique linguistic, imagistic, and imaginative repertoires. We bring our imaginations to every new experience; thus, the “live circuit” is created each time such an interaction occurs. Each reader has a unique reading of a text or work of art because we each bring our own histories, perspectives, and prior experiences. Dewey describes imagination as “a way of seeing and feeling...a large and generous blending of interests at the point where the mind comes in contact with the world” (p. 278).

Inspired both by Dewey’s admonition that perception demands that we create our own experiences to help us better understand the world and Maxine Greene’s belief in the transformational quality of such experiences, I have worked to bring experiences in aesthetic inquiry to a university-based Masters’ Degree program certifying teachers of middle school and high school English Language Arts at Lehman College, the Bronx campus of the City University of New York (CUNY). Our graduates often teach in communities in which many families struggle to cope with the multiple challenges that are direct and indirect results of poverty. Many schools that serve the children of families living in poverty tend to take an impoverished stance towards the students’ school experience. There are few opportunities for rich hands-on experiences in the arts or in the sciences or, for that matter, anything beyond the bare-bones academic subjects that will be assessed on

high-stakes standardized tests. When students' education is devoid of painting, poetry, theater and dance they may fail to develop the complex and critical ways of seeing and knowing that are associated with prolonged and habitual interactions with the arts. True engagement with works of art creates opportunities for rich and complex responses in the form of writing and discussion which helps students develop skills and efficacy across the curriculum.

INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING THROUGH THE ARTS

Not only do our schools lack resources for meaningful education in the arts, many of our teacher candidates have little background in the arts and need guidance in integrating non-print media into the curriculum. That is why students in the English Education program take a methods course called Inquiry-Based Learning Through the Arts. The course is based on the existentialist philosopher Maxine Greene's theory of Aesthetic Education, which is "concerned about perception, sensation, imagination, and how they relate to knowing, understanding, and feeling about the world" (2001, p. 5). Greene's concern with the aesthetic draws upon Dewey, who asserts that the "esthetic cannot be sharply marked off from intellectual experience" (p. 40) and that the "esthetic quality rounds out an experience into completeness" (p. 43). Dewey also explains that art is a "mode of knowledge," capable of revealing "the inner nature of things that cannot be had in any other way" (p. 300).

In this course, teacher candidates study works of art as their primary "texts" and engage in an inquiry process that involves research, writing, and art making in response to these works of art. One of the benefits of expanding teachers' repertoires to include non-text-based works of art is that it invites into the conversation those students who struggle with reading, even though they might be capable of sophisticated thinking. English language learners, students with learning disabilities, and others who score poorly on standardized tests for a variety of reasons are often fed a steady diet of workbooks and test preparation which seldom offers a way to lift them out of the endless cycle of dull rote teaching. The ability to engage in inquiry around works of art instills confidence and accesses a linguistic repertoire that students can apply to their comprehension of texts. Teaching academic subjects through aesthetic experiences is a strategy that enables teachers to engage students with ideas that make learning meaningful and memorable, leading to true understanding. Young learners especially are more invested in school experiences when there is a personal connection to the material. This is why this teaching methods course is designed around the notion of infusing the arts into the academic curriculum not just as a mere "frill" or add-on, but as a major subject of study.

This approach involves extensive questioning and discussion, but the most critical element is the art making that students experience as part of the process. For Dewey,

true understanding “is concerned with discovering the nature of the production of works of art” (p. 11). Through their own creative expression, students enter into a transaction with the works of art they are studying. A good deal of the questioning and discussion process involves understanding how the choices made by an artist, writer, musician, dancer, or film maker comprise the aesthetics of their work. These discussions of aesthetics help students recognize their own agency in creating work in which they are truly invested.

In my own experience, writing poems can be a way of engaging in a dialogue with something I am trying to understand. The process of writing poetry is very often a process of discovery. Traditional school writing assignments tend to be accompanied by summative assessments of students’ mastery of the curriculum but writing—particularly poetry—can actually be a means of discovering unarticulated knowledge. The act of writing brings inchoate ideas into being. This approach that integrates writing, discussion, and art making to enable learners to make connections that deepen their understanding is essential to aesthetic education.

