



Disability and Disability Arts
Invisible Disabilities
“See Me; Invisibility”
Paintings Lessons



Lesson Title: Disability and Disability Arts - Invisible Disabilities - “See Me; Invisibility” Paintings Lessons

Subject and Topic:

Visual Art, Diversity, Disability Arts

Grade Level:

9-12

Duration:

45-50 minutes

Lesson Summary:

This is a three part lesson to introduce the student to disability and a disabled artist's work. Disability arts is an art form where the context of the art takes on disability as its theme. Disability art is about exploring the various realities of what it's like to be disabled. The theme of disability may be used in a variety of ways in how the artist chooses to represent the theme in their work. This lesson uses 3 paintings created by Mali Fenning.

PA Standards:

Visual Arts Education is a spatial art form that satisfies the human need to respond to life experiences through images, structures and tactile works.

Standard Category 2 in Arts and Humanities; Historical and Cultural Contexts, Category 4 in Arts and Humanities Aesthetic Response



Objectives:

Lesson 1:

The student is introduced to the social model of disability where disability is a natural part of the human condition.

The student will be able to learn about how disability is a normal part of life.

The student will be able to gain a beginning understanding of invisible disabilities.

The student will be able to define a short set of vocabulary words around disability.

Lesson 2:

The student will be able to begin to view a video of a disabled artist with an invisible disability to understand their disability, their artist process, and critically view their artwork.

The student will be able to gain an understanding. The student will be able to define a short set of vocabulary words around disability.

Lesson 3:

Through a review process the students review the information from the other two lessons. Generally what is a disability?, what kinds of disability are there, and what are the statistics of disability in the world and in the United States. In the review they will discuss the insights that they learned from the artist's work and their video. Students can share their short critical analysis of the work they wrote from Lesson two. Students can engage in one of two projects, one to create a work of art that reflects something about themselves or two share their critical essay and expand through applications that they found relatable in the artist's work and presentation. The teacher may also choose to have an open conversation about what the students gleaned from the artist's work and process.



Essential Questions

Lesson 1:

- What does disability mean?
- How many people in the world and in the United States have disabilities?
- What is an invisible disability?
- What is ableism?
- What is Disability Art?

Lesson 2:

- Who is the artist and how do they identify themselves?
- What are the elements in the Artist's paintings?
- How does the artist use color in her paintings?
- What is an invisible disability?
- What is masking
- How does the artist use form and layering in her paintings?
- Did your analyses of the paintings change when you heard their history and critical analyses of their work? If yes, how did it change?

Lesson 3:

- What have you learned about disability from the last two previous classes?
- What can you learn about a piece of work as you begin to learn about the historical and cultural details of their life?
- In learning about the pieces of this work and the artists, how do you view disability?

Vocabulary:

- Disability
- Invisible disability
- Physical disability
- Mental Health disability
- Ableism
- Disability Art



- Neurotypical
- Anxiety
- Masking
- Neurodivergent
- Form
- Texture
- Design

Lesson Procedures:

Lesson One - Introduction to Disability Arts

The goal of the first lesson is to make the student aware of disabilities, types of disabilities, and what is ableism. How do people identify themselves with disabilities?

The second goal is to make the student aware of the area in the Arts called Disability Arts. What is it? What makes it a piece of work Disability art?

Lesson Two - Meet the Artist and their Art

The goal of the second lesson is to introduce a disabled artist and their artwork. The students view both the artwork and the video of the artist talk. Through a teacher-led discussion the students engage in a critical examination of the work from the lens of disability art. How are disabled artists empowered through art? What do they offer our culture, society, in experiencing their art work and their process of art making?

What did you learn from the artist and their artwork?

Lesson Three - One art form informs another

The goal of the third lesson is to have a reflective process from what the students learned in the first two lessons.

Ask students what did you learn from the artist and their artwork?

Related Materials:

Three prints of the work of Mali Fenning

Physical prints available for loan to your class/school are available to schools within Pennsylvania. Reach out to Vicki Landers at vlanders.dee@gmail.com for more information.



