

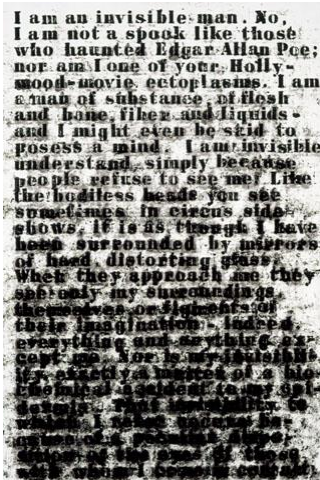
ALL ABOUT "WE"

USING LITERARY TEXT AS ART IN THE CONTEXT OF STUDYING SOCIAL ISSUES

ART AND LANGUAGE ARTS

GRADES: 9 - 12

BASED ON



Glenn Ligon (American, b.1882, d.1967)

Untitled (I Am An Invisible Man), 1993

Oil on canvas

Museum Purchase: Bequest of Mr. and Mrs. Walter J.

Wichgar, 2000.255

OBJECTIVES

- Students will analyze and discuss Glenn Ligon's *Untitled (I Am An Invisible Man)*.
- Students will read a fiction or nonfiction book with a social issue-related theme.
- Students will select a quote from the book that they strongly identify with.
- Students will reproduce the appropriated quote into a piece of artwork.

CONCEPT

Ligon has said of his work, "It's not about me. It's about we."

This is a key component of addressing many social issues – it is about the "we" of society. Social issues affect us collectively – as individuals, yes, but also as community members. Our community consists of our schools, towns, cities and counties, but we are also part of a larger community – our country and the world.

Our students have ideas and sometimes vocal opinions about what goes on around them; they have a keen awareness of undesirable social conditions simply through exposure to media and technology or personal experience. Real-world issues like peace and justice, race, gender, poverty, bullying, environment, violence, education, and economics often move our students to action. They become critical thinkers through dealing with topics relevant to their lives – by defining problems, gathering evidence, identifying causes, evaluating policies and developing solutions.

By coupling an independent reading assignment that deals with themes of social issues to an art assignment, students have an opportunity to explore ideas further. By connecting student-identified literary quotes with to

an art activity, students have a tangible reminder of the impact of the reading assignment to their lives and may be prompted to action.

Additional Ligon Quotes:

"...But I also had a deep interest in literature, which became a big part of what my work is about. But back then I was just filling up notebooks with sketches and drawings. So my mother sent me to pottery classes after school. At this point she had separated from my father. My brother and I were going to private school on scholarship. There wasn't a lot of extra money, but there was an attitude that money could be spent for anything that bettered us—in that black, working-class, striving kind of way. Culture was betterment. Anything we wanted to read was fine. Pottery classes or trips to the Met were fine. Hundred-dollar sneakers? No." -- Glenn Ligon

"I consider all the work I've done self-portraits filtered through other people's texts."
-- Glenn Ligon

MATERIALS

Book List of Suggested Social Issue Reading
[handout]
Summary of novel *Invisible Man*
Paper for Cutting Stencils
Cutting Mats

Xacto Blades
Cardboard (for lining t-shirts if spray painting)
Canvases
Paint / Collage Materials
Brushes

VOCABULARY

Conceptual Art
Quote
Social Issue

Social Justice
Stencil
Appropriation

PROCEDURE

1. Students will choose a book from a list of novels and nonfiction works with themes dealing with social issues and read the book.
2. Introduce the project by discussing Glenn Ligon's *Untitled (I Am An Invisible Man)*. Project image onto white board or in whatever manner works for your classroom. Ask students to describe what they see (black text on a canvas, image becomes blurry as it advances to the bottom, smudgy, use of contrast, etc.) Have students infer or speculate about how it was created. Ask students to interpret the text simply from what is read. What does it mean that he is an invisible man? Give a brief background of the novel *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison [handout]. Does this change your interpretation of *Untitled*? Why would an artist use a literary work to create art?

Other questions to consider: Is it ok or appropriate to "borrow" someone else's words to create art? Is it considered art when you borrow your ideas? Can words in a painting serve as self-portraits of the artist? What can you learn about the artist through this piece?

3. Spend the next class period giving students an opportunity to discuss the books read in context of social issues. Have students cite specific passages from the text that resonate with them or have caused them to think. Brainstorm ideas that could turn into works of art from the text. What is it about the text that resonates with students – author, characters, setting, plot, theme, style of writing, conflicts?

4. For a culminating project, students will “appropriate” or borrow a specific passage of text from their reading that resonated with them.
5. Students will use the selected text to create artwork for the classroom. Students will create a stencil for the artwork, then paint using the stencil of the quote. Students may choose to paint on a canvas, poster, t-shirt or other item.

ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed based on successful completion of the reading assignment, participation in class discussion, and successful completion of their finished project.

NATIONAL STANDARDS

Art Connections

Standard 1. Understands connections among the various art forms and other disciplines.

Visual Arts

Standard 3. Knows a range of subject matter, symbols, and potential ideas in the visual arts.

Standard 5. Understands the characteristics and merits of one's own artwork and the artwork of others

Language Arts

Standard 1. Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

RESOURCES

Glenn Ligon

http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=6902

<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/02/27/arts/design/20110227-ligon.html>

<http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/GlennLigon/Images>

Social Justice Websites for Teachers & Students

<http://krystal.d.hubpages.com/hub/How-to-Teach-Social-Justice-Throughout-the-Year-Books-Songs-Videos-and-Websites-for-Children>

<http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org/2008/07/01/the-best-teacher-resource-sites-for-social-justice-issues/>

<http://gws.ala.org/tags/social-justice>

<http://teachingforpeace.org/> [my favorite – has links to videos, comprehensive materials, etc.]

http://globalclassroom.unicef.ca/en/resources/secondary_lesson_plans.htm

<http://www.grandmothersforpeace.org/activism/links>

http://www.freechild.org/youth_activism_2.htm

Print Resource

Reaching Diverse Learners Through Social Justice Themes (handout)

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids - and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me! Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination - indeed, everything and anything except me. Nor is my invisibility exactly a matter of a biochemical accident to my optogenetics. That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiarly allergic reaction of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact.

Glenn Ligon (American, b.1882, d.1967)

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