

Inter-school activity: exploring identity through *art*.

Planning document · Johna Hungler & Suzanne Byerly Taylor · 2025

Essential question

What makes up our identity? Is it where we are from, or where we live? How can we use art as a form of self-expression? What similarities and differences do we find among the students? Where did these assumptions come from, and how have they impacted our perception of others?

Student introductions

Description and tool used: Zoom.
Student-facing introductions with teacher supervision. Students were introduced to one another through Zoom. They interacted as a whole group, and they also took time to introduce themselves to each other individually. The teacher was present in each classroom to facilitate and observe.

Classes

Johna's class: 6th grade
(newcomers), 15 students, all girls.

Suzanne's classes: 16 6th graders, boys and girls, most of whom have lived in Jacksonville their whole lives and many who have attended the same school their entire lives.

Student interactions

The students interacted twice. First, through email correspondence between teachers. In their individual classes, students were asked about their impressions of refugee teenagers in America (Suzanne's class) and American teenagers (Johna's class). Suzanne and Johna then shared responses so they could share with their respective classes. The second time was through Zoom, where they introduced themselves to each other and then asked questions. Upon completion of this activity (since it is due this week), the students and teachers hope to interact again to discuss reflections.

Spotlight Challenge resources

Arts & Culture, Project Zero's Lenses for Dialogue to guide the student discussions when viewing each other's projects, Empatico's resources for digital literacy and preparing our classroom to partner with another classroom, and the lesson *How Do You See Me*.

Technology tools

Google Arts & Culture to explore museums, Zoom to interact with our partner school, YouTube shorts (a day in the life of an American teen), and Google Translate.

Content resources

Google Arts and Culture; *Don't Ask Me Where I'm From, Ask Me Where I'm Local*; Empatico's resources for digital literacy; NAMLE *Key Questions When Analyzing Media Experiences*; Project Zero's *Lenses for Dialogue*.

How students are grouped

Throughout the lessons for Johna's class, students will be grouped individually, in small groups, and in whole groups on different days. Students will work independently to complete their identity wheel and reflections.

The students in Suzanne's class will work independently to each reflect on his/her own identity and create his/her own shadowbox. Think-pair-share was employed for the students to reflect on what they would like to talk about during our Zoom with Johna's class. As a whole group, we did a silent chalk talk and, of course, Zoomed with Johna's class.

Formative assessments

JOHNA'S CLASS

- Think-Pair-Share
- Exit tickets
- Interactive student poll
- Oral presentation

SUZANNE'S CLASS

- Completing Guiding Questions handout to plan and sketch their shadowbox
- Silent Chalk Talk to express impressions of refugee teenagers in America
- Think-pair-share what they would like to share during the Zoom
- Visible reflection about Zoom—what similarities did they find; what surprised them

How global education is part of this activity

This activity will connect students from diverse backgrounds and cultures (Johna's class is low-income, refugee newcomers; Suzanne's class is mostly high-income, belonging to the same country club, and lived in the same place their entire lives) and encourage the students to use empathy and communication skills to understand each other's perspectives. We will identify deeper learning themes as we explore the role of responsibility in the students' lives and how that defines who they are (for example, Johna's students are responsible for cooking, cleaning, and caring for younger siblings while parents are at work, and the responsibilities of Suzanne's students are mainly to obtain good grades in school, be involved in after-school activities, be involved in the church, and get into a good middle school).

Johna's lessons

DAY 1

Whole-group: write a list of determining factors that help you identify with the main characters, and connect the events in the story with emotions/feelings.

Small-group: ask students to share their experiences of what it was like when they attended their first day of school in the USA; what "groups" were they placed in?

Movement: the teacher will call aloud these different groups/themes that evolved from discussion and ask students to stand in their groups according to the topic (i.e. "I wear a hijab") and reflect on how we move among groups.

DAY 2

Students will sit in small groups with classmates they have not sat next to in ELA. They will be asked to use the Empatico question list as a guide to ask deeper or higher-level questions. These questions aim to build empathy and understanding. Question choice is up to the students, and volunteers will be matched with small groups to help explain or define new or unfamiliar vocabulary.

The answers will help students narrow down specific words or phrases that are important to them and shape who they are as individuals. They will fill in the identity wheel using these answers.

DAY 3

Class starter: Use the other side of the identity wheel for students to fill in what they think defines an American teenager. I will share these assumptions and the student responses with Ms. Byerly Taylor's class via email.

Students will use Google Arts and Culture to find and view famous portraits. Students will discuss how artists use different ways to express individuals through art. Students will participate in a portrait art mini-lesson to learn a short history of silhouette art. Then they will be given a silhouette to represent themselves and find images to place around the silhouette representing things that define/identify them as individuals.

DAY 4

Students will meet with Ms. Byerly Taylor's class from Jacksonville, FL to introduce themselves to one another and ask questions about their interests and their art projects. Afterward, the students will reflect on their assumptions of American teenagers after their meeting and identify similarities and differences. What do they share in common and how does this create empathy and understanding of a person who is different from me? What are the ways we share an "identity aspect"?

