

CURATING CULTURE – WORKING WITH THE AFRICAN AND ASIAN VISUAL ARTISTS ARCHIVE

1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

AIM: PUPILS TO BECOME FAMILIAR WITH IMAGES IN THE AFRICAN AND ASIAN VISUAL ARTISTS ARTIST ARCHIVE TO UNDERSTAND THE PROCESSES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CURATING AN EXHIBITION.

OBJECTIVES:

FOR PUPILS TO BE FAMILIAR WITH THE AFRICAN AND ASIAN VISUAL ARTISTS ARCHIVE AS A RESOURCE FOR THEIR WORK IN ART A DESIGN.

FOR PUPILS TO GAIN INSIGHT INTO THE PROCESS OF CURATING AN EXHIBITION, AN AWARENESS THAT EXHIBITION CURATING HAS A LONG HISTORY

TO UNDERSTAND THE PROCESS OF EXHIBITING ART AND ARTEFACTS HAS BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN DETERMINING OUR VIEW OF ART HISTORY AND WHAT WE REGARD AS IMPORTANT ART WORKS.

FOR PUPILS TO APPRECIATE THE POWER OF TEXT IN INFLUENCING THE WAY WE VIEW IMAGES.

FOR PUPILS TO DEVELOP THE ABILITY TO MAKE CONFIDENT, CRITICAL RESPONSES TO WORKS OF ART AND TO FEEL THAT THESE RESPONSES ARE VALUED.

2. PROJECT OUTLINE

FOUR SECONDARY SCHOOLS FROM NEWHAM, DAGENHAM AND BARNET HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN CURATING CULTURE A PROJECT LOOKING AT IMAGES HELD BY THE AFRICAN AND ASIAN VISUAL ARTISTS' ARCHIVE (AAVAA) - A COMPREHENSIVE SLIDE ARCHIVE OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART BY ARTISTS OF AFRICAN AND ASIAN DESCENT WHO HAVE WORKED OR ARE CURRENTLY WORKING IN THE UK. SELECTA! IS A SELECTION FROM THE COLLECTION OF IMAGES PRESENTED THROUGH THE EYES AND VOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE.

THE PROJECT BEGAN WITH PUPILS LOOKING AT IMAGES FROM ADVERTISING, REFLECTING ON HOW TEXT AND IMAGES WORK TOGETHER. EDUCATIONAL GAMES WERE PLAYED BY STUDENTS TO INSPIRE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE IMPACT OF WORDS ON HOW ART WORKS ARE READ BY AUDIENCES. ON A VISIT TO THE HAYWARD GALLERY FOR THE UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE EXHIBITION (2005) AND TATE BRITAIN, PUPILS MET WITH A CURATOR AND WERE INVITED TO TALK AND ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FACTORS THAT DETERMINE THE SELECTION AND COMBINATION ART WORKS FOR EXHIBITIONS, THE PRACTICALITIES OF CURATING AND ISSUES AROUND INTERPRETATION AND THE PROVISION OF INFORMATION ABOUT ARTISTS AND ART WORKS. PUPILS PLAYED CURATORIAL GAMES, SELECTING A COMBINATION OF IMAGES FOR THEIR OWN REASONS WHICH OTHERS WERE ASKED TO TRY TO GUESS.

IN ADDITION TO IDEAS AROUND EXHIBITION DISPLAY AND CURATING, PUPILS LEARNED ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE ARCHIVE AND THE REASONS BEHIND ITS EXISTENCE. OF THE 200 ARTISTS REPRESENTED IN THE ARCHIVE, 20 WERE SELECTED, EACH SCHOOL LOOKING AT 5 ARTISTS. FINALLY THEY WERE GIVEN THE TASK OF EXPLORING DIFFERENT POSSIBILITIES FOR THE WAY THESE IMAGES COULD BE SELECTED AND PRESENTED. THIS INVOLVED LOOKING AT THE EFFECT OF DIFFERENT COMBINATIONS OF ART WORKS AND IDENTIFYING KEY THEMES IN THE ART WORKS.