Artist Video of Mali Fenning speaking on her work and her disability:

<https://youtu.be/CWeCFQkzFks>

[Slideshow](#) containing artist info, the poems and video in one document

Disability Arts Websites

Accessible Arts, <https://aarts.net.au/>

Disability Arts online, <https://disabilityarts.onlin.e/>

Code of Freaks <https://www.codeofthefreaks.com/about-the-film>

Disability Resources

Baglieri, Susan and Priya Lalvani, Undoing Ableism, teaching about disability in K-12 Classrooms, Routledge Press, New York, 2020.

Autism Spectrum Disorder 10 things You should know

<https://youtu.be/DZXjJVrm1Jw>

“Why do many girls go undiagnosed?”

<https://childmind.org/article/autistic-girls-overlooked-undiagnosed-autism/>

“Girls on the Autism Spectrum are Being Overlooked.”

<https://ipmh.duke.edu/news/girls-autism-spectrum-are-being-overlooked>

“You’re Not Autistic!” Dealing with Ableism

<https://youtu.be/qERtsUL78TA>

Autism ACTUALLY Speaking: Internalized Ableism

https://youtu.be/Z_JCWn184M4

Evaluation:

Lesson 1:

Did you know how prevalent disabilities were in the world, in the United States?

Did you know the difference between a physical and invisible disability?

Can you define ableism?

Can you describe what Disability art is as a category of Art?



Reflection: In a few short paragraphs describe how you understand disability and Disability Art? You can include any prior history of information that informs your reflection. You can also write about any insights you had in the discussion that may inform your reflection.

Lesson 2:

Using the essential question in the lesson plan, write a short critical analysis of this body of work. How do you view these pieces through the lens of Disability art and what insights did you learn?

You can include any prior history of information that informs your analyses. You can also write about any insights you had in the discussion that may inform your analyses.

Lesson 3:

Create a piece of Art work in any style that reflects your understanding of what the artist was reflecting in their work or create a personal piece of artwork that reflects something about you in the piece.

Ask your students this question related to this lesson to gauge how much they learned. **Did this lesson help you understand what Disability Arts is?**

Thank you for bringing the conversation about disability into your classroom.

Help us evaluate this lesson plan by visiting [our evaluation page to assess this lesson](#). You will find an evaluation both for you and your students to complete there.



Information Sheet for “See Me; Invisibility”

Designed for grades 9-12, artist Mali Fenning has created a series of 3 paintings that address her personal experience of OCD and neurodivergence.

About the Artist:

My paintings are vulnerable and personal. I paint freely allowing abstraction to speak for me. Although my paintings are inspired by my personal experience of navigating my late diagnosis of OCD and living through the lens of neurodivergence, anyone can connect to them as the abstraction allows for interpretation.

Bio:

I am a painter, dancer, and sometimes writer. I’m passionate about neurodivergence awareness especially for women, femmes, and nonbinary people. My work is often abstract and I enjoy the simplicity of working with acrylic paint.

Artist Journey Video Sizzle Reel in YouTube: (iunlisted)

<https://youtu.be/CWeCFQkzFks>



About Disability Arts Project 2021

In the Spring of 2021, Disability Equality Education, funded by the Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council, commissioned four disabled artists to create works of arts for a K-12 audience. There are three lesson plans to go with each of the artists' work.

Using the Pennsylvania state standards for K-12 education this unit primarily focuses on the arts and Humanities standards written by the Commonwealth. However teachers may find other core standards that they could apply to the unit.

Disability arts is an art form where the context of the art takes on disability as its theme. Disability art is about exploring the various realities of what it's like to be disabled. The theme of disability may be used in a variety of ways in how the artist chooses to represent the theme in their work.

While the four Artists defined a particular grade range to work with, the four artists as a collective could be studied at the high school level on a unit on disability artists and how they create work in different mediums. Each artist has also created a video explaining their work and their journey.

In K-2, artist Wendy Elliot-Vandivier has created a coloring book entitled "A Day of Questions". Wendy is a wheelchair user and has a service animal. In the book different students ask Wendy how she goes about daily activities and tasks in her life. Through her drawings and text Wendy shows the student how she does the activities and tasks. Wendy uses pencil and pen and ink to complete her work. She has created pictures of herself in activities for the students to color.

