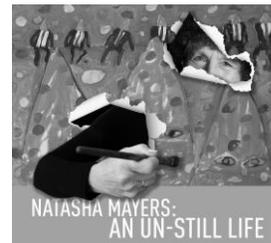


# **Natasha Mayers: an Un-Still Life**

## **MIDDLE SCHOOL LESSON**

April 2021

This lesson was created to accompany the film **Natasha Mayers: an Un-Still Life**. You are encouraged to adopt this as presented here, adapt it to your teaching situation, or use it as a starting point to design a lesson for your student population.



**TITLE:** Investigating and Messaging - Art and Practice

### **Overview:**

- Students collaboratively examine and respond to a body of contemporary artworks, then make interpretations of meaning conveyed through such works. (*MLR - Disciplinary Literacy; Visual and Performing Arts Connections*)
- Students use knowledge gained to experiment, plan, and collaborate to make a banner that expresses meaning relevant to a theme or idea important to the group. Students use banners to communicate a message using the work of [Artists' Rapid Response Team](#) as a model. (*MLR - Creative Problem-Solving; Creation, Performance, and Expression*)
- Students provide and receive feedback during and at the conclusion of the art making. Students collaboratively exhibit their work and develop an exhibition narrative to guide viewers. (*MLR - Aesthetics and Criticism*)

## **DETAILS OF LESSON**

### **Preparation**

It is recommended that the teacher view three films to prepare for this lesson. Each film provides different information and some overlapping details about Natasha Mayers' art and life. Each one touches on the suggested lesson. After viewing the films, the teacher determines how to use the lesson provided or adapt it for their student population.

- **Natasha Mayers: An Un-Still Life** at <https://vimeo.com/482734214>
- Excerpt two: **Friends: Artists & Collaboration** at <https://vimeo.com/527562972> and,
- **Artists' Rapid Response Team Banner Making**, which provides an overview of a project of the Union of Maine Visual Artists at <https://www.arrteam.org>

**Step 1:** Students watch one or part of the videos listed above. During the video(s), students make notes of ideas that jump out at them, of how Natasha's work speaks to them, of the artmaking process, or about Natasha's life.

*See suggested questions below to help the teacher lead the discussion after watching the film(s).*

**Step 2:** Share examples of banners and how they have been used for different purposes in Portland or another community. For example, Creative Portland has commissioned banners to be made for light poles across the city to promote mask wearing.

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Examples of how art has been used for social change can be found here:

<https://art.350.org/examples/>.

**Step 3:** In groups of 3 or 4, discuss the notes and ideas generated by the students. Each group determines which two ideas are the most important at this moment in time. (*See also Step 7 below, as this can influence ideas.*)

**Step 4:** With the entire class, brainstorm a list of ideas/thoughts/concerns that are most important to each member of the class. The list will lead to the messages that students would like the community (entire school, beyond the school, regionally, state-wide, nationally, and/or internationally) to learn about.

**Step 5:** Make sketches that depict each student's main idea that they are passionate about. Students share their sketches/ideas. Through discussion, the group determines which ones are similar and select the idea(s) to make into banners.

**Step 6:** Working in small groups, students collaborate to create the banners, including the idea, messaging, image(s), border, text, etc. Everyone contributes.

**Step 7:** The class determines how the banner will be presented to the community. (*See also Step 3 above.*)

### **SUGGESTED GUIDING QUESTIONS**

After watching the video(s), the teacher may decide to use some of these suggested questions to lead the discussion.

- What is the main message of ARRT!? What is the main takeaway from the video?
- Is it clear that the images come first, and the words follow? Why is that important to ARRT!?
- The banners are made using basic materials and the ideas communicated in a very low-tech manner. What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of the 'low-tech' method?
- Where in the process does taking and giving feedback come in? How and why does that work with ARRT!?
- What does it mean to be an activist artist? How can art function as a tool for activism?
- How can art be used to educate, inform, and express ideas or messages? Can this be a collaborative effort?
- Working collaboratively can be more difficult than working alone. What does ARRT! do to support each person's participation and the idea of collaboration?
- Does the ARRT! art making process allow for artists' individual ideas and voices to be heard? If so, how does that occur?
- How does the organization that ARRT! is creating the banner for benefit?
- Is there anything else that you notice that is important about ARRT!'s process?
- Do you think the work of ARRT! is making a difference? Why or why not?