Maxine Greene defines aesthetic education as:

An intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what there is to be noticed and lend works of art their lives... When this happens, new connections are made in experience, new patterns are made, new vistas opened. (2001, p. 6).

The key to these experiences is active engagement—the notion of “lending a work of art one’s life” suggests a thorough immersion that requires that learners not only attend, but that they search for ways to connect with the work of art and to understand the ways in which art emerges from the world in which it was created. This is where inquiry comes in. When we frame the experiences that comprise aesthetic education as acts of inquiry we foreground the sense of agency that characterizes these encounters. This is achieved through thoughtful facilitation. Teachers learn to guide students’ experiences by directing their gaze toward noticing the choices an artist has made through carefully crafted activities and questions. For example, when viewing Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937), we may ask students to notice the juxtaposition of figures and the use of lines, shapes, angles and shades of gray.

Considerable time would be spent gathering students’ observations before entertaining opinions or interpretations to ensure that students really do see what there is to be seen. This is important because a hasty response, whether positive or negative, can tend to end the conversation before it has begun. Writing poetry in response to works of art is a mode that encourages us to use language to explore the

essence of what the artist is expressing or positing. In the classroom engaged in aesthetic inquiry we also incorporate art making in other modalities; students often draw, dance, sing and play musical instruments in the context of exploring the aesthetic elements of a work of art, but in an English Language Arts context, we inevitably come back to language, and poetry allows us to explore and experiment with fewer constraints than prose.

Creativity, the ability to execute the product of one's imagination, first necessitates what Greene in her writings on aesthetic education calls the ability to "imagine things



Figure 12.2. Pablo Picasso (1937). *Guernica* [Oil on canvas]. Laura Estefania Lopez (Photo).

as if they could be otherwise" (2001, p. 98). Dewey understands this ability as "a way of seeing and feeling things as they compose an integral whole. It is the large and generous blending of interests at the point where the mind comes in contact with the world" (p. 278).

If works of art can be doorways to inquiry, the act of writing poetry in response to works of art is the act of walking through the doorway, leading to a new place of understanding. Dewey cites Shelley, who says "poetry awakens and enlarges the mind by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought" (p. 301). While poems themselves can seldom be credited with changing the world, those who write poetry are creating new marriages of words and ideas, leading to the possibility of imagining new worlds. This possibility born of an awakening in response to interacting with works of art and engaging in the creative process is what Maxine Greene refers to as "social imagination," which, as she expressed in a 1998 lecture, "awakens people not only to see, not only to feel, but to hold someone's hand and act."

EKPHRASTIC POETRY

This semester, I have eighteen graduate students in a poetry seminar. All but one of the students² are currently teaching English in a middle school or a high school, most are in a program called New York City Teaching Fellows. The students in the poetry seminar would also be taking the Inquiry Based Learning through the Arts course—about half already had taken it, the rest will be taking it next semester.

In selecting works of art to include in the course syllabus, I look for work that is complex, provocative, and engaging, and that they might be able to use in their own classrooms. I considered a series of paintings by the artist Romare Bearden (1977) called *Black Odyssey*, his visual retelling of Homer's epic tale of the return of Odysseus to Ithaca after the Trojan War. In choosing this work I wanted the class to explore how some stories are retold through the ages in a variety of ways; hence the choice of a story originally told in poetic form and retold in paintings. This would allow me to introduce the topic of ekphrastic poetry. According to Alfred Corn (2008) writing for the American Academy of Poets, the original meaning of ekphrasis in ancient Greece was "a vivid description of a thing". In the 20th Century it came to mean more specifically poems written about works of art. Corn goes on to say: "The most contemporary ideas of ekphrasis have generally shrugged off antiquity's obsession with elaborate description, and instead have tried to interpret, inhabit, confront, and speak to their subjects." This contemporary take on ekphrastic poetry opens the work to poets who see metaphorical connections that can be explored by moving beyond description of the art to a poetry that originates from an essential truth the art is telling.

