



CRAFT IN AMERICA

EDUCATION GUIDE

Sharing Our Stories in School



"...The kids will have a connection to an educational institution that will change their point of view of what happens when they go to school."

— Therman Statom

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will view the segment on artist and educator Therman Statom in the episode *TEACHERS*, from the PBS series *Craft in America*. The episode highlights how Statom encourages students' investigation of their heritage, their understanding of self, and their connections to others as topics worthy of study in school. After viewing the segment, students will discuss various aspects of Statom's teaching and his artwork. After considering Statom's goals in teaching, students will locate a family member they would like to present to the school community through a constructed artwork. The studio portion of the lesson involves working with glass or with transparent plastic sheeting, and with imagery that is representative as well as symbolic, to create a portrait of their chosen family member. Working in small groups, students will offer feedback on each other's projects. Finally, the groups will decide how to curate their section of the display area in school in which all of the groups' portraits will be arranged.

Grade Level: 9 - 12

Estimated Time: Eight 45 minute class periods of discussion, research, and design

Craft In America Theme/Episode: *TEACHERS*

Background Information

TEACHERS highlights artists committed to sharing skills and passion for craft with a new generation. Therman Statom (b. 1953) is a glass artist currently living in Omaha, NE. Statom is best known for his painted ladders, houses, chairs, and boxes, constructed out of plate glass, blown glass objects, plywood, and found objects. He studied glass at Pilchuck Glass School and received his BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design. He holds an MFA from Pratt Institute of Art and Design and has taught at Pilchuck and the University of California, Los Angeles. He has also received commissions for countless permanent large-scale installations, including the Los Angeles Central Public Library and the Toledo Museum of Art. Much of the latter half of Statom's career has been focused on the importance of educational programming within the arts. He has taken a deep interest in employing workshops as catalysts for social change and, in effect, positively impacting a community. Working directly with the artist himself, adults and children alike share a combined experience of exploring art making via a hands-on experience.

Key Concepts

- Teachers can be artists and artists can be teachers.
- The traditional goal of assimilation in schooling can be balanced with recognition and respect of various cultures.
- Artworks can be visual objects that teach and that advocate on behalf of someone or something.
- Experimentation and playfulness in art making can help us develop new forms of expression.

Critical Questions

- How do teaching and art making overlap?
- What are the benefits of balancing assimilation in school with recognition and respect of various cultures?
- How can artworks teach? How can artworks advocate on behalf of a person or a culture?
- Why are experimentation and playfulness useful in art making? How can they help us develop new ways of “saying something” meaningful?

Objectives

Students will:

- Delineate examples of ways that teaching and art making overlap.
- Describe the benefits of balancing assimilation in school with recognition and respect of various cultures.
- Develop an artwork that teaches the school community about an important family member or figure in the student’s life.
- Experiment and play with ideas and processes to develop a portrait that says something meaningful about the student’s chosen subject.

Vocabulary

Advocate, aesthetics, assimilation, colleague, culture, curate, heritage, listicle, medicine wheel, portrait.

Interdisciplinary Connection

- History:

“This program is very important because Native Americans are still suffering the effects of some of the issues that came after the boarding school experience, and it helps students reconnect to who they are.” – Sarah Pierce, Lead Teacher, NICE School

This lesson addresses an exploration of the complex history of American Indian boarding schools, and how ideas of assimilation in schools have altered with the times. Students can investigate the “melting pot” concept of assimilation of immigrants, and the early 20th century focus on inculcating “American” culture and values in schoolchildren, particularly aimed at immigrant populations. In addition, teachers might draw on the archives at their schools, including yearbooks, records, and news clippings to examine the history of the cultures represented, and how the school represents itself over time. Students whose family members attended other schools may want to add their families’ yearbook examples or stories about school to this exploration.



National Standards for Visual Arts Education

This lesson addresses the following standards. The performance standards listed here are directly related to the lesson's goals.

