

My Mechanical Self: The Cyborg Within

Michelle McDonald

Introduction

Today's student looks very different from the ones of even twenty years ago, but the way in which we educate them is relatively the same. Popular culture surrounds today's youth from the moment they wake up and eat their breakfast cereal with a box plastered with celebrity images all the way up to the evening when they set their alarm, using their favorite song as a wake up call. In order for a more synthesized classroom, we must be preparing our students for their future by understanding what is important to them and utilizing their interests in the curriculum. "Art educators are the key to convergence of the two paths and should lead the charge in the transformation" (Unrath & Mudd, 2011, p.6). Art educators have the opportunity to fluidly combine student interest with the subject matter and in turn create more genuine interest in school and learning for students.

Key aspects of this type of classroom environment include the visuals of popular culture and the use of technology. These two components are a considerable part of the lives of today's student and by utilizing them in the classroom will bridge a connection from the classroom to their lives outside of school. Most curricula rely on students to make these personal connections, but with the help of a teacher who is willing to provide these experiences, a student is more likely to make meaning and be more engaged in their education. Teachers need to see popular culture as way of communicating and connecting with their students instead of critically analyzing the evils of the media (Alverman, Moon, & Hagood, 1999). Teachers must utilize the link of popular culture as a positive force in the classroom and allow students to celebrate their love for it through exploration.

Cyborg Identities

Exploration of identity is a vital part of an adolescents developmental process. As children, adolescents did not contemplate the complexities of what it means to be yourself and as youth grow they are challenged to identify themselves through friends, family, and teachers. Identity theorist,

Erik Erikson studied the developmental concept of leaving childhood in a never ending search of identity. Erikson's work concludes that an adolescent is in a key crisis stage of development that pits identity against role confusion. During this stage, a person is defining themselves through interests, values, past experience, and skills. Adolescents are trying to determine who they are and Erikson theorizes that they will either find an identity or be confused in their actual role (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006). Teachers are a great advantage to helping adolescences discover some aspects of their identity by relating to them through the curricula. Identity needs to be explored in a safe environment that provides challenges on what identity means and could mean.

The curriculum designed focuses on the use of cyborgs in order to examine identity and the idea of living in a posthuman society. Donna Haraway (1991)states that a cyborg:

is a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction.... It is the bastard offspring of patriarchal culture-a kind of dissembled and reassembled, post- Modern collective and personal self. (p.189).

Our identities as we once had known them are in flux of being constructed by the technologies of today's world. The curricula asks students to investigate the idea of being a cyborg and what it means to try on new identities through the use of technologies they use now and what they see as the future of technology. Today's generation of students were born into a world that already had technologies and they have naturally found these devices to be a part of their lives. The technologies have become a part of them and they take for granted how a cell phone, for example, has become a part of them (Clark, 2003). By exploring the technologies they use daily, they can begin to understand how a device becomes part of their identity and how the two cannot be separated.

The idea of being a cyborg may not be excepted or considered by students without an exploration of both popular culture cyborgs and real people who outwardly label themselves to be cyborgs. Approaching the topic with a more playful perspective will allow for students to feel free to crit-

ically analyze the term cyborg without feeling that their opinions are incorrect. The students will first deconstruct popular cyborgs such as Iron Man and Darth Vader as a class and then will be able to investigate a popular cyborg of their own choosing. Students are given guide questions but are encouraged to think beyond what was discussed in class in order to better clarify their knowledge about what it means to be a cyborg (in terms of popular culture). Popular culture in this text acts as tool to “not only teach about popular culture but through it” (Duncum, 2009, p. 241).

These ideas will then be further explored through the identification of people who have accepted themselves as cyborgs and what characteristics they have that make them cyborgs. One such example claiming himself to be an artist and cyborg, Neil Harbisson, recognizes his right to be a cyborg and utilizes it in both his art work and everyday life. The students will see first hand how technologies can change how we perceive the world and how Harbisson fully accepts that his cyborg device, the eyeborg, has changed how he understands the world of color. They will also have an opportunity to view the world through an application that works as Harbisson's eyeborg, hearing color. This application will further develop the idea of perception and how seeing the world from a different point of view can shape your identity and create new realities.