In grades 6-8, artist Jade Ramos has created several works that include graphics and sentences that show disability inclusion entitled "Disability Looks Like You and Me". Jade uses bright colors layers on top of one



another and words with different kinds of spacings to create disability inclusion and empowerment messages. In Jade's video they discuss their disability of being legally blind and their process to make art with their disability. Jade's work can easily be used for the other grades as well. This body of work works well in the PA standards for arts and humanities and also in Language arts.

In Grades 9-12, artist Mali Fenning, has created three paintings that reflect her experience with her disability. Mali is diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and neurodivergent as a young adult. Mali uses bright colors, layers of paint and different forms in her paintings. In her video she discusses how she navigates life with her disability and goes through each of her paintings and what the forms and layers represent.

Also in Grades 9-12, artist Ian Fay created a series of five Golden Shovel poems in a workbook for students. Ian has autism and he uses a form of poetry called Golden shovels created by poet Terrance Hayes. His lines that he uses in his poems comes from the Autism Speaks' AD called "I am Autism". He explains in his video why he uses those lines in his video. Ian does a reading of his five poems in video.

Artist information

Wendy Elliott-Vandivier

Biography

Wendy is a graduate of Tyler School of Art, Temple University. She has been making art and mischief since she was a young child growing up in Philadelphia. In college, she majored in sculpture and staged a funeral of a disabled poster child to lay stereotypes of pity and helplessness firmly to rest. Her paintings explore issues of family, memory and experiences as a disabled woman. Her autobiographical cartoons focus on attitudinal barriers and stereotypes regarding disabilities, and some of the microaggressions that disabled people experience while living normal, un-inspirational lives. She is also a photographer of micro-scale



monuments in nature, and is often inspired by close-up images that people often do not notice in daily life – tree bark, dead leaves, flower anatomy, and water.

Her work has been accepted for exhibitions, including:

- Villanova University’s “Expressions and Impressions” (juried exhibition) – First Place Winner 2018
- All About Art @ MossRehab (juried exhibition) 2018
- Congregation Or Hadash – “The Art of Wendy Elliott-Vandivier” 2018
- Philadelphia City Hall – Disability Pride Week 2019
- International Day of People with Disabilities 2018
- Jewish Learning Venture, Whole Community Inclusion “Maps, Apps and Art” 2019

To view some of Wendy’s work, visit her website at www.wendyevart.com

Artist Statement

My work draws on the visual arts to raise the visibility of the experiences of Disabled people, a group who are often marginalized and made invisible in daily life by attitudinal barriers that objectify and infantilize, and physical barriers stemming from architecture that is not accessible. These barriers limit opportunities for Disabled people in all areas – education, employment, housing – and thus breaking down these barriers is key to liberating the full human potential of Disabled people. My illustrations of the joys and challenges of life as a person with a disability aim to show the viewer that Disabled people are complete human beings, thus weakening attitudinal barriers and giving the viewer impetus to remove physical barriers as well. By doing so, my work aims to build a solidarity and connection among people with disabilities to remember their experiences are shared, and educate nondisabled people who are often unaware of their microaggressions.

My artistic practice aims to break down barriers, both physical and attitudinal, that prevent people with disabilities from participating in all aspects of life. My art uses a combination of bright colors, detailed



rendering, and humor to delve into issues that are often painful, difficult to talk about, or ignored. Each piece tells a story that brings the lives of Disabled people to a wide audience of people with and without disabilities. I hope that my work will help foster acceptance and respect among nondisabled allies, and bring pride and solidarity among Disabled people as the work of achieving disability justice is carried on to the next generation.

I am a woman with a disability and longtime disability justice activist at the local, state, and national levels. I work with the Disabled community to advocate for increased access and opportunities and build disability pride. I also serve as a mentor for young people with disabilities, as when I was young I had no role models with disabilities and felt isolated. My art is bound together with my activism, and I work with the disabled community to advocate for full inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of life. I also aim to give Disabled people a voice to tell their stories, just as my art has given me a voice.

