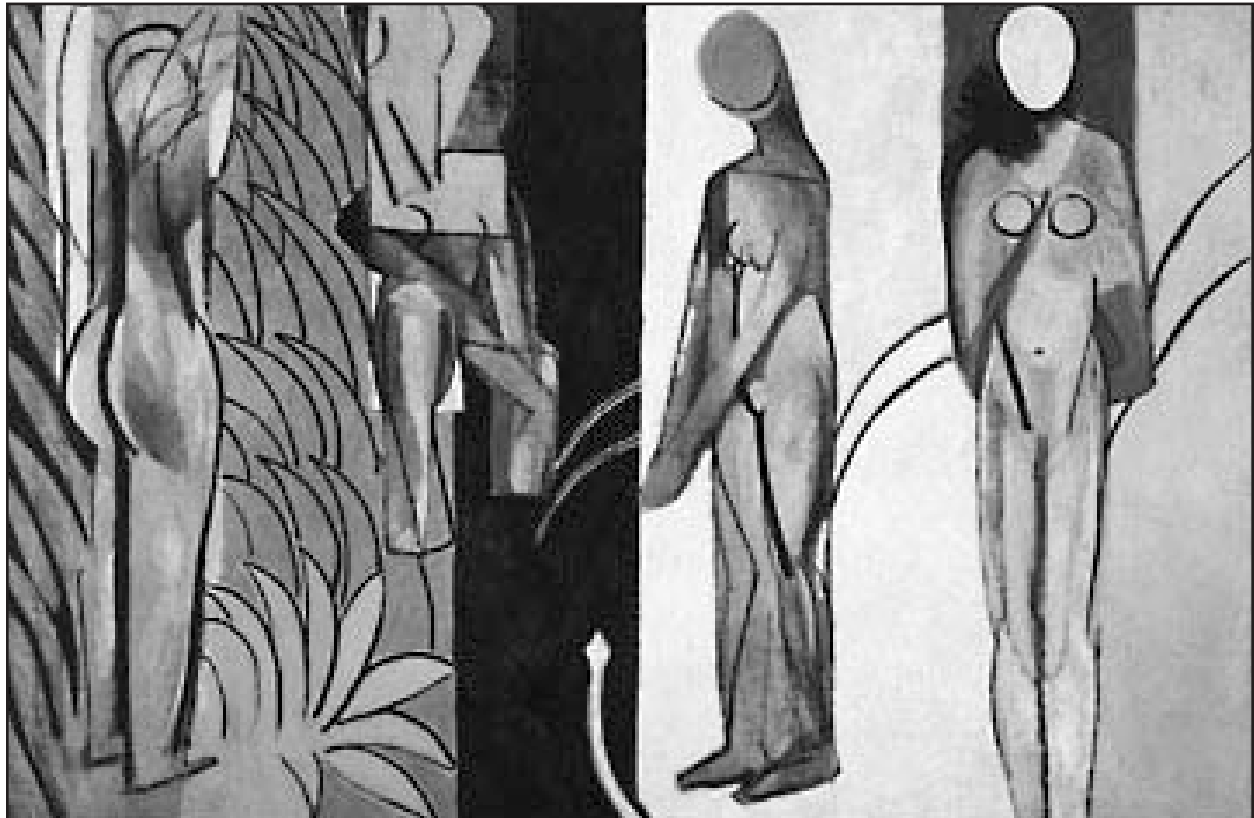


STUDENT & TEACHER PROGRAMS

department of museum education • the art institute of chicago

Body Language:

HOW TO TALK TO STUDENTS ABOUT NUDITY IN ART



Teacher Workshop

MARCH 18, 2003

“Don’t let the fear of what is difficult paralyze you.”

