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## Creating Visual Voices



"Growth happens by starting where students actually are and helping them develop. The teacher needs to be willing to discover her students true concerns and interests." Judy Chicago Institutional Time

**OVERVIEW:** The feminist pedagogy that I facilitated resulted in students learning to respect each other's differences while helping others reach individual artistic goals. Students were involved in participatory learning, validation of experience, social understanding, and critical thinking; accomplished through the [circle method](#) described by Judy Chicago (2014) in her book, [Institutional Time](#), and in [Encounter 10 from The Dinner Party Curriculum](#), and a compare/contrast of Judy Chicago's art, [The Dinner Party](#), to [Holocaust Heroes: Fierce Females: Sculptures and Tapestries by Linda Stein](#).

The six students in the senior art course differed in their artistic abilities. Therefore, I began the first part of the year teaching techniques and skills, but students became apathetic toward making art. I wanted to motivate the students to make art that is meaningful to them. I have used Chicago's [circle method](#) in facilitating discussions and thought this might be a good approach for these students. I reviewed my notes that I took from reading [Institutional Time](#) (Chicago, 2014) and based the entire unit described on the following pages on Chicago's [circle method](#). The overarching goal was to help students develop a visual voice and to actively listen to others.

The first project, a self-portrait based on the poem "[Where I'm From](#)" by George Ella Lyon, started with students writing their own "Where I'm From" poem, which they shared one after another in sitting together in a circle. They create metaphoric sketches based on their poem, as a way to plan their artwork. The next class started with a circle; each student presented their ideas and received suggestions from the rest of the group. Everyone was spoke and listened to each other. Students offered technical suggestions to each other and offered and received feedback on how to better express their ideas. The process of suggestions and feedback to work in process continued in formative critiques around the circle throughout all stages of making art.

The second project was based on a social issue. Some students had been introduced to [The Dinner Party](#) through [different encounters](#) in previous courses with me. I began by asking the students what they remembered about *The Dinner Party*? Students noted the symbolism, triangle shape of the whole work and within the work, the many tiles on the floor with names as part of the art, the plates on mats, and that it was about women and was created in the 70s. Students watched the [PowerPoint from Encounter 10](#) individually on iPads and filled out in-depth questions on a worksheet. They shared their responses in our circle.

Students also studied Judy Chicago's poem line by line, as I guided based on [The Dinner Party Curriculum Project encounter 10](#), and compared it to the poem used on the banners hung at the entrance to the exhibition. They noticed that the poem was now written with a women's voice and that it's a shortened version that conveys why *The Dinner Party* was created.

I printed out the 10 tapestries of Linda Stein's series, [Holocaust Heroes: Fierce Females](#). Each student picked one, researched the person it was about, and presented their findings to the group. After the presentations, students deduced that the work honors women from the holocaust. Students watched the [video from Stein's website](#) and compared/contrasted Stein's and Chicago's work. Students recognized the research involved in visually communicating social issues. Each student then identified a social issue to create a visual message through research, presenting their work using the circle method for group critiques. Through this method students learned how to take personal experiences/interests and transform them into tangible content-based visual expression.

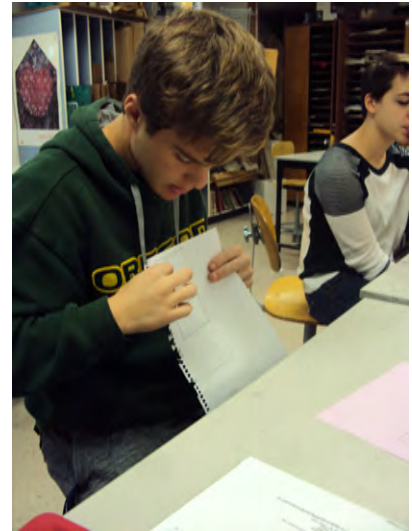
The final project was a collaboration with 100 fourth-graders who created "protecting" robot paintings. Utilizing the circle method to discuss selections and artistic plans, each of the 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students selected one painting by a 4<sup>th</sup>-grade student to create a 3-D representation. The collaborative project and social issue art culminating in an art show that spoke to the other students through visual voice.

