Taking Our Place in the Art World

Feminist Arts Curriculum

Developed and Written by Kesa Kivel

Cover Illustration by Lynn Eames

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Introduction

The Taking Our Place in the Art World curriculum's art-based activities and discussion topics focus on contemporary gender stereotypes and the gender discrimination that women in the art world have encountered from the Middle Ages to the present. Included are a Gender Stereotypes Exercise, a handout on Discrimination and Obstacles Faced by Women in the Art World, a Research and Art Timeline Activity, and a list of resources.

My goal in creating this curriculum was to present a balanced learning experience, highlighting some of the ways in which women have been discriminated against as well as some of the contributions women have made despite that discrimination. It is essential to introduce positive female role models and success stories about women in addition to noting some of the hardships they have faced. Hope, celebration, and inspiration are important teaching tools.

The curriculum was designed for students from the 6th grade to college levels and can be incorporated into art classes, women's studies classes, and after-school programs for adolescent girls. Pick and choose the exercises that work best for your group, and modify them to meet your particular students' needs. No special art skills are needed for any of the exercises. Art is for everybody!

I would appreciate any feedback you may have about your experiences in using Taking Our Place in the Art World: Feminist Arts Curriculum. Please e-mail me at kesakivel@mac.com or use the curriculum evaluation form at the back of the guide. Future editions will be enhanced by your responses. I look forward to hearing from you.

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Project Background

The Taking Our Place in the Art World: Feminist Arts Curriculum was developed in conjunction with the exhibition Multiple Vantage Points: Southern California Women Artists, 1980-2006, which was on view at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery in Barnsdall Park from February 25 through April 15, 2007. Curated by Dextra Frankel, the exhibition was presented and sponsored by the Southern California Women's Caucus for Art, the Southern California Council of the National Museum of Women in the Arts, and the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs. The exhibit featured the work of fifty women artists who were active in the decades following the rise of the feminist art movement. The exhibit, which drew more than 3,500 visitors, included performance art as well as works in both traditional and new media. Organized as a complement to WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution, 1965-1980, the Multiple Vantage Points exhibition explored the connections between women artists working in Southern California today and the early global history of feminist art.

An illustrated exhibition catalog and a DVD documentary are available. Information can be found online at scwca.org.

Both Taking Our Place in the Art World: Feminist Arts Curriculum and the Multiple Vantage Points: Southern California Women Artists, 1980-2006 exhibition are part of The Feminist Art Project, a national initiative recognizing the aesthetic and intellectual impacts of women on visual arts and culture.
Discussion Points

Objective:
Students will consider the dearth of well-known women artists, as well as the reasons for and value of women-only art exhibitions.

Supplies Needed:
Butcher paper, marker

Say to Students: Do you think there is a need for women-only art exhibitions? Why or why not?
Possible answers include: There is a need because of gender discrimination in the art world or It’s unfair to show only women’s art.

Say to Students: Let’s explore this further by trying to think of the names of different artists. After you have offered a name, please wait until several other people have offered names before you add another one for me to write down. This will give everyone a chance to participate.

• First of all, let’s think of the names of male artists we’ve heard of (teacher writes down names of male artists as students mention them).
• Now let’s think of the female artists we’ve heard of (teacher writes down names of female artists as students mention them).

If there are more male names than female names (a likely result), ask the students why they think the list of male artists has more names on it than the list of female artists.
Possible answers include: We weren’t taught about women artists in school or Women aren’t as good at art as men are.

Say to Students (whether or not many women were listed): It’s important to know that in the past, most women were denied an art education and exhibition opportunities just because they were female. Even today, there is a lot of discrimination that women artists experience because of their gender. Discrimination against women also exists in many other areas. Can you name some?
Possible answers include: In the workforce -- for example, women often receive less money than men for the exact same job; in the legal system -- for example, a husband cannot take his wife’s last name as easily as she can take his, as if his last name were more important than hers; in public practices -- for example, except for a few rarely circulated coins, U.S. currency does not have images of females.

Let’s explore some of the real and assumed differences between females and males and see how these assumptions relate to gender stereotypes, discrimination against women in the art world, and the existence of women-only exhibitions.

