

Advertising: Propaganda or Dream Making

A Curricular Encounter by Juliann Dorff

TEXTURES

THE HISTORY AND ART OF BLACK HAIR



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Advertising: Propaganda or Dream Making

Section: Hair Politics

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Grade Level: 7 – 12

Expected Length: 5 – 7 class periods

We are inundated with advertising messages everywhere we look and in everything we do. From the backs of grocery receipts and church bulletins, on our internet searches and while driving down even the most remote street, these messages work to create a story and influence us to view ourselves in a new way, push us to change our buying habits, and alter the way we understand the world. Through an examination of advertising messages students will consider the message they want the world to consider, to encourage the user (reader) to begin to see their idea (issue) in a new light. Is it propaganda (bad word) or Dream Making?

Artworks/Artifacts

Beauty and Success!, Madame C. J. Walker advertisement, 1920's (page 86)

In this work, the story of the rise of Madame C.J. Walker outlines how she became the first self-made female millionaire in the United States. She uses her story as a recruitment poster for other Black women to follow her example. While the ad highlights the power that could come from “proper grooming” as a tool to achievement it primarily promotes the history of Walker’s rise along with others in the Black community. It provides images of her humble beginnings in a log cabin juxtaposed with the image of her now owned mansion, as well as discussing her plans to use her philanthropy to assist others in her community. Missing is any sign of difficulty in her rise to success. She was orphaned as a young child and lived with an abusive brother-in-law, was provided only a 3rd grade education and was first married at the age of 14. The work is empowering but does not tell the whole story. What, if anything, is lost by not revealing the entire story?

Barber Pole from Dr. Willie Morrow’s first barbershop, 1950 (page 91)

Photograph of Dr. Willie Morrow’s Barber Shop, 1960’s (page 143)

Beauty (vol. 3, no. 2), 1986 (page 164)

Shop Talk Journal of Cosmetology (vol. 6, no. 2), 1987 (Page 164)

The barber pole has been used as a symbol and a sign of the presence of a barber since the earliest times. The original poles were traditionally just red and white stripes. In the United States a blue was added, some believe as homage to the colors of the flag. The pole is seen in the photograph of Dr. Morrow’s barber shop. Dr. Morrow is seen celebrated on the covers of two popular cosmetology magazines from the 1980’s as a legend in the development of the celebration of Black hair.

Born the son of sharecroppers (a tenant farmer who pays a portion of their crop as rent) Dr. Willie Morrow was a self-taught barber and chemist. He is the author of the text *400 Years Without a Comb* published in 1973. In this text he chronicles the loss of the traditions of hair care as African people were brought to the United States as slaves, having to leave all their possessions behind. Those possessions included the tools used to care for their hair, a physical representation of their identity, that was attempted to be erased.

The universal symbol of the *Barber Pole* stands as an advertisement in front of any storefront calling out to potential customers that here is a barber, eager to cut your hair. What is obvious is that this is simply a barber pole, not a Black barber pole, it calls out to all customers, we cut all hair here.



Key Vocabulary

Emphasis: an area in the work that draws your attention and focus

Contrast: a strong difference between light/dark, smooth/textured spaces that creates impact in a composition

Advertisement: a message designed to persuade the viewer to take action

Propaganda: presentation of biased information to promote a specific point of view.

Artifact: an object made by a human being, typically an item of cultural or historical interest

Symbol: an object or image used to represent an idea

Objectives

Critical Inquiry:

Students will scrutinize the advertising approaches as seen in the Madame C. J. Walker advertisement, *Beauty and Success!* Dr. Willie Morrow's *Barber Pole* and the *Photograph of Dr. Willie Morrow's Barber Shop* to identify the stories being presented and their ability to make people take action.

National Visual Arts Standard:

Responding: *Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.*

Anchor Standard: *Perceive and analyze work.*

Enduring Understanding: *Visual imagery influences understanding of and responses to the world.*

Art History Inquiry:

Students will investigate the products, artifacts, and life story of Madame C. J. Walker to discover the ability of one individual to impact the economic and personal lives of so many.

National Visual Arts Standard:

Connecting: *Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context*

Anchor Standard: *Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.*

Enduring Understanding: *People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.*

Aesthetics Inquiry:

Students will compare and contrast Dr. Willie Morrow's Barber Pole and the Madame C. J. Walker advertisement, Beauty and Success! to determine if any form of advertising can be considered art.

National Visual Arts Standard:

Responding: *Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.*

Anchor Standard: *Perceive and analyze work.*

Enduring Understanding: *Visual imagery influences understanding of and responses to the world.*

Studio Inquiry:

Students will create a watercolor and fine line permanent marker poster supporting a social issue important to them using emphasis and contrast.

