

# Art for Action

“Art is to the community what the dream is to the individual.” –Thomas Mann

## Background Information:

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This lesson is the third in a series of three nature art activities. It is preceded by “Ephemeral Nature Art” where students use natural materials to create a temporary piece of art and “A Closer Look” where students will complete a series of art exercises to heighten their observation of nature. In this activity, students will design an art installation with a purpose behind it; either sharing information or promoting a certain cause or effort.

## Materials and Set-Up:

You will need:

- Art supplies
- Copies of the Art for Action Planning Worksheets
- Access to a way to display the art PowerPoint slides, or print outs of the slides.

Set-Up:

- Set up a classroom or other space that the lesson will take place in so that everyone is able to see a presentation and later be able to break away to work independently.

## Introduction:

Estimated Duration:

Begin this lesson by showing several different works of art and asking students to share for each one what they believe the artist’s purpose in creating the work was. The pictures are included as a digital presentation linked.

On the presentation, there will be a slide with just an image of an art piece. Pause on that slide and have students share their interpretation of the piece and the artist’s reason for creating it. Reasons will vary for the piece and may include ‘to capture beauty,’ ‘someone paid them to make it,’ ‘to record a historical event,’ ‘to tell a story...’ etc. (The pieces chosen here are not intended to represent all possible reasons for someone to create art.) The next slide, or several, will show the image again next to the title and artist, and some background information.

### Author:

Dominique Menard

### Themes:

Social Action, art, service projects

### Estimated Duration:

Variable

### Audience Identified:

6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade

### Location:

Classroom, can be adapted for other settings

Optional: Sidewalk for Chalk Art.

### Goal:

Students will examine different purposes of art and create a design for an art installation with an environmental message.

### Objectives:

Students will identify art pieces with messages behind them.

Students will choose a local environmental topic and research to identify a change that can be made or information people should become aware of.

Students will design an art installation that conveys the message that they outline in their planning sheet.

Students can share a few further thoughts after receiving that information. The last few pictures are from environmental artists.

After discussing for a few minutes how art can serve many purposes, including raising awareness or promoting social change, tell students that they will be working on their own art piece with an environmental message of their choice. They may choose to create something with the purpose of raising awareness, educating or sharing information, or encouraging social change. The purpose should be relevant, but important to the student and-if advocating for change-aligned with their personal beliefs.

## Content and Methods:

Estimated Duration: Variable

### Choosing a Topic

Give students some time to choose the topic that they wish to focus on. If this assignment is given in a classroom, you may choose to introduce the activity one day and give students time on their own to decide what they would like to focus on. Once the general topic area has been chosen and approved by the instructor, hand out the Art for Action planning sheet to be filled out.

### Planning Sheet

On the planning sheet, students will refine the message that they want to get across, the medium or materials that they plan on using, and the key components of the art piece. Key components may vary based on the project: anything from specific facts to imagery or symbolism, or even thoughts about colors or location for installation. On the back of the planning sheet there is room for more notes or for students to start sketching out what they want their piece to look like.

### Feedback

When the initial draft of planning is complete, have students pair up or form small groups. In the groups, they should take some time to share their ideas and get some feedback. Then, using this feedback, give students time to refine their ideas if they have new thoughts or see things that wouldn't work.

### Creation

There are many different options for the creation portion of this activity, and ultimately it will come down to what works for your group and the setting. You may choose to have students create the project outside of class time as homework and bring in the finished project, you may choose to have them work in class with designated material that are available to you. You may even choose to pick one project to carry out as a group on a larger scale.

One specific option is chalk art. Because of the temporary nature of chalk, it is relatively easy to find a place to draw a chalk mural, though it is still best to get permission before beginning. Have each student design a plan for a square on a sidewalk and then decorate it with the chalk. The sidewalk becomes a gallery.

For an abbreviated version of this lesson, you can choose not to create the actual art pieces students design. In lieu of this, have students draft a final version of what they would create and a short paragraph explaining where it would go and an artist's statement for the piece.

## Conclusion:

Estimated Duration: 20 minutes

For the conclusion, students will present their pieces. The format that this will take place will depend on the direction that your group goes for the creation phase, but a general format goes as follows:

- Set up all of the works in a space and give students around 5-10 minutes to circulate and observe all of their classmates work on their own.
- Gather back as a group and give each student a short amount of time (1-2 minutes) to share any relevant details about their piece and read or give a short artist statement about their intentions. Students can then respond with their reactions to the piece, and if the message they interpreted was the same or different to the artists intentions.
- Optionally, break into smaller groups for deeper discussions.

## Reflection and Evaluation:

### Reflection

Students should reflect after hearing what their classmates thought about what they created. Some points to consider include:

- Was the message clear and effective?
- Was the reaction what the artist hoped for?
- Was there anything that the artist would like to change? If so, what?

### Evaluation

Evaluation for this lesson takes place based on either the student's final plan for their art piece or the work itself, and on their responses during the reflection portion of the lesson. Students will be considered successful for this lesson, not only based on the effectiveness of the art, but also if they are able to interpret what did or didn't work about the installation.

## Extensions:

### Accessibility and Adaptations

**Distance Learning Option:** If running this activity through distance learning, introduce the activity through web conferencing and use screen share to go through the power point for the introduction the same way. Give students instructions and time on their own to go through and fill out the planning sheet digitally and share that back with the teacher, but for the medium, have students plan to create a design that is to be shared via social media. This could be a drawing or photograph of an art piece, or it could be something more interactive or a short video. Students can choose whether to share an artist statement as a caption and if there are appropriate tags or other additions that apply to the platform that they choose. Submissions can be a link to the teacher, and reflection can be based on the response of classmates, or on interactions online should they choose to actually share the post.

### Washed Ashore Curriculum

As an education non-profit, Washed Ashore has a set of curriculum that integrates art concepts and information about marine debris and other waste management concepts. There are 12 lessons in the series, and they can all be found at [washedashore.org/iamdc/](http://washedashore.org/iamdc/)

## Art as Advocacy Lesson

This lesson, created by the organization “Learning to Give” focuses on art that advocates for social change. Students will learn about art related to the historic contributions of César E. Chávez, Dolores Huerta and the United Farm Workers, and then create art designed around a human rights issue. The full lesson can be found at [learningtogive.org/units/art-advocacy/art-advocacy](https://learningtogive.org/units/art-advocacy/art-advocacy)

## Reference Materials:

Denes, A. (n.d.) Wheatfield- A Confrontation: Battery Park Landfill, Downtown Manhattan. Retrieved from [agnesdenesstudio.com/works7.html](https://agnesdenesstudio.com/works7.html)