Facilitator continues with the “Gender Stereotypes” exercise (page 6).
Gender Stereotypes Exercise

Objectives:
• Students will be able to define stereotypes and provide examples -- in particular, examples of stereotypes about women in art that have been in place since the Middle Ages.
• Students will be able to define discrimination and provide examples of the ways in which women artists have been discriminated against in the art world.
• Students will explore how stereotyping and discrimination affect people and will discuss the reasons for and value of women-only art exhibitions.

Supplies Needed:
Writing paper, pens, butcher paper, marker. Copy the “Discrimination and Obstacles Faced by Women in the Art World” handout (pages 8 and 9) for each student.

Introduction:
Write “Girls are…” and “Boys are…” at the tops of two columns on the butcher paper. Ask students to define the word stereotype (an oversimplified and usually negative generalization about a particular group, race, or gender). Next, ask students to define the word discrimination (the unfair treatment of one person or group, usually because of lack of knowledge or inaccurate stereotypes).

• Ask students: “What are some common beliefs about girls and expectations for their behavior in our society?” Then list the students’ responses under the “Girls are…” column. Examples: Girls should be sweet and polite, submissive to boys and men, not aggressive. Girls like the color pink, are mean to each other, are not good at math.

• Ask students: “What are some common beliefs about boys and expectations for their behavior in our society?” Then list the students’ responses under the “Boys are…” column. Examples: Boys should be physically strong, athletic, adventurous, in charge; they are not supposed to cry or show vulnerability. Boys are always domineering; boys are better than girls at math and science.

• Ask students to determine which responses on their lists are stereotypes.

• Ask students to think of someone they either know or have heard of who counters (goes against) these stereotypes.

• Say to students: Listen to these two sentences -- Girls like pink. Some girls like pink. The second sentence contains a qualifying word -- in this case, the word some -- and is therefore less of a generalization. Some examples of qualifying words are most, many, some, a few. Can you use some of these qualifying words in the lists on the butcher paper? How do qualifying words help to prevent stereotypes?

Note to Facilitator: Make sure that qualifying words are not used to rationalize racist or sexist remarks. For instance, if a student said, “Most girls are stupid and will never understand math,” the remark is sexist, mean, and unacceptable, and qualifying words do not change that.

Discuss:
• Are stereotypes restricting? Why or why not?
• What are the possible effects of stereotyping girls just because they are female?
• What are the possible effects of stereotyping boys just because they are male?
• Have you ever been stereotyped? What happened? How did it make you feel?
Writing Assignment:
Say to Students: Write about a time when you either were the victim of discrimination yourself or witnessed someone else being discriminated against. What happened? How did it make you feel? What, if anything, might have prevented the situation from happening?

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Handout Reading Assignment:
Say to Students: Each of you, one at a time, will read out loud one section of the “Discrimination and Obstacles Faced by Women in the Art World” handout (pages 8 and 9).

Handout Writing Assignment:
Say to Students: You can see from the handout that many women artists in the past were told that they could not create art because they were female. Females were stereotyped as being incapable of being serious artists. They were discriminated against when they were denied entrance into art schools and guilds.

For the next assignment, choose one of the following topics and write about it:

1) What, if any, feelings arose for you after reading the “Discrimination and Obstacles Faced by Women in the Art World” handout? Does artwork ever help you deal with your emotions or help to heal you? Please explain.

2) The women who continued/continue to create, despite a lack of recognition for their talent or equal money for their work, had/have considerable strength in order to keeping doing their artwork despite the obstacles. Where does the strength to keep “at it” come from? Do you think you have this kind of strength? Please explain.

3) Some people might argue that it is morally unfair that most female artists have had more obstacles than male artists, and that we should all have equal opportunities to succeed. Do you agree with this argument? Please explain.
Discrimination and Obstacles Faced by Women in the Art World: Handout

Historical Examples:

In the past, there was a common belief that an artist must be male and that great art came from genius (someone with exceptional abilities), rather than from a combination of talent and supportive social conditions. Some examples of the ways in which women were not supported and/or were discriminated against include:

• During the Middle Ages (c. 500 - 1400) and Renaissance (c. 1400 - 1600) in Europe, the guild system was in place. Art guilds were organizations of artists that educated students and were available for art commissions. Girls could not participate in guilds until the late sixteenth century.

• During the Middle Ages and Renaissance, some women worked in painting or sculpture workshops headed by men (most often, the woman’s father). The man heading a studio directed the work and got credit for any work done there.

• During the Middle Ages, women of high social status were allowed to do book illuminations, which were books decorated with beautiful handwork. These books, however, were often unsigned; therefore, no credit could be given to the women who made them.

