

The Dinner Party Curriculum Project

Classroom Connections: A Silent Stitch



Dolores Eaton

Grade Levels: High School

Art educator Dolores Eaton created a unit of study for high-school students entitled *Silence and Voice*. In Lesson One students first interview a family member who has engaged in handwork of some kind to learn about the role this form of art-making has played in their lives. After investigating one wing of *The Dinner Party* and the women honored there, students explore handwork techniques and processes, and complete a collaborative artwork incorporating handwork processes and techniques.

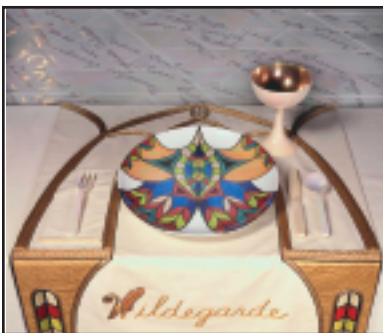
Enduring Ideas:

1. Throughout history women have been silenced by the constructs of patriarchy.
2. Through art women have found a voice.

Lesson One: A Silent Stitch

Class: AP Studio Art

Time Allotment: 3 weeks



Overview:

Lesson Summary:

Students will uncover family history and give voice to that history, and learn of the women who played a role in establishing church structure, as well as the handwork done by women in the Roman Catholic Church. Through a collaborative project students will pay tribute to women who have never been thanked for their skills, artistry and silent contributions to society.

Artworks, Artists, and Artifacts:

▶ **Artwork:**

1. *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago with a focus on the second wing, "Christianity through the Reformation."

▶ **Artist:**

1. Judy Chicago

▶ **Artifacts:**

1. Personal collection of family handwork in addition to examples brought in by the students.
2. Maher, F.A. and Tetreault, M.K. (2001) *The Feminist Classroom: Dynamics of Gender, Race and Privilege*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.



Resources:

1. *Right out of History: the Making of Judy Chicago's "The Dinner Party"* by Johanna Demetraka
2. *The Dinner Party: From Creation to Preservation* by Judy Chicago, Merrell Publishers Limited, 2007
3. Kellman, J. (1996). *Women's handwork, Stories of similarity and diversity. Art Education, 49(2), 33-39.*
4. Brooklyn Museum of Art *The Dinner Party* website:

http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/home.php

Key Concepts Addressed in Lesson One:

1. Judy Chicago created *The Dinner Party* in large part "to break the cycle of repetition that has consistently erased the achievements of women." (Judy Chicago, 19).
2. There is a wealth of information now available about the history of women, but still today what is deemed as "real knowledge" is predominantly that of white, upper-class males. (Maher & Tetreault, 12).
3. "We can see how society has given women's work (art or otherwise) a secondary status because it has been seen as instinctual, rather than intellectual; private, rather than intellectual; and domestic, rather than professional." (Rosenberg and Thurber, 49).
4. An "overweening male perspective" has dominated the writing of history. (Judy Chicago, 23).
5. Throughout history women have gathered to collaboratively create handwork. These groups, sometimes referred to as "affinity groups," have been a safe haven and a creative outlet for women.
6. A goal of collaborative art-making is to work together in the service of a larger mission. (Judy Chicago, 27).
7. Judy Chicago is one female artist who found a voice in art.
8. Women's handwork serves as an excellent example of domestically rooted art that reflects adult expertise, family, and community life. (Kellman, 34).
9. Women's handwork demonstrates esthetic considerations, proficiency, and careful workmanship as it marks the days, celebrations, and seasons of our lives. (Kellman, 34).
10. It is important when working collaboratively that each member of the group be heard.

Essential Questions Addressed in Lesson One:

1. What functions in society has handwork fulfilled?
2. How has history been recorded?
3. Why is women's history important?
4. Why practice collaborative art making?

PA Standards:

- ▶ 9.1.12.F. Analyze works of art influenced by experiences or historical and cultural events through production, performance or exhibition.
- ▶ 9.1.12.K. Analyze and evaluate the use of traditional and contemporary technologies in furthering knowledge and understanding in the humanities.
- ▶ 9.2.12.A. Explain the historical, cultural, and social context of an individual work in the arts.
- ▶ 9.2.12.K. Identify, explain and analyze traditions as they relate to works in the arts.

Interdisciplinary Connections:

▶ Religious Studies/Church History:

1. These classes can provide base knowledge for comparison to the historical knowledge contained in *The Dinner Party*.



► History/Civics:

1. Exploration of oral history and documentation of local history through research of handwork created by each student's family members.
2. "Foster a desire to understand and investigate the stories and narratives found in art objects, and cultivate interest in, and respect for the lives of other cultures and time periods." (Kellman, 1996, p. 34)

Lesson Objectives:

► Students will:

1. Understand what it means to work in a collaborative mode.
2. Create a visual expression that gives voice to women who have been silenced in the history of the Church.
3. Begin to understand the historical context in which Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* was created.
4. Understand that many of the contributions of women to society have been silenced through the constructs of patriarchy.
5. Understand that women's handwork was a creative outlet for women. It allowed for creative contribution to the family and community; it sometimes provided income: through objects of women's handwork a good deal of women's history can be pieced together.
6. Develop awareness of the presence of art in everyday life.
7. Develop awareness of the many stories and narratives found in art objects.