National Visual Arts Standard:

Creating: *Creating and developing new artistic ideas and work.*

Anchor Standard: *Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.*

Enduring Understanding: *Artists and designers experiment with forms, structures, materials, concepts, media, and art making approaches.*

Materials

Watercolor paper minimum 9" X 12"

Newsprint for planning

Permanent fine line marker

Watercolor brushes

Watercolor sets

Pencils

Typeface resources

Salt

Rubbing alcohol with containers

Cotton swabs

Cups for water

Paper towels

Sponges

Prepare/Discuss

Divide your class into groups of no more than 6 students. Provide each group the artifacts suggested. One group reviews the poster promoting Madame C. J. Walker's products, one group reviews the works presenting Dr. Willie Morrow. Be sure to include supporting materials that provide context about the artifacts for students to review. More than one group can review each of these. Also, consider having a group review current materials promoting products for specific groups of individuals such as Canvii and/or Kinky Tresses.

Also provide each group with the Investigation Sheet (attached). Have the groups present their results and then discuss with the class. Note that, while the Walker poster is certainly used to promote the brand and products, it also serves as the promoter of an idea - the potential for each individual to achieve success. This mirrors the image of Dr. Morrow.

Share the image of the Marcus Garvey quote above. This represents the cultural divide in the Black community in the early 1900s. Madame C.J. Walker along with other entrepreneurs who sold hair care products focusing on straightening hair were criticized by activists such as Marcus Garvey who argued that blacks shouldn't change their appearance to appease the dominant standard of beauty. It was a means of survival that to be employed, Black people had to look "presentable." This is still very prevalent in the Black community today. Dr. Morrow presented the story of the value of both wearing natural hair and wearing straightened hair.

Create

Encourage students to consider issues/ideas they believe to be important. Once each has selected the issue/idea for their poster, have them complete the idea generation sheet (attached) to guide the development of their ideas.

Demonstrate how to lay out the poster using a light touch. Provide resources for typefaces that will reinforce the message(s) and the opportunity to practice the typeface style.

Once the layouts are complete, consider demonstrating techniques for using watercolor:

1. Layering - starting with a light touch apply pale under coat colors, remembering that you can always add but not subtract color.
2. Wet-on-wet - applying a layer of water on the paper first permits the color to flow and contains the color to just the wet area
3. Dry brush - applies the color for a feathered effect
4. Using salt on a wet and colored surface to achieve texture
5. Using paper towels/sponges to dab wet surfaces for added textures
6. Using alcohol applied with a cotton swab. The alcohol repels the color and creates a texture/effect
7. Colors can be layered.

After the color has been added, use the fine line permanent markers to highlight key areas and/or provide definition to areas and objects.

Reflect

Post all the student work in the room and provide a simple evaluation sheet (see below) to each student and randomly assign each student an artwork (not their own) to evaluate. Encourage students to provide honest and caring feedback framed by the questions. These evaluations are then submitted for the educator's review and then returned to the artist whose work has been reviewed



Studio Model: *Save Our Space: It's Home*, by Juliann Dorff

Advertising Investigation
Madame C. J. Walker Poster

As a team, review the materials you have received and answer the following questions:

What is the focal point of the poster and why?

How is contrast used to draw attention to certain parts of the message?

What, if any, symbols are used and what message do they send?

After reading the entire poster, how would you summarize what you have learned about the Walker Company, the products, and the sales force? What do you believe to be true about the information?

Circle one:

Advertisement

Propaganda

Advertising Investigation

Materials presenting Dr. Willie Morrow

As a team, review the materials you have received and answer the following questions:

What symbolism is present in the barber pole from Dr. Morrow's shop?

What is emphasized in the magazine cover images of Dr. Morrow?

How is contrast used in the magazine covers?

What is your impression of Dr. Morrow based on his presentation on the covers of the publications?

Circle one:

Advertisement

Propaganda

Idea Generator

What's My Issue

My poster will focus on:

Possible symbols/images to express this message:

This slogan/headline will frame the message:

This is the typeface that will reinforce the idea:

To develop contrast on my poster I will use:

The most important part of the poster to emphasize is:

Critic's Corner

You are tasked with reviewing the work before you. Spend a few minutes with the work, noting all the details and then answer the following questions. Please remember to be respectful to the artist. Your review will go to the artist.

Your Name _____

Artist's Name _____

Please provide your explanation of the message presented.

What specifically reinforces this message to you that you find in the work?

How has your opinion been reinforced or altered by viewing this work?

What watercolor techniques were used and how have they reinforced the message?