• From the period of the Renaissance through the nineteenth century, it was considered improper for women to draw nude models. The result was that women could not use models to learn about human anatomy. Think about it -- If you never actually saw a bare back, how could you accurately draw or paint it?

• For a long time, women found it difficult -- if not impossible -- to gain entrance to the best art schools.

• Because they were not considered serious artists, if women did go to school, they could only take art classes for beginners.

• Most women were not allowed to take examinations to prove their expertise, nor were they permitted to enter art competitions.

• Most of the small numbers of women who succeeded in the art world were daughters of artist fathers or had some close relationship with an artist, allowing them to learn about art materials and techniques without attending art school.

• Women did create artistic products such as crafts, but the works they created were often undervalued compared to works in the male-dominated world of visual art (such as painting).

• Crafts such as lacemaking, weaving, and embroidery were considered acceptable for women, but because the works were typically unsigned, no credit could be given to the women who made them.

• In the 19th century, those women who did manage to paint on their own without benefit of education, patronage, or family/professional associations usually lacked access to technical knowledge and access to the best materials. As a result, their work often perished – for example, colors faded or darkened, canvases rotted or sagged.

• The work of male artists was valued much more highly than that of female artists. In the 19th century, several paintings by the artist Judith Leyster were falsely attributed to the painter Frans Hals so that they would fetch more money (Germaine Greer, The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work).

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Current Examples:

- Despite an abundance of talented women artists, in 2006 women were selected for only 23% of the solo exhibitions held at the top 125 New York galleries.\(^1\) This unfair ratio of men’s solo shows to women’s solo shows is repeated in galleries across the nation.

- Male artists generally receive more money for their artwork than female artists do.\(^2\)

- Gender bias still exists among art collectors, as painter Rogue Simpson learned. The director of a gallery where her work was shown told her that a male art collector had come in and expressed great interest in one of Simpson’s paintings, saying “Tell me about this guy!” When the director told him that “the artist is one of our best -- but he’s a she,” the man immediately lost interest and left the gallery.\(^3\)

- The most widely used art textbook in the world is H.W. Janson’s *History of Art: The Western Tradition*. No female artists were selected for inclusion in the first edition, in 1962. In the 1986 edition, because of feminist protests, 19 female artists were included, along with 2,300 male artists.\(^4\) In the 2004 edition, 38 female artists were included, with 3,900 male artists.\(^5\)

- In blind juried shows, where the gender of entrants is unknown, women’s works are chosen 54% of the time (compared to men’s 46%); however, in invitational shows, where the gender of the artist is known, women’s works are chosen 16.7% of the time (compared to men’s 83.3%).\(^6\)

Gender and Racism:

- Women artists of color are selected less often than white women artists to show artwork, and their artwork is often valued less than that of white women.

- The prestigious *Artforum* magazine has an annual December “best of” issue (best artists of 2000, etc.). Between 2000 and 2004, 580 artists were mentioned in this issue; of these, 65 were white women, and 9 were women of color and non-European or American women.\(^7\)

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5 See note 3.
6 See note 3.
7 See note 4.

Other Resources


Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work*.


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Research and Art: Timeline Activity
Celebrating Women’s Accomplishments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1800*</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Any period of time may be chosen.

Objective:
Students will research and learn about women’s achievements, then create a timeline (incorporating art and collage) to help educate others about these achievements. If students want to include a specific personal achievement of their own, or if they want to note the achievement of someone they know, that is fine, too (e.g., for Option One, a student might include her artist grandmother’s name and her birth year; for Option Two, a student might include her mother’s name and the year her mother graduated from college.

Supplies Needed:
Long piece of butcher paper, colorful markers, and other drawing materials. Optional: Multicultural images of women, or materials such as fabric to create a border around the timeline. If you use these options, provide glue, scissors, and rulers.

Note to Facilitator:
The timeline can be either an individual or group project. It can cover any time period and focus on any category of women and their artistic/other achievements (for example, an Option One timeline might include women artists of color from 1950 to 2000). For each entry on the timeline, students will write the name of the woman (or women’s organization), the relevant year, and the achievement.

Option One:
Students will create a timeline celebrating women artists.

Option Two:
Students will create a timeline celebrating women’s achievements across many disciplines — art, science, music, sports, etc. (The “Option Two: Timeline Handout” on page 10 can serve as a resource, if desired.) Encourage students to do their own research to discover women of interest.