Assessment:

► Formative assessment:

1. Completion of handwork investigation.
2. Listening to the contributions of each voice.
3. Experimentation and investigation of stitching techniques.
4. Completion of student written reflections on *Right out of History: the Making of Judy Chicago's "The Dinner Party"*.
5. Did students play an active role in designing and creating the collaborative product?

► Summative assessment:

1. Students will complete a written reflection on the success of the collaborative visual expression and how they believe the collaborative process contributed to or diminished the final product.
2. Viewers of the work will be asked to give their interpretations of the visual imagery to help students in determining whether or not the group accomplished its goals.

Sequence of Action:

Instructional Strategies/Activities:

1. Find and investigate a piece of handwork done by a family member. See *Giving Silence a Voice* worksheet. (appendix 15A.worsheet)
2. Students will take part in a circle during which their findings will be unpacked and recorded. It is imperative that every voice is heard and respected as the stories of handwork are revealed.
3. Students will be surveyed to determine the technical skills that can be contributed by the group.
4. If possible, view *Right out of History: the Making of Judy Chicago's "The Dinner Party"* by Johanna Demetrakas. Follow with a discussion and a written reflection by each student.
5. Working in teams students will unpack the stories of the women at the place settings of the second wing of *The Dinner Party*, utilizing *The Dinner Party: From Creation to Preservation* by Judy Chicago.
6. As homework, students will individually investigate the runners found in the "Christianity to the Reformation" wing of *The Dinner Party*, utilizing the website for the Brooklyn Museum of Art.
7. Utilizing the examples of handwork collected by the students and teacher, the second wing of *The Dinner Party*, and by *Needle Lace* Jill Nordfors Clark (see Instructional Resources below), students will investigate, learn, and try their hand at stitching techniques and possibilities.
8. Students will determine art-making goals and how to navigate the constraints of *time, space, and resources*.
9. As a group and guided by the teacher, students will identify imagery and design elements that will best convey their art making goals.
10. Students will construct visual expression in a collaborative mode.
11. Final reflection by the students.

Preparation:

► Teacher Research and Preparation:

1. Rent or purchase *Right out of History: the Making of Judy Chicago's "The Dinner Party"* by Johanna Demetrakas via Through the Flower.
2. Gather examples of handwork and stories that give voice to the history of each piece.
3. Read and learn about the women represented in the second wing of *The Dinner Party*.
4. Explore the information about *The Dinner Party* found at The Brooklyn Museum's web site.

► Instructional Resources:

1. *Needle Lace: Techniques & Inspiration* by Jill Nordfors Clark, Hand Books Press, Madison, Wisconsin. 1999.
2. Brooklyn Museum of Art *The Dinner Party* website:

http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/home.php

► Student Supplies:

1. Fabric background, scraps for student experiments and appropriately sized piece for group project.
2. Threads in a variety of colors, weights, textures
3. Needles: Tapestry blunt-ended needles, darning needles, and sharp pointed needles
4. Sewing machine
5. Tracing paper
6. Sketchbook

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Giving Silence a Voice

By Dolores Eaton

Task: Find a piece of **handwork** created by a family member. This can be from a woman of any generation. Handwork can be anything created of thread and/or fabric. Examples of this are lace work (such as doilies and table clothes), crocheting or knitting (such as baby bonnets and blankets), quilting, embroidery, or needlepoint. Embroidery and needlepoint can stand on its own or be embellishments on pillows, aprons, handkerchiefs, etc. *This is an opportunity for you to do some investigation into your family/cultural history, specifically the history of a female.*

Goal: To give voice to the silent work of a woman in your family. Family can be defined very broadly; it is perfectly acceptable if you consider the woman a part of your extended family or community. Inquire about the origins of the piece. The information does not need to come from the maker, as in many cases handwork is held onto partly to remember a person who has passed. You may need to talk to more than one member of your family/community to get the whole story.

Critical Questions To Help You Along:

1. What inspired this to be made?
2. Who was it for?
3. Why was the pattern, color, or imagery chosen?
4. Was the piece created in the company of others or was this an act in solitude?
5. How did the maker feel while creating the piece?
6. Where and from whom did they learn the process of the handwork you are discussing?
7. Was it a collaborative project? If so, who were the other women who helped construct the work? (Daughter, sister, friend?)

Take notes and be prepared to informally present your findings.

Last, please thank the woman for sharing her history. Tell her you will think of her every time you see the handwork. Tell her you appreciate the artistry of the piece and are amazed at the craftsmanship by her or her mother, grandmother, aunt, etc. If you feel you can't say these things out loud, write her a card!