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- What contributions do artists and their art make in our society? How does art contribute to making a difference in the world?

### **IDEAS FOR CONNECTIONS OF SUBJECTS WITH CURRICULUM**

- Environmental stewardship, nature-based education with science
- Social justice, community service, project-based learning with civics and social studies
- WPA New Deal-works project, protest art, street art, art as propaganda, photography as an influence/documentation/storytelling, political and editorial cartooning with history, writing, and/or poetry
- Equity, access to basic needs for healthy living with family consumer science
- Specific to Common Core Standards for English/Language Arts, the Reading Literature anchor standard urges that we, “Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.” (CCSS Standard 7, p. 35)

### **ASSESSMENT**

**Formative:** Ongoing throughout brainstorming, sketch making, collaborating on ideas, and during creation of the final banner. Observations by teacher, student feedback by responding in writing, voice recordings, photographing work samples.

**Summative:** Group critique and discussion at completion of the banners. Written or audio/video responses to the following (suggested) questions:

1. What was the main message you and your group wanted others to learn from your banner?
2. Compare the banners that were created by each group and discuss the merits of the Elements and Principles to enhance the artwork.
3. What are you wondering about art making and working together for a common cause?
4. What did you notice about you as a learner during this process?
5. What “aha” moments did you have while learning about ARRT! and creating the banner?
6. How might you apply what you have learned to using your voice in the future?

### **MAINE LEARNING RESULTS**

<https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/content/arts>

*Note: These are the selected visual arts standards for grades 6-8 that are aligned with this lesson as written.*

A. Disciplinary Literacy: Students show literacy in the art discipline by understanding and demonstrating concepts, skills, terminology, and processes.

A.1. Artist’s Purpose: Students explain and compare different purposes of artists and their artwork, in the context of time and place.

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A.2. Elements of Art and Principles of Design: Students compare features of composition both within an artwork and among art works.

- a. Compare Elements of Art: color, form, line, shape, space, texture, and value.
- b. Compare Principles of Design: balance, contrast, emphasis, movement, pattern, rhythm, and unity.

B. Creation, Performance, and Expression: Students create, express, and communicate through the art discipline.

B.3. Making Meaning: Students create art works that communicate an individual point of view.

- a. Demonstrate skills in the use of media, tools, techniques, and processes.
- b. Demonstrate knowledge of visual art concepts.
- c. Communicate a variety of ideas, feelings, and meanings.

B.4. Exhibition: Students select and prepare art works for display in the classroom, school, or other community location, and articulate an artistic justification for their selection.

C. Creative Problem-Solving: Students approach artistic problem-solving using multiple solutions and the creative process.

C.1. Application of Creative Process: Students describe and apply creative-thinking skills that are part of the creative problem-solving process.

- a. Flexibility
- b. Elaboration
- c. Originality
- d. Analysis

D. Aesthetics and Criticism: Students describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate art.

D.1. Aesthetics and Criticism: Students compare and analyze art forms.

- c. Compare the effectiveness of selected media, techniques, and processes in communicating ideas.
- d. Explain and compare different purposes of artists and artwork in the context of time and place.

E. Visual and Performing Arts Connections: Students understand the relationship among the arts, history, and world culture; they make connections among the arts and to other disciplines, to goal setting, and to interpersonal interaction.

E.5. Interpersonal Skills: Students demonstrate positive interpersonal skills and analyze how interpersonal skills affect participation in the arts.

- a. Getting along with others
- b. Respecting differences

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- c. Working as a team/ensemble
- d. Managing conflict
- e. Accepting/giving/using constructive feedback
- f. Accepting responsibility for personal behavior
- g. Demonstrating ethical behavior
- h. Following established rules/etiquette for observing/listening to art
- i. Demonstrating safe behavior

### **NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS**

<https://www.nationalartsstandards.org>

*Note: These are the selected visual arts national standards that are aligned with this lesson as written.*

**Artistic Processes:** Creating, Performing/Presenting/Producing, Responding, and Connecting

#### **Creating**

Anchor Standard #1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard #2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard #3: Refine and complete artistic work.

#### **Performing/Presenting/Producing**

Anchor Standard #5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

#### **Responding**

Anchor Standard #8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Anchor Standard #9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

#### **Connecting**

Anchor Standard #10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Anchor Standard #11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.