- Visual Arts/Connecting #VA:Cn10.1
Process Component: Interpret
Anchor Standard: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
Performance Standards:
High School (accomplished) VA:Cn10.1.HSII: Utilize inquiry methods of observation, research, and experimentation to explore unfamiliar subjects through art making.
High School (advanced) VA:Cn10.1.HSIII: Synthesize knowledge of social, cultural, historical, and personal life with art making approaches to create meaningful works of art or design.
- Visual Arts/Creating #VA:Cr2.3
Process Component: Investigate
Anchor Standard: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
Performance Standards:
High School (proficient) VA:Cr2.3.HSI: Collaboratively develop a proposal for an installation, artwork, or space design that transforms the perception and experience of a particular place.
High School (advanced) VA:Cr2.3.HSIII: Demonstrate in works of art or design how visual and material culture defines, shapes, enhances, inhibits, and/or empowers people's lives.
- Visual Arts/Presenting #VA:Pr6.1
Process Component: Analyze
Anchor Standard: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
Performance Standards:
High School (advanced) VA:Pr6.1.HSIII: Curate a collection of objects, artifacts, or artwork to impact the viewer's understanding of social, cultural, and/or political experiences.
- Visual Arts/Responding #VA:Re7.2
Process Component: Perceive
Anchor Standard: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
Performance Standards:
High School (accomplished) VA:Re7.2.HSII: Evaluate the effectiveness of an image or images to influence ideas, feelings, and behaviors of specific audiences.



Resources and Materials for Teaching

Resources

- Craft in America DVD, *TEACHERS*. Also viewable online at www.craftinamerica.org/episodes/teachers
- Craft in America website, www.craftinamerica.org
- Therman Statom's website, www.thermanstatom.com
- National Museum of the American Indian's website on the topic of Boarding Schools: www.nmai.si.edu/education/codetalkers/html/chapter3.html
- The Teaching Tolerance website features useful resources, including ideas for teaching about stereotypes: www.tolerance.org/blog/teaching-about-stereotypes-20
- Books and resources on the history of United States education
- Grade school readers and other textbooks from the late 1800s to the 1970s and later; toys, advertisements, and other ephemera from the same timespan (or internet resources.)

Note: Vintage textbooks are plentiful and can be purchased inexpensively. These resources often feature examples of stereotyping of different groups as presented to American schoolchildren. It was only during the late 1960s and the 1970s, for example, that African Americans finally were depicted in school readers in positive roles.

Worksheets

- *From Assimilation to Advocacy*
- *May I Present...*

Materials

- Salvaged picture frames with glass inserts, various sizes
- Additional glass pieces
- Glass jars and other found glass objects
- Glass cutters; metal straight edge rulers and glass pliers (for cutting glass pieces)
- Gloves
- Safety glasses
- Glass glue; several options (Hot glue works but it is visible; on the plus side it does not have noxious vapors.)
- Water-based glue for adhering images
- Various tapes: duct, clear, masking, washi, metallic (use for connecting glass, plastic sheets, and attaching images)
- Images: photo copies, magazine pictures, photos, newspaper, handwritten texts
- Paper: colored papers, papers of different weights, tissue papers
- Sandpaper for roughening glass surfaces
- Acrylic paints
- Paintbrushes
- In place of, or in addition to glass, students may use a selection of clear materials such as plastic sheet protectors (polypropylene); vinyl or poly clear report covers; polyester sheets; and acetate sheets.
- Thread; sewing and embroidery (for potential use with plastic sheeting)
- Cotton string; spools of colored crochet thread
- Sewing needles
- Assorted findings and supplies for adding to portrait constructions such as buttons, badges, natural objects, small toys, old jewelry, etc.



INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

After a class discussion of the video, students will use the worksheet, *From Assimilation to Advocacy*, to research topics of assimilation and advocacy in school history and in their own school. Students will then use the worksheet, *May I Present...*, to choose and then research their subject. Working in small groups, students will discuss their chosen subject and collaborate using feedback in planning and developing their artworks. After creating their portraits, students will negotiate curatorial decisions for an exhibit within their small group, as they decide how to arrange and present their collected portraits.

