



EVIDENCE

Art teacher, Laura Hall Tesdahl of Emerson Middle School in Niles, Illinois, created the Evidence project in conjunction with the University of Illinois at Chicago, Contemporary Community Curriculum Initiative.



Cultures reveal much of what they are and what they value through what is consumed and discarded each day. In this project, students collect evidence of their lives each day for the duration of the unit. The things that are collected are used to create a series of small installations that portray a single moment of a life or many moments in a life. The installations change each day as students incorporate new evidence and learn new formal strategies of composition. Through this postmodern project, students can also effectively learn modernist principles of design. Rather than spending days completing a single ink sketch or collage that illustrates a particular principle, students engage in the dynamic activity of arranging and rearranging found materials--experimenting with many possible combinations within a few class periods.

By looking at the work of artists who have tried to make meaning out of their everyday lives and ordinary objects, students gain insight into the potential relationships between art and contemporary life. How does it change one's conception of art to think of it as a reflection of reality or as a residue of lived experience?

This project gives teachers and students the opportunity to take a closer look at what may be missed, passed by, or discarded each day. It creates opportunities to think symbolically and metaphorically about mundane remnants and scraps. Students and teachers discover new things about themselves and each other, not through trying to find some inner essence, but rather through reaching a better understanding the minutiae that make up a life.

From an aesthetic point of view, one of the best characteristics of this project is that it is not structured to result in a final, fixed collage or assemblage. Recognizing that for over thirty years, artists have been interested in temporary, less structured forms of creating visual art, the project is conceived as transitory and performative. Students collect, display, communicate, and then disassemble the artworks--sometimes within a single class period. This aids students in



understanding that permanence is not necessarily a criterion of the quality of an artwork and it opens up students' understanding to many sophisticated contemporary art practices.

This project can be done on a large or small scale. Students can make individual installations on their desks or students with common themes can work together in groups at tables to create larger pieces. The groups at tables could discover ways to unify all of the pieces into a larger work. The scale of the artwork would depend on the amount of evidence and the size of the space available to install the work.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to create an installation constructed from evidence collected from daily experiences and routines. This project will enable students to discover how other artists have used everyday experiences and found materials to create meaning in their work. They will question why these artists have chosen to show us these things and begin to understand how these artists have created meaning while controlling how we look at their work. Students will discover new things about themselves and their classmates through the process of this project that will contribute more meaning to their artwork

REFERENCE ARTISTS

Some artists who make art from everyday found objects

Robert Rauschenberg

Kurt Schwitters

Candy Jernigan



LESSON 1:

Contemporary Art and Found Objects

Ideally this is done 1 week prior to the beginning of work on the project during class time.

DISCUSSION OF MEDIUM

Show examples of artworks by Rauschenberg, Schwitters, Jernigan, and others that include found objects.

How do these works differ from more conventional drawings, paintings, and sculptures? Ask the students to speculate about why collage and assemblage first emerged as art media in modern times.

What is contemporary art? Of the visuals presented which ones would you call contemporary? Why?

Contemporary Art: Art that is being made today. Art that is remarkably diverse and fast changing. Today's artists make a point to keep up with the shifts in technologies as well as ideas. They acknowledge that our lives are varied and fast changing and they want to keep pace. Many of them are concerned with social issues and take a critical stance with regard to the way things are. Contemporary artists employ all media from paint to clay, photography to video, computers to neon.

A useful book for teachers conducting art discussions:
Key Art Terms for Beginners by Philip Yenawine
Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers 1995 New York.

DISCUSSION OF MEANING

Consider images by Rauschenberg, Schwitters, Jernigan, and others that include found objects. Discuss the artists' intended meaning. Discuss the interpretations of the students.

Show examples of teacher and student Evidence projects. (Some teachers are reluctant to show samples of a project because they believe that this may inhibit student creativity. Because the whole idea of a transitory evidence project will be unfamiliar to most students, it's important to show them images that will stimulate them to collect a wide range of evidence. One way to downplay the effect of "copycatting" is to show widely divergent solutions to the same project problem.)

Discuss the meaning of each Evidence project sample. Read statements by the artists. Discuss whether the artist statements enhance or change the students' understanding of the artworks.

COLLECT EVIDENCE

Hand out the **Evidence Collection Sheet** and read it over with the students. Organize storage areas and containers for the students' evidence. Grocery store bags, either paper or plastic, are efficient and free storage containers. Be sure that students clearly label their evidence bags or boxes with names and period number.

Remind the students each day to continue to collect evidence. It helps to take a minute or two each day to show students some of the interesting materials that have been collected. This will help inspire them to bring in more things.

Cleaning out desks and lockers is a great way to obtain evidence. This can be an ideal end-of-the-year project, a way to thoughtfully consider the last few months.

** There is an Evidence Collection Sheet to print out in the Process chapter.*



LESSON 2: Discussing Unity and Variety in an Artwork

DISCUSSION

Students learn about the different ways that unity and variety can be created in an artwork. They receive a Unity & Variety handout to help them consider strategies for creating unity and variety in their artworks.