My work addresses two main audiences – the disabled community of which I am a part, and a wider community of people without disabilities. For instance, through dialogue about my work, people from other marginalized groups have recognized common experiences and sought ways to support the disabled community. Many nondisabled people have been genuinely surprised to learn about the reality of disabled experiences, and pledged to be allies. Likewise, nondisabled kids at my cartoon workshops have spontaneously flipped my prompts to illustrate what a better world might look like for people with disabilities: free of barriers, with better communication, and full of accessible design. I have also seen my work build awareness in the disabled community. For instance, in cartoon workshops, I saw kids with developmental disabilities create powerful self-portraits describing how they are proud of themselves and their disabilities. I've also reached other disabled artists through exhibitions, creating dialogue about the potential of disability art.

I do not view my art and political advocacy as separate. I look at the impact of my art both in terms of improving perceptions of disabled



people and improving physical access: lifts on every SEPTA bus, curb cuts to let disabled people enjoy and work in Philadelphia, better employment opportunities, and a sense of pride to let the next generation of disabled people continue to advocate for their rights to full inclusion in society.

Mali Fenning

Biography

I am a painter, dancer, and sometimes writer. I'm passionate about neurodivergence awareness especially for women, femmes, and nonbinary people. My work is often abstract and I enjoy the simplicity of working with acrylic paint.

Artist statement

My paintings are vulnerable and personal. I paint freely allowing abstraction to speak for me. Although my paintings are inspired by my personal experience of navigating neurodivergence, anyone can connect to them as the abstraction allows for interpretation.

Ian Fay

Biography

Ian Fay started writing poetry when he was 16 years old through his high school's poetry club at Science Leadership Academy. From there, he competed in the PYPM Youth Night slam poetry competition throughout 2016 to 2017. He then joined Babel Poetry Collective at Temple University as a performance poet during his freshman and sophomore years. Now, he is an in-house artist of House of Edge where he continues to write about his experiences as an autistic man.

Artist Statement

My work was born from the fact that I often found myself being one of the few people with Autism in poetry spaces or one of the few people with Autism anywhere I went. I realized fairly late in my life as a poet that



I needed to write about my disability and that doing so was worthwhile. I know that an autistic poet may seem quite unusual. Someone would not expect me to be able to bear my emotions to strangers as I do. Yet I have and I still do. I am able to speak of my disability by myself. I create my work because I do believe it must exist. When it exists, it allows me to claim emotions I never knew were possible. It allows me to live a life I never knew I could. It plants my feet into my Autism and reminds me that this is the reason I am the way I am. It keeps me grateful for that fact.

Jade Ramos

Biography:

Jade Ramos is a blind artist and disability activist who was born in 1994 and raised in the Northern part of New Jersey. Having been born extremely premature, Jade has been legally blind since birth and has been into art for almost just as long. But her art didn't come hand in hand with activism until moving to Philadelphia in 2015 for art school. She attended Moore College of Art & Design and as of December of 2019 has a BFA in Fine Arts with a minor in Textile Design. She uses a variety of mediums (watercolor / mixed media paper, fabric, canvas, pins, paint, stencils, glue or markers.) to make her art accessible to blind people, making what is visual also tactile through adding layers of materials that vary in texture and weight. Disability is such a wide spectrum and art should be accessible to all people, we should be breaking barriers, not building more of them. Disabled people are the largest minority group with the least amount of representation; that has got to change and it all starts with a change in perception. Society says one thing while the disability community says another. It's time to start listening to the actual reality of the world from the disabled point of view that is in front of you. We exist, we are here, and are not going anywhere. To learn more about living with a disability and keep up to date with Jade, check out their Instagram at ONEOJO.



Artist Statement

Everything that I create in my personal artistic practice is rooted in disability activism; the text, phrases, symbols, and pictures within my art pieces are inspired by the complexities of life from a disability point of view. My art allows me to both raise awareness, educate a wide range of people, and get some healing out of it as well. Life is rough being a part of more than one marginalized group and having no representation in anything you watch or see. I try to be the person I needed when I was younger. Through my work I aim to educate whoever I am able to on what it's like to exist in a world that doesn't have your existence in mind more than 95 percent of the time I want to share my reality and the stories of those who have disabilities and make sure that what's usually ignored or forgotten about, no longer can be.