## Where I am From Plan Presentations in our Circle/ Everyone Gets a Voice

"Students need to learn to present themselves properly. Speaking clearly and loudly enough to be heard and claiming space both physical and mental" (Judy Chicago, 2014, Institutional Time). This really motivated the students.



Taylor's Fern-self



AJ's Tree-self

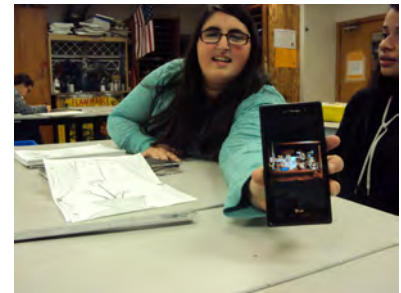


Erin's Forget Me Not-Self

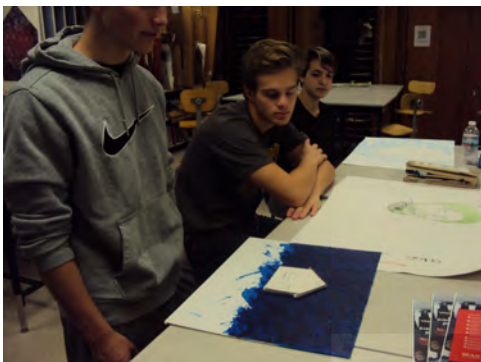
## Where I am From In-Progress Critique/ Teacher as facilitator rather than authority figure.

In our circle, each of the students presented their work as well as a question to the group.

Liz showed a photograph of a shelf of her things at home and explained each object on her shelf and expressed her frustration with all the elements. She asked should she make all the objects? Nate asked: Is this a shelf on the wall? Yes. Taylor suggested bringing in some of the objects to look at and recreate. She also suggested a bottom, asking: Do you want everything floating? Liz decided to not recreate everything but to create relief of a shelf to put the objects of most importance to represent her.



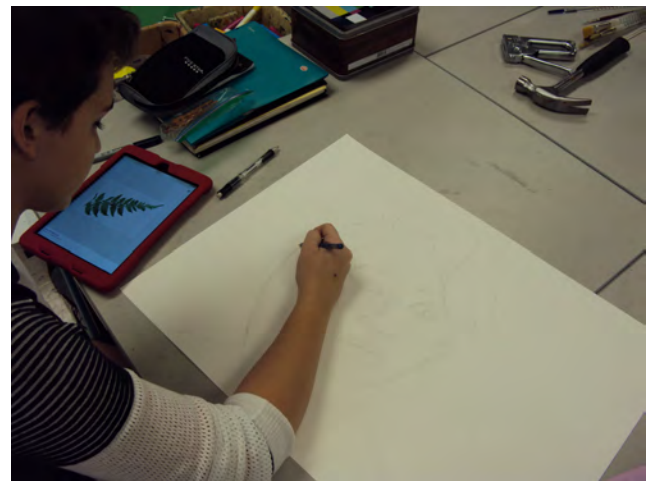
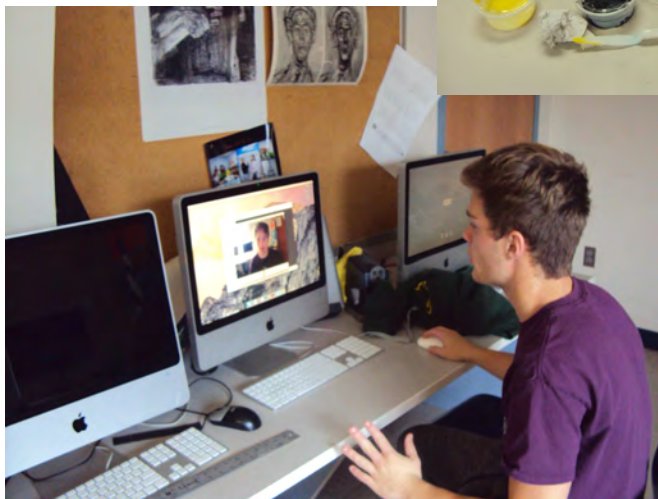
Chrissy presented her Venus flytrap self-portrait. She asked what should she do about the background? Liz said to add tissue paper to areas. AJ was very impressed and asked her to explain how she made it. She explained. Liz then suggested to tint the background- "I look right at the white and not at the subject" Chrissy decided to add strips to keep the viewers' eyes on the fly trap which sticks out from the canvas.