Reason (2012) describes ekphrastic poetry as "texts that seek to evoke another non-textual art form, and creative products that potentially manifest the experience of the spectator/author to the reader/researcher." It is this seeking to evoke that makes ekphrastic poetry a form that facilitates an inquiry process. The writer seeks to capture and interpret his or her encounter with the work of art and find what is essential in that relationship.

Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) is so powerful precisely because it vividly depicts the chaos imposed on ordinary people by acts of war, and echoes of all wars can be seen in the violence and terror it captures. (See figure 12.2.) In this case, Bearden's (1977) take on *The Odyssey*, "invites the viewer to consider the artist's Homeric collages not as rarified explorations of Western antiquity but as evocations of familiar seekers of a welcoming place to stay" (Smithsonian, n. d.).

In searching for versions of *Black Odyssey* to use in the class I came upon the book *Bearden's Odyssey: Poets Respond to the Art of Romare Bearden* (Dawes & Shenoda, 2017).

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This book presented an opportunity to have students experience multiple iterations of ekphrasis, as this was a book of poems responding to Bearden's paintings, which in turn are a response to Homer's epic (Romare Bearden Foundation, n. d.).

In Bearden's painting we see a black ship bouncing on treacherous waters stirred up by an angry Poseidon. Odysseus plunges into the sea and is rescued by the goddess Ino. The painting faithfully references Homer's *Odyssey*, but adds an additional layer of meaning as Ino can be seen to represent African American women who have traditionally taken on the role of healer in the community, especially when men are threatened by authority figures.

The poets responding to Bearden's collage/paintings drew connections to people and events from African American history. One of the poems responding to this painting is "Blues: How Many Sat Underwater" by Honoree Fanonne Jeffers (2017). In this poem, Jeffers frames this scene in *The Odyssey* as a metaphor for one of the more tragic scenes of the relentless horror of the Middle Passage:

And centuries after that story was written
in the land of Not Make Believe,
a crew of slave-ship sailors
threw one hundred and thirty-two
Africans into the Atlantic Ocean. (p. 39)

The number one hundred and thirty-two suggested that the poem was referencing a specific incident, so a bit of research revealed this headline from the PBS (2019) website, taken from their series on the Middle Passage. The story, titled "Living Africans Thrown Overboard," references an incident in 1781 in which the captain of a slave ship made the decision to chain together 132 Africans and throw them overboard over the course of two days, because disease had broken out on the ship and food and water supplies were low. The captain reasoned that this way, he might be able to make an insurance claim for the dead Africans as one might for lost livestock.

After being almost immobilized by the shock of such cruelty, continued searching turned up a New York Times article (Marriott, 1994) titled "Remembrance of Slave Ancestors Lost to the Sea". This article described a gathering at the Coney Island Boardwalk to pay tribute to African Ancestors who did not survive the slave ships. The article ended on this bittersweet note:

Yesterday, hundreds of blacks gathered bundles of flowers and baskets of fruit in their own kind of memorial. They walked solemnly into the ocean

and cast their offerings into the water, grave to millions of blacks unknown but not forgotten. (p. 25)



Figure 12.3. Romare Bearden. (1977).
Sea Nymph. [Collage].

This collection of artifacts—the painting, poem, and two articles held great potential for an aesthetic inquiry that was complex and multi-layered. Any one of them would have provided rich and interesting material for the students to respond to, but taken as a whole, they presented a variety of creative modalities grounded by the historical information provided by the two articles. We began in class by looking at Bearden’s (1977) “Sea Nymph” painting (Romare Bearden Foundation, n. d.) (See figure 12.3), describing the color, form, movement, and relationships of the figures in space. Then we read Jeffers’s (2017) poem and discussed the meaning of the title. Students understood

immediately that “How Many Sat Underwater” had to be referencing something other than Homer’s *Odyssey*. They seized upon the “Land of Not Make Believe” line as evidence that this mythological story could be seen as a metaphor for real life events, which led to questions about the meaning of the explicit reference to “one-hundred and thirty-two Africans.” At this point, I distributed the article from the PBS (2019) website, and asked the students to read and annotate it

We hold on

How many blacks were lost at sea

a sea of confusion. **Hazy**

blue. How many blacks were held
in captivity? How many died, and how many lived
to Die? **Between 100 million and 200 million.**

How many were birthed through canals just to turn to
dust.