Jack Watson (2012) asked his students to view the familiar spaces around them in a new way by having them develop *Improv Everywhere* pieces in spaces they use weekly (if not everyday). The students were challenged to identify new uses for the spaces and to develop ideas that would convey this message to the participants. Watson wanted his students to come to their own conclusions about the spaces and “make personal connections to concepts” (p. 34). The cyborg unit also challenges students to consider the technology they use daily as not only tools but as a part of their identities. They will view their I-pads, cell phones, laptops, etc. with a fresh set of eyes in order to understand how they enhance and change their world and formulate their identities. The students will be challenged to reflect on living without their favorite items and in order to gain perspective on what value these items have in their lives.

Reflection and Collaborative Learning

Reflection through journaling is one of the primary components in this unit plan because it enables the student to spend more time analyzing ideas without the fear of judgments from their peers. Reflection must be used in order to fully develop individual ideas and understanding of the subject matter and it also helps the teacher to evaluate the students' understanding of the material. The students will journal at various stages in the unit and most of the information written will be of their own opinion and some will require educated opinions through class references.

Collaboration through production and discussion also holds high value for a successful unit outcome. According to Henry Jenkins (2009), the students of today live in a participatory culture that invites aspects such as peer-to-peer learning in affinity spaces. Affinity spaces are informal spaces that occur online but can be used to great advantage of the teacher. Although there is no anonymity in the classroom as there are on online spaces, students are still familiar with engaging in informal learning constructions amongst their peers. These new online communities could prove to help a student collaborate more easily within the classroom. Not all youth have used these type of spaces on the internet or may not have access to them, but collaborating with those who are used to doing so may help to advance those who are not as familiar with the process. Collaborative learning also promotes critical thinking, higher levels of thought, and retain information longer than when working individually (Gokhale, 1995). The identification of the term cyborg is not a relatively easy process to deconstruct, so by having the opportunity to work in a group there will be a greater likelihood of understanding of topic.

Conclusion

The cyborg unit allows for students to reflect on their own identities and what it means to live in a world filled with technologies to shape those ideals. There are many opportunities to reflect on terms and ideas so that the opinion(s) formed is that of the student and not of the teacher. The teacher in this context acts as more of a guide. Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood (1999) states:

As a guide, teachers assist students in identifying and critiquing popular culture texts. In this way, teachers are not the transmitters of information to a passive audience; instead by readily placing themselves alongside their students, both students and teachers become agents of change. (p. 40).

Through the commitment of the teacher to initiate popular culture texts into the classroom the students will be able to explore the term cyborg in relation to themselves and consider its true meaning. The students will also be able to consider how they perceive others and how their perceptions of the world may change through trying on different identities. Popular culture texts act as a foundation that leads to greater thought processes and deeper meaning for today's student. Educators must use this knowledge without hesitation in order to enhance our students' lives and education.

References

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Curriculum Unit Theme: Discovering my mechanical self: The cyborg within

Teacher: Michelle McDonald

Grade Level: 7th

State Visual Art Goals:

VA7-2.1 Use the elements and principles of design to describe the composition of a particular artwork.

VA7-3.3 Use the relationships among subjects, themes, and symbols in communicating intended meaning to analyze their two- and three-dimensional artworks and the artworks of others.

VA7-4.2 Describe and analyze how time, location, climate, resources, ideas, and technology give meaning and value to architecture and two- and three-dimensional artwork.

VA7-5.1 Make informed aesthetic judgments about their two- and three-dimensional artwork and artwork of others and describe, interpret, and evaluate both works.

VA7-1.3 Use art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner.

State Media Arts Goals (if any):

MA7-2.1 Expand his or her media arts vocabulary and identify elements of artistic design specific to individual media.

MA7-2.2 Design and create media artwork that communicates his or her experiences.

MA7-3.5 Identify creative techniques used in a variety of media texts (for example, television, film, radio, Internet).

MA7-3.6 Identify the techniques used in different media texts that reflect varying perspectives and points of view.

MA7-6.2 Practice legal and ethical behavior in the media arts and the use of technology.

General goals for the curriculum (describe in 2-5 sentences):

The students will explore the term cyborg and how it relates to their identity and their perceptions of

themselves and others. The students will be challenged to work through the idea of enhancing the human body by discussing cyborgs in pop culture and artists who consider cyborg aspects in their work. Their discussions will lead them to work on an enhanced version of themselves using the medium of digital collage.

