Global Art Encounters *

We use art to communicate who we are and how our culture works. So do all groups of people. Art is a form of cultural language.

–June King McFee

The following creative prompts are intended to encourage "thinking in a global context." These activities are designed around universal purposes of art that are common to all, or many, cultures (such as the use of art to portray myths and legends, to adorn the body, to create an illusion or magic, etc.) and how universal themes (such as family, celebration, love, injustice, war, and so on) are expressed through the art objects of various cultures. In these encounters, students will learn to analyze, compare, classify and interpret art objects as signifiers of cultural values. They also get to design and create art objects themselves that reflect their own cultural beliefs and values. By emphasizing commonalities and relationships among all people, these global art encounters discourage the formation of narrow stereotypes regarding persons from other cultures. By recognizing the unique differences among all people, these global art encounters encourage students to be open-minded and to consider points of view other than their own.

- 1. Examine masks from different cultures, primitive to modern. Discuss the universality of masks. Identify purposes for various types of masks and categorize them by form and function. Analyze how specific masks make you feel, especially masks which transform the personality, and how various emotions are conveyed in the masks. Consider ways people "mask" their thoughts and feelings by using facial expressions. Using found materials, create a mask that will give you special powers when it is worn.
- 2. Create a work of art that passes on to the next generation something about now which you think is important. Categorize works of art made by members of your class according to similarities and differences. Discuss what factors were considered to determine importance. Examine how art is used in different cultures to record and transmit myths, folklore, legends, beliefs, and truths. Select a well-known myth or legend and draw a picture(s) which places the hero or heroine in modern American life (e.g. "Robin Hood in New York City").
- 3. Design a postcard about you. Consider the kinds of lines, textures, colors and shapes that you like. Then, include these things in your postcard. Exchange postcards with a pen pal in another country. Examine ways "new tools" (e.g. computers and the Internet)allow us to make new connections between people, places and ideas.

- 4. Research and select a folktale or myth characteristic of a particular culture past or present. Plan and present a puppet show that shares with others the particular story.
- 5. Examine how different cultures use art to commemorate and celebrate persons and events. Compare and contrast stamps and currency from different cultures. Design currency that celebrates you!
- 6. Imagine yourself as an animal. Describe the basis for this animal as being you. Examine the use of animal metaphors by artists in different cultures. Create a mask based upon your personal animal metaphor.
- 7. Analyze human beings. Evaluate their needs and abilities. Draw a picture showing how you would make human beings better. Discuss and compare designs among class members. Value diversity and similarity of thinking.
- 8. Draw a picture showing how you would keep a dog and cat from fighting. Compare solutions among class members. Discuss the meaning of "conflict." List examples of conflict on the board including personal, group, national and international. Discuss the global implications of the dog/cat conflict and the solutions offered by the class.
- 9. Visually examine your school. Decide and illustrate how you would make your school a better place. Compare designs among class members. Value diversity and similarity of thinking. Decide and illustrate how you would make the world a better place. Discuss the meaning of the phrase "Think Globally act locally." As a class, select one or more of the proposed "school improvement" solutions Devise a plan for implementing the solution and then do it!
- 10. Imagine that you are a 40th-century archeologist on a "dig" and you've discovered remnants of our 21st century culture. Choose any contemporary object, the more familiar and commonplace the better, and give your "misinterpretation" of its original function. Illustrate and describe your idea. Examine artifacts from past cultures. Speculate on their possible functions and purposes.
- 11. Identify "causes of the year." Select what you consider the most important "cause" and produce a work of art to increase public awareness. Observe works of art made to affect social change.
- 12. Generate a group list of possible meanings of the word "shelter." Consider the broadest sense and application of the word. Analyze various factors that affect the design and construction of shelters in different parts of the world. Determine how culture influences shelter design (e.g., extended families remain close together in multi-family units in some cultures; the habit of sitting on the floor in the Oriental home influences its design). Consider how technology determines the design of shelters? Location? Climate? Draw three

- views of an "ideal" shelter for your family to live in. Construct a 3-D model using cardboard and found materials from your drawings.
- 13. Discuss the meaning of "injustice." Recall a time in which you experienced or witnessed an injustice. Identify your thoughts and feelings at the time of this incident. Depict this scene in a drawing, using expressive lines to convey your feelings. Examine and compare works of art from various cultures and time periods that bring attention to social injustice (e.g. Picasso's "Guernica" and Rivera's "The Liberation of the Peons").
- 14. Research hats and headgear from various world cultures, past or present. List various attachments. Consider function and aesthetics. Create a hat or headgear that will make the wearer feel important.
- 15. Examine how art reflects daily living patterns. Compare the hand tools and utensils of various cultures. Consider, for instance, the clay pottery of the Pueblo Indians, the wine storage vessels of the ancient Chinese and the paper cups of America's fast-food restaurants. Decide which culture seemed to place the most/least value on food containers. Create a food container that visually conveys the value of its contents.
- 16. Discuss how people from various cultures have viewed death through the generations and how their ideas are portrayed in their art. Examine reproductions of the relics from King Tut's tomb. Speculate on the meaning and use of the objects. Identify contemporary people who are similarly honored and idolized. Select and research a well-known person from any world culture. Create an art object to honor the person of your choice.
- 17. Examine ways human beings decorate their faces. Collect examples of facial ornamentation from various cultures. Categorize them according to purpose (e.g., protection, concealment, symbolism, appeal). Design facial decoration that symbolizes the inner and outer you.
- 18. Analyze and ponder the "ingredients" of various cultures. Select one culture and imagine how it might fit together like a giant working machine. Draw a picture of your selected culture. Examine how various cultural designs "work" individually as well as together.
- 19. Examine the ways in which people "package" themselves. Analyze everyday concerns that affect our choices. Research "people packaging" within family, friends, neighborhood, community, state, nation, and world. Imagine and design your most ideal self-package.
- 20. Compare various artifacts created for use in rituals or ceremonies throughout the world. Determine functional and aesthetic values. List ritualistic behaviors that are apart of our daily existence Including work, play, social action, worship, marriage, education and so on). Create an art object for use in a daily ritual.

- 21. Examine various forms of architecture throughout the world. Distinguish between general forms and specific details. Design a hat that reflects architecture from a particular place or culture. Plan an "architectural style show" where class members model their creations.
- 22. Consider ways we could increase the world's food supply. List alternative solutions. Draw a picture showing how you would increase the world's food supply. Propose a solution unlike anyone. Discuss and compare ideas. Value diversity of thinking among class members.
- 23. Collect examples of graphic symbols that portray the variety of human experience on earth. Use these found images to create a "cosmic message" about life on earth to be carried aboard a spaceship and directed to other intelligent life forms in the universe.
- 24. Select two works of art from different cultures yet related to the same content (e.g., love or family). Analyze and discuss how culture influences the interpretation. Decide which one best signifies the meaning mentioned. Explain why.
- 25. Examine ways that artists from various cultures have depicted relationships between human beings and their environments (e.g., compare Chinese landscape paintings with American landscape paintings). Create an art object that celebrates the earth. Plan an EARTH day.
- 26. Design your own global-art problem to solve. Create a solution.
- * I created this list of creative prompts while going to graduate school in the 1980s. I recently found the list and while reviewing it decided it is just as relevant today as it was nearly 30 years ago.

-- Craig Roland, 2012