UNITY & VARIETY WORKSHEET: A GROUP ACTIVITY

Students choose a table to work at for the period. They should choose the table based on their interest in the art on that table. Each table features the work of a different modern to contemporary artist. Prints, pictures cut from magazines, or a book featuring the artist can be used to represent the artist's work. Try to choose some artists whose work shows a connection to found objects.

Students are to choose a work of art and then answer the questions on the UNITY & VARIETY handout. They share their answers with the group. The group decides on one piece of artwork to present to the entire class. Every member of the group should be prepared to present the work to the class and discuss the way that the artist created both unity and variety within the piece.

In most art classrooms peer discussion is a distraction from the content and focus of the class. When discussion about art

is at the heart of the class it is usually in the form of a classroom critique that is mediated by the teacher. In this group learning activity, the emphasis is on peer discussion. It's easy for the teacher to move throughout the room, observing the small group discussions, learning valuable information about how students respond to artworks.

** There is a **Unity/Variety Worksheet** to print out in the Process chapter.*

DISCUSSION OF MULTIPLE MEANINGS

One student from each table presents a piece of work to the class and points out how unity and variety were achieved. The student will also be asked to describe what meaning the group discovered within the piece. Other students should be called on for their insights. The teacher should add his or her insight as well as discussing the artists' intentions. It is important for the students to come away from this activity with an understanding that contemporary art can have multiple meanings. Artists create their own meaning in a work. Each viewer brings all of his or her life experiences to the work and the work is then "re-created" by the viewer.

REMINDER: ALL EVIDENCE SHOULD BE AT SCHOOL FOR THE NEXT CLASS

Students bring found evidence in a bag that is labeled with name and homeroom.



LESSON 3: Arranging Evidence

OBSERVATION

Have students lay their evidence out on their desks. Have them walk around the room and look at one another's evidence. Ask them to think about what the evidence does and does not reveal about each person.

TEACHER DEMONSTRATION

Discuss with the students that they will be creating INSTALLATION ART on their desks.

Installations are works of art that are created in a space by an artist. Installations are temporary artworks that exist for a limited amount of time until the artist disassembles them.

The students work in this way, rather than in “permanent” collage because it provides a limitless avenue for them to explore different compositions and to discover how meaning can change based on where things are placed next to one another. It also helps students to develop an appreciation of impermanence and performance in contemporary art practices.

Arrange your evidence in front of the class without thinking about it too much. Just do it. Ask the students if they can identify how you created **unity** within the piece. Ask them to identify ways that you used **variety**. Maybe you created unity, maybe you didn't. The point is to play first, then discover whether you have achieved unity and variety. Tell the students this. Experiment with rearranging your evidence with the advice of the students.

MAKE ART

Have each student arrange his or her evidence to create a visually interesting installation. Videotape each student's installation or assign teams of students to do the videotaping.

Remind the students to stay at their desks until you come around to tape them. If their name is not creatively integrated into the piece, have them say their name when you give the sign. Afterwards they should walk around looking at other's work and locate installations that exhibit **unity** and **variety**. They should be prepared to comment on the piece the following day in class.

Spend at least the last 10 minutes of class taking 5-second videos of each student's installation. Dub the footage onto a videocassette so that you can play back the tape for discussion the following day.

REMINDER: STUDENTS SHOULD BRING MORE EVIDENCE.

They should bring in new evidence each day for the rest of the week

NO VIDEO CAMERA?

If you do not have a video camera you can still do this project.

Have the students set up their installations for half of each class and then use the final half of the class to hold a discussion. The video camera just speeds things up a bit and is a nice way to document the students' process and progress. It is not crucial to the project.



LESSON 4: Arranging for Meaning

DISCUSSION

Review the tape from the day before. Discuss those pieces that showed strong **unity** and **variety**. Discuss pieces that evoked strong or unusual **message** or **meaning**.

MAKE ART

The goal for today is to create a new installation considering **meaning** or **message** as well as **unity** and **variety**. Remind the students to stay at their desks until you come around to tape them. If their name is not creatively integrated into the piece, have them say their name when you give the sign. Afterwards they should walk around looking at others work and locate installations that exhibit **meaning** or **message** as well as **unity** and **variety**. They should be prepared to

comment on the piece the following day in class.

Ask students to think about what kind of information their evidence reveals. Ask them to consider the **message** or **meaning** that their installation reveals. Ask them to think about important aspects of their lives that are not documented by the evidence.

Spend the last 10 minutes of class taking 5-second videos of each student's installation. Dub the footage onto a videocassette so that you can play back the tape for discussion the following day.

REMINDER:
STUDENTS SHOULD BRING MORE EVIDENCE.

LESSON 5: Arranging for Movement

DISCUSSION

Review the tape from the day before. Discuss those pieces that showed strong **unity** and **variety**. As you go, point out those pieces where **movement** carries the eye through the entire piece. Explain how directions of line, direction of shape, repetition or placement of any of the elements have created movement.

MAKE ART

Explain that now in addition to creating unity and variety, the students should arrange their evidence in a way that **moves** the viewer's eye **through the entire installation**. They should consider creating **movement** today in their installation. Afterwards students should walk around, look

at others work and locate installations that exhibit **meaning** or **message**, **unity** and **variety** as well as **movement**. They should be prepared to comment on the piece the following day in class.

