“RECYCLED PAIN”

ABSENT NARRATIVE EXPLORATION

Inspired by Rodney McMillian (b. 1969, Columbia, MO), Untitled, 2005, carpet
Created by Kevin Lytle Jr, Educator and Multimedia Artist
Grade Level Middle-High / 7th – 12th grade

OVERVIEW
This lesson takes you through the historical and cultural life journey of Rodney McMillan’s “carpet.” We will explore the need to deep-dive into Absent Narratives for the purpose of finding the impact behind the stories, history, art, and culture we encounter. We will craft narratives based on our understanding and analysis of this work.

ANTICIPATORY SET
This carpet has had quite the life. Its journey has spanned two continents, and many generations, with endless trials and triumphs yet no one has ever heard its story, until now.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES:
• Students will learn the power of story and danger of absence by going deeper and exploring Absent Narratives in literature, art, history, and society as a whole.
• Students will place oneself in the space of the marginalized and non-mainstream in literature, art, history, and society.
• Students will shift from learning about something or someone’s experience to learning from someone or something explicitly.

CONTENT STANDARDS
• NEBRASKA CONTENT AREA STANDARDS
• IOWA CORE STANDARDS

RESOURCES:
• The danger of the single story | Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, TED, YouTube https://bit.ly/1LqGpQD
• How do people experience Historical Trauma, UofMNCYFC, YouTube http://bit.ly/2tvsjeT
• 30 Americans, Rubell Family Collection https://rfc.museum/30a-statement
*Preview all resources before sharing with students

VOCABULARY:
• Absent Narrative
• Mainstream Narrative
• First Person Context
• Historical Trauma
• Cultural Perspective
LESSON OUTLINE

- Present Rodney McMillan’s “carpet” from the Rubell Family Collection, 30 Americans.
- Provide the context of the entire exhibit from which the artwork derives.
- Provide the vocabulary list to each student.
- Explain Mainstream Narratives and the impact those have on shaping our viewpoint and understanding of literature, art, history, and culture among other things.
- Explain what an Absent Narrative is and the impact missing stories and perspectives have on either lifting up or silencing other people, histories, and perspectives.
- (Strong recommendation for teachers) Craft your own narrative for the “carpet” as an example for your students to follow.
- Ask students to spend a few minutes with artwork, studying the details, asking themselves the following questions:
  - What do you see?
  - From where could these details have stemmed?
  - How can this artwork fit in the stories you know about Black History and Black Culture?
- Have students, while examining the artwork and answering the questions, jot down single words that describe what they are seeing and how they are feeling during their participation in this activity.
- Have students write a short story, in first person from the perspective of “being the carpet.” Encourage students to… describe from where it comes, explain what it has seen, share who it has been around, illustrate why it looks the way it does, and most importantly, reveal what it would say to people if people could understand it.
- After the writing assignment, ask students to answer these two questions:
  - Did Historical Trauma play a part in their story? Why or why not? Explain.
  - From what Cultural Perspective was this story written?
- If there is time, offer a sharing space for students’ stories.
- Reiterate the reality of Absent Narratives in the mainstream and our role to uncover and give recognition to the voices of all. Remind them of the importance of learning from something or someone in addition to learning about something or someone.

LESSON OUTLINE
Absent Narratives, when uncovered, help to explain the full picture of any given story or subject. It gives the learner additional inroads to connect, relating and understanding truly to what is being taught in any subject.