Nate wants warmth from the house and cold on the outside. How should he do that? Liz liked the background but where is the warmth? She suggests it to be flowing out the window. Others suggested a chimney with smoke would suggest warmth from within.



Students working in different mediums and doing research for their self-portraits.



Students presenting in our circle around a table. Judy Chicago stresses no distractions with a table that also creates a barrier between students. However, it would be hard to remove the tables in my art room. I also feel I needed to ease my students into the circle method. Having their artwork laid out in front of them helped them to discuss about themselves through their art. However, later, I facilitated a critique of the social issue project without a table in the way.

## Going More In-depth with “The Dinner Party” by Judy Chicago (Responses from Students)



Why is it important to learn about the contributions of all human beings?

Because all of us matter and have made contributions that deserve to be recognized regardless of our race/gender/religion/ etc.

Everyone has an impact on the world and we should know what impact they made.

It can help show how big or small the contributions are to everyone.

So that everyone can learn, grow, and get better.

Everyone has their own story that is unique to them.

There is that saying that history repeats itself—the good things inspire, and the bad things can be stopped. It's particularly important to learn about all contributions because women are often overshadowed by men.

How might the Dinner Party help heal or repair the world?

It will bring attention to women's achievements and can inspire other girls and women to make more contributions.

Ideas change the world.

To show that you should not think women are lesser than men because they can accomplish anything they set their minds to.

It might show how those people honored help shape the world in their own way and to teach those who don't know.

Shows that women have made an impact on the world that we should know about.

By filling in gaps left in history by women's achievements and informing the general public on them so we can all benefit from their achievements.

List three things needed to accomplish this monumental artwork?

Research, teamwork, thought, patience, knowledge, education, time, effort, power, collaborations, exhibitors

List the similarities and differences between *The Dinner Party* and *Holocaust Heroes: Fierce Females* tapestries.

Both represented women that stood up for what they believed in.

Research, Women, Recognition

Teamwork, multiple medias but tapestries were about Jewish/supporters women.

Both about women who made an impact, highly researched

Representational pieces, achievements, extensive research, teamwork, social issues. Differences: pop culture references, holocaust, equality vs. bravery.

All of these answers created in depth conversations. Students had already recognized the research, time, and meaning needed for *The Dinner Party*, by showing another artwork, it really hit home. They too wanted to express meaning visually and do the necessary research.



## Poem as Metaphor to Create Meaningful Student Art/Later Relating to Judy Chicago's Poems



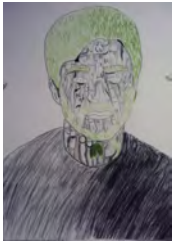
### Elizabeth Valvo

I am from pasta, from Kraft and macaroni and cheese. I am from the bedroom door. I am from the sunflower the sunflower seed. I am from the Christmas pajamas and baking cookies, from mom and dad and Valvo. I am from the criminal minds and the hallmark Christmas movies. From I look like Snow White and the tooth fairy is real. I am from catholic. First communion. I'm from brooks and Italy, chocolate Italian cookies and spaghetti. From the swimming with dolphins the

family vacations, and the fun roller coasters we ride together. I am the pictures underneath the big desk in the office and in a big shelf my aunt made for me in my room.