Lesson Title (name each lesson to reflect a general unit theme)	Visual Exemplars (list specific images and artists, TV shows, and/or books that you plan to use for each lesson)	Motivation / Dialogue (list basic issues and questions to be explored during classroom dialogue and any other motivational strategies that you plan to use for each lesson)	Media / Process (list artistic processes that your students will engage in during each lesson)	Concepts and/or Design Principles to be learned during each lesson	Closure/Assessment (list an assessment strategy used for each lesson)
Lesson 1 Explore the term cyborg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Iron Man (Anthony Stark): Video clip of Iron Man movie (scene of investigation: Stark constructing his heart device) -The Bionic Woman images -Cybermen: Video clip from Doctor Who of people (both male and female) being transformed into cybermen -Inspector Gadget images 	<p>The students will explore the term cyborg through the use of popular culture media first as a class discussion and then through their own self-directed investigation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -What is a cyborg and why does it exist? -What are some traits of a cyborg. (explored using each pop culture references) -What are some reasons these cyborgs may have altered their original appearance/structure? -Could all these alterations be considered enhancements or do they alter a person in a negative way? 	<p>The students will engage in the introduction of the cyborg through class discussion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Begin locating a cyborg of their own choosing to explore individually (at the end of the lesson or for homework). 	<p>The students will explore the term cyborg through pop culture references in order to better understand what it actually means to be a cyborg</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The students will consider what makes up a cyborg structure -The students will investigate the term enhancement. <p>Terms to explore: Cyborg Enhancement</p>	<p>Teacher will visually evaluate the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Did the student actively participate in the class discussion? -Did the student express an understanding of the topic through questions and statements made during discussion?

