

ECRI

Early College Research Institute

Bard College at
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Early College Folio

Digital by Necessity

Volume 1, Issue 2 | Spring 2022

Finding Clarity in the Abstract: A Class Script for “1 Recipe 4 *Dérive*” by Tongji Philip Qian

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OVERVIEW

The following is a two-day exploration of [“1 Recipe 4 *Dérive*” by Tongji Philip Qian](#), suitable for early college students studying the fine arts, humanities, or art history.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Increase awareness of the existence and utility of photo essays as an artistic form.
- Provide opportunities for students to sit with intellectual discomfort and precognition, and provide avenues for increased understanding through group discussion and solo reflection.
- Practice verbal and writing skills in relation to students’ shifting perspectives and knowledge.

RELEVANT INFORMATION

Title: “1 Recipe 4 *Dérive*”

Year: 2022

Artist: Tongji Philip Qian

Abstract: This visual essay attempts to provide a recipe for *dérive*, a form of conceptual navigation on supposedly uncharted grounds. Because of the digital platform and the accompanying hint of community, *dérive* can gain momentum and pose questions on both personal and collective levels. One feels wildly autonomous yet suspects they are operating within a much larger arena. Ultimately, this field guide serves as a casual reminder that independence and collective culture are necessary to the thriving of any society even during tumultuous times.

LESSON PLANS

DAY ONE

Warm Up | 20 minutes

- Loop write:
 - What comes up for you when you think about *abstract art*?
 - Can you think of anything really important to you that is difficult to describe easily or clearly? Examples include: the exact way it feels to love somebody, or when something just feels *right*.
 - Why might an artist choose to create abstract art instead of something more realistic? (5 minutes)
 - Share out. (5 minutes)

Story Circle | 45 minutes

- Prompt: Tell a story about a time that you felt frustrated by something that you didn't understand in the moment, but gained perspective on in hindsight.
- Explain the process: (5 minutes)
Each person will tell a story for about two minutes. Once everybody in the circle has told a story or passed, students will reflect on "windows" and "mirrors" in their classmates' stories. Windows are moments that provide new perspectives, mirrors are moments that reflect your own experiences.
- The instructor should begin with a "seed story," modeling vulnerability and specificity. (2 minutes)
- Group Story Circle (15-30 minutes)
- Windows and Mirrors (10 minutes)

Process Write | 10 minutes

- Process Write: What mirror or window from the stories today will stick with you? What made it memorable? (5 minutes)
- Share out. (5 minutes)

DAY TWO

Warm Up | 15 minutes

- Focused Free Write (FFW): "In abstraction comes freedom." Respond to this perspective.
 - Write. (5 minutes)
 - Share out. (10 minutes)

Cold Read | 20 minutes

- We are going to look through the photo essay on our own. Focus on

noticing what thoughts, feelings, and opinions come up organically as you are viewing. (5 minutes)

- FFW: What feelings, thoughts, and opinions came up for you as you were viewing this photo essay? (5 minutes)
- Share out. (10 minutes)

Deep Dive | 15 minutes

- As a full group, read the abstract out loud. Note anything that needs to be clarified. (5 minutes)
- Discuss the following questions:
 - What is a photo essay? (5 minutes)
 - What does *dérive* mean? (5 minutes)

Group Activity | 10 minutes

- Break into groups of three and answer the following two questions:
 - What do you think the author means when he writes that *dérive* is “a form of conceptual navigation on supposedly uncharted grounds”? Where do you see this concept surfacing in the images shown? Show at least two examples in the photo essay that support your answer.
 - Why do you think the images are ordered in the way they are? The artist refers to this as a “field guide.” What journey does the chronology take you on? Show at least two examples in the photo essay that support your answer.

Share Out | 5 minutes

- Share out big ideas and takeaways from the group work.

Integrated Viewing | 10 minutes

- On your own, look through the photo essay again, taking into account the class discussions and the new knowledge you have gained. (8 minutes)
- Return to your FFW from today’s Cold Read section and re-read it. (2 minutes)

Process Write | 5 minutes

- What (if anything) has shifted for you from when you wrote your first response? What factors contributed to this shift?

(Optional) Share Out from Process Write | 5 minutes

RACHEL NELSON is a professor of Humanities at Bard Early College in New Orleans. She teaches at the intersections of systemic issues of identity and oppression, and creates at the possibilities of education and imagination as transformational systems of liberation.