



Choice-Based Art Edited by Nan Hathaway

Choice-Based Art classrooms are working studios where students learn through authentic art making. Control shifts from teacher to learner as students explore ideas and interests in art media of their choice. This concept supports multiple modes of learning to meet the diverse needs of our students. Learn more at teachingforartisticbehavior.org.

ART HISTORY IN THE TAB CLASSROOM

BY LINDA M. PAPANICOLAOU

When I returned to art education from years of art history and museum education, I joined a district where the elementary curriculum was Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE).

The weekly lesson plans included a large museum reproduction, dog-eared from years of use. I would bring it to the classroom, prop it on the whiteboard tray and do an anticipatory set about the artist and artwork before dispersing everyone to tables for a hands-on project related to it.

Now a TAB teacher, I'm often asked how I handle art history when my students head off to different centers after a demo or mini lesson that's much shorter than a traditional DBAE anticipatory set. *TeachingforArtisticBehavior.org* has a page that offers numerous suggestions for working in art history that are more TAB compatible. I've used a number of them, but here are three I rely on in my practice:

THE FIVE-MINUTE MUSEUM: Uncoupled from an art-making project, one or two slides on the projector screen can be a whole-class opening activity.

THE TEACHABLE MOMENT: During work time, if a student seems to have a problem that an old master drawing can help solve, or if someone's project simply reminds me of a famous artwork, I call up the image on my laptop computer and do a quick demo. If it might interest everyone, I may pause the class and put the image on the projector.

ART HISTORY AS A CHOICE CENTER: Books and museum calendars, certainly, but videos are even more effective. I often put one on during work time. Students may seem to be oblivious but they occasionally glance up, and some move near the screen to watch quietly.

In a teacher-directed art program, the artists selected for inclusion often reflect what has been taught in the teacher's college art history class. Many lessons, such as "Van Gogh Sunflowers" or "Picasso Portraits" may mean more to adults than to the students and a steady diet can turn Studio Art into an Art Appreciation class—not what my students want from art class.

In a TAB program, the students are artists. In aid of that, art history connections should draw on interests the students themselves bring to the classroom, and what the teacher sees they need to realize their ideas. The first time

I was hired to teach an art history survey class, my mentor advised me not to cover everything; rather, teach enough that students want to come back for more. How then does a teacher choose? One way to make connections immediate is to include regional and local artists in the Five-Minute Museum. Piggybacking on the Social Studies curriculum is also effective.

As a discipline, Art History encompasses several methodologies. The oldest focuses on artists, their lives and artwork. It's common in DBAE lesson plans and still works well for younger students. Another approach is Iconology, the study of visual symbols: how certain images or motifs convey meaning, how they are transmitted or transformed within or across cultures and time. This fits the middle-school grades I teach. On the other hand, recent approaches such as Feminist, Marxist, Race, Queer or Postcolonial analyses are above my students' cognitive levels and may best be left for a high school AP class.

We're fortunate that the new National Standards offer a place for higher level thinking and essential questions that art history can best address:

1. *What does an artwork say about the religious practices, the social stratification, the patronage systems, or the culture in which it was made?*
2. *What was the status of artists in that society?*
3. *How were artists trained?*
4. *What makes some of them innovative, others not?*
5. *How can we connect to the art of the past?*
6. *Can we ever really understand the art of the past?*
7. *How do we use it as a legacy while remaking the message as our own?*

Technology and connectivity have transformed the art classroom in ways the creators of DBAE could scarcely have envisioned. We're no longer tied to dog-eared old museum reproductions but can call up almost anything we need through Google Images or YouTube. True, emergent curriculum does put greater responsibility on the teacher to have a range and depth of understanding of the field, but that's the fun of it.

As TAB teachers know, we learn from our students as much as they from us. That goes for the art history strand as well. If we open ourselves to the artists, cultures and traditions they have to show us, our own knowledge and understanding will grow as well. ■

Linda M. Papanicolaou teaches middle-school art in Northern California's Bay Area. She has been a TAB-Choice teacher for over 10 years and is a contributing author to the book, "The Learner-Directed Classroom: Developing Creative Thinking Skills through Art" (Teachers College Press; 2012).