



Art, Popular Culture and Racial Iconography

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Participants (preservice and early career art educators) will investigate the ways in which images have mediated their understandings of race and racial identity. This professional development opportunity answers the question, “Why is race, culture and ethnicity relevant in art education?” The activity counters the narrative that skill and techniques should be the only focus in art classrooms.

NAME Learn Learner Learning Outcome(s)

- Develop positive social identities
- Develop social justice consciousness

Level

Introductory

Goals

- Recognize and reflect upon how the construction of one’s own racial/social/political/cultural identity has been informed by visual imagery.
- Develop racial literacy and beginning strategies for cultivating racial literacy to students.
- Develop a critical language through which to speak about the ways race is visually mediated.
- Apply critical frameworks for “looking” not only in the art and art education classroom, but daily in the world and society.

Assessment or deliverables

To assess at the introductory level, take note of the following during the process:

- How are participants able to reflect upon how the construction of one’s own racial/social/political/cultural identity informs individual perspectives and philosophies of art education; and
- Have participants be able to thoughtfully investigate current theories and pedagogies of art, art education and visual culture education?

Materials

- **Literary and Media Resources:**

- Rhode Island School of Design, "Room of Silence," *Vimeo*. <https://vimeo.com/161259012>
- Barco, M. D. (2014). "How Kodak's Shirley Card Set Photography's Skin-Tone Standard." *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2014/11/13/363517842/for-decades-kodak-s-shirley-cards-set-photography-s-skin-tone-standard>
- Acuff, J. B., & Kraehe, A. (2020). Visuality of race in popular culture: Teaching racial histories and iconography in media. *Dialogue: The International Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, 7(3).
- Handout with discussion prompts and guiding questions

Process

- **Watch.** Screen the video "Room of Silence" and unpack the content in small groups. Utilize the brainstorming prompts in section one of the attached handout.
- **Listen.** Tune in to the 6-minute segment from *NPR* titled, "How Kodak's Shirley Card Set Photography's Skin-Tone Standard." The information segment, led by Mandalit Del Barco, also has companion article/transcript that may also be read in addition to listening.
- **Have a discussion.** Share initial reflections regarding the role art educators have in helping society "read" the visual environment and what that means for social justice movements (as they often center art).
- **Read.** Engage with the article, "Visuality of race in popular culture: Teaching racial histories and iconography in media." As a large group, discuss the key topics in the article. Utilize the guiding questions in section two of the attached handout. This discussion should garner shared understandings to move on to more complex and nuanced discussions around the implications of popular culture.
- **Go deeper.** Now, in small groups (3-4), discuss the questions in section three of the attached handout. These questions require higher order thinking and critical considerations about sociocultural relationships and context.
- **Explore.** Return to the concept of "Countervisual Strategies" from the article. Research some artists whose work falls into this category. The article mentions artists Betye Saar and Carrie Mae Weems. Can you name other artists and describe how their work creates counternarratives for the historically racist imagery?

Wrap Up:

- To wrap, participants should engage in a 10-minute quick write in which they reflect on how the information introduced 1) connected with some of their existing knowledge(s), 2)

extended their thinking in different ways, and 3) challenged their thinking/made them wonder. Finish this quick write with a list of short-term goals for continuing the learning in this area.