Spend the last 10 minutes of class taking 5-second videos of each student's installation. Dub the footage onto a videocassette so that you can play back the tape for discussion the following day.

REMINDER:
STUDENTS SHOULD BRING MORE EVIDENCE

Ask them to think about what kind of information their evidence reveals. Ask them to consider how their message or meaning might change based on the addition of new evidence.



LESSON 6: Arranging for Emphasis

DISCUSSION

Review the tape from the day before. As you go, point out those pieces where **movement** carries the eye through the entire piece. Today's focus will be **emphasis**. Discuss installations where a piece of evidence has been **emphasized**. Discuss ways that emphasis was achieved--contrast, isolation, convergence. This lesson plan does not include a worksheet for movement or emphasis because students in the pilot class had already covered these concepts during the year.

MAKE ART

Students should be considering the **meaning** or **message** that they want to convey. They do not have to use all of their evidence at this point. They should be selective in what they use and how it is displayed. They should consider which piece or pieces of evidence they want to **emphasize**. They may also consider hiding or partially obscuring evidence

within the piece. (Note that the teacher did not create an emphasis worksheet for this project because the students had learned about emphasis earlier in the year so this project reinforced previously learned vocabulary.)

Today's installation should consider **message, unity, variety, and movement**; however, the primary goal is to **emphasize a piece of evidence** that holds special meaning to the artist. Afterwards students should walk around, look at other's work and locate installations that exhibit strong **meaning** or **message, unity and variety, movement and emphasis**. They should be prepared to comment on the piece the following day in class.

REMIND STUDENTS that tomorrow is the last day to bring in evidence.

Ask them to think about what kind of information their evidence reveals as well as how the meaning or message has changed based on the addition of new evidence. Ask them to consider the message or meaning that their final installation will reveal.



LESSON 7: the Final Installation

DISCUSSION

Review the tape from the day before. As you go through the tape, have the students point out the best examples of installations that showing **meaning**, **unity**, and **variety**, **movement**, or **emphasis**.

MAKE ART

Students create a final installation that exhibits an understanding of **unity** and **variety**, **movement**, **emphasis**, and personal **meaning** or **message**.

REFLECTION/ARTIST STATEMENT

Students complete a reflection sheet after they have set up their final installation. The information gathered on the reflection sheet will be used to create an artist statement.

** There is a **Reflection Statement Worksheet** to print out in the Process chapter.*

LESSON 8: the Artist Statement

WRITING AN ARTIST STATEMENT

Have each student create a title for his or her installation and write an artist's statement to accompany the piece. The students should describe where their evidence came from and why they chose to include the evidence in their piece. They are to describe the meaning or importance behind the evidence. In addition, the students should be able to explain why they emphasized certain pieces and how they intended the viewer's eye to move through the installation. Finally, they should describe how they attempted to unify the piece and explain what meaning or message they were trying to reveal in their work.

SAMPLE STATEMENT:

My Trip with Soccer

by Kelly Morgan

My evidence mostly came from Northeast Park in Park Ridge or from old handouts from my coach. I chose to do my installation about soccer because I spend most of my time doing it, either playing it or learning about it. The one piece that I emphasized was my old cleat shoelace. I put it there because when I wore it our team won first place. I made it stand out by placing it so it looked big because it is a big part of my life. Everything is unified because everything is from soccer. The meaning I wanted to get across was that I spend most of my life playing soccer.



CLOSURE

Display the finished work with accompanying artist statements in a gallery-like space such as the school library. For the University of Illinois at Chicago Gallery 400 show, we brought school desks to the gallery so that each piece was “framed” by its own desk surface.

Consider creating a video in which students read their artist statements while the visual shows the installation piece completed or being created. Show the tape on a monitor in the hallway before or after school.

Take conventional photographs or digital pictures of the final installations. Display the photos with the Artist Statements.

DISCUSSION

Let each student present his or her installation. Did anyone in the class feel that they learned something new about this person from this project? Ask the students to reflect on whether they learned anything new about themselves from working on this project.

Discussion of personal issues requires a teacher to have firm control of the class when necessary. Teachers who ask that students share inner thoughts and feelings need to provide a safe and respectful environment in which to do so.

Because they are not often asked to bring their full humanity into the classroom, the first time you conduct a more personal discussion, students may begin to act goofy and say rude things. This should never be permitted. Be prepared to stop and establish ground rules in a calm and non-judgmental manner if someone says something inappropriate or unkind. You can create a class with a climate of trust where students feel free to reveal more about themselves.

MATERIALS

for Evidence Project

- 1.** Samples of teacher’s work from this web site
- 2.** Samples of student work from this web site
- 3.** Visual examples of artists’ work
- 4.** EVIDENCE collection handout
- 5.** UNITY activity handout
- 6.** REFLECTION handout
- 7.** Containers and space to keep the students’ evidence
- 8.** Assorted “evidence” brought by students
- 9.** VCR
- 10.** Video Camera
- 11.** Blank Video Cassette for Camera
- 12.** Editing Machine (optional)
- 13.** Blank Video Cassette