

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

ART AS SOCIAL JUSTICE

Anyone who spends much time with Briggs' images from "In the Wake of Juárez" may find it hard to imagine using these in a high school classroom setting. Yet, projects like this exhibition must be included in our curriculum. As educators we toss around terminology like cultural competency, culturally relevant teaching, multiculturalism and social justice education, but too often we don't really think about what these things mean or how they should impact our classrooms and our teaching. We ask our students to take risks, to trust us, to make themselves vulnerable in sharing their own personal histories through their writing or art, but how often do we do these things ourselves? Briggs' exhibit gives this opportunity. Through incorporating "In the Wake of Juárez" in the classroom we're showing students the multiple facets of art: art as an expression of the personal, as creativity, as storytelling, as activism, and as social justice.

Briggs' artwork comes from a deeply personal place; her own willingness to discuss this can be an excellent model for students. In explaining the violent nature of many of her images, she writes, "I've always made images about this kind of material. When I was seven I had an experience close up and personal with a violent death. My brother was fifteen and climbing at the Tetons when he fell. Subsequently, I spent about eight years trying to pretend that it couldn't possibly have happened. In a lot of ways it was perfect preparation for a place like Juárez where every day there are rapes, disappearances, murders. Every day people try to pretend that rapes, disappearances and murders aren't really happening. I think it's getting harder to pretend" (Stunda, Interview with artist Alice Leora Briggs, AdobeAirstream).

Her artwork is not only a means for sharing her own personal story. It's also an example of how art functions as a means for fighting for social justice, as the practice of activism, as documentation of stories that too many times are ignored. In serving these purposes, art becomes a voice for those who have been rendered voiceless.

“ *The world cannot afford to ignore these crimes against humanity that continue to destroy so many lives. The rights to life, physical integrity, liberty and personal safety must be protected and ensured whenever and wherever they are threatened.* ”

It is a means of participating in civil society—both as resistance and as empowerment. It’s powerful, and should be presented to our students as such. I’ll leave you with a quote from Celeste Kostopulos-Cooperman’s introduction to Marjorie Agosín’s book *Secrets in the Sand: The Young Women of Juárez* (p. 21). I think Cooperman sums up quite well why lessons like the ones we can learn from Briggs’ exhibit are so important: “The world cannot afford to ignore these crimes against humanity that continue to destroy so many lives. The rights to life, physical integrity, liberty and personal safety must be protected and ensured whenever and wherever they are threatened.

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