THROUGH DISCUSSION WITH THEIR PEERS, TEACHER AND ARTIST-EDUCATOR, STUDENTS COMPILED THEIR THOUGHTS ABOUT THE ARTWORK AND GAVE THEIR INTERPRETATIONS. PUPILS SELECTED WORKS THAT THEY WERE INTERESTED IN TO GIVE THEIR OPINION AND THESE COMMENTS HAVE BEEN COLLECTED TO CREATE THE CD-ROM

3. IN BRIEF

THE PROJECT TOOK PLACE AS A RESULT OF A GRANT AWARDED TO AAVAA FROM THE HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND. PUPILS FROM KEY STAGES 3, 4 AND 5 WORKED WITH ARTIST MATTHEW KRISHANU AND ALANA JELINEK OVER SEVERAL SESSIONS. SELECTA! IS A RESULT OF THE PROJECT WHICH PRESENTS IMAGES AND INFORMATION FROM THE ARCHIVE AS WELL AS PROVIDING ACTIVITIES THAT EXPLORE THE PROCESS OF COLLECTING AND CURATING. THE SUCCESS OF INTRODUCING THIS APPROACH TO SCHOOLS LED TO A NEWLY DEvised SCHEME OF WORK ON CURATING CULTURE TO FURTHER EXPLORE ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT IN THE PROJECT. THE SCHEME ALLOWS PUPILS TO TAKE INSPIRATION FROM THE WORKS THEY EXPLORE TO INFORM THEIR OWN ART WORKS MAKING REFERENCE TO THEIR CULTURAL EXPERIENCES. (SEE SCHEME OF WORK YEAR 10: CURATING CULTURE)

4. ANALYSIS

LOOKING AT CULTURE IN THIS WAY WAS SIGNIFICANT FOR LEARNERS BECAUSE:

- IT HAS PROVIDED PUPILS WITH ROUTES TO FINDING ART WORKS FOR INSPIRATION THAT ARE DIFFERENT FROM WHAT IS OFFERED USUALLY BY MAINSTREAM ART INSTITUTIONS
- IT HAS DEMONSTRATED HOW THE SELECTION AND COMBINATION OF IMAGES AND THE USE OF TEXT CAN PLAY A KEY ROLE IN DETERMINING HOW WE LOOK AT AND RESPOND TO ART WORKS
- IT HAS PROVIDED PUPILS WITH TOOLS FOR LOOKING CRITICALLY AT ART WORKS AND ARTICULATING RESPONSES.

THE PROJECT HAS BEEN SIGNIFICANT FOR THE SCHOOL BECAUSE:

- IT HAS SHOWN THE SCHOOL HOW RARELY IT IS THAT PUPILS CONSIDER THE INFLUENCE OF CURATING ON WHAT ART WORKS WE SEE AND HOW WE SEE THEM
- IT HAS LED TO PLANS FOR A SCHEME OF WORK THAT EXPLORES THE PROCESS OF CURATING TO BE EMBEDDED IN THE YEAR 10 CURRICULUM.
- IT ALLOWS PUPILS THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE THE ARTWORK BY ARTISTS THAT REFLECT THE DIVERSITY OF THEIR OWN BACKGROUNDS.

KEY ISSUES THAT OTHER SCHOOLS MIGHT CONSIDER IN DOING CROSS-CULTURAL WORK IN ART AND DESIGN ARE:

- EXPLORING THE ACT AND PROCESS OF CURATING IS A VALUABLE WAY OF BOTH DEVELOPING TOOLS FOR LOOKING CRITICALLY AT ART WORKS AND ARTICULATING RESPONSES AND PROVIDES VALUABLE INSIGHTS INTO HOW OUR VIEW OF ART AND ITS HISTORY HAS BEEN SHAPED AND INFLUENCED BY THE CHOICES OF COLLECTORS AND CURATORS.
- PILOTING A NEW APPROACH USING AFTER SCHOOL TIME CAN BE A VALUABLE WAY OF EXPERIMENTING, HONING AND REFINING ACTIVITIES THAT WILL BECOME PART OF REGULAR CURRICULUM PROVISION.

SCHOOLS: STRATFORD SCHOOL, NEWHAM
ROBERT CLACK SCHOOL OF SCIENCE, BARKING AND DAGENHAM
SARAH BONNELL SCHOOL, NEWHAM
KINGSFORD COMMUNITY SCHOOL, NEWHAM

TEACHERS: JULIA MILLETTE
CHRISTINE POOLE
MARIAN DOULL
SARAH DONOVAN

ARTISTS: MATTHEW KRISHANU, ALANA JELINEK
PROJECT MANAGER: SEPAKE ANGIAMA