To burn in the blazing sun,
how many fought to survive? **With prayers,
speeches, and song. A sea voyage
into Slavery. Cargo of 417 slaves. Ripped
from their homes in savagery. To be seen as less
than animals. Since it was permissible to kill
animals for the safety of the ship,
they decided, it was permissible to kill slaves
for the same reason.** Only for the benefit
of what benefited them, They decided that the
Africans on board the ship were people.

We still hold our ancestors names on our lips

We still hold our ancestors pain in our grips
hanging heavily. Like those swinging from trees
a century after with such **enthusiastic audiences**
**14 million people perished. With prayers,
speeches, and song.** Lifted their spirits

straight up to their Savior's gate knocking loudly
Not too proud but proudly. Not knowing as they were
Flying home to freedom

That they would be such a big part of what is known
as our history. They are what help us
know our history and know our greatness.

We wear our blackness like the sun wears her rays.
Swaying with a heat so radiant.

So full of Power. Only if they knew
how much power they had and how much
they have influenced us. **With prayers,
speeches, and song.** We hold on.

Figure 12.4. Naomi Lake (2019). *We hold on.* [Poetry].

through the lens of these two stories (one mythological and one factual). The discussion was lively and passionate, enriched by the perspectives of students of very diverse backgrounds who were from Africa, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Italy, rural upstate New York, as well as those who had been born and raised in

silently, followed by discussion. The choice to read silently was deliberate, based on the traumatic nature of the material. It seemed more humane to allow the students to take it in at their own pace, then have the opportunity to discuss it together. This article was followed by the much more hopeful New York Times article (Marriott, 1994), which we did read aloud as students also annotated; in both articles searching for language that stood out to them for any reason.

Once we had discussed the facts contained in the two articles, we circled back to the painting and the poem, and discussed the interrelationship of reality and mythology

New York City. The culminating assignment was for students to combine language that they chose from the two articles and the poem to create a found poem of their own. A few examples of the students' poems follow. I also asked them to write a reflection describing their composing process.

One student, **Ramata**, eloquently describes her process of capturing what was essential to her about the articles we had read in class and their relationship to Bearden's *Black Odyssey*.

I was inspired most by the statement "I started off as a Negro. I had to grow into being an African". This statement has always been in my heart, but I was never able to express it to all my African American peers who was always ashamed of their African-ness. My peers that use to tease me for proclaiming that I am African. My Jamaican friends from middle school that never knew the African blood that flows in their veins. This one statement brought back the memories of black people in my life who denied being African. So, I took the statement and let it guide me.

The students had free rein to use the language of the three texts in any way they chose and to add their own language as well. It did not have to be a purely found poem. They also had complete agency regarding the topic. The idea was more to use the language of the texts to capture the "essence" of what they said as a whole. Dewey states: "The term 'essence' is highly equivocal. In common speech it denotes the *gist* of a thing; we boil down a series of conversations or of complicated transactions and the result is what is essential" (p. 305). For Naomi, (Lake, 2019) this was the essence of the intersection between the story of Odysseus and the story of the fate of 132 Africans (See figure 12.4).

