

Individuality Within Togetherness

A Curricular Encounter by Christina Timmons

TEXTURES

THE HISTORY AND ART OF BLACK HAIR



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MUSEUM

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Individuality Within Togetherness

Section: Black Joy

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Grade Level: 9-12

Expected Length: 1-2 class periods

In this lesson, students will channel Nelson Stevens' use of expressive color and meaningful subject matter to compose an abstract artwork. Students will do so with inspiration by Chris Brown's dance-painting process. Students will use their own bodies as art tools by responding to the music of their choice, making marks on large pieces of fabric while simultaneously expressing the feelings the music evokes. Prior to beginning their pieces, students will be briefed on which body parts and music are considered school appropriate, this includes selecting the clean version of music without swear words. Once finished, the fabric will then be hung on a string in a banner-like fashion in an approved area of the school to represent individuality within togetherness.

Artworks/Artifacts

Nelson Stevens, *Spirit Sister*, 2013 (p.153)

In this piece, Nelson Stevens captures the frantic energy within the Black community brought on by the struggle for civil rights. Through the clever use of negative and positive space, blocks of color, and organic and geometric shapes, Stevens depicts a figure looking up and out, possibly searching for hope. As stated in the catalogue, Stevens' goal with this image is to express the longing for psychological emancipation within the black community.

Chris Brown, *Chris Brown: Dances with Paint*, 2018

In this video, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxUwQMDzOV0>, singer, songwriter, and dancer Chris Brown shows that there is more than one way for one to express themselves, and these ways can be combined for an ultimate display of feeling. As a celebrity, Chris Brown has been subject to the balancing act of wanting to be who he is and being who the world thinks he should be. It is because of this that he seeks escape in other forms of artistry, including painting. By combining the act of dancing with painting, Brown is able to permanently mark his every move as his body fluidly stretches all types of colors and lines across the canvas. As if this is not expressive enough, Brown finishes this piece by adding a peculiar character which brings semi-representational imagery to his colorful, abstract mark making. It is with this piece that Chris Brown almost lets the viewer into his mind, clearly showing that he is full of energy, has a clear vision of what he wants even if it is not so clear to others, and that there is more to him than what the media may portray.

Studio: High school students will make use of music, paint, and cloth to create an abstract piece using their bodies to record the emotional responses to music.

Key Vocabulary

Expression: the way in which a person makes their inner feelings visible.

Dance: movement of the body, usually to the rhythm of music.

Joy: a positive feeling, synonymous to happiness.

Celebration: a pleasurable moment, event, or experience that marks an important occasion, usually involving social engagement or activity.

Rhythm: the flow or pattern of sound or movement.

Movement: changing from one position to another; the effect of being in motion.

Objectives

Critical Inquiry:

Students will examine the expressive qualities found in Nelson Stevens' *Spirit Sister* and Chris Brown's dance-painting technique and determine their effectiveness.

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 study the act of dancing as it relates to art, expression, and celebration across various cultures.

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 identify how the use of color, texture, and movement contributed to the expressive nature of Nelson Stevens' *Spirit Sister* and Chris Brown's dance-painting process and product.

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 acrylic paint, sharpie markers, and spray paint to create 36in x 36in work of art by using only their bodies as mark-making tools as they dance to music.

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 shape artistic investigations, following or breaking with traditions in pursuit of artmaking goals*

Materials

36in x 36in square of fabric

Acrylic paint

Sharpie markers

Spray paint

8in x 11in paper - for preliminary drawings

Protective plastic floor covering

Create

Before beginning the official studio, students will further their understanding of movement, rhythm, and expression by completing a series of small, 8x11" marker drawings as they listen to two different instrumentals. The first instrumental is meant to incite uplifting and happy responses while the second will channel a more somber, dramatic reaction. Students will be prompted to make any marks that come naturally to them as they listen to the music, including changing their marker colors anytime they feel a new emotion. This activity will serve as a gateway to a similar studio to be completed on a larger scale.

Once complete, students will be given a 36in x 36in square of fabric and told to dance! Using any and all colors of acrylic paint, Sharpie markers, and spray paint, students will dance to any music of their choice. Students are welcome to use headphones and dance to their own beat, or they decide on a song as a group and use a speaker provided by the instructor. The song should be anywhere from 2.5-3 minutes long. Students will also have the option to protect their skin, clothes, and eyes by being provided plastic shoe covers, plastic shower caps, gloves, and goggles. Students will be informed beforehand to dress appropriately for the messy occasion. This activity can be done both indoors and outdoors, depending on the regulations of the school. Plastic to cover the floor will be provided.

As they create their pieces, students will be encouraged to consider color, movement, and imagery. As seen in Chris Brown's video, he uses his body to create an abstract array of lines and planes of color. However, at the end of the video, Brown doubles back and spray paints an image of a fictional character. While there is not much explanation as to why he chose this character, its personality and facial expression reflect the chaotic fun that Brown seemed to have while making the piece. Students will be challenged to think of how they can incorporate school-appropriate imagery into their movement-based pieces.

When finished, students will bring their pieces back to the classroom to dry, and will later be hung on a string in a banner-like fashion. This banner could become one long banner to be

displayed in a large area such as an auditorium or gymnasium, or smaller banners to be hung all across the school to further enforce the idea of individuality within togetherness.

Reflect

To reflect on creating their pieces, students will refer to their introduction adjective activity and create a community poem using said adjectives. In groups of four or five, each student will create one stanza related to their dance-painting, using at least three words from their original lists. Students will collaborate throughout the writing process to ensure that their poems are cohesive and reflective of each of their artistic processes. In completing this activity, students will have the opportunity to verbalize the emotions that were translated into their works of art. This activity will also help students make direct connections between *Spirit Sister*, Chris Brown's dance-painting piece, and their own work. Once complete, students will share their poems with the rest of their peers along with their paintings to enhance visual connections.