<p>Lesson 2</p> <p>Self Directed Learning: My Favorite Cyborg</p>	<p>-Handout with investigation questions</p>	<p>-Handout Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the characteristics of your selected resource that classifies him/her as a cyborg? 2. What are the reasons behind why they were altered. 3. Do these alterations change who that person is/was before they were altered? List some personality traits of your character. <p>-The students will discuss their classmates findings and the teacher will guide them to discovering identity alterations in cyborgs.</p>	<p>-The students will locate a pop culture cyborg that interests them (or that they are already interested in) and investigate its traits and motivation(s) for alterations.</p> <p>-The students will conduct a brief presentation to the class describing what information they gathered from their research.</p>	<p>-The students will reflect on cyborg more thoroughly through individual investigation.</p> <p>-The students will consider not only the physical alterations of the cyborg but also the mental alterations that may exist.</p>	<p>Teacher will visually evaluate the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Was the student able to locate a pop culture cyborg? -Did the student begin to clearly answer the questions provided by the teacher about their cyborgs? -Did the students present their cyborg information clearly and fully to the best of their ability?
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<p>Lesson 3</p> <p>Exploration of real life cyborgs & Identity Crisis: Am I a cyborg?</p>	<p>-Oscar Pistorius images and Powerpoint information on his biography.</p> <p>-Video of Oscar Pistorious sprinting.</p> <p>-Journal investigation questions.</p>	<p>-Discuss Oscar Pistorius' prosthetic legs and whether the students consider him to be a cyborg because of them.</p> <p>-Discuss how Pistorius was originally disqualified from the Olympics because of his prosthetic legs. Should he be considered differently because his legs aren't "natural?"</p> <p>Journal:</p> <p>-Students will consider the technology they use everyday and if that classifies them as being cyborgs. Examples include cell phones, pencils, glasses, and computers. Students will reflect a day without these items. What benefits do we receive from using these devices and could you live without them? Would you be a different person without the ability to use these items?</p> <p>-The students will share their findings in small groups.</p>	<p>-Students will explore their cyborg identities in terms of the technologies they use daily. The students will journal their exploration.</p>	<p>-The students will explore the term cyborg through the use of real people and the technologies they use daily.</p> <p>-What classifies a real life cyborg and why?</p> <p>-Are we all considered cyborgs because of our use of technology?</p> <p>Terms to explore: Identity Discrimination</p>	<p>Teacher will visually evaluate the following:</p> <p>Did the students stay on task during the discussion?</p> <p>Did the student participate and listen to classmates in small group sharing time?</p> <p>The teacher will read the student's journal entry and provide feedback.</p>
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<p>Lesson 4</p> <p>Neil Harbisson: Cyborg & Cyborg Artist</p>	<p>-Neil Harbisson's Justin Bieber's "Baby" painting</p> <p>-Neil Harbisson's video of how his eyeborg depicts faces using sound (celebrity faces)</p> <p>-Powerpoint of Neil Harbisson information (including his work with forming the Cyborg Foundation)</p> <p>-I-pad with Sonified application</p>	<p>-Students will discuss the idea of applying a device directly to the body. How would they feel if they were to wear their cell phones, for example, instead of carry them.</p> <p>Would this change their perception of someone/themselves?</p> <p>-What would be the benefits of applying something directly to the body?</p>	<p>-The students will participate in a discussion centered around the ideas of Harbisson's eyeborg.</p> <p>-The students will each have the opportunity to view the world like Neil Harbisson using Sonified application.</p> <p>-The students will reflect on their experience with the I-pad application.</p>	<p>-Harbisson is viewed differently by the world and he in turn views the world differently. The students will consider the term perception in terms of judgment and viewpoint.</p> <p>-The students will experience first hand what it would like to wear an eyeborg though the use of the Sonified app.</p> <p>Terms to explore: Perceptions</p>	<p>Teacher will visually evaluate the following:</p> <p>-Did the student participate in the discussion?</p> <p>-Did the student participate in the activity?</p> <p>The teacher will review the students journal entry and provide feedback.</p>
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<p>Lesson 5</p> <p>Collaborative creation: A device to enhance my life</p>	<p>-Teacher's project example.</p> <p>-Rubric for project</p>	<p>-In groups the students will consider how they would enhance their view of the world using a device.</p> <p>-The groups will formulate a paragraph that considers why this enhancement would benefit the wearer and how it will change the way they view the world.</p> <p>-The teacher will review the rubric for the project.</p>	<p>-The students will break up into groups of 3 and collaboratively brainstorm a device that would enhance the way they view the world.</p> <p>-The students will sketch at least three ideas by the end of the class period.</p> <p>-The students will work on completing their reasoning (paragraph) for completing the project.</p>	<p>-The students will use a variety of line, space, and form in order to create a realistic cyborg device.</p> <p>-The students will be able to express why they selected to use these elements in their work.</p> <p>Vocabulary: Line Space Form</p>	<p>Teacher will visually evaluate the following and record for the final rubric grade:</p> <p>-Did the student work well with group members and participated in the brainstorming of the project ideas?</p> <p>-Did the group complete three sketches and write three to four sentences on what their enhancement will do?</p>
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<p>Lesson 6</p> <p>Collaborative creation: A device to enhance my life/Reflection</p>	<p>Journal reflection questions handout.</p>	<p>Journal Reflection Questions:</p> <p>Imagine wearing your device for a day.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you think people would view you differently as they do Harbisson when he wears his eyeborg? 2. How do you think your view of the world would change if you wore the device? (consider the Sonfied application and how you viewed the world when using it) 3. Could you then be classified as a cyborg and if so, how do you feel about this term when applied to you directly? 	<p>-Groups will continue work on their projects by selecting a drawing to convert into a collage.</p> <p>-Students will complete their collages.</p> <p>-Students will reflect in their journal about their group project.</p>	<p>-The students will reflect on their work focusing on perception of the world when wearing the device and how they believe the world views them.</p>	<p>-Students project will be graded using a rubric. The rubric focuses on participation, use of line, form, and space, use of time during class, and the overall understanding of the project as graded from the paragraph written by the group.</p> <p>-The teacher will review journal entries and provide feedback to students.</p>
