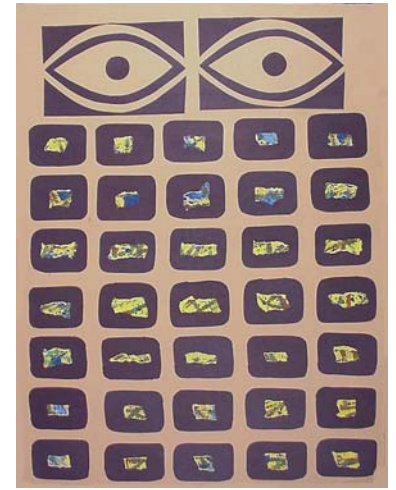




# ELEMENTARY "I" SCHOOL

*An elementary version of the Elementary "I" School project was first developed by Olivia Gude for Principals and Pupils, a workshop for Chicago Public School principals sponsored by Urban Gateways in 1998. The project was further developed in the Contemporary Community Curriculum Initiative at University of Illinois at Chicago in 2000.*



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**H**ow do you learn to be a self in society? Does the social context provide maximum opportunities for being a coherent, perceptive, thoughtful self?

School is the place where many people recall first experiencing a gap between what they think and what they are allowed or able to express. Many people recall experiences of feeling confused or somehow "out of sync" with what was going on around them and of being unable to communicate this to teachers. Other people have vivid memories of complicated and interesting ideas that occurred to them in the course of their studies and of having no way to share these intense, if rudimentary, observations or ideas with others in the classroom.

In this project you will create a portrait of one of your elementary classroom environments. You will create a "conceptual map" of the kinds of things you noticed and thought about in one of your elementary school years. Draw in a style similar to what you would have used at that time in your life. The goal of the project is to reclaim aspects of self that were not understood, seen, or cultivated at that time.

This is a great project to teach early in an art curriculum. It's a project that eases the anxieties of those who do not perceive themselves as good at art, at the same time that it challenges students who see themselves as being good at drawing, to consider artmaking paradigms that aren't based on visual verisimilitude. The project sets a climate for personal introspection and for encouraging students to place their subjective experiences at the center of their artmaking process. A look at the list of objectives listed below shows that a seemingly simple project such as this can have many complex and sophisticated objectives. Compare this list of objectives to a typical "draw a city in one point perspective" project.



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## Objectives

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- ◆ Foreground for students the concept of "discursive space"—the possibilities that exist within various situations to notice, examine, share, and explore a variety of feelings and ideas.
  - *This helps to "break the grip" of visual realism as the sole criteria of quality in art.*
  - *This gives students a more culturally diverse understanding of artmaking.*
- ◆ Show respect in the school for the validity of each individual's perceptions.
- ◆ Show respect for knowledge that is not "book learning."
- ◆ Create a climate in which students feel welcome to expand the cultural conversation of the classroom to include ideas of vital interest to them, to their families, and to their communities.
- ◆ Model that an appropriate subject for art is the exploration and valuing of personal memories and idiosyncratic ideas.
  - *This gives students a metaphoric way of imagining the space for dialogue and exchange within the classroom. This also creates the understanding that such a space can be expanded.*
  - *This gives students access to a style in which they can concentrate on communicating personal experience.*
  - *This helps to "break the grip" of visual realism as the sole criteria of quality.*
  - *This gives students a more culturally diverse understanding of artmaking.*
- ◆ Create a context within the artroom that values sensitivity, thoughtfulness, and attention to nuance over technical skill.
- ◆ Give students the opportunity to "create self" (rather than merely representing self) by recalling and valuing their own almost forgotten experiences.
  - *This introduces the concept of color schemes without resorting to formalist exercises.*
  - *This gives students the knowledge to create unity and harmony within an artwork by limiting colors.*
- ◆ Teach students to represent the human figure in stylish ways that are not based in visual realism.
  - *This gives students a visual means to tell stories about their experiences.*
  - *This gives students the opportunity to experience tension free drawing because they have "deniability" about the style and quality of the art.*
  - *This gives students a means by which to create rhythm, movement, and variety within an artwork.*
- ◆ Teach students non-perspective based methods of creating space in art.
  - *This helps to "break the grip" of visual realism as the sole criteria of quality.*
  - *This gives students a more culturally diverse understanding of artmaking.*
- ◆ Teach students to use limited color schemes and accent colors.
  - *This introduces the concept of color schemes without resorting to formalist exercises.*
  - *This gives students the knowledge to create unity and harmony within an artwork by limiting colors.*
  - *This gives students a means by which to create rhythm, movement, and variety within an artwork.*



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## Lesson Plan

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(See final page for materials list.)

### LOOK AT ART

**Creating Space.** Consider interior scenes created by artists such as Horace Pippin, Hollis Sigler, and Jacob Lawrence. The goal is to help students to observe, analyze, and appreciate why artists choose to represent space in various ways. It's important to note the ease with which a few diagonal lines or changes in value in the background suggest space to the human eye. Consider with students the cultural, psychological, or metaphorical implications of only depicting space by means of classic European linear perspective.

**Drawing People.** Look at drawings or paintings of people by artists such as Paul Klee or Xul Solar. Consider in what ways these artworks look like the work of children. In what ways are the drawing styles different from the work of children? Contrast the words "childish" and "childlike." What do artists hope to gain by eschewing naturalistic styles of drawing the human figure?

### REMEMBER

Take some time for quiet reflection.

Remember a vivid incident that happened at your elementary school. Think about the experience of being in school during that year.

