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## **LESSON ONE: USING P.O.V.'S BORDERS SNAPSHOTS ART AS SYMBOLIC JOURNALISM**

### **OBJECTIVES**

- Students will be challenged to think in a thematic and multi-disciplinary way.
- Students will be introduced to art as a form of documentation.
- Students will explore the difference between factual accounts and more poetic/symbolic accounts of an event, and analyze how artists have depicted different historical events.
- Students will create a "symbolic journalism" artwork on theme of borders, showing understanding of both symbolic and factual approaches.
- Students will add their ideas and artwork to the larger discussion of borders by submitting their artwork to POV's Borders website, as a "Borders Snapshot."

### **STANDARDS**

This lesson addresses the following national Language Arts content standard established at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>:

- Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media;
- Uses a range of strategies to interpret visual media (e.g., draws conclusions, makes generalizations, synthesizes materials viewed, refers to images or information in visual media to support point of view, deconstructs media to determine the main idea);
- Understands how images and sound convey messages in visual media (e.g., special effects, camera angles, symbols, color, line, texture, shape, headlines, photographs, reaction shots, sequencing of images, sound effects, music, dialogue, narrative, lighting);
- Effectively uses mental processes that are based on identifying similarities and differences;

The curriculum also addresses national arts standards established at: [http://artsedge.Kennedy-center.org/professional\\_resources/standards/natstandards/index.html](http://artsedge.Kennedy-center.org/professional_resources/standards/natstandards/index.html)

- Students conceive and create works of visual art that demonstrate an understanding of how the communication of their ideas relates to the media, techniques, and processes they use.
- Students initiate, define, and solve challenging visual arts problems independently using intellectual skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.
- Students demonstrate the ability to form and defend judgments about the characteristics and structures to accomplish commercial, personal, communal, or other purposes of art.

- Students create artworks that use organizational principles and functions to solve specific visual arts problems.
- Students apply subjects, symbols, and ideas in their artworks and use the skills gained to solve problems in daily life.
- Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art.
- Students analyze relationships of works of art to one another in terms of history, aesthetics, and culture, justifying conclusions made in the analysis and using such conclusions to inform their own art making.
- Students identify intentions of those creating artworks, explore the implications of various purposes, and justify their analyses of purposes in particular works.
- Students reflect analytically on various interpretations as a means for understanding and evaluating works of visual art.
- Students compare the materials, technologies, media, and processes of the visual arts with those of other arts disciplines as they are used in creation and types of analysis.

## **MATERIALS**

For this curriculum students need access to Internet and the ability to print out materials and images. If no access is available, then teacher will need to have all the materials printed out. Exercise #1 requires the ability to stream video. Exercise #2 requires scissors, glue, construction paper, and either a color printer or a supply of clip art and magazines.

### **Prerequisite Knowledge:**

Exercise #1 asks students to write a poem based on facts and brainstorming, and assumes some experience with poetry. If students have not had exposure to writing poetry, teachers may refer to [www.onlinepoetryclassroom.org](http://www.onlinepoetryclassroom.org), or [www.theteacherscorner.net/writing/poetry/](http://www.theteacherscorner.net/writing/poetry/) for warm-up lessons.

## **PROCEDURE**

### **1. Introduction**

The term "borders" refers to both very real and very symbolic phenomenon. In fact, in the era of globalization, it's a concept that more and more cannot be fully understood from any single viewpoint. In some arenas, such as race and class relations within many nations, the "real" borders are disappearing while many of the symbolic borders hold fast. Many would-be immigrants, however, find the "real" borders as tight as ever, but find the borders between ideas, information and communication disappearing by the day.

Art has the power to explore an issue from many levels and viewpoints. Throughout history, one of the roles of artists has always been to look at the world (the politics, history, culture) and interpret it and try to make sense of it through their art.

In this exercise, we will use the metaphor of "Art as Symbolic Journalism" to explore how art can sometimes be a better tool for analyzing and interpreting the world than strictly factual or journalistic approaches. Students will use this framework to analyze the idea of "borders" and create poetry and artwork in response.