The words that appear in bold are taken from the two news articles, and the rest of the language is hers, interwoven with the New York Times (Marriott, 1994) and PBS (2019) articles. She chose not to quote the poem, but keep it focused on the story of the slave ships and the associations that held for her. This is also from her reflection (Lake, 2019):

Towards the end I used the sun again but this time I gave it a positive connotation to say, yes, this might have been what killed us at one point (working tirelessly under the blazing sun) but now we are as powerful as the sun. Nothing can stop the sun from shining just as nothing can stop black people from shining. Although I am accustomed to writing my poetry in free form, I wanted this to have more structure.

‘The Land of Not Make Believe’ is a line from the poem that Jeffers uses to emphasize the fact that so many Africans whose names are long forgotten suffered and died, while Odysseus lives on forever in the land of make believe. Kristine does incorporate some language of her own, notably “before whiteness was invented and changed Jeffers’ line from “poppycock swallowing girls” to “poppycock swallowing white hope” (See figure 12.5).

Joanna’s (2019) reflection examined how she used her personal response to inform her teaching (See figure 12.6):

Personally I didn’t feel respectful writing this poem on my own when I can’t relate or speak on a history that is not of my own so I chose to include my students. They were super excited to help me out with this poem and very involved in making sure this poem made sense and flowed

The experiences around reading these highly sensitive materials and processing individual understandings of them by writing poems became an ongoing theme of exploring their own identity and broader questions of identity and American-ness in relation to the work of many poets over the course of the semester. Their own writing was an integral part of taking ownership of not only individual poems, but of the subject of poetry—a subject often avoided even by English teachers because they find it difficult to comprehend. As the semester progressed the poems we studied (as well as other texts and works of art, newspaper articles, even their teaching textbooks) became lenses through which to examine and express their beliefs and their understandings of the world and their place in it. In Kristine’s (2019) reflection on her process of writing “In the land of not make believe” she described underlining words and phrases and searching for common themes among them, and asking herself “what are all of these telling me and why, and how do I connect them in order to make them mine?”. (See figure 12.5.) That desire to understand history by taking ownership of the language in which the story was told, to internalize that language by connecting it to some part of her own story is the very embodiment of active and engaged learning.

Dewey was a powerful believer in the integral role of hands-on experience in learning, especially complex and challenging material and ideas. Maxine Greene (1995) argued for the importance of such learning experiences in teacher education: “Any encounter with actual human beings who are trying to learn how to learn requires imagination on the part of teachers—and on the part of those they teach” (p. 15).

The teachers in these classes are learning techniques for making art accessible to their students and in many cases developing a greater appreciation and more comfortable relationship with the arts.

In the land of not make believe

Compounding the problem, there was an outbreak of disease
 In the land of Not Make Believe.
 enslaved africans!
 The audience applause and yells of approval
 Threw one hundred and thirty-two
 Africans engulfed by a sea,
 Entangled by myth's past tense overboard.
 Our history and our greatness
 Before whiteness was invented,
 Unveils bundles of flowers and baskets of horror.
 Ultimately defiant slave experiences
 sat underwater
 In such a way as to give them the impression
 They were helpless people.
 Yet Centuries after that story was written,
 Africans have to communicate with little more than their tears.
Heave-ho to souls
 Who died at sea,
 Who were so great
 Sharks learned to follow
 Poppycock-swallowing white hope.
 As more blacks come to realize, more are able to draw
 Strength,
 Never imagining
 It permissible to kill
 Slaves, Equal to killing animals.
 Oblivious to the carnival atmosphere that radiated,
 Now angry, now benevolent.
 No matter how hard things get these days,
 It is not as bad as what they faced on the slave ships.
 We all deserve our maker's love - we are people, one destiny.
 a chant for heroes
 Whispered names of relatives and friends.,
 And people. And laws. And kin.
 Preserved the castles with no more
 Than a touch of the motherland.
 No plague, memorial, day, ritual, or hour
 Casts
 Memories
 Into the water, grave to millions of blacks unknown, but not forgotten

Figure 12.5. Kristine Weekes. (2019). *In the land of not make believe*. [Poetry].