Ideas to Give Students:
- Instead of a straight line, students could use a tree limb, an arrow, footprints, or some other type of symbol to mark the horizontal line.
- The women noted on the timeline can be represented by graphic symbols in addition to their names. For example, the symbol used could be the notation for female (a circle on top of a cross), a flower, or a hammer with the woman’s name written on it.
- Students can create a border of women’s images around the timeline, either with a collage of images cut from magazines or with their own artwork.
- Students may want to use some of the art styles (e.g., impressionistic, realistic) they have seen or studied in decorating the timeline.
Some Achievements of Women in the U.S.
Handout: Timeline Activity, Option Two

1800s

1832--A group of free black women form the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Salem, Massachusetts.
1848--The first women’s rights convention in the U.S. is held in Seneca Falls, New York.
1851--Former slave Sojourner Truth gives her most famous speech, “Ain’t I a Woman,” at a women’s rights convention in Akron, Ohio.
1872--Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton, the first Mexican-American to write books in English, publishes her novel *Who Would Have Thought It?* The book satirizes (makes fun of) Yankee racism.
1872--Victoria Woodhull is the first woman to campaign for the U.S. presidency.

Late 1800s--The women’s auxiliaries of the Mutual Aid Societies are formed to assist the Mexican-American community.

1881--Clara Barton starts the American Red Cross, which she led for 22 years.
1883--Jewish poet Emma Lazarus writes her sonnet “The New Colossus” (containing the famous words “Give me your tired, your poor...”), which is eventually engraved at the base of the Statue of Liberty.
1892--Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s classic short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” is published, about a woman experiencing a mental breakdown as a result of her limiting wifey role and domestic duties.
1892--Ida B. Wells writes the editorials that begin her nationwide anti-lynching campaign.

1900s

1903--The Women’s Trade Union League is formed to work for an eight-hour workday, minimum wages, and women’s suffrage.
1920--Because of the suffrage movement, the 19th Amendment is ratified to give women the right to vote. However, women (and men) of color could not vote until passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
1962--Dolores Huerta co-founds the United Farm Workers.
1962--Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring* is published, sparking the environmental movement.
1965--Because of the Civil Rights Movement and its leaders such as Fannie Lou Hamer, black people are given the right to vote with passage of the Voting Rights Act.
1967--An organization called New York Radical Women is formed and the next year starts the first consciousness-raising group, intended to empower women through self-knowledge. Groups spring up across the country.
1973--Attorney and civil rights activist Vilma S. Martinez is elected president and general counsel of the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF).
1976--Physicist Chien-Shiung Wu receives the National Medal of Science for her research into subatomic particles.
1900s, continued

1977--Rosalyn Sussman Yalow shares the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for her work in the use of radioisotopes to measure small amounts of peptide hormones in the body.

1979--The artist Judy Chicago’s art piece The Dinner Party, a representation of women’s history, is exhibited in San Francisco.

1981--Maya Lin, a 21-year-old Chinese-American architectural design student, wins the competition to design the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

1987--Wilma Mankiller becomes the first woman to be elected Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.

1993--NASA astronaut Ellen Ochoa becomes the first Latina to go into space, as a member of the space shuttle Discovery crew.

1997--Singer/songwriter Sarah McLachlan launches the first Lilith Fair, a transnational women’s music festival.

2000s

What women could you list here?
Resource List

Films

**Girl House Art Project DVD**
This 16-minute film documents the last month of the ten-month YWCA Santa Monica/Westside Girl House Art Project, inspired by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro’s 1972 Womanhouse art installation. The Girl House Art Project public exhibition was held in June 2006 and showcased feminist art by middle school girls. For a free Girl House Art Project DVD and Girl House and Beyond: A Facilitator’s Guide for Empowering Young Women (while supplies last), contact Kesa Kivel at kesakivel@mac.com.

**Multiple Vantage Points DVD.** To purchase the documentary film (for ages 17 and up) about the Multiple Vantage Points exhibition, please send an e-mail request to mvp@scwca.org.

**Women Artists: The Other Side of the Picture.** Film for the Humanities and Sciences (800-257-5126). This 54-minute color film addresses the lack of women artists from various points of view, including those of the Guerilla Girls, individual women artists, and art museum directors.

