



**2011 Minx M. Auerbach Award Recipient: Deborah Filbin
Bloom High School, Chicago Heights, IL.
Lesson: Inspiring Women (for High School)**

Overview:

In her Art Fundamentals class, Deborah Filbin adapted six Encounters from *The Dinner Party Curriculum*, creating a unit plan to engage her students in a deep exploration of *The Dinner Party*, and its focus on the women written out of history. Deborah incorporated lessons on art criticism, the history of the second wave Women's Movement in the 1970s, and a look at a variety of feminist art. She included an activity in which students mapped out the size of the installation *The Dinner Party* in the school gymnasium so they could comprehend the scale of the work. Finally, students created works honoring women who positively impacted their lives.

Deborah Filbin adapted Encounters [2](#), [3](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#), and [10](#).

All the encounters are linked here: http://judychicago.arted.psu.edu/?page_id=142

The titles of her lessons provide an overview of Deborah's unit plan:

Lesson One: Understanding Art Criticism

Lesson Two: Understanding Historical Context

Lesson Three: Analyzing Wing One; A Better Understanding of Feminist Art

Lesson Four: Understanding and Experiencing Size and Scale

Lesson Five: Seating Someone You Know at the Table

Introduction

Understanding Art Criticism

Objectives:

- Students will be introduced to Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* through looking at images and viewing a film about the piece.
- Students will use a four-step process of art criticism to critique *The Dinner Party*.

Deborah Filbin introduced her class to *The Dinner Party* using Encounters [8](#) and [10](#). #10 features the use of a DVD, *The Dinner Party: A Tour of the Exhibition*. Note: This video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/user/TheJudyChicago?feature=watch>

Show students the PowerPoint: *The Dinner Party; Exercise in Art Criticism*. As a group, introduce students to an overview of the work. Using copied images of the artwork, and leaving the PowerPoint available for students' reference, have students work in small groups, with one student as recorder. Students use the four-step criticism process to critique the work:

- Look closely at the work and describe it in detail.
- Analyze the artwork by noting the specific use of the elements of design.
- Interpret the work by studying the artist's intention, message, or meaning. This may include an exploration of history: making connections between historical periods and social movements that are reflected in artworks.
- Based on the above steps, make an informed judgment of the work. Defend the judgment with information from the description, analysis, and interpretation.

As a group, have students compare notes. Do they all agree on the analysis, interpretation, and judgment of the work? What are some of the different interpretations and judgments of the work?

Understanding Historical Context

Objectives:

- Students will consider *The Dinner Party* in the context of the time of its creation.
- Students will engage in a class quiz about the history of The United States' Women's Rights Movement.

Deborah Filbin states that this lesson helped students see “the social obstacles that had to be overcome for the completion of the artwork to even be realized. It also helped the students understand the inspiration that guided the Feminist Art Movement.” She used Encounters 3 and 6 to inform this lesson. Prior to class, the teacher should view the *Pop Quiz for The Dinner Party* PowerPoint and gain some familiarity with the history described.

Ask students what they know about the Women's Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Show students the PowerPoint *Pop Quiz for The Dinner Party* and take the quiz as a whole-class discussion activity. Discuss: what did students think they knew, what do they now know, and what do they want to learn? Using sticky notes, let students post questions on a question board, and refer to the board throughout the unit as questions are revisited or answered.

Analyzing Wing One: A Better Understanding of Feminist Art

Objectives:

- Students will look closely at wing one of *The Dinner Party*
- Students will learn about the goddesses featured in wing one

Deborah Filbin states that she “wanted to expose the students to the dynamics of Feminist Art and some of the ideas that created controversy. Wing One begins by challenging the modern religious notion of *god* by introducing the concept of the *goddess*.” She adapted Encounter 6 for this lesson. The teacher should view the PowerPoint: *Starting to Understand The Dinner Party* before class, and be familiar with the slide content. Note: the book *The Dinner Party: From Creation to Preservation* (2006) by Judy Chicago is an excellent resource, for this lesson and for women's history education in general. The book features biographies of the 1,038 women featured in the place settings and inscribed on The Heritage Floor. It is illustrated with clear photographs of the plates and place

settings, including detailed images of the needlework on the table runners. Deborah Filbin also used the book *When God was a Woman* by Merlin Stone as a discussion generator with her class.