The influence of Dewey and his followers is not felt everywhere. Too many schools are driven more by standardized tests than by inquiry and aesthetics. There have always been progressive educators arguing for creativity and imagination, pushing back against bureaucracies that value only what they can measure. As William Carlos Williams (1938, p. 10) said:

It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there.

In speaking of poetry, Dewey quoted Shelley's claim that it is "at once the center and circumference of all knowledge" (p. 301). This is why the reading and writing of poetry can be essential tools in enacting the pedagogy of aesthetic experiences. A curriculum that has rich and varied opportunities for aesthetic inquiry can awaken creativity and imagination in learners, motivating them to fully invest themselves in their own education.

By the time that *Art as Experience* was published, Dewey had become focused more on the theoretical than on practical applications of his philosophy. This chapter describes one possible approach to interpreting and creating aesthetic experiences in 21st Century classrooms. The approaches described here are intended to reach young people who need to be personally connected to material in order to learn. Many English teacher candidates express trepidation about teaching poetry because of their own lack of a connection to the form. They avoid it if they possibly can. Knowing that, I sought poems and writing assignments that would allow them to express ideas that were important to them, while still rigorously engaging with the subject at hand. Of course, the purpose of choosing powerful, accessible, mostly contemporary poems to study was not only about having these graduate students have a safe space in which to express themselves. The lessons were designed to model strategies they could use in their own teaching to guide and support their middle and high school students towards make a personal connection to the material they were studying. Many students in the class did report that they had tried some of our lessons in their own classes with great success.

In Hilary's essay on the question "What is poetry for?" which was assigned as part of the class final, she wrote:

I fought with myself a whole lot before finally giving in and signing up for the class. I have never been too interested in poetry classes despite my love for poetry. I knew that a poetry class meant that I would be stepping out of

