SecondHand News: Using the Headlines to make Art: Lorraine O'Grady

Empire State Creates: Teaching Artist-Led Activities for Everyone

Project Title: Identity and public language: Lorraine O'Grady Age(s): Teachers (High School)

Time: 15-20 minute read (2 class periods)          Arts Discipline: Visual Arts

ACTIVITY AT A GLANCE

Goal(s):

● Learn and Use Visual Thinking Strategies with contemporary art
● Learn how to use contemporary art to spur conversation in other subject areas or topics other than visual art
● Learn about Lorraine O'Grady
● Learn to make a Lorraine O'Grady inspired artwork

Materials:

● Lorraine O'Grady's 1977 text work *I hear my Sister Speak My Name* from her series Cutting Out the New York Times image printed or projected on screen or smart board
● Newspapers with headlines
● Scissors
- Glue or double-sided tape
- Paper of any quality for the artwork
- Notebook or notepaper and pencil to make notes and plan artwork

**New Word(s)**

**Subjectivity**: the quality of existing in someone's mind rather than the external world.

**Feminism**: advocacy of women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes

**Black Feminism**: Black feminism rose to prominence in the 1960s, as the civil rights movement excluded women from leadership positions, and the mainstream feminist movement largely focused its agenda on issues that predominately impacted middle-class White women. (wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_feminism)

**Cultural Construction**: Context dependent entity or understanding that is created and maintained by a culture. Its meaning can change over time.

**NYS Arts Learning Standards (select no more than 2 - student audiences only)**

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**STEPS**

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<th>Step #1</th>
<th>At the heart of Lorraine O'Grady’s work is language and specifically the complications of language.</th>
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<td>”This is as true in public conversations as in private ones. Speaking at a 2015 conference at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, wearing a rubber gorilla mask as part of the anonymous feminist activist group the Guerrilla Girls, she delivered an earnest seven-minute dissection of the phrase “women and artists of color” and the way it leaves out people who are both. At the end, she quipped: “This problem is defeating us, and, I mean, it defeats me, because any time I try to get a language, it just doesn't work on a poster!””</td>
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Lorraine O'Grady's 1977 text work, *I heard my Sister Speak My Name*, from her series, *Cutting Out the New York Times*, is an enigmatic poem created from the series 26 cut-outs made on Sundays, from June 5 to November 20, 1977. The series is an attempt by the artist to see the person in public language.

She started the series in response to a chain of personal crises. She made the first collage for her doctor after a cancer scare but decided that it was too good to give away and continued working every Sunday for six more months. It was during this time that O'Grady became an artist.

“This was something I knew I would never get bored with, because how can I get bored? I would always be learning, and I would never, ever master it. That was part of the appeal.” (O'Grady in Steinhauer, J in Vulture, https://www.vulture.com/article/lorraine-ogrady-profile.html, March 2, 2021)

O'Grady was born to Jamaican immigrant parents in Boston, Massachusetts. She went to the Latin School for Girls and Wellesley College, where she studied Economics and Spanish literature. Restless but determined to succeed, she worked in the Labor and State Departments, including as an intelligence analyst during the Cuban Missile Crisis. She moved to Scandinavia to write a novel, dropped out of Iowa's Writers' Workshop, ran a successful translation firm, had a stint as a Rock Critic at the Village Voice, had two failed marriages and lost her sister before turning to art in 1977. Her work explored her own complicated identity--as a black woman artist from Caribbean American heritage, middle class and well-educated. She did not fit
neatly into proscribed categories, and it made her question the cultural construction of black female subjectivity.

**Connections:** Subjectivity and cultural construction—do we shape society, or does culture shape us? Feminism. Black feminism. Self-perception vs. how the world perceives you.

*"It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences," Audre Lorde wrote in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches.*
—Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex”

*"The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference. The old definitions have not served us, or the earth that supports us. The old patterns, no matter how cleverly arranged to imitate progress, still condemning us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old exchanges the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation, and suspicion. “

| **Step #2** | The image can be projected using a SmartBoard or Projector for the class. Ask students to take a few minutes to look at the image and write down their thoughts and reflections. Ask them to answer the following questions with the artwork in mind:
○ What’s going on in this picture?
○ What do you see that makes you say that?
○ What more can you find?
● In the classroom, do this process yourself while your students are writing their own. |
• Ask students to share their thoughts pointing to particular details in the artwork that support their observations.

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<td>★ Using your notes, find newspaper headlines that grabs your attention.</td>
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<td>★ When you have your image, make a few photocopies of the newspaper pages.</td>
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<td>★ Make some notes on how you might use that newspaper to create a poem or word piece.</td>
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<td>★ <em>Rough Draft:</em> Using a photocopy, try out your idea. Cut it up into pieces that you think will work. Don’t worry if you do not like what you come up with. You can rearrange the pieces until you get something you like or collage or add drawn lines for you to paint. And, you still have more copies and the original.</td>
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<td>★ Try to create a poem that works both as an artwork and as poem; try to make a strong image and a grouping of words that makes sense and says what you want it to say.</td>
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*Activity Modifications (as needed):*

*If you do not have a photocopier, cut up the original newspaper and arrange the elements of your artwork before you glue things in place.*