(Video and discussion: one 45 minute period)

Before Viewing

Introduce the scope of the lesson to students, sharing the key concepts, critical questions, and objectives. Outline for students what they will be working on in the studio project. Share an overview of the episode with students. In the segment, Therman Statom is shown working with very young children who share in common their Native American heritage. He is shown working in his studio on his own glass constructions. And finally he works with a group of teenagers; African-American students and Sudanese-American students from the Omaha Talons Leadership Academy. Place students in small groups of two to five members. Have students work with their groups to look for and note the following, which can be posted on a board:

- What is Therman Statom's occupation? Does he do more than one thing?
- What is special about the NICE school program? What is an important goal for children to learn there? Is this part of the curriculum at your school?
- What is Therman Statom making with the pre-K children? Why are they making this?
- Have you ever heard about the boarding schools that Therman Statom and lead teacher Sarah Pierce talk about? What feeling do you get about these schools?
- What materials does Therman use in his work? How would you describe his work to someone else?
- When Therman teaches, does he focus more on developing the student's craft skills, or on encouraging them to think? Or both?
- Who are the two groups of high school-aged students that Therman has working together? Does your school have any programs like this?
- According to Therman Statom, what do the teenagers get out of this experience? Could you learn from such a program? What teenagers would you like to partner with?
- What does Therman think about immigration and immigrants? How does he "position" himself concerning his background? He says that student Ty Gatuoch has "incredible resources." What do you think he means by that?
- What benefits does Koang Doluony believe that immigrants provide (and have always provided) to the United States?



After Viewing

Have students share their responses to the prompts to start a discussion of the video. Add context to the prompts as the discussion proceeds. The following additional questions may be helpful:

- In what ways is Therman Statom an advocate?
- How does he encourage the high school students to become advocates themselves?
- Statom's proposed title for his piece about Bessie Coleman, the first Black aviator, is *They Don't Allow Black Women to Do That*. How is this a form of advocacy? In what ways is the title a teaching tool?

After Discussion: Investigation

(one or more 45 minute class periods)

Worksheet: *From Assimilation to Advocacy*

Have students use the worksheet *From Assimilation to Advocacy* for research.

Discussion

Have students share their answers to the worksheet *From Assimilation to Advocacy* in a group discussion. Have students jot a mini list of family members, past or present, whom they are considering to feature in their project. Extending the idea of family if needed for individual students, they might choose an influential mentor. Students should pick someone they know personally so that they create a link, through the student, to the school.

Worksheet: *May I Present...*

(two 45 minute class periods and research at home)

Students will brainstorm using the worksheet, followed by five class periods for studio exploration and production.

Studio Production

(five or more 45 minute class periods)

"There's a core connection of craft that connects to our inner being. And with every craft medium there's sort of a hidden language." – Therman Statom

Demonstrate several aspects of working with glass to students, especially noting safety procedures: handling glass, cutting glass sheets, and cleaning glass. Also show how to clean up broken glass. With that in mind, think about secure ways to hang or otherwise display the finished glass pieces.

Then note the excitement of what can be done with glass: achieving interesting layered and translucent effects, roughing the surface with sandpaper, fastening glass pieces together with glue and/or with tape, painting and drawing on glass, and gluing images on glass.

You may want to re-watch the section of the video that shows Therman in his studio to refresh students' inspiration. Have students look at his website as well for examples of glass constructions and sculptures, noting the effects of color with glass, and the use of layers in his work.

If you include plastic sheeting types in students' material choices, you can also demonstrate stitching as a decorative and/or connecting method. Lightweight plastic is easy to hang, so students might want to explore layered hangings as another sculptural form of portraits.



As students work, remind them of this quote from the video:

"You actually can't mess up because the worst thing that can happen is in the process of messing up, you actually learn and you refine your aesthetic..." – Therman Statom



Here is one simple method of constructing a portrait with glass as a primary material: Start with a picture frame with the glass intact. If there is a picture already in the frame, remove it, then clean and replace the glass. Arrange an image on the glass (or underneath the glass). Remove the image, brush on a layer of water-based glue, and then press the image in place. When dry, add a layer of water-based glue to seal the image. Continue with more images and papers. Add another smaller piece of glass (from a small frame) to one section of the larger piece. Decide if you want to place an image under the glass or on top before taping the glass in place. Or, glue a smaller frame (with no glass) in place over the larger piece of glass. Arrange and glue some tiny found objects in place inside the small frame. Then place the glass piece from this smaller frame on top of the small frame, creating a shadow box over the objects, and glue or tape it in place.

