

Lesson 3: “Art as Activism”

Summary:

Students will learn about and experience the works of Audre Lorde and James Baldwin and discuss how and why someone might use their passions for activism.

Materials: Lorde and Baldwin Poems

Goals:

1. Students will connect themes of activism with their own creative and individual expression.

Objectives:

1. Students will represent their LGBTQ experience through artwork that is inspired by the activism of Lorde and Baldwin
2. Students will discuss art as activism and discuss turning your passions into activism.

Session Outline

1. **Opening Essential Questions:** *Tell the group your favorite form of expression. How have you used this form of expression in the past? Can you name an LGBT artist who uses that form of media?*
 - Ask this question to the entire group, and either answer around the circle or as a “pair share.”
2. **Poem Activity:** Students will read poems by both Audre Lorde and James Baldwin aloud as an illustration of how art can be a form of activism. See poems in “Resources” section below.
Feel free to include other poets or artist as well (Ex. Adrienne Rich, Keith Haring, etc)

Discussion Questions About Poems:

- Can you relate to any lines in the poems?
 - Does any part of these poems jump out at you as being about LGBT issues?
 - What do you think James Baldwin is talking about when he says “the day comes when you wrestle with that lie”?
 - Do you think Audre Lorde’s poem “Never to Dream of Spiders” is about her activism and her sexual orientation? Why or why not?
3. **Role-Model (Optional):** The role model will tell the group about how they’ve used art to raise awareness about LGBT issues.

Discussion Questions:

- How does being a member of the LGBT community affect your artwork?
- How do you use your artwork to comment on LGBT issues?
- What is the relationship between private life and artistic expression?
- What facets of your identity have gone into your work other than your sexuality?
- What artistic pieces have inspired you to take action? Has any work had the

opposite effect on you?

- What are some social issues you feel the art world should be speaking to? What do you feel we/they should be saying?

RESOURCES

Five Poems by Audre Lorde: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k36ObcXFWCY>

Some Days (For Paula) by James Baldwin

1.

Some days worry
some days glad
some days
more than make you
mad.
Some days,
some days, more than
shine:
when you see what's coming
on down the line!

2.

Some days you say,
oh, not me never _ !
Some days you say
bless God forever.
Some days, you say,
curse God, and die
and the day comes when you wrestle
with that lie.
Some days tussle
then some days groan
and some days
don't even leave a bone.
Some days you hassle
all alone.

3.

I don't know, sister,
what I'm saying,
nor do no man,
if he don't be praying.
I know that love is the only answer

and the tight-rope lover
the only dancer.
When the lover come off the rope
today,
the net which holds him
is how we pray,
and not to God's unknown,
but to each other _ :
the falling mortal is our brother!

4.

Some days leave
some days grieve
some days you almost don't believe.
Some days believe you
and you won't.
Some days worry
some days mad
some days more than make you glad.
Some days, some days,
more than shine,
witnesses,
coming on down the line!

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Never to Dream of Spiders by Audre Lorde

Time collapses between the lips of strangers
my days collapse into a hollow tube
soon implodes against now
like an iron wall
my eyes are blocked with rubble
a smear of perspectives
blurring each horizon
in the breathless precision of silence
one word is made.

Once the renegade flesh was gone

fall air lay against my face
sharp and blue as a needle
but the rain fell through October
and death lay a condemnation
within my blood.

The smell of your neck in August
a fine gold wire bejeweling war
all the rest lies
illusive as a farmhouse
on the other side of a valley
vanishing in the afternoon.

Day threeday four day ten
the seventh step
a veiled door leading to my golden anniversary
flameproofed free-paper shredded
in the teeth of a pillaging dog
never to dream of spiders
and when they turned the hoses upon me
a burst of light.

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