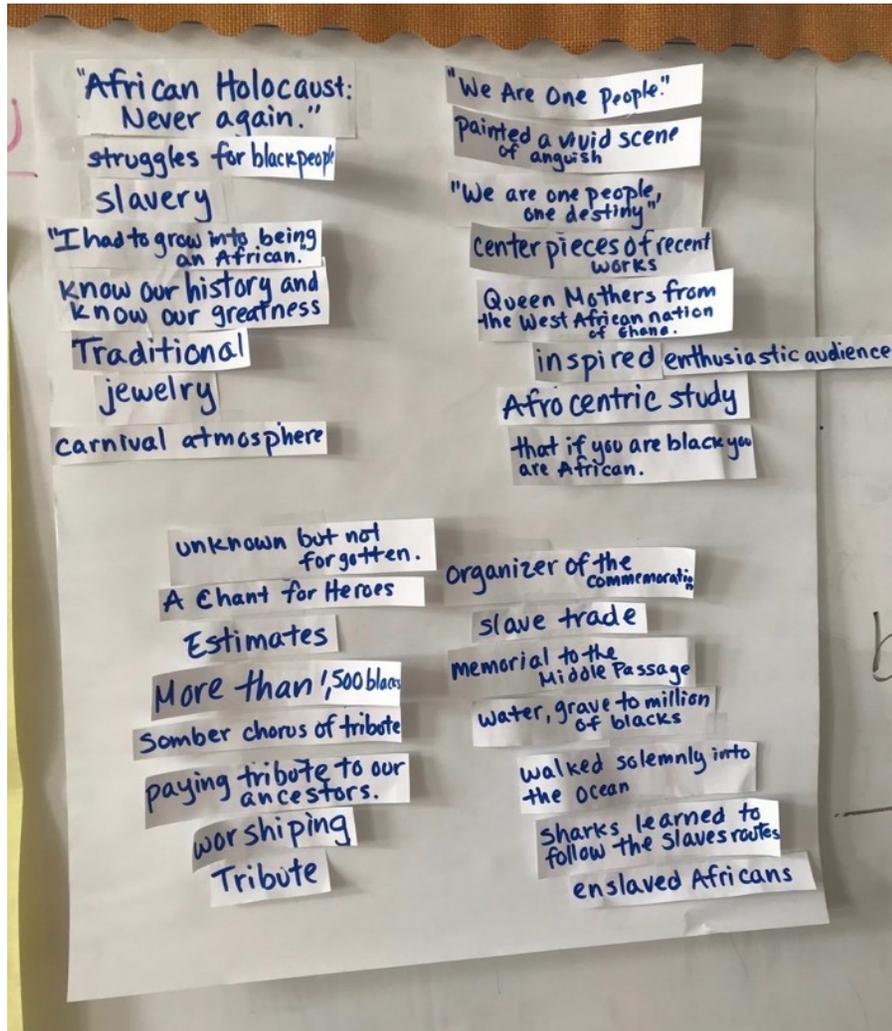


Figure 12.6. Collaborative class poem by high school students with Joanna Guerrero, teacher.(2019).

my comfort zone. I knew that a poetry class meant that I would have to be completely vulnerable. That my poems would be seen by eyes other than my own. I was not sure if I was ready to take that step, but after taking this class, I know I am and always will be. I am now proud of the work I produce and I am excited to share that work.

Taking this class has been an experience of growth for myself and my writing. I have learned so much from my peers as well as my professor, and for that I will forever be grateful. I have learned that it is okay to be vulnerable and to speak my truth. Additionally, I learned so many different forms of poetry that I did not know before. This class allowed me to be vulnerable without even realizing it. Sharing in class was something that always gave me anxiety. However, in this class it was always so easy and effortless. I knew we were all there to grow and speak our truth and this, as a result made me comfortable about being uncomfortable. This class was full of amazing people who just made the process of being vulnerable so easy. I will always cherish all the lessons and new ideas I learned from this class.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND RESOURCES

Reflection and Discussion

One of the questions that arises most frequently in the context of aesthetic education is how to assess student learning. Conventional means of assessing student learning value traditional forms of literacy, numeracy, and problem solving. When a student makes a poem or a drawing in response to a work of art that reflects a depth of understanding of the ideas the artist was trying to convey and a grasp of the aesthetic choices the artist made, what is the best tool for measuring what the student has learned and how well she has learned it?

The assessment tool that is used most frequently in large school systems is a paper-and-pencil test, usually scored with a rubric. There are limitations to this kind of assessment, as they cannot account for whatever stresses that student might be experiences on the day of the test, and they sometimes are better at assessing students' test taking ability than they are at interpreting a child's true understanding of the subject. When planning lessons that contain an aesthetic education element, it is important to design assessments that value the kinds of learning such experiences can foster. Qualitative assessments of written reflections allow the teacher to understand the nature of the students' understanding and development of skills. Pre-and-post lesson written reflections demonstrate the student's ability to use language to explain their understanding of the material they are studying by describing it, making connections to other works, and discuss the significance of the work in its cultural context. It is also an essential part of the guided inquiry process to assess the students' own art products made in the context of studying a work of art. The intention is to see how a student's understanding of the ideas that shape the work are reflected in their own creative expression.

There are challenges to assessing creative work. Creativity does not lend itself to being quantified. There is a paradigm shift away from measurement and toward qualitative assessment. A child makes something (a drawing, a dance, or a poem) that reflects her perception of what the artist is saying. She learns through discussion, questioning, and guided observation to use an art form to articulate whatever it is that she is able to take away from her encounter with a work of art.

Academic subject teachers who integrate non-textual works of art into the curriculum often face challenges from administrators who are under pressure to raise standardized test scores. School leaders may exert downward pressure out of fear that any teaching that strays from the skills and materials that will be tested will distract from test preparation. Because of this reality, teachers need to be well versed in the Common Core Standards or whatever set of standards their school system uses. Being able to explain how studying a sculpture will help develop spatial awareness in a math class or a series of paintings about the African American migration might help students understand this important aspect of American history in a social studies class or students in an English Language Arts class might come to understand different ways that arguments can be made and sustained through various literary forms will help administrators see the value in studying works of art as central texts in the curriculum.

