

Early College Folio

The House of Education Needs Overhaul

Issue 1 | Spring 2021

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Local to Global A Model for Engaged Activism and Student-Led Inquiry

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EDITORS' NOTE: *This lesson plan is one of five projects created out of the Bard Early College Fellowship, which have been highlighted for the first issue of Early College Folio. Read Ligaya Franklin's "[Early College Pedagogy: An Introduction to the Bard Early College Fellowship](#)," for a comprehensive review of the fellows, their pedagogical approaches, and the broader goals of the fellowship.*

SUMMARY

A set of teacher guides and resources to encourage engaged activism and stewardship within both the local and global communities, as exemplified through an arts and ecology curriculum.

OVERVIEW

This project was developed as a set of guides for educators to guide them through a process to connect with and respond to local and global communities and build stewardship and citizenship. While this project is discussed in the context of an art class, the pedagogical approach can be applied to enrich diverse content areas.

Each semester, my 9th grade *Foundations of Art* course participates in an Art and Ecology Unit with the following sequence of objectives:

1. **Orient to the local environment** through observation, memory, mimetic reproduction of plants and animals.
2. **Orient to the impact of human actions** on the environment, specifically litter, plastics in waterways, through research on the Great Pacific Garbage Patch
3. **Investigate how artists participate in environmental activism**, for example, artists who raise awareness about environmental concerns, artists whose art is in itself "cleaning" the environment (for example, using recycled materials), or artists who design sites and structures that

- physically change the environment.
4. **Develop, discuss and refine conceptual approaches to art-making** following one or more of these themes
 5. **Collaborate as a community** to create artwork which addresses environmental concerns. This could include:
 - a. Collecting trash and making art out of repurposed materials to minimize waste stream. These works are often exhibited at the Maryland Department of the Environment Recycled Art Show; in school at recycled fashion shows.
 - b. Grant funded work on environmental art or land art, including bird habitats, garden design, terraforming, and more. These require more substantial funds so usually require the teacher pre-planning and applying for numerous grants and following through if they are received (I will provide a compendium of resources for grants).
 6. **Take action to advocate for environmental change.** Publishing images including posters, photographs, postcards; taking artworks to local parades; participating in online exhibitions and local art shows in order to get the message out there. This is all about community connections and taking the work outside of your classroom. For an extension, teachers can use sister cities, online platforms like iEARN, and peace corps partner teachers to take the work global! I will provide a bank of local resources and examples of resources in Baltimore as well as national resources. Teachers are encouraged to research and compile lists of partners over the years—these bear more fruit over time!

ISSUES ADDRESSED

- Coursework not being connected with issues going on in the local (or global) community
- Lack of sense of personal engagement for students
- Increased civic engagement built into coursework

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students have a sense of how the work they do in class connects to their own communities
- Interest in and engagement with local and global issues
- Passion for subject material through real-world practice
- Students possess resources for their own civic engagement work moving forward

SIGNATURE PEDAGOGIES EMPLOYED

- Project-based learning

- Multimedia integration
- Discovery learning

UNIT COMPARISON

Here I have provided another unit's activities for comparison to allow you to see how this technique can be applied to various disciplines.

| OVERARCHING THEME | SAMPLE ACTIONS |
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| 1. Orient to the environment | <p>In art and ecology: go for a community walk and make observations; bring natural objects into the classroom for observational drawings; look out the window and observe animals, plants or litter in the school environment; take surveys, polls, or environmental samples; go on field trips to explore local nature or waste pathways.</p> <p>In urban planning and architecture: draw your block and the kinds of buildings on your block; draw maps or views of the neighborhood around the school; compare and contrast the building types in different neighborhoods; go for a community walk and reflect on empty lots or abandoned buildings; identify how buildings are used; identify where construction is happening; read articles about initiatives and current events such as mixed-use-zoning, tear down, and vacant lot programs.</p> |
| 2. Understand the impact of human actions | <p>In art and ecology: examine documentary photography of environmental problems; read articles and watch videos to gain for information; jigsaw reading or webquests can help here; students chart cause and effect or source-action-outcome; identify specifically how local behaviors create local and then global problems; examine pictures of the same location from different time periods and assess the environmental changes.</p> <p>In architecture: read articles and discuss the broken windows theory; examine zoning maps in your area and discuss the rationale behind them; slum landlord project/discussion; greenlining/redlining; look at historical maps and understand how areas are developed or underdeveloped by investment or divestment.</p> |