Show students the PowerPoint: *Starting to Understand The Dinner Party*. In a whole class discussion, ask students which goddess figures they already knew about, and which were new to them. Ask students to write any questions on sticky notes and post them on the question board. Note: There are 80 goddess figures featured in *The Dinner Party*, searchable from the Brooklyn Museum website. Interested students can be encouraged to explore here, and the wealth of information lends itself to additional lesson ideas:

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

Understanding and Experiencing Size and Scale

Objectives:

- Students will physically map out the size and shape of *The Dinner Party*
- Students will consider the logistics of creating, moving, and storing an artwork of the size of *The Dinner Party*.

Deborah Filbin states, “Often when artwork is looked at in reproductions, books, or even on the screen, it is hard to imagine the actual size.” She decided it was important for her students to experience the actual scale of the work. She adapted Encounter [7](#) for this lesson.

Have students do research to find out the size of *The Dinner Party* (It is an equilateral triangle that is 48 feet on each side.) Find and reserve a large enough space in the gym, cafeteria, or outside on a playground or field. Borrow tape measures from the physical education department or from the maintenance department if possible, of the extended length style used for marking fields. Have students measure and mark out the triangle with removable blue tape or yarn. Let students sit spaced around the triangle, and conduct a group discussion in that formation. It is helpful if students have a copied image of *The Dinner Party* to use for reference. Some questions that occurred to Deborah Filbin’s students about *The Dinner Party* are:

- How was it constructed?
- How much time and how many people did it take to make, and to set up?
- How was it packed and moved?
- How much did it cost to make?
- Are you allowed to touch it?
- Why was it sometimes showed in gymnasiums? Do other artists show their work in gymnasiums?
- How did Judy Chicago think of the idea?
- How did Judy Chicago stay motivated to work on it for so long?

Seating Someone You Know at the Table

Objectives:

- Students will consider the criteria that Judy Chicago used to select the women represented in *The Dinner Party*.
- Students will research the biographies of the women depicted in *The Dinner Party*.
- Students will create an artwork that depicts a woman they know who has positively affected their life.

Deborah Filbin asked students to find a woman represented in *The Dinner Party* with a biography that they could connect to. Following that, she states, “I wanted to make this [the practice of considering the contributions of women] more personal for the students.” She asked students to choose a woman they personally knew that had positively impacted their life, to be depicted for a studio art assignment. She adapted Encounter 2 for this extended lesson. The PowerPoint associated with this lesson includes Deborah Filbin’s comments about her personal connections to women depicted in the place settings in *The Dinner Party*. You may want to create your own PowerPoint after studying the women included in the artwork.

View and discuss with students the PowerPoint: *A Woman That Has Inspired You*. Have students review and consider the criteria that Judy Chicago used to select the women represented in *The Dinner Party*. In a group discussion, talk about who was included, and who students feel should have been included. Names can be searched through *The Heritage Panels* and other links on The Brooklyn Museum website, here:

https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/heritage_panels/panel.php?n=1

Ask students, who would they invite to be part of *The Dinner Party*?

Give students the following assignment for “Brainstorming for An Invitation to *The Dinner Party*.” Students will create an image of the significant woman they choose, using these guidelines:

- Write a narrative about the significant woman you chose, and why: Tell her story.
- Draw a pre-sketch of your idea for your image. Create an image that represents the woman, or tells her story.
- The image may be abstract, realistic, or symbolic.
- The final project should use some mix of media; more than one art material.
- The artwork can be 2-D or 3-D.
- Create a materials list of all the art materials you will need in order to complete your artwork.

Proceed with studio work on students’ projects. During studio work, periodically examine *The Dinner Party* as a class. Note the use of symbolism in imagery, color, and texture, and note the use of the needlework popular during the women’s lives to situate each woman in her historical period. Can students make use of these ideas? When the projects are completed, have students create an artist’s statement to accompany the display of the artworks.

Assessment:

Considering the objectives of the lessons, it should be evident that students have:

- Used the four-step criticism process to examine and critique *The Dinner Party*.
- Placed *The Dinner Party* in the context of the time of its creation.
- Learned about the history of early goddess figures in Wing One of *The Dinner Party*.
- Experienced the size and scale of *The Dinner Party* by measuring an equivalent space in school.
- Created an artwork that demonstrates the recognition of a particular woman's contributions to the student's life.