Some questions to spur your memory:

What was it like to walk to school? What did you do when you got to school? How did you enter the building? Where did you sit? What did you wear? Who sat next to you? Where did the teacher stand or sit? Remember being

praised by the teacher. Remember being criticized by the teacher. Do you remember interacting with your peers during class. During recess or lunch? After school?

What kind of desk did you sit in? What did you keep inside your desk? What color was the classroom floor? Were there windows in the classroom? Could you see out of them? What decorated the walls? Was student work displayed on the walls? Was your work displayed? Where was the door? How big were you in relationship to the door? Did you ever spend time in the hall?

What was your favorite classroom activity? What activity did you most dislike? Do you remember any holiday celebrations? Do you remember bringing any personal belongings into the class? Do you remember thinking about things that happened at home or in the community while you were in school?

*\* There is a Memory Worksheet file for downloading in the Process Chapter.*

### DRAW

Look at drawings by children of various ages.

(*Emphasis Art* by Frank Wachowiak and Robert Clements has an attractive 2 page spread showing figure drawings by children of from first through eighth grade.)

Make sketches of people and objects that are important parts of your story. Draw in the style you drew in at the age the events happened.

Cut out these pictures.



## MAKE SPACE

Use scissors, x-acto knife, and rulers to cut and tear paper.

Do not pre-draw. Do not use a pencil until later in the project.

Begin with an 18 x 24" or larger paper in black, gray, or dark brown.

Use only grays, white, black, and shades of brown papers.

First put down a few large pieces to create floors and walls.

Note how laying a diagonal line instantly creates the illusion of depth. Allow yourself to create conceptual (not necessarily) realistic space. For example, you may be able to see the side and top of a table at the same time.

After making the basic space, add doors, windows, large pieces of furniture, etc.

One great way to shape papers for your collage is to tear them, either free hand or against a ruler to create a straight, but soft edge.

Add the characters and objects you created in your child style sketching.

## ADD DETAILS, CREATE TEXTURES AND PATTERNS

After you have created the basic spaces and large and small shapes, you can begin adding detail to your picture with white, black, and brown markers, pencils, and chalk.

The details may be small objects such as equipment, posters, plants, clocks, loudspeaker, etc. Consider adding actual or symbolically significant posters, pictures, maps, and charts to the wall.

Added details should include creating the patterns and textures you associate with various surfaces. When the picture is nearing completion, you may take a small scrap of colored paper (about 4 by 6 inches) and use bits of it in places around the picture as an accent color.

## WRITE & RECORD

As you make visual art, you will often find that your memories of places, people, and events become more vivid. Jot down words to help describe your experience.

Write: things you remember people saying, questions you thought or asked that were not answered, opinions you had about teachers and peers. Describe a time you got in trouble. In your judgment today was it justified or unjustified? What did you worry about? What stories do you remember reading? What did you learn? What didn't you learn? Describe something you thought was wonderful or impressive.

Choose from your writing notes: sentences, phrases, and words that will enhance your drawing. Write words on your drawing. Layer over images or write in negative space. Add any information that helps to "paint a portrait" of the discursive space in your classroom.

## COMMUNICATE & RESPOND

Post the finished artwork on the walls. Assign or let each student choose a work (not his or her own). Use the *Elementary "I" Response Form* to stimulate each student's consideration of his or her chosen artwork. Have students write in answers to all the questions that seem applicable. Use the thoughts stimulated by the worksheets as the basis for classroom discussion. Share the Response Forms with the artist.

\* There is an Elementary "I" response form file for downloading in the Process folder.



## **Teachers, take the time to make your own Elementary "I" School projects.**

Moments from our pasts are often formative, constituting who we are and what we will become. These personal stories are not available to us for experiencing and acting upon unless they are remembered and recounted. This project is about encountering our own earlier selves, experiencing them, engaging them, and reflecting on what lessons they have to teach us about our work as teachers today.

Seeing the wisdom of our earlier selves allows us to see and cultivate the wisdom of our students. In a dialogical style of teaching, we learn as we teach, giving to our students the tools they need to structure and tell the stories of their lives. To do this effectively we need to remember the ways we were and were not enabled to share our thoughts and feelings in our own educations. Through artmaking, our students learn to tell and hear their own stories in their richness, complexities, contradictions, and possibilities.

In this project, you'll connect the development of visual and verbal literacy. You'll consider how images can generate discussion, analysis, engagement, and critical thinking and writing. You'll explore how familiarity with various styles of modern artmaking can free young (and more mature) artists from the constraints of visual realism. You'll experience how giving yourself permission to use alternative practices for imaging space and for creating elegant and simple human figures develops a rich language to express and explore inner self.

Using words and images together helps a student to find his or her authentic voice. Helping students visualize and share their personal stories tells them that their lives are important, that their experiences are a valuable contribution to the school and society. Telling his or her story allows the young person to feel the sense of agency and possibility that comes from being seen and being heard. Artmaking and storytelling allows youths and the youth in each of us to remember, to grow, to learn, to make, and to make things happen.

***Begin a conversation about understanding the self through artmaking.***

***Share your "Elementary I" story with your students.***



# **MATERIALS**

## **For Elementary "I" School**

- 1.** 18 x 24 inch or larger paper in black, browns, grays, and white
- 2.** Various size pieces and scraps of paper in black, browns, grays and white  
(Collect paper from all sorts of places--paper bags, typing paper, etc.)
- 3.** Small pieces of brightly colored paper (These can also be textured or patterned papers.)
- 4.** White, gray, black, and brown--markers, pencils, chalk, crayons
- 5.** School glue (or acrylic medium) with a paste brush or glue sticks