Engaging the Social Imagination

In Maxine Greene's *Releasing the Imagination* (1995), she describes John Dewey writing in *Art as Experience* of the imagination as the "gateway through which meanings derived from past experiences find their way into the present" (p. 20). When students "lend a work of art their lives" (Greene, 2001, p. 7), the art can become a lens for understanding and expressing their own lived experiences. Such experiences can be transformative, as they can help disempowered people find their voices (Gulla & Sherman, 2019).

Student Identity Development

It is important to choose works of art that provide points of entry for students to engage with. Contemporary students, particularly those who are living in or near poverty, often struggle to cope with multiple sources of stress and even trauma. The right work of art can be a catalyst for students to find their voices. Such experiences can build students' confidence in their academic skills, improve the length and quality of writing, increase their engagement in school thereby improving attendance, and build community among students who may have previously felt isolated (Gulla & Sherman, 2018).

Organizations

- The Maxine Greene Institute for Aesthetic Education and the Social Imagination <https://maxinegreene.org/>: Web-based organization providing access to readings by and about Maxine Greene. The institute sponsors the annual Imagination, Innovation, and Inquiry Institute conference in which people present work from across a broad range of disciplines. The institute also sponsors the Peggy Ann Richards lectures at the New School for Social Research.
- Lincoln Center Education <https://lincolncentereducation.org/>: Provides a repertory and teaching artists who provide arts-based experiences for K-12 students and teachers.
- The Center for Arts Education <https://centerforartsed.org/>: Works with New York City schools to provide workshops and resources for K-12 students.

Suggested Readings

- Butler-Kisber, L., Guiney, Y. J., Stewart, M., & Wiebe, S. (2017). *Poetic inquiries of reflection and renewal: Poetry as research*. Nova Scotia, CA: MacIntyre Purcell.
- Davis, J. H. (2008). *Why our schools need the arts*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
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- Greene, M. (2001). *Variations on a blue guitar: The Lincoln Center lectures on aesthetic education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
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- Gulla, A. N. (2015). Nobody knows the stories of others: High school English language learners find their poetic voices by responding to works of art. *TESOL Journal* 6(4), 612–620.

Rosenblatt, L. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
 The Common Core State Standards Initiative (2019).
<http://www.corestandards.org/read-the-standards/>

Suggested Works of Art for Aesthetic Inquiry

Jacob Lawrence: *The Migration Series* (1941). Series of 60 paintings with accompanying text depicting the Great Migration of African Americans from South to North. The series was on display at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2015. The museum's interactive website of the series with accompanying materials is available here: <https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2015/onewayticket/>

Pieter Brueghel the Elder: "Landscape With the Fall of Icarus" (1558). Painting depicting Icarus falling from the sky into the water, based on the story "Daedalus and Icarus" in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. <http://www.pieterbruegel.org/landscape-with-the-fall-of-icarus/>

W. H. Auden. "Musee des Beaux Arts" (1938). Poem based on Brughel's painting. <http://english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/auden.html>

William Carlos Williams "Landscape With the Fall of Icarus" (1962). Poem based on Brughel's painting. <https://poets.org/poem/landscape-fall-icarus>

George Ella Lyon "Where I'm From" (1999) Poem originally published in *Where I'm From: Where Poems Come From*. Absey & Co.
http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/professional_development/works_hops/writing/george_ella_lyon.pdf

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- Corn, A. (2008). *Notes on Ekphrasis*. [webpage article]. Academy of American Poets. Retrieved March 29, 2019 from <https://poets.org/text/notes-ekphrasis>
- Dawes, K., & Shenoda, M. (Eds.). (2017). *Bearden's odyssey: Poets respond to the art of Romare Bearden*. Evanston, IL: Triquarterly Books, Northwestern University Press.
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NOTES

¹ All of the quotations of Dewey's texts are from *Art as Experience* so the year only appears in the first reference.

² One of the students was getting her Master's degree in Creative Writing rather than English Education.

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCES AND DEWEY'S DESCENDANTS

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