Art Books

**Exhibiting Student Art: The Essential Guide for Teachers,** by David Burton (2006). This is an excellent practical guide for exhibiting art that emphasizes an active role for students through an empowering, collaborative process.

**Art on My Mind: Visual Politics,** by Bell Hooks. The author talks about producing, exhibiting, and critiquing art, with special focus on the black struggle in the art world.

**The Power of Feminist Art,** edited by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard. Through photos, essays, and interviews, this book documents the feminist art movement, including feminist art education programs, publications, and women artists.

Books for Young People


**Speak,** by Laurie Halse Anderson. 1999 National Book Award Finalist. Beautifully written novel about a high school girl speaking up for herself. Highly recommended.

**Girl Stories,** by Lauren R. Weinstein. A comic book suitable for some high school and older girls.


**33 Things Every Girl Should Know About Women’s History,** edited by Tonya Bolden

Books on Education

**Gender in the Classroom,** edited by David Sadker and Ellen S. Silber

**Rethinking Our Classroom: Teaching for Social Justice,** edited by Bill Bigelow and others

**Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope,** by Bell Hooks

**Tomorrow’s Children,** by Riane Eisler

Books on Feminism

**Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics,** by Bell Hooks

**Hijas Americanas: Beauty, Body Image, and Growing Up Latina** by Rosie Molinary

**Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation,** edited by Barbara Findlen

**Why History Matters: Life and Thought,** by Gerda Lerner

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About The Author

Kesa Kivel is a Los Angeles-based artist, educator, and activist engaged in social justice issues, especially those concerning girls and women. Since 2003 she has volunteered to teach feminist issues to middle school girls, offering a broad-based curriculum in an interactive format. The Girl House Art Project, which was inspired by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro’s 1972 Womanhouse art installation, was completed in 2006.

For the Girl House Art Project, Kesa worked with a small group of middle school girls over a ten-month period as part of the YWCA Santa Monica/Westside’s community service programming. Among the topics covered in the curriculum were media literacy, women’s history, and the gender wage gap.

To find the theme for their art installation, the girls wrote and talked about what issues were important to them, with sexual harassment emerging as the most distressing common problem. The girls transformed a small on-site house into the bedroom of a girl who is being sexually harassed, artistically expressing this imaginary girl’s worries as well as the potential consequences to her of the harassment. A public exhibition of the project was held in June 2006. A 16-minute film, The Girl House Art Project, documents the last month of the ten-month project.

Kesa also created the teaching tool Girl House and Beyond: A Facilitator’s Guide for Empowering Young Women, which uses art and interactive activities to address the issue of sexual harassment and the cultural context in which sexual harassment is likely to occur. (See Resources, page 13, for information on how to obtain the film and the guide).

Prior to teaching a feminist arts curriculum, Kesa taught poetry to foster teens in a residential facility, as well as to young women and men incarcerated in juvenile halls and at a probation camp. She won the Operation Read Award from Camp Fred Miller in 2000.

Creating art is as important to her as creating curriculum. Using fabric, paint, and handmade paper, Kesa makes mandala-like forms that provide her with insight and direction for her spiritual journey. Kesa is a member of the Southern California Women’s Caucus for Art.
Taking Our Place Curriculum Evaluation

Please print out this form and mail your completed evaluation to me at:

Kesa Kivel
149 S. Barrington Ave. #132
Los Angeles, CA 90049

To request an e-mail evaluation form, please contact me at kesakivel@mac.com

Once I have received your completed evaluation form, you will be sent a special thank-you gift.

Name _____________________________________________

E-mail address _____________________________________________

Mailing address _____________________________________________

Place where curriculum was taught

__________________________________________________________

(community center, school, university, etc.)

Grade level: _____ middle school _____ high school _____ college/university _____ mixed group

Was it an _____ after-school program? _____ in class? ____________________ which class or program?

_________________________________________________________________________________________

What did you like most about Taking Our Place in the Art World: Feminist Arts Curriculum?

_________________________________________________________________________________________

What was the least effective part of it?

_________________________________________________________________________________________
What changes, if any, would you make to it?

Did you do any of the activities? If yes, which one/s? 

Were the instructions for each activity easy to follow? Any suggestions for improvement?

How would you describe your students’ reactions to the activities? Please explain.

Did you add to or change any activity to make it more relevant to the group of people you taught? Please describe your group.

What additions/changes did you make?

Would you recommend/have you recommended the curriculum to other educators? ____Yes ___ No