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Visually Speaking Editor
SD#73

RATIONALE

This project is intended to connect students with global issues and give them the opportunity to express their own concerns about their world through art making. The specific issue of the movement known as the “Umbrella Revolution” that took place in Hong Kong in 2014 is used as a springboard to concerns of personal interest to each student and their ideas about what can help to make the world a better place. They will learn to overcome the challenge of working with the unwieldy umbrellas, and will make design choices to communicate their ideas, opinions, beliefs, and emotions to others.

PRE-CLASS PREPARATION

The teacher will need to make the following preparations prior to the class(es)
- create a presentation providing the background to the Hong Kong Umbrella Revolution of September 2014 or find some suitable resource material
- provide the necessary background to show how the umbrella became a symbol for change during this crisis

RESOURCES & REFERENCES

- http://bit.ly/1rDCoi9
- http://globalnews.ca/tag/umbrella-revolution/
- numerous internet sites with various perspectives on the history and issues facing Hong Kong

CORE COMPETENCY

Facet: Students value diversity, defend human rights, advocate for others, and act with a sense of ethics in interactions, including online.

Painted umbrella by Elena C., Westsyde Secondary School, SD#73. With this piece, she explored the issue of wildlife impacted by human interference, and the need to protect such an important part of our ecosystem.

Materials and Technologies:
- umbrellas (these can easily be obtained in various discount/dollar stores)
- acrylic paint
- chalk
- optional miscellaneous materials (yarn, thread, buttons, acrylic mediums, etc.)
Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions. This lesson gives students the opportunity to see this principle as not just being about negative consequences for wrongdoing, but how visual imagery can be used to further a cause and effect change. It also shows how Joshua Wong, a 17-year-old youth, was instrumental in starting a movement on an international scale.

LESSON

- **Initiating question:** “What symbols can you think of that convey the idea of revolution or change?”

- After some discussion, show students one of the yellow umbrella graphics used by protestors in Hong Kong during the pro-democracy protests of September 2014.

- Move into the slide presentation that you have prepared on the Hong Kong Revolution, ensuring that students understand how the English love of tea led to the Opium Wars and British control of Hong Kong for 99 years. Lead into the modern situation “one country, two systems”, of a people used to democracy for 156 years now under communist rule. Discuss the reasons for the Hong Kong umbrella movement and its key events.

- Discuss how the umbrellas were first initiated as a protection against pepper spray and tear gas during peaceful protest, but quickly came to be a symbol of resistance and a fight for democracy.

- Students can also be asked to consider the role of the media in dubbing this movement as the “Umbrella Revolution”, and how the media can impact social change. The photo on the cover of the October 13, 2014 issue of Time magazine can be used as a springboard to other photos that have brought about significant social and political change (e.g., the photo of 3-year-old Alan Kurdi spurring countries to get involved in the Syrian refugee crises) Refer to http://100photos.time.com for other examples.

- Share photos of the umbrellas that were decorated, as well as artwork and posters that used images of yellow umbrellas as a way of sharing their message; students could also find them on-line instead.

- **Following the presentation and discussion, pose the following question:** “What do YOU think is needed to make the world a better place?”

- Ask the students to brainstorm a list, and when they've settled on one, have them choose the designs, colours, patterns, images, etc., that will help them convey their idea.

- **Choice and Voice.** I gave students the following options:
  - use text and/or images
  - artwork may be abstract or representational
  - use acrylic paint and/or other materials (e.g. appliqué, buttons, acrylic medium, etc.)

This umbrella was painted by Katie A., a Grade 9 student concerned about developing self-esteem in ourselves and nurturing it in others. Westsyde Secondary, SD#73.
When students have formulated their plan, their designs can be transferred onto the umbrellas with blackboard chalk. They’ll find working with the structure of the umbrellas a challenge, and they can use problem-solving skills to find ways to keep them still while they’re drawing and painting on them. My students found slipping the handles through slats in the back of the classroom chairs to be very helpful. Acrylic paint works well on the fabric, and students can also use stitching and fabric/craft glue to add other materials. Encourage improvisational use of additional materials.

**Presentation.** Students displayed the finished pieces as a large outdoor installation near the main entrance of the school. We photographed them using pyramid cedars as a backdrop, and also arranged them around the flagpole. Students could play an active role in determining the best way to present them at their school, and consider ways to get conversations going about the concepts they chose.

**EXTENSIONS**

- possible connections to the Pink Shirt day, also started by young people, which began in Nova Scotia in 2007, as well as International Day of Pink and Orange Shirt Day
- could be adapted to a variety of other issues that arise in current events, with the symbol of the umbrella being replaced with another one that best fits the chosen issue(s)—e.g., blankets and the homeless; shoes and social class; suitcases and refugees...

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**The Big Idea**

**What they will understand.**

- The visual arts reflect the interconnectedness of the individual, community, and society.

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**Curricular Competencies**

**What they will be able to do.**

- Use visual art to communicate and respond to social and environmental issues occurring locally, regionally, and globally as they connect to personal values
- Create artistic works to reflect personal voice, story, and values in connection with a specific place, time, and context

**Concepts and Content**

**What they will know.**

- the influence of visual culture in social and other media
- symbols and metaphors to represent ideas and perspectives in visual art
- the role of the artist in presenting social justice issues to an audience
Students should be encouraged to consider not just negative issues, but positive solutions; also, sometimes simple ideas can be the most profound.

**REFLECTION**

We began this project on the first anniversary of the Hong Kong “Umbrella Revolution” (or “Umbrella Movement”). The day I had planned to start this project with my class, an international student from mainland China joined the class, so I felt that, given the sensitive nature of the material, I had better hold off with the presentation until I had a chance to check it more closely for content. I was glad I did that, as I found adjectives that were best omitted from the slideshow; even though I thought I’d been objective, I needed to tweak the presentation.

I did this unit with a Grade 9/10 class, and so the images shared are by younger students. However, it would work very well with Grade 11 students, who will soon be old enough to vote and make decisions that can impact a wider audience, so I have written this lesson plan using the Art Studio 11 curriculum. My students responded very well to the project, and their ideas were quite varied, with ideas about the economy, the environment, diversity, self-esteem, and so on. They were very proud of the work they did, and some of them still hang from the ceiling in our Learning Commons.

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**ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION**

These are the criteria I gave my students:

- My concept is thoughtful and well-represented by my finished work.
- I have exercised “Choice” and “Voice”– I was actively engaged in my learning, and this is evident in my work.
- My design choices are well suited to my subject matter.
- My use of materials, technologies, and processes shows that I have grown as an artist.

**ADAPTATIONS/MODIFICATIONS**

- Because of the open-ended nature of this assignment, it is well-suited to a variety of ability levels
- Where some students may struggle is with the concept development, and those with learning difficulties may need some one-to-one assistance in the planning stages as they formulate their ideas

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This umbrella was created by Kahlia T., a Grade 10 student concerned about acid rain and the need to ensure that our rain is free on contaminants. She put blue watercolour paint into a fluid acrylic medium to draw attention to the drops of rain. Westsyde Secondary School, SD#73.
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