“Third Space” Identity - Body Installation & Wire Sculpture

Inspired by Brad Kahlhamer, Native Artist and his “Third Space” realm; Brad Kahlhamer on view in Joslyn’s Riley CAP Gallery November 14, 2015–April 17, 2016

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Overview
This is a three-part artistic process. It examines the artwork, responds with body tableaux, then recreates the physical sculpture with wire and mixed-medium. Indigenous “ways of knowing” are revealed in the Native artistry of Brad Kahlhamer, and participants will engage in discovering the metaphor and symbolism of that knowledge. Integrating human body sculpting into this process allows students to interpret and synthesize through a collective consciousness their feelings, ideas, and connections with Native knowledge systems.

Anticipatory Set
Kahlhamer works with visual language to explore and make meaning of Indigenous identity. He does this through the “Third Space,” a symbolic space where transformation, rethinking boundaries, and culture is activated. It is a where unique knowledge and understanding can integrate to create a meaningful whole. In this work there are no wrong answers. Pedagogically “Third Space” allows students the opportunity to rethink, to allow all ideas put forth as valid and part of a larger journey forward, and proves empowering for students as a way of addressing self and identity through understanding others.

Objectives
Students will:
• Explore, synthesize and interpret the Indigenous artwork of Brad Kahlhamer, describe and interpret through human body sculptures the diverse symbols that signify meaning and identity.
• Replicate (simulation) the body sculptures of one another through brief pencil sketches that capture interpretation of Indigenous ways of knowing.
• Define (make meaning) of personal and cultural identity by building wire and mixed media art pieces that represents their experience in a “Third Space.”

Resources
• Brad Kahlhamer website: http://bradkahlhamer.net/
• Video of artist talking about his work: http://www.jackshainman.com/artists/brad-kahlhamer/
• Introduction to Drama (including Image work) in the classroom. Focus on elementary: http://goo.gl/uQTWiF
• Joslyn Art Museum’s hand outs and program
• Third Space: Blended Teaching and Learning; https://goo.gl/OHbwNG

Supplies
• Jewelry pliers (enough to accommodate students) Side cutters & Long nose
• Coiling tools
  This can be wooden dowels, pencils, materials you may have on hand to coil wire
• Wire
  Dark Annealed Specialty Wire, 24-28 gauge is probably the least expensive
  And any odds and ends of sculpting or colored wire you might have on hand. Enough for each student to create an approximate 12” x 12” wire sculpture.
• Fibers
  Jute, string, embroidery thread, hemp (or materials you have on hand)
LESSON PLAN

- **Beads**
  Wooden, clay, glass. No pony (I'd like to stay with natural materials).

- **Embellishments**
  Bells, paper, natural materials from nature (twigs, nuts, leaves)

- **Paper**
  Can be one-sided recyclable for sketching a prototype

- **Pencils** (whatever is on hand)

**Vocabulary**

- **Third Space**
- **Installation**
- **Sculpture**
- **Image**
- **Identity**
- **Symbol**
- **Metaphor**
- **Respond**
- **Story**
- **Space**
- **Indigenous/Native**
- “Knowing”
- **Impressions**

**Lesson Outline**

This is a three-part artistic process. It examines the artwork, responds with body tableaux, then recreates the physical sculpture with wire and mixed-media. Indigenous "ways of knowing" are revealed in the Native artistry of Kahlhammer, and participants will engage in discovering the metaphor and symbolism of that knowledge. Integrating human body sculpting into this process allows students to interpret and synthesize through a collective consciousness their feelings, ideas, and connections with Native knowledge systems.

**Observation/Synthesis**

Students collectively observe the artwork by Kahlhammer in silence. Follow by facilitating a discussion on the narrative of the work focusing first on the artist. Who is he? What is he telling us about himself? What symbols does he use? What might the symbols mean? What are they like; what are the metaphors? Are there symbols in the art that might represent something about the student?

**Simulation**

This part of the process works best in silence so that students can focus on the language of the human body. The image will always speak louder than the word. This can be done in a variety of formats. Following is one method:

1. First, as a single group, each within a space where they do not touch one another, ask them to create frozen images from some of the "symbol words" and "metaphors" they used in their discussion. Call out one of the words and have them "freeze." Without breaking their images, have them use peripheral vision to look at some of the other statues.

2. Break into two groups. The first group becomes the audience. The second group will become the first human sculpture. Ask the participants to close their eyes and think of the words or ideas that they feel best represents either the artist or themselves. What does that identity "look" like? Have them open their eyes and then slowly, without speaking, one-by-one, create a human sculpture that reflects that identity. Have them hold the freeze. Invite the next participant to "add" to that sculpture with their own "meaning" and connect in some way. Whether it is by touching the first sculpture with the toe of the shoe, or touching with an elbow. The idea is to connect each image and create from that a whole sculpture—a story installation—that consists of each participant.
3. Once the installation is created have the audience group "respond" with a quick pencil sketch. These will be "impressions." These brief, visual responses will be the prototype for their material sculptures. Anything they feel or see in response to their classmates' body installations can also be sketched. This should last no more than 3-4 minutes.

4. Allow the tableau to disassemble. "Shake it out" and relax. Sit on the floor. If time allows, have them debrief for a few minutes. Allow group one, the audience, to share the symbols and metaphors they saw in the sculpture.