### Christina Muniz

I am from cats from kit-Kats and cats I am from the green on my house shudders I am from the fly trap the stem I am from midnight baking and birthday parties from Lisa Matt and Dave I am from the jokes and laughter from no such thing as monsters and Santa is real I am from brooks hospital, chicken Alfredo and chocolate chip cookies from the time I swallowed my tooth the tears because I'd get no money and the laughter from my brother I am from the scrapbook of pictures and my baby books with memories I am from those moments



### AJ Amatuzzo

I am from spaghetti, from Gatorade and soda. I am from the big tree I am from the daisy, the rose I am from thanksgiving and getting angry. From Amatuzzo and Thompson. I am from the angry and mean. From short and but and round and tall. I am from Presbyterian and down the road. I'm from Erie and Jamestown. From the funny family time and the route 5. I am from never believing everyone all the time.

### Erin Bennett

I am from graphite, from Hershey's and stardust. I am from the bricks and backyard. I am from the forget-me-nots, the soft clovers around them. I am from camping and chaos, from Susan and Bennett and Woodworth. I am from the undone dishwasher and unfolded clothes. From "how many times do I have to ask" and "broccoli or beans?" I am from Presbyterians, and their all-woman session. I'm from Buffalo and Franco's and pie. From Grandpa's endless knowledge of trains, the 3 AM board games, and the hand-me-down Apple products. I am from the wall of fame, the refrigerator door, the closet full of boxes (one with my name on it)--the keepers of all my time and space.



### Nate Ruthland

I am from snow from winter boots and salt. I am from the snow bank across the street. I am from the lake the frost. I am from Christmas and those spending time with family. From mom and non-existent pop and siblings. I am from the warmth and love. From respect everyone and keep an open mind. I am from forced faith and blind hope. I'm from a long line of last names I can't spell. From the fake Santa the eaten cookies and the reindeer tracks made in the freezing cold. I am from a family that cares and a family that always wants the best for me.

### Taylor Britz

I am from rain, from pine sol and pine trees. I am from the little valley. I am from ferns, the knotweed pollen. I am from biweekly dinners and being 3 years apart, from Deena and Denmark and Darlymple. I am from summers on Bear Lake. From "Try again," and "That's beautiful." I am from Harvest Chapel but only for holidays. I am from Western New York, pasta and pirogues. From all the people my grandfather has met, the celebrities and politicians. I am from the hope chest in the corner of the room and the totes behind my walls, overflowing with the past, both mine and others.



Student hand-out with responses. Each student is represented with a different color.

Mellowed as I am by maturity, I don't believe we'll ever attain Eden. However, I believe that we could do a far better job of living in harmony with each other and the earth. The principles of cooperation that are embodied in both feminism and feminist art education are, could be, a great contribution to our world.

Judy Chicago Talking about the "Merger Poem" that we studied earlier. Taken from "Made in California: Feminist Art Education" Judy Chicago, March 3, 2001

When did you first realize the injustice of your social issue? **When I watched TV shows and they had abused animals/** While learning about political parties in history class/ **It is all over the news and a highly debatable topic/global warming/** I first heard my riddle in 10<sup>th</sup> grade/ **Kids in our area taking their lives because of social media/** Early last year when I really started to get into movies  
What made you realize this injustice? **By having animals, I can't picture hurting them/** Watching/listening how our government can't really make things work/happen/ **It is talked about a lot/** When I couldn't figure the riddle out, I realized this problem really effects everyone. / **When I was a freshman I was bullied on Facebook/** I always was aware of it from reading interviews and talk online but I learned a lot about women in the film industry from my own research done out of curiosity

How can you use your talent to bring notice to this injustice? **Representing the problem in a way people understand/** By creating a compelling piece of art/ **I feel like the melting will literally be the social issue/** By spreading the riddle, and the realization that we, as a country, have a lot of international sexism to overcome. / **Showing the harsh reality of it/** I can create a piece representing my feelings on the issue or write out my thought about it

What needs to be said? **That animals should not be abused/** Having the separation of political parties makes government work slower and creates stalemates/ **People need to understand everyone is contributing to it/** Women=men! And women are just as capable! / **Stop Cyber bullying** Women need to be represented more fairly in the entire industry characters/writers. Producers/etc.

How are you going to say it visually? **Having animals faces cut out of abused animal articles** I'm going to have Washington's farewell address as the background and all the presidents will be separated into political parties with lots of dark colors around it. / **With the factories at the bottom** With an easy-to-follow comic and a flip covering the answer. / **Show the affects of cyber bullying** I'm picking 20 female characters to illustrate through symbols on strips of film. The 20 I pick are ones I feel offer good representation in their stories.