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| 3. Examine professional practices | <p>In art and ecology: describe, analyze and respond to environmental art which directly cleans the environment through practices (Richard and Judith Lang, El Anatsui, Chakaia Booker); art which calls attention to problems, raises awareness and prompts action (Chris Jordan, Sue Stockwell, Michelle Reader, Tim Noble and Sue Webster, Sue Coe); and art which applies design-based solutions to environmental problems (inhabitat.com, Baltimore Water Wheel; seabin; theoceancleanup.com); chart processes that artists use; participate in short “concept art” or “thought experiments;” discuss and evaluate which processes and conceptual approaches are most effective; submit or present artistic proposals for calls for entry.</p> <p>In architecture: identify and evaluate different architectural styles for form and functions; Discuss what each style communicates about the building’s status, class and function; Identify the needs of clients relating to the architecture and the responsibilities; Practice using tools and techniques to draw and design buildings; Participate in architect/client simulation; read about current events in urban planning in your city; look at revitalization, urban farming and multiuse spaces in Detroit; Analyze and respond to “extreme architecture” in Dubai or extreme climates. Examine ways that architectural styles and traditions have evolved over time and cultures. Examine trends in environmentalism, 3D printing of houses, container houses, tiny houses, and other trends. Participate in charrettes for unique challenges such as tiny houses or portable homes.</p> |
| 4. Applied practice | <p>In art and ecology: create a collaborative mural of Chesapeake Bay animals using repurposed fabric collage; use collected garbage to create wearable garments for a trashy fashion show; paint birdhouse gourds to build a bird habitat and design signs to alert people to migratory birds; design and plant a garden; create sculptures from repurposed waste material; visit a site for a community clean up or mural.</p> <p>In architecture: work in teams to design an ideal neighborhood or a plan to revamp the school neighborhood and present ideas to the class; evaluate these plans and examine proposals for use of public space in the area.</p> |

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| 5. Take action | Write letters to local politicians or papers; exhibit work publically; send postcards; create an online presence; create a work of art in a public space; conduct environmental testing or clean up; students present at conferences and meetings; students coach other students in methods; students connect with partner classrooms and create global understanding of issues; students produce a TV or radio show or short film about the topic and then publish it by screening in local film and art festivals; march in parades and rallies; exhibit in a gallery outside of the school; meet with congressmen, senators, and others; present to the school board; participate in a community school planning meeting. |
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STEP ONE: ORIENT TO THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

WHAT IS GOING ON, HERE AND NOW?
HOW CAN STUDENTS CONNECT?

SAMPLE ACTIONS

In our unit we connect to the natural environment. We take community walks and observe and count litter; we clean up the harbor with groups like Living Classrooms; we draw what we see outside of the window; students log animals they see over a weekend; we discuss our favorite outside memories. The stress is on observation. Within the classroom we build technical skills by completing observational drawings of shells, bones and plants in my collection; or perhaps I'll bring in seasonal items such as pinecones or pumpkins. One year we even created floral arrangements for Thanksgiving which students drew for a holiday card then donated to a community food bank.

This observational approach is not limited to study of the natural environment. In my unit on architecture, this may mean discussing which buildings are where, or listing problems caused by urban planning. In a unit on advertising, students may be asked to bring in their favorite advertisement from a magazine so that we can analyze the composition and messaging.

RESOURCE LIST

- Cornell Ornithological Lab has numerous lesson plans and materials for observing birds. (<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/Page.aspx?pid=1478>)
- I use a program called The Drawing Zoo to bring live animals into my classroom. Audubon, and even zoos may offer similar programs in your

area

- <http://www.audubon.org/conservation/education>
- <http://aqua.org/learn/outreach-programs>
- <http://www.thedrawingzoo.com/>
- Are there local parks near the school where students can observe flora and fauna?
- Botanical gardens, conservatories and even historic farms and houses can provide strong resources too. (<http://www.rawlingsconservatory.org/>)
- In Baltimore, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation is a great resource for materials, research, and field trips. Do you have any similar conservation groups in your area? Most will work with low income groups for free. (<http://www.cbf.org/join-us/education-program/student-field-programs>)

THINKING QUESTIONS/NEXT STEPS

- What elements of the environment do I want students to connect to?
- What multisensory activities can we engage in to assist us in making these observations and connections?
- Which classroom-based activities will we follow up with to deepen our understanding and observational skills?
- Are there outside organizations and partners that can come into my classroom to facilitate observation, mimesis, and analysis?