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<p>Lesson 7</p> <p>Lorenz Potthast: Slow motion helmet/ Introduction to production piece (My cyborg self)</p>	<p>-Lorenz Potthast: Slow Motion Helmet piece.</p> <p>-Video taken of a model wearing the helmet in a public setting.</p> <p>-Project Rubric</p>	<p>-Discuss what the artist's purpose is for constructing the helmet.</p> <p>-Do you view this helmet as an enhancement? Why or why not?</p> <p>-Explain final project to class: Students will photograph each other and load their images onto the computer. The students will edit their photographs using Photoshop tools. Each student will then construct their enhancements using mixed media (painting, drawing, collage, etc.) and scan their work into the computer to create a digital collage.</p> <p>-Teacher will review the rubric for the project.</p> <p>-Consider what you would change/enhance about yourself and brainstorm ideas for final project.</p>	<p>-Students will reflect on Potthast's work and the video.</p> <p>-Students will sketch enhancement ideas for their project and complete their ideas and description for homework.</p>	<p>-Students will evaluate how the world sees Potthast's model when she wears the helmet/do they judge her for the helmet?</p> <p>-Students will begin brainstorming their ideas for their self-enhancements and write three to five sentences explaining their choice of enhancement(s).</p>	<p>Teacher will visually evaluate the following:</p> <p>Did the student participate in the discussion and make the most of their work time.</p> <p>Verbally the teacher will ask about the student's ideas for their final project.</p>
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<p>Lesson 8</p> <p>My cyborg self (2 class periods)</p>	<p>-Teacher's example of project.</p> <p>-Photoshop quick reference guide.</p> <p>-Project Rubric</p>	<p>-Teacher will show the class the first step of the project and introduce the vocabulary for the lesson.</p> <p>-Teacher will explain the lighting equipment, why we use backdrops, and tripods, and how to upload their photographs to the computer.</p> <p>-Teacher will hand out the quick reference guide and after most of the class finishes their uploading, the teacher will explain and visually show how to use the tools in Photoshop that are necessary to use to complete their cyborg project.</p>	<p>-Students will photograph a partner using a digital camera, soft box, and tripod.</p> <p>-Students will load images onto the computer.</p> <p>-Students will edit their images using Photoshop.</p>	<p>-Students will learn how to set up a tripod and photograph a partner using a digital camera. The students will learn about lighting equipment and how to set up a backdrop.</p> <p>-Students will scan in their images and learn how to crop and adjust their images using Photoshop.</p> <p>Vocabulary: Soft box light tripod Photoshop tools including crop, image adjustments, blur tool, lasso tools, and layers.</p>	<p>Teacher will visually evaluate the following and record for the final rubric grade:</p> <p>Did the students stay on task?</p> <p>Did the students use the equipment in a safe manor?</p> <p>-Did the students share the space and equipment with their fellow students?</p>
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<p>Lesson 9</p> <p>My cyborg self (3 class periods)</p>	<p>-Teacher's finished example of work.</p> <p>-Photoshop quick reference guide.</p>	<p>-The teacher will introduce mixed media and ask each student to consider the most effective medium for their enhancements.</p> <p>-The teacher will explain the term digital collage, and visually show the students how they will complete their work using the scanner and then photoshop.</p> <p>-The teacher will show an example of a completed work.</p>	<p>-Students will work on their digital collage pieces using mixed media construction and then scanning their work into Photoshop to complete a digital collage.</p>	<p>-Students will use a variety of mixed media techniques to complete their enhancements; students must consider which medium best conveys their ideas to the viewer.</p> <p>-Students will consider detail using when constructing their pieces using a variety of either pattern, texture, line, shape, or form.</p> <p>Vocabulary: Texture Pattern Digital Collage Mixed Media</p>	<p>Teacher will visually evaluate the following and record for the final rubric grade:</p> <p>-Did the student stay on task and use time wisely?</p> <p>-Did the student respect the classroom materials?</p> <p>Verbally the teacher will ask each student about their choice of medium.</p>
<p>Lesson 10</p> <p>Critique/Reflection</p>	<p>-Teacher Rubric</p> <p>-Self evaluation Rubric</p>	<p>Reflection Questions:</p> <p>-After enhancing yourself, do you think that there is point where the enhancements become too much?</p> <p>-Should we draw a line on how much someone can alter themselves (consider identity and perception)?</p> <p>-Can a person truly become a cyborg why or why not?</p>	<p>-Students will have an in class critique of each others work.</p> <p>-Students will write in their journals reflecting on their final pieces.</p> <p>-Students will self-evaluate their work using a rubric.</p>	<p>-Students will participate in a critique and learn how to critically analyze work of a peer in a constructive way.</p> <p>-Students will reflect on the concepts learned in the unit: identity and perceptions of a cyborg.</p>	<p>-Students will self-evaluate their work using the rubric provided by the teacher.</p> <p>-The teacher will also use a rubric to evaluate the students work.</p> <p>-The teacher will review the reflections and provide feedback to the students.</p>

Lesson #4

Title: Neil Harbisson: Cyborg & Cyborg Artist

Grade: 7th Grade

Teacher: Michelle McDonald

Length: 45 minute period

State visual art goals:

VA7-3.3 Use the relationships among subjects, themes, and symbols in communicating intended meaning to analyze their two- and three-dimensional artworks and the artworks of others.

VA7-4.2 Describe and analyze how time, location, climate, resources, ideas, and technology give meaning and value to architecture and two- and three-dimensional artwork.

State media arts goals (if any):

MA7-3.6 Identify the techniques used in different media texts that reflect varying perspectives and points of view.

Objectives:

1. This students will discuss the work of Neil Harbisson in terms of meaning and media usage.
2. The students will analyze how using technology can enhance a person's lifestyle and change their perception of the world.
3. The students