CLOSING STRATEGIES

Presentation and Reflection:

As students work in their groups to decide how to curate and present their work, encourage them to think about how the arrangement of the portraits can add further meaning to the projects. For example, the multiple images will form a visual recognition of the many community members that have connections to the school through the students. For another example, students might decide to give ancestors or elders a place of prominence that symbolizes respect.

Assessment:

In discussions with the class and with individual students throughout the lesson; by examining the students' worksheets; by witnessing the students' experimentation and construction, and by viewing the display as a class, it should be evident that the student has:

- Delineated examples of ways that teaching and art making overlap.
- Described the benefits of balancing assimilation in school with recognition and respect of various cultures.
- Developed an artwork that teaches the school community about an important family member or figure in the student's life.
- Experimented and played with ideas and processes to develop a portrait that says something meaningful about the student's chosen subject.

Authors

The Education Guide for *TEACHERS* was developed under the direction of Dr. Marilyn Stewart, Professor of Art Education, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, Kutztown, PA.

Lead author for *Sharing Our Stories in School* is Dr. Amy Albert Bloom, July 2016.

Worksheet: *From Assimilation to Advocacy*

"...A success will be the African American kids working with the Sudanese kids and communicating with each other and dealing with the beauty of their differences."

— Therman Statom

Use this worksheet as a guide to explore the history of assimilation in U.S. public schools. Use the quotes from the segment, as well as the classroom resources provided, to think about, discuss, and answer the questions in your group.

"When they got sent off to schools, they weren't allowed to speak their language, their hair was all cut off, just cruel stuff." — Amber Alexander, parent, on her grandmother and grandfather

"For her little hands on the wheel, and other little kids' hands to be on the wheel, I think is really good because it's always a connection tied there." — Amber Alexander, parent

"The kids have a better sense of place, and they have fun, and they're in a school that's better than what happened thirty years ago, where their hair was cut off and they were separated from their family." — Therman Statom

"We're the new face of what makes America special. We're the new form of immigrants. America has always been refreshed by just a fresh wave of new ideas; a new way of doing things; a new way of seeing the world."

— Koang Doluony, Executive Director, Omaha Talons Leadership Academy

"How can their cultural heritage enrich ours?" — Therman Statom

- What is assimilation? What is its purpose in schools?
- Why do you think assimilation has been such a large effort of schooling over time?
- What is the downside of traditional kinds of assimilation in schools?
- What is lost if the only focus in schools is on assimilation?
- How does Therman Statom advocate for practices that differ from assimilation? What does he want students to do?

Worksheet: *May I Present...*

"...and community members come and share stories about their history for the first time in the school system." – Therman Statom

You will be making a portrait of a family member, using a frame and glass, or other transparent material. Your portrait should incorporate:

- Images and symbols that represent the person, possibly including handwritten or word processed text, colors, textured items, and found objects.
- Layers of some sort (translucent glass, plastic, or papers) that feature various aspects of the person's life.
- A "title as advocacy" that presents your family member to the school as a person of importance in your life, and by extension (through you) to the school.

Start by making some listicles; little lists of things about the person that you might want to feature in the portrait. This likely requires talking to the person, or, if you are choosing someone no longer living, you may be able to interview other family members about the person. For example, list:

- 1 aspect of heritage and/or history I share with this person
- 1 thing I never knew about this person that I just found out
- 2 ways this person influenced me
- 2 ways this person interacted with the community
- 3 cultural traditions this person kept alive
- 3 things this person was known for
- 4 things this person loved to do (or just loved)

Add more listicles of topics of your choice. Share what you have found out about your family member with the people in your group. Are there any similarities between the people you have all chosen? Finally, thinking about the materials you have to work with, sketch one or two ideas on the back of the worksheet. Share them with the people in your group and give each other feedback. What kind of feeling do the group members get from your piece?

"Part of what I'm going to be doing is exploring advocacy through titles." – Therman Statom

What will you title your work? What idea do you want to advocate for, concerning this person, and how they represent you and aspects of your heritage and cultural background?