5. Have group 1 now become the human sculptors, and through the same process, one-by-one, build their own sculpture. Now group 2, the new audience, will “respond” by sketching their perceptions of the new human sculpture. This should move relatively fast.

Adaptation for Elementary

- Focusing on the sculpture of Kahlhamer, have students talk about the elements of story they observe in his work. What are the "feelings" they get from the art? What do they tell about who the artist might be? Do they see familiar feelings and ideas in the artist that they might also share? Build connections.
- The installation of a group tableau can also take place. Sometimes this is more easily done with the whole class. Begin with individual statues providing one word prompts having them “freeze.”
- Partner with another person (groups of two) and have them connect through a new word.
- Encourage them to explore different levels of body sculpture. Have them make a high or tall sculpture. Follow with a low, close to the ground sculpture, then a medium image. Direct one person to be a high or low sculpture and the other to respond with a medium or opposite image.
- For grades 5-6 have them work in groups of three and explore the same process.
- Their final mixed media sculpture can move directly from human body sculpture to the material sculpture.
- Provide slides or power points of Kahlhamer's work.

Mixed Media Sculpture

1. This is the time to "give permission" to students that there is no wrong way to make this sculpture. This is their response to the work of the artist, Indigenous "ways of knowing," of seeing the world, and responding impromptu to these perceptions without inhibition.

2. Using their sketch they can approach the sculpture a couple of ways. They can use their sculpting wire to trace what they have drawn, or they can interpret their sketch freestyle. This central piece of the sculpture should be one single piece of wire. It can be flat or three-dimensional.

3. Using smaller wires, or cut pieces of wire they can begin to add embellishments, details and extensions on to the larger piece. Refer back to Kahlhamer's wire work (see resources, Kahlhamer's website).

4. Place organic beads, twigs, bells where it feels right reminding students to stay true to their perceptions of the human tableau they viewed and interpretations they captured in their sketches.

5. Place wire in the appropriate places if they want their finished project to be hung on a wall or from a ceiling or porch hook. It they want it to be a free-standing piece have them create a based, if needed.
Adaptation for Elementary

Use white pipe cleaners to create a sculpture. Allow the organic embellishments to carry the meanings or ideas of the art.

Extensions

- This process can be transposed to work with a variety of disciplines including the visual arts, literary genres and tropes, multicultural studies, social studies, history, and human growth and development.

- This process is originally adapted from workshops which address issues of identity in prevention and intervention initiatives with youth.

- Human tableaux and “image” work with the body is particularly useful with students who work best without language, are too dependent up on “talk”, or reserve themselves socially. I have used this process with shy, autistic, and traumatized youth who respond well to physical embodiment of story that allows them to “reimagine” themselves in new ways that assert identity, but structured enough to ensure a safe-space. Also, with non-English speakers, i.e. Indigenous Mayan students from Central America who do not speak English or Spanish. Instead of word “cues” one can use cards that depict emotions, i.e. joy, fear, surprise, etc., or, various cards or illustrations of artwork, and allows participants to enter into the “language of body” to communicate in a collective whole.

Academic Standards
Available on online version at www.joslyn.org/education/teachers/thursdays-for-teachers [select Lesson Plans, then American Indian]

About the Author
Sheila Rocha is a native of the Great Plains. She is of the Pure’pecha nation and is an interdisciplinary arts educator and PhD candidate from the University of Arizona in America Indian Studies. She served as multicultural director at the Omaha Theater Company for twenty years. As an art-educator with both the Arts Council and Lied Center of Nebraska she is a practitioner and workshop facilitator of social justice and liberatory theater practices, and storyteller. Sheila is a multi-genre published author, a playwright, and recently completed her tenure as editor of Red Ink magazine. A free-lance photographer, she has both published and exhibited her work. Her research in the Harlem Renaissance, and meso-Indian culture has resulted in professional theater touring productions. Most recently she served as faculty in the Humanities department at Oglala Lakota College on the Pine Ridge reservation.
Indigenous groups and tribal nation throughout the Americas are distinct with their own languages, sacred histories, spirituality and relationship to the land. However, there are fundamental similarities that exist and determine their guiding stories that explains their world view, (e.g., customs, languages, histories,), similarities exist in terms of their guiding story, one that explains “the universe, its origin, characteristic, and essential nature” (Cajete, 2000, p. 58). Knowledge, in the Native way, is embedded into all things. It is “relational”, meaning knowledge is not owned by any one individual—it is collective. It is part of a collective consciousness known as “all my relations”—we are all related. Understanding this concept is primary to approaching Indigenous or American Indian studies and requires we step outside of the western paradigm. By doing so we begin to understand how the Indigenous world is organized and how everything is reciprocal, respectful and responsible—animals to humans to water to stones to plants. It is one entity with many facets.

Indigenous ways of knowing is a philosophy that suggests the relationship with the land and all life forms, and the Divine. This worldview directs and guides the value systems of Indigenous people. Both visual and narrative art forms support the idea of all things being interrelated. Traditions that sustain this cosmology endure through the “oral tradition”, the continuance of memory through storying. Storying occurs through story-telling, ceremony, dance, and music. All of these are ways of teaching and preserving the past and the future—because it is one thing. This way of seeing the multiverse, the larger world, ensures identity, and is a way through which we can understand ourselves through an understanding of “all our relations”.

The following diagram is a model that illustrates an Indigenous paradigm, a framework in which Indigenous ways of knowing are cyclical, interdependent, and relational.
References/Resources


