

Calling Out the Critics

A Curricular Encounter by Christina Timmons

TEXTURES

THE HISTORY AND ART OF BLACK HAIR



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Calling Out the Critics

Section: Hair Politics

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Grade Level: 9-12

Expected Length: 5 class periods

For this lesson, students will reflect on their own experiences with being counted out, criticized, stereotyped, or discriminated against. Whether it be due to race, physical appearances, disabilities, or other reasons, students will develop a poster as propaganda against their critics. Using academic texts, magazines, and reliable web sources, students will also conduct research to learn the stories of others who have faced similar issues. Students will be taught the basics about propaganda, how to compose a meaningful message through poster design, and how to consider their audience and location when making artistic decisions.

Artworks/Artifacts

April Bey, *Creamy Chris*, (2013) (page 125)

In this piece, April Bey calls out comedian Chris Rock and the negative impression his film *Good Hair* made about Black Hair. While the film was insightful about the various developments of hair care products, tools, and processes, it also included many jokes from Rock about what type of hair should be considered good or bad. What the film failed to include was the experiences of the everyday Black woman. *Good Hair* included input from many hair industry professionals and Black celebrities (predominantly women), but without the voices of the everyday women who have fought diligently to solidify their own hair care journeys, the film ignores the experiences of those not in Hollywood and popular beauty communities.

Danielle Coke, *Worthy*, (2020) (supporting artwork)

In this print, Danielle Coke combines the power of words with the power of color to present a bold message about the worthiness of all groups of people. With each hand a different color of the skin-tone spectrum and the repetition of the word “worthy,” viewers are coerced into thinking of all the reasons they are worthy of being happy, loved, and simply existing. The nail polish on the hands initially establishes this piece as one about women’s empowerment as well but considering it would be incorrect to assume each hand belongs to a woman, it subtly leads to the conversation of not presuming the identity of others. Similarly, to Bey, Coke takes color, imagery, and composition into account when presenting a bold message.

J. Howard Miller, *Rosie the Riveter*, (1942) (supporting artwork)

This propaganda poster is a clear representation of the belief that women can do anything a man can do. In this piece, a female figure is showing off her “guns” as she mugs the viewer, something women were never encouraged to do. As women were expected to remain prim, proper, and complacent, their contribution to the post WWII work industry gave women a new-

found confidence. Rosie's muscles are a symbol of both outer strength and the inner strength to go against what a patriarchal society believes a woman's place should be. Miller's bright yellow background is the "feminine" pop against Rosie's masculine blue denim jumpsuit, while the speech bubble stating "We Can Do It!" indicated that masculine tasks are no match for feminine power. This image is the perfect example of how to match concept and design when creating a propaganda poster.

Key Vocabulary

Critic- a person who shares their opinion, often negative.

Discrimination- treating someone poorly or unjustly based on their categorical differences, usually involving race, gender, and age.

Exclusion- being prohibited from spaces and experiences.

Propaganda- information used to promote a specific point of view, usually political.

Emphasis- placing special importance or attention on a specific object.

Text- letters and words with subjective meaning.

Color- the pigment that a person or object has.

Balance- an even distribution of visual weight.

Objectives

Critical Inquiry:

Students will consider the many ways in which people of various backgrounds are discriminated against by reflecting on their own experiences and those addressed in *Creamy Chris* by April Bey and *Worthy* by Danielle Coke

National Visual Art Standard:

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

Anchor Standard: *Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.*

Enduring Understanding: *Through art making, people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge, and experiences.*

Art History Inquiry:

Students will be introduced to an example of a propaganda poster in *Rosie the Riveter* and printmaking, understanding how various elements and principles of design are prioritized when attempting to spread a strong message.

National Visual Arts Standard:

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

Anchor Standard: *Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.*

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

Aesthetic Inquiry:

Students will determine how April Bey's and Danielle Coke's use of color, imagery, text, and composition lends to the strength of their messages in *Creamy Chris* and *Worthy*.

National Visual Art Standard:

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

Anchor Standard: *Perceive and analyze work.*

Enduring Understanding: *Individual aesthetic awareness developed through engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, the natural world, and constructed environments.*

Studio Inquiry:

Students will use EZ cut linoleum printing blocks, printing ink, metal carving tools, and paper to create an 8in x 10in propaganda poster addressing a type of discrimination or exclusion that either themselves, a peer, or other influential figure/group of people have experienced. Special attention will be paid to their use of imagery, text, color, balance, and emphasis.

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 balance experimentation and safety, freedom and responsibility while developing and creating artworks.*

Materials

Paper the same size as the printing block
Printing ink (water soluble), various colors
Ink brayers
Various size & shape carving tools
8in x 10in paper suitable for printing
Pencils
EZ cut linoleum printing block
Bench hooks

Prepare/Discuss

Students will be presented with images of *Creamy Chris* and *Worthy* with speech bubbles directly beside them. Students will be given 1 minute to closely and quietly observe each piece. After viewing each work, students will be prompted to answer the question "If this piece could talk, what would it say?" Students will be provided with two pre-cut speech bubbles and given 1-2 minutes to respond to this prompt with a statement or question that they believe the pieces are trying to communicate. Once they have written their final response, students will post their speech bubble directly next to the artworks to reveal their answers. With *Creamy Chris*, anticipated answers will be "I'm so funny/ugly that I look like a clown now," so an explanation of the film *Good Hair* would be in order, along with showing an appropriate clip from the movie. Students are likely to give on-track answers with *Worthy* considering its

imagery is self-explanatory. After learning more about the pieces, students will have the opportunity to rewrite their more accurate statements and share with the class.

After discussing and analyzing the works of Bey and Coke, the students will then be introduced to the influence of propaganda. This discussion will include the origins of propaganda, how artists were to carefully consider color, imagery, text, and composition when sharing a meaningful message, and how audience and location should be a forethought when thinking of concepts and designs. To exemplify propaganda, students will be shown *Rosie the Riveter* and will determine how the components of this piece compare with that of *Creamy Chris* and *Worthy*.

Create

Students will begin by tracing their linoleum block 3 times onto white paper the same size as the plate. After sketching three different poster ideas within the parameters of the block, students will use a graphite pencil to forcefully trace the outline of the final version of their poster. To successfully transfer the image, students will flip the original sketch over so that it is face down on the block and retrace the backwards image to allow the original drawing to stick to the block. Once transferred, students will use graphite pencils to color in the sections they would like to carve to help easily define the positive and negative space. Students will then use linoleum cutting tools and a bench hook to carve the first set of negative space. Once carved, students will apply ink to their plate using the brayer. Students will be encouraged to begin with lighter colors first as darker colors may bleed through if applied first. Placing the 8 X 10 paper (it should be larger than the plate to allow for a border on all four sides). Using the heel of their hand they burnish the paper onto the plate to transfer the ink to the paper. Students will repeat this process for each section until their poster is complete.

Reflect

To further expand on the power of their message, students will write an artist's statement including a brief explanation of their concepts, what audience they would like to reach, and the optimal location (attainable or not) that they would like to place their prints. Students will also find a place in the school to place three of their best prints and describe why they believe it was a fit location.