Envision the future without this issue. Tell me about this. **I don't think this issue will ever be resolved because some people are just cruel/** More things in government would get resolved quicker and more smoothly/ **Green/reusable energy/** Women and men are treated, valued, and paid equally. There are no more feminine or masculine jobs, and no wage gaps/ **a safer Internet. You wouldn't need to be afraid of going on line/** Girls would be inspired more through proper representation could alter a lot of other social issues because of the influence movies have on society

What do you need from our group? Support? Technical? Understanding? We are all here to help each other get our messages out and heard.

**Some good opinions on how I should do things**

It would help by hearing what I could improve in my artwork

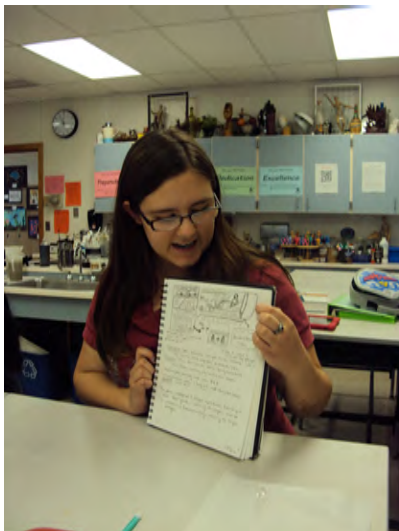
**Some help with encaustics**

A critique at some point would be nice. I want to make sure it flows.

**Help on how to do technical stuff/ where to put certain things**

Critique, maybe some technical ideas, opinions always help





## Social Issue Planning Presentation in our Circle

**Erin** started her presentation with a riddle: a son and father are in a car crash and the father dies. The son is rushed to the hospital, but the doctor says I cannot work on him, he is my son. How can that be? Her social issue is going to be about gender role stereotypes. After everyone was guessing, she said she is not sure she is going with the doctor is mom or if it is a homosexual couple, but leaning towards mom and gender roles. She plans on making it a comic strip because it would be a good way to illustrate the riddle she is using to express her issue. Question: what media? She thinks color pencil, marker, and a more masculine font (hers is to curvy)

**Chrissy's** social issue is animal cruelty. She is going to find articles of animal abuse and put soft and cuddly animal pictures over them. Question: how does this say abuse? She doesn't want to look at abuse pictures or work with them. Liz suggests to just doing little pictures that form a big cute one like Chuck Close. She doesn't want to look at them. Another student suggests cutting the articles in the shape of animals, silhouetting. Another suggests paper mache an animal out of the articles.

**Liz's** issue is with the political parties revealing creating roadblocks. Presidents rated from worst (top) to best (bottom) Erin asked how are you rating them? Liz said from the Internet. Erin asked how about dividing them by political parties. Nate said to make it a triangle. Liz also mentioned putting Washington's Farewell address as the background. In the end she decided not to rate them. She needs to rethink things to narrow her message down.



**Taylor's** social issue is women's representation in film. She wants to do something with an old projector, but she has no computer skills or old projector. I suggested Photoshop printed on transparencies but she feels she would rather do something she knows. I have old film. She is going to use the film and cut and paint on it.



**AJ's** issue is bullying on social media. Building as metaphor is going to be a cell phone, but still working out ideas. He wants to use modern media- spray paint. The person jumping to death creates a line of hurtful words. There is another person pushing the person off.

**Nate's** issue is global warming. He wants melting crayons to form a drippy earth over a city that is creating a lot of smog that is melting the earth. Others suggest encaustics. He never worked in that so we will all work together to teach him.



Everyone Researching, Trying New Techniques and Using Each Other's Knowledge To Visually Communicate Their Message About A Social Issue



Erin using the Ipad for research



Nate learning encaustics.