The students will continue to develop their art pieces and eventually create a shadow box as a final project. The assessment will be the presentation of their shadow boxes and the speech they give expressing their identity through art.

DAY 5 (EXTENDED ACTIVITIES)

Students will recreate the identity wheel. The teacher will conduct an opinion poll of which factors more accurately represent their identities or backgrounds. We will use this reinvented identity wheel to express ourselves that provides a better snapshot of who teens in the 21st century are and how they view themselves. Students will use Project Zero's *Lenses for Dialogue* to guide discussion with their small groups as a way to reflect on the other person's experiences.

Suzanne's lessons

(In addition to this being an inter-school activity, this is also jointly an Art/Language Arts project.)

1. Students took a slow look at Joseph Cornell's works on Google Arts and Culture and engaged in See-Wonder-Think to explore his themes and ideas.
2. They were then asked to reflect on their own identities and what was important to them using Empatico's How Do You See Me handout. They thought about their own shadow box—if it were a portal, where would it lead? What personal memory, dream, or historical event could inspire your contained world? How can you combine objects to create a story without words?
3. Students were then provided with a 3×5 shadow box and challenged to transform their boxes into a visual poem—something that invites viewers to linger, explore, and wonder. Eventually, when this project is completed, the inside, outside, and back walls will be decorated with original work.
4. Students were then asked to think about refugee teenagers living in America—what might they like? What might be important to them? What might they place in their shadow boxes? Students engaged in a silent chalk talk, followed by a whole-class discussion of their ideas, compared to the responses that Johna's students gave about their impressions of American teenagers.
5. Students then engaged in think-pair-share as they planned out what they might talk about with Johna's students during our Zoom.
6. Zoom with Johna's students. Suzanne's students and Johna's students introduced themselves and shared individually about what is important to them and what they are adding to their shadow boxes.
7. Students debriefed and did a visual reflection (foil sheets with verbal explanations) about the Zoom—particularly about the similarities between the students in our two classes.
8. After students finish their shadow boxes this week, they will create the poem or narrative that their shadow box is communicating.
9. At the end of this project, our students will share their work once again, this time using Project Zero's Lenses for Dialogue to take slow looks at what is important to the artists.

Reflection A: Johna

- The lesson and collaboration went really well! I enjoyed collaborating with Suzanne because it seems we approach teaching with a similar attitude and perspective. We both enjoy using art to engage and educate the students on topics within our ELA curricula.
- I think this project could be improved with an extended period of time dedicated specifically to interacting with another school. I would love to continue working with Suzanne and her class because they are so different from who I teach, and I am consistently reminded in this course of the importance of developing citizen diplomacy and global education through our students. We are the facilitators; we must pass the torch, and meaningful activities like this, where young people interact and are called to implement high-level thinking and reflection, can build those bridges between communities.
- Interacting and collaborating with another Fulbright educator has really opened my eyes to different ways of encouraging my students to reflect and engage with a global community. I have also learned that global doesn't mean "far away"; it can be local. As the world, and our students, become more connected, the tools I've learned in this course (like media/digital literacy and well-being) will help my students have the tools they need to be critical thinkers when interacting with people online and people from diverse backgrounds.

Reflection B: Suzanne

- This collaboration was fantastic! Working with Johna and her students really elevated the project for me and my students. Their understanding of identity and also about how similar we all are have been positively affected by this experience...and I think it will be something we can build upon all year. After the Zoom, my students were so tickled about the similarities they all shared (even 6-7!). Johna was instrumental in getting this project going, and she had some wonderful ideas for discussions to have with our students, as well as resources to use.
- I agree with Johna in that we just need more time to complete this project, and I am ecstatic that she is willing to extend the project beyond the scope of our assignment. I am looking forward to sharing my students' finished work with her class and to seeing the work her class completes, and I would love to have another Zoom or other type of interaction (like Flipgrid) in the future, if time allows. I find it so important to help my privileged students see what is outside their protected bubble—to get rid of this idea of "otherness" and to give them opportunities to interact with people who are not like them (and yet so similar to them!).
- This project took a little bit of work to coordinate, but I think it's working out very well because Johna and I have been able to engage our students in different (but related) activities to fit our students' needs and then come together at certain points. This would be a fine project to do without the collaboration, but through collaborating with Johna and her class, the world becomes smaller for all of us. I keep going back to the idea that our students "will live alongside, work with, and relate to, peers with the widest possible range of cultural backgrounds, beliefs, values, and perspectives" ("Essentials of Dialogue," IBO). It is therefore our responsibility as educators to prepare them for this... and what better way to start than to have them learn alongside students in a different school/city.

Samples of student work — identity collages, guiding-question handouts, the silent chalk talk board, and a finished shadow box — appear in the original planning document. · Johna Meldau · johnameldau.com