Paulo Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* (New York, 1998)

These notes summarize a teacher workshop that introduced methods for approaching nudity in art in museum and classroom settings. Comments and lesson plans were suggested by participating K–12 teachers, museum educators, administrators, and parents.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- From your perspective, what are some of the different purposes that artists have when they represent nude, or naked, figures? Why do you think that the human figure has been, historically and globally, such an important subject for artists?
- What productive role might these kinds of representations play in our lives and the lives of our students? Please give one or two examples.
- In what context do you discuss nudity in art with your students? How do you go about presenting the topic?
- In general, at what age do you think it is appropriate to begin speaking to students about nudity in art? Why? Are certain representations of nudity, or nakedness, in art more or less appropriate for different age groups? Can you give an example?
- What kinds of reactions do your students have to nudity in art? Why do you think students react the way they do? What does it reveal about their experiences or current trends in their cultural or social worlds? Also, what do students' reactions reveal about how they are interpreting art or their understanding of the importance of art?
- What reactions have you had from parents or administrators when you've addressed the topic of nudity in art? Why do you think they react the way they do? How important are the reactions of parents and administrators? How do their reactions impact students' experiences and attitudes?
- What are some ways that we can prepare our students for viewing and interpreting nudity in art? What are some ways that we can prepare administrators and parents of our students for this experience?
- In which other contexts does nudity become an issue for you and your students? How can these related discussions aid you in teaching about nudity in art?

WHY TALK ABOUT NUDITY IN ART?

Talking about nudity in art provides a way to . . .

. . . HIGHLIGHT COMMONALITY.

The body is universal and provides an entry point into a discussion about other cultures.

Students will find comfort when they feel at home in their bodies and see they are part of a human community.

Use the topic as an opportunity to teach about ideals of beauty and how they change depending on time and place.

Relate to age-appropriate common experiences, such as bathing, dress, etc.

. . . TALK ABOUT SEXUALITY.

Discussing nudity in art over time can create a solid historical basis from which you can begin to talk about sexuality.

Compare different sexual references and assumptions across cultures.

Subjectivity of art allows you to talk about sexuality in an open, sensitive way.

Use the discussion to encourage students' self-awareness and sense of comfort about their own bodies.

Help students understand the differences between appropriate and exploitative representations of the body.

Allow students to ask questions about sexual issues. Questions signal they may be ready to deal with the topic.

. . . ENHANCE VISUAL LITERACY.

Universality of the body allows students to identify with artwork and feel comfortable analyzing it critically.

The use of this pervasive subject in art and mass media allows students to compare/contrast how the medium, function, and audience affect how a subject is visually represented.

. . . BOOST KNOWLEDGE OF ARTISTIC TRAINING AND ART THEORY.

Introduce the body as the common denominator in art. This allows students to assess style, techniques, and iconography across cultures over time.

Teach about the history of drawing from life in workshop or academic settings.

Introduce students to art-historical literature and debate, such as differing viewpoints on the definitions of *nude* and *naked*. (See suggested reading: John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* and Kenneth Clark's *The Nude*.)

METHODS OF APPROACH

Be sensitive.

Be sensitive to the personal and academic needs of students. Consider students’:

- age/stage of physical development
- culture/religion
- parents’ reactions
- comfort level with you

Be comfortable with the subject matter.

- Ask yourself whether you are comfortable talking about nudity before embarking on the subject with students.
- Practice talking about the subject with friends or family.
- Take a “no big deal” attitude. Kids will respond to the subject with ease if you teach the subject with ease.
- Take control of the discussion to get through moments of discomfort.
- Make wise choices about which artwork you present. Include a variety of body types—skinny, tall, short, pudgy, male, female, etc.
- Works should represent multiple cultures, geographical regions, functions, and artistic styles.
- Present the artwork within social, historical, and geographical contexts.
- Take your students’ needs and interests into consideration when selecting objects.

Build a relationship.

- Frequent contact with artwork that features nudity and discussion about the objects helps make the topic more familiar and less scary.
- Begin discussing the body at an early age. Don’t wait until kids reach adolescence.
- A lengthy classroom discussion about nudity works better than just briefly touching on the subject in the museum.

LESSON PLANS—ELEMENTARY

Lesson one

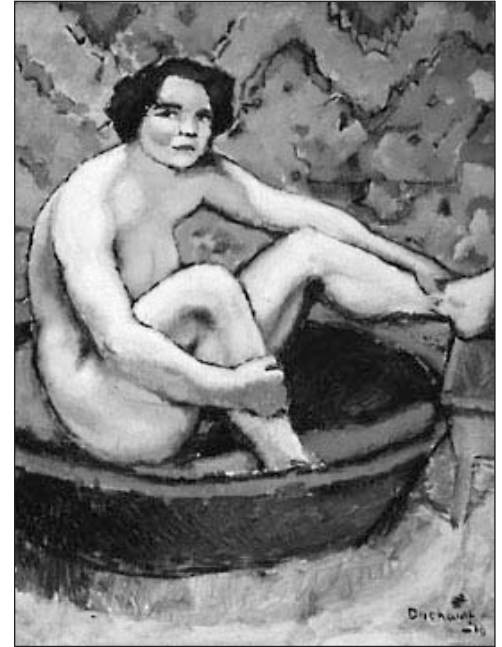
Create a curriculum that relates artwork to a child's everyday experience. This lesson plan should include an activity for students to do at home with their families. The objective is to help students and their parents understand and become comfortable with the fact that art represents both public and private aspects of life—including intimate experiences, such as bathing.



Mary Cassatt. *The Child's Bath*, 1893. Oil on canvas. Robert A. Waller Fund



Edgar Degas. *The Morning Bath*, 1892/95. Pastel on tan wove paper. Mr. and Mrs. Potter Palmer Collection



Marcel Duchamp. *Nude Seated in a Bathtub*, 1910. Oil on canvas. Gift of Mrs. Marcel Duchamp

INTRODUCTION

- Discuss why we bathe.
- Have students chart their daily bathing ritual.
- Discuss the development of modern bathing, from Roman baths to water basins to modern plumbing.
- Test how long it takes for water to boil and how often you need to adjust water temperature to keep it warm.
- Homework:* Have students interview older relatives to learn about their bathing rituals as children.

HOME ACTIVITIES

- Students take sponge baths.
- With the help of a family member, students fill up a bathtub with buckets of water.
- With the help of a family member, students keep track of how long it takes to boil water and discuss how to fill up a tub with that water.
- Students list the items they need to take a bath.
- Students consider the design of plumbing or bath items and design their own.
- Students create a photo exhibition of various bathrooms.

CONCLUSION

- Discuss why artists represent bathing in their work.
- Compare students' routines with the above paintings.

LESSON PLANS—ELEMENTARY

Lesson two

Create a lesson plan that prepares students for a field trip to the Art Institute to look at mythology in art. This pre-visit lesson should make students consider the reasons that artists often depict gods and goddesses without clothing. The lesson plan should also include some study of the contexts in which the works of art were produced.



Greece, Cycladic Islands, probably from the island of Keros. *Female Figure*, early bronze age, 2600/2400 B.C. Marble. Katherine K. Adler Endowment



Greece, Roman copy of a fourth century B.C. Greek original attributed to Skopas. *Statue of Meleager*, c. 50 B.C. Marble. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene A. Davidson



Luca Cambiaso. *Venus and Cupid*, c. 1570. Oil on canvas. A. A. Munger Collection

INTRODUCTION

- Teacher recounts a myth to the students, who then illustrate the god or goddess based on information from the story. Teacher defines mythology.
- Teacher asks students: What does a god/goddess look like? Do they wear clothes? Why do you think this, or why don't you?
- Teacher shows slides of mythological artwork at Art Institute.
- Class discusses different depictions of same god/goddess based on cultural differences and artistic interpretation.
- Homework:* Students choose one of three myths to take home and read with their families. Students draw the god or goddess from the story. They compare their homework drawing(s) with the one they made in class.

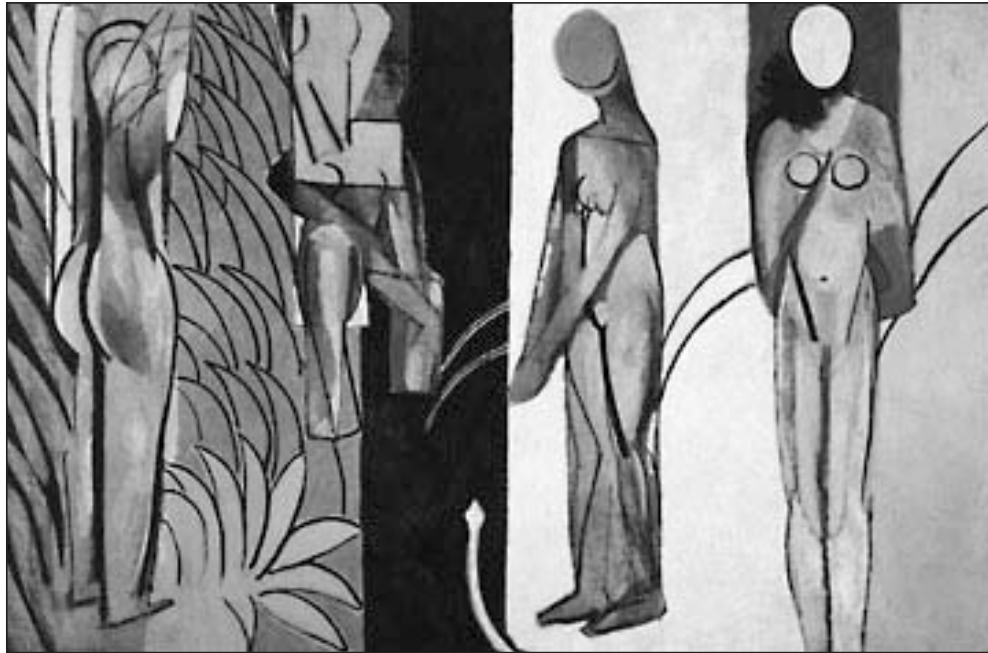
CLASS PROJECT

- Students imagine their own gods/goddesses. Each chooses an adjective for their deity.
- Students study the anatomy of the arm.
- Students create sculptures of their god's/goddess's arms based on the adjectives they chose.
- (Optional)* Students create value study drawings of their arm sculptures.

LESSON PLANS—MIDDLE SCHOOL

Lesson one

The body, in various stages of undress, is used in the media to sell or attract attention to a product. Prepare a classroom lesson that encourages students to think critically about the differences between how the naked body is used in advertising in art. The lesson should offer students an outlet to discuss how these differing representations affect their self-images and the public perception of nudity.



Top left: Lucas Cranach. *Eve*, c. 1530. Oil on panel. Charles H. and Mary F. S. Worcester Collection.

Top right: Henri Matisse. *Bathers by a River*, 1909, 1913, 1916. Oil on canvas. Charles H. and Mary F. S. Worcester Collection.

Bottom left: Jan Sanders van Hemessen. *Judith*, c. 1540. Oil on panel. Wirt D. Walker Fund.



INTRODUCTION

- Teacher defines “visual culture:” a field of study that analyzes and interprets the use and function of images in our culture as well as the way the viewer interacts with those images in relation to the world around him/her.
- Students choose images of the body in contemporary advertising.
- Students discuss their choices of images.
- Class discusses the history of the role of the body in advertising.
- Class discusses how images of the nude body in the media affect students’ self-images.
- Students compare/contrast how artists use the body in art and how it is used in advertising.
- Students compare the ages of the figures seen in advertising and art.

CLASS PROJECT

Create a visual timeline of how the body has been represented in art and advertising across cultures over the last 200 years, using the following materials: magazines, reproductions of art-work, scissors, glue, paper, pencils.

LESSON PLANS—MIDDLE SCHOOL

Lesson two

Using selected artwork and mass-media images (research nationalgeographic.com), create a lesson that makes students think critically about the ways art and the media affect our perceptions of another culture. The lesson should encourage students to consider how the American view of nudity affects the way we perceive the conventions of another culture. The lesson should also contrast the different kinds of information we are able to gather from artwork created by a given culture versus images of that culture created by an outsider. Be sure to include some discussion on the context of artwork and photographs. It may be helpful to first define American notions of modesty.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Compare/contrast a true representation of someone and an image that has been manipulated to create a sensation or certain feeling.
- What is American modesty? Is it learned? Relative?
- How do the following words relate to the way Americans view nudity? liberating, civilized, individual, innocent, distasteful
- Pose “what if” questions related to what is omitted from and included in an image.
- How would each culture’s own advertising differ from ours?



Top left: Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), Luluwa. *Maternity Figure*, early/mid 20th century. Wirt D. Walker Endowment. **Top right:** Paul Gauguin. *Why Are You Angry?*, 1896. Oil on canvas. Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection. **Bottom:** Nigeria, Kishi or Old Oyo, Yoruba. *Twin Commemorative Figures*, early/mid 20th century. Wood, glass beads, string. Gift of Jeffery and Deborah Hammer

LESSON PLANS—HIGH SCHOOL

Lesson one

Using the following artwork as a starting point, create a gallery activity that analyzes how the context of nudity changes our perception of it. The lesson should contrast the locations in which nudity is socially acceptable in the everyday world with how it is presented in fictional works (i.e., visual arts, literature, drama). How does nudity become associated with these particular contexts, whether real or invented? The lesson plan should also introduce the distinction between *nude* and *naked*.



Luca Cambiaso. *Venus and Cupid*, c. 1570. Oil on canvas. A. A. Munger Collection



Pablo Picasso. *Nude under a Pine Tree*, 1959. Oil on canvas. Bequest of Grant J. Pick



Marcel Duchamp. *Nude Seated in a Bathtub*, 1910. Oil on canvas. Gift of Mrs. Marcel Duchamp



Paul Delvaux. *The Awakening of the Forest*, 1939. Oil on canvas. Joseph Winterbotham Collection

INTRODUCTION

- a. Have students read John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1995) and Kenneth Clark's *The Nude* (1972).
- b. Discuss the distinction between nude and naked as a class, using reproductions of artwork.
- c. Have students find images of unclothed bodies in magazines.
- d. Have them classify these representations as naked or nude.
- e. As a class, discuss how the context, pose, and gaze of the figure affect the viewer's perception of that body.

MUSEUM VISIT

- a. Make a trip to the Art Institute to view different images of the body.
- b. Have students discuss how Berger and Clark would view these images.
- c. Have students discuss their own reactions to these images. This discussion will help them form their own opinions about nude versus naked.

FOLLOW UP

- a. *Homework:* Have students write journal entries reflecting concepts of nude/naked as a way to clarify ideas and create their own definitions.
- b. Share these reflections in class.

LESSON PLANS—HIGH SCHOOL

Using this androgynous Indian figure as a starting point, create a classroom lesson that forces students to consider the ways in which our bodies and genders define us socially and intellectually. Have students contrast the ways that art and the media may objectify gender and the body.

ADDITIONAL LESSON IDEAS

- a. Compare and contrast male and female beauty through the ages, using artwork and popular images from magazines, movies, etc.
- b. Have students write journal entries about how they personally relate to the terms *masculine* and *feminine*. Select a few of these essays to read aloud and discuss as a class. (This method allows students to remain anonymous about sensitive body issues.)
- c. Using reproductions of artwork, have students select images they identify with in some way. In their journals, have them describe their connections to the objects they chose. Anonymously read journal selections aloud and discuss as a class.
- d. Ask students to make lists of words that are commonly associated with *male* and *female*. Using media images, create collages that represent the male and/or the female body. Then create similar collages using reproductions of artwork. Compare and contrast these collages and word lists. Ask students to create their own lists or images of these categories. Discuss how their definitions differ from the ones they see in the media.
- e. As a class, brainstorm definitions of *man* and *woman*. Ask students to discuss the ways in which they can relate to both classifications. Using materials of their choosing, have students create self-portraits that include whichever characteristics they identify with.
- f. Have students create drawings of masculinity or femininity that do not include body parts. For example, don't use a breast to identify a woman. Share these drawings and discuss as a class.
- g. Have students create a uniform figure from gingerbread or paper. Make multiple copies of this figure. Differentiate the gender of these figures using color, line, and texture. Share these figures and discuss as a class.



India, Tamil Nadu. *Androgynous Form of Shiva and Parvati*, 14th century. Granite. Gift of the Alsdorf Foundation

SUGGESTED READING

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