## 2. Discuss

What is the difference between a poem and a newspaper article? What if a poet and a journalist watched the same event (for example, a car accident, or a parade, or a presidential inauguration)? How would they describe it differently?

[Let the brainstorm develop, until there's at least a general sense of the difference between emotional/symbolic descriptions and factual descriptions.]

Refer to the P.O.V.'s Borders website. The first question the website asks is "Where are your borders?" How would a journalist answer this question? What are some of the most important "factual" or literal borders in the world? How might an artist or poet answer this question? What are some non-literal or symbolic borders? (For example, borders between the rich and the poor, between people who don't understand each other, between different emotions, between states of mind?) What are some of the borders in our own lives? (For example, the border between childhood and adulthood, between family members, between happiness and sadness, between things you love and hate.)

**Journal option:** Have each student list and explain the "real" or factual borders that affect their lives, and then list and explain the "symbolic" borders in their lives.

## 3. Analyze

Have students read the factual account of Paul Robeson's life and a concert he gave in 1952 (visit <http://www.bayarearobeson.org/BriefBiography.htm>, or see Appendix for condensed biography). Then have the students look at two "Symbolic Journalism" interpretations of the event.

First, a poem by Naomi Shihab Nye entitled "Cross That Line" (<http://poetry.about.com/library/weekly/aa100201a.htm>) and then the poster art depiction of the event ([http://www.seiu.org/images/robeson\\_sm.jpg](http://www.seiu.org/images/robeson_sm.jpg), another interesting poster depicting the same event is at <http://www.ilwu19.com/history/robeson/robeson.jpg>).

Analyze the difference between the factual information and the symbolic interpretations. What does the poem convey that the facts do not? (What questions does it ask?) Why is the concert that Robeson gave significant to the poet? What does it symbolize for her? How does the collage depict the event? How are all the images collaged together different than if you were to see each image separately? What emotions is the artist evoking? [This could be a group discussion or a take-home writing assignment.]

## 4. Create "Symbolic Journalism"

### EXERCISE #1: POETRY COMBINING FACTUAL OBSERVATION AND PERSONAL RESPONSE

i. On the P.O.V.'s Borders website, click on the "Snapshots" section of the compass, and then on the piece titled "Love on the Line." Have students screen the video.

ii. Make a list of the facts we learn in the piece (Where is this border? Who are the people on either side? How often do they see each other? Why can't they be on the same side of the fence?)

iii. Now, imagine you're one of the characters in the film. Make a list of all the emotions you might be feeling. What is difficult or painful about this situation? What might you tell yourself to cope with the situation? What hopes do you have? After an initial list, ask students to imagine situations that they have been in that may have felt the same way (e.g., where they were separated from someone they loved.) With that situation in mind, add to the list of emotions the characters might be feeling.

iv. Write a "journalism poem" from the perspective of that person. The poem should carefully convey factual information, but also capture the emotions felt by the character.

## **EXERCISE #2: GRAPHIC ART COLLAGE**

Students will create a "Symbolic Journalism" Collage depicting both the facts and the emotions around the post-September 11th security and border controls.

Students should either research or be provided with statistics and images relating to the security measures and tightened borders after the September 11th attacks. Students will need to synthesize these documents into a collage that, like the Robeson poster art, conveys factual as well as poetic or emotional interpretation of the event. Source materials could be newspapers, Newsweek or Time magazines, or images or statistics printed out from websites, including the following:

[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/law/jan-june02/immigration\\_1-01.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/law/jan-june02/immigration_1-01.html)  
(article on US closing its borders with Mexico after 9-11)

[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/terrorism/july-dec01/us\\_safety\\_10-8a.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/terrorism/july-dec01/us_safety_10-8a.html)  
[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/july-dec01/q\\_a.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/july-dec01/q_a.html)

<http://www.pbs.org/itvs/beyondtheborder/immigration.html> (all relating to tightened security in US)

If teachers wish to provide examples of graphic art "Symbolic Journalism" in addition to the Robeson poster, they are encouraged to look up:

- Picasso's Guernica  
([http://www.pbs.org/treasuresoftheworld/a\\_nav/guernica\\_nav/main\\_guerfrm.html](http://www.pbs.org/treasuresoftheworld/a_nav/guernica_nav/main_guerfrm.html))
- Ben Shahn's paintings depicting post-WWII reconstruction in Europe
- Jacob Lawrence's depictions of the Great Migration
- William Kentridge's drawings and animations about Apartheid in South Africa
- Graffiti murals of 9-11
- Robert Rauschenburg's silk-screen collages of historical moments in the 60's

## **EXERCISE #3: POEM OR COLLAGE BASED ON PERSONAL BORDERS**

i. Based on the earlier discussion (or journal assignment) about personal borders, have the students each pick one border (real or symbolic) that exists in their own life.

ii. Have each student make a list of facts about this border, and then a list of emotions or symbols that relate to the border. (If a student is having difficulty thinking of emotions or symbols, have them interpret the border through the five senses; what does this border look like, sound like, taste like, smell like, feel like?)

iii. Have students create a "Symbolic Journalism" piece based on their own border. This could either be a poem or a collage, following the guidelines above. If a student chooses, this could be a drawing or painting.

#### **4. Assessment**

During presentation of each finished piece, ask the artist to justify each artistic decision he/she made.

#### **For Discussion and Analysis sections**

- Student participated in discussion
- Student demonstrated understanding of the difference between factual and symbolic levels
- Student demonstrated self-reflection
- Student was able to identify multiple meanings of the word "border"

#### **For Exercises #1**

- Student participated in discussion of video piece
- Poem conveys accurate factual information about the story
- Poem attempts to write from the voice of one of the characters in the video
- Poem includes details of emotions or thoughts from the point of view of the character

#### **For Exercises #2**

- Student researched or brainstormed materials and demonstrated comprehension of the data
- Collage employs factual information
- Collage attempts emotional or symbolic interpretations of the data
- Collage is carefully constructed
- Student worked through technical obstacles or limitations of the medium

#### **For Exercise #3:**

- Student thoroughly brainstorms both the factual and symbolic levels of the border they chose
- Student's work includes specific detail (based on what medium the students choose, follow the poetry or collage criteria from exercises #1 and 2)

#### **5. Learning Extensions**

- Submit students' work to the POV's Borders website (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2002/borders/snapshots/sendinyours.html>). Selected writing, art and video work will be displayed in the Snapshots section.

- Create newspaper combining all writing and artwork completed by the student. Students can create "headlines" about the 3 artworks.

- Create an experimental video Snapshot. The other video snapshot, "A Visible Border," can serve as a model. The piece combines a factual/economic experience of the border with a very personal experience of a border.

- Have students read a collection of poetry that deal with borders and then write a "Borders homage poem", or a poem written in the style or voice of one of the poets.
- "Event poems": Expand exercise #1 by having students research an historical event (or a current border conflict) and then write poems from point of view of a person who lived through that event.
- Elaborate on exercises #2 or 3 by having students paint, draw, collage, or write over a photograph, adding emotional and symbolic information to a "factual" document.
- Research Mural art: Explore how murals function to convey both facts and symbolism.
- Create an art gallery show of Borders Symbolic Journalism.

## APPENDIX

### Paul Robeson Biography

**Facts:** Paul Robeson, the son of an escaped slave, was one of the 20th centuries most prominent figures: an accomplished singer, actor, athlete, and writer. By 1952, Robeson was one of the 10 highest-paid concert artists in the world. But because of his ties to communism and his strong support of labor unions, the US government labeled him a threat to national interests. He was "blacklisted" (or prevented from working) in the US and his passport was taken away -- preventing him from traveling and giving concerts to his fans around the world. In May, 1952, in defiance of his restrictions, he gave a concert from the back of a flatbed truck in the northernmost part of Peekskill, NY, to 40,000 coal miners and fans sitting across the border in Canada.

*Lesson Plan by Jeremy Robins  
September, 2002*

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Find more lesson plans and classroom activities at P.O.V.'s website.

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/classroom.php>