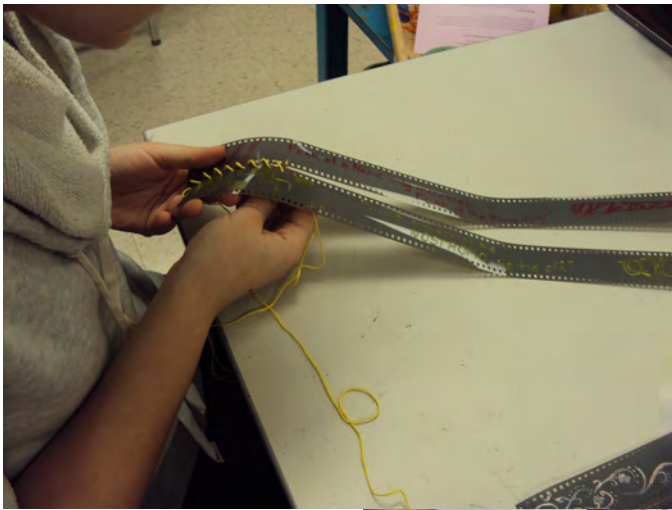
Liz learning how to make transfers after tea dyeing the speech.



Taylor painting symbols and quotes from research on women in movies on film.



Chrissy experimenting with tissue paper to help get her message across.

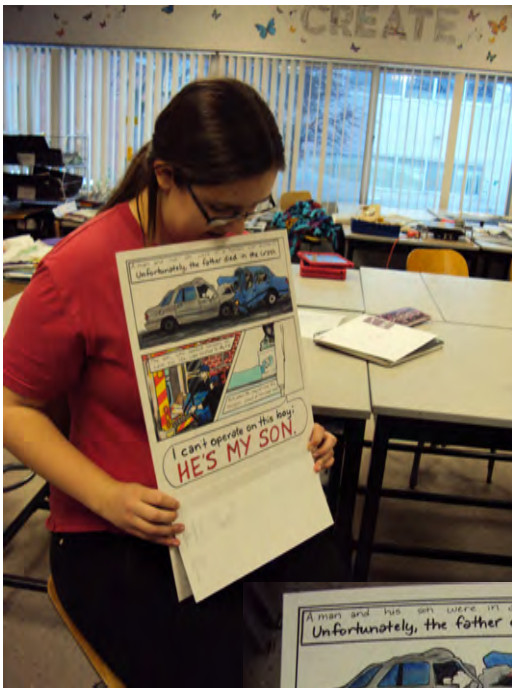


Taylor's women's representation in film. 13 strips used for the same reason Judy Chicago used 13 on a side of the Dinner Party. Each strip has symbols for the woman and a quote from their movie character. No names. She wants the viewer to have to figure it out, but an artist statement will explain it. She will be sewing them all together with the different colors used on the film to represent the woman and hanging them that way also.





Presenting in our open circle. (One student is absent). In-progress critique. The students adjusted well to the open circle. Everyone was very respectful.



Erin's social issue is about gender role stereotypes. She is creating an interactive comic strip style artwork. Erin shared with us, in critique, that she was working on this during another of my classes and a male student saw it and couldn't figure out the riddle at all. He felt stupid when he found out the answer.





Chrissy felt hers was too boring before the symbols (hands) were put in place. Taylor had asked what was highlighted? Words of abuse. She put 8 paw prints on to represent the 8-12 million animals saved each year by rescues. She used yellow to match the high lighter.



Liz is still in progress, Political Divide. She has tea stained her paper (Boston Tea Party and to "age" it) The presidents (all will be on the finished piece) will be see through so you can still read Washington's address underneath. The divide will be more prominent when she uses black and red paint on it.



Nate wanted the world to be flat and dripping. He originally wanted it in front of the smog, but realized it needed to interact with it to visually express his message. Wax was the perfect medium for his visual voice. Nate has really developed/grown the most in this project. He usually avoids all his work. He wanted to work every class. He loved expressing his visual voice and now understands how to do it.



The final project in this unit will be for each of the students to create a 3-D artwork based on a 4<sup>th</sup> graders painting. I had presented the project and they all had a say in the decision. All of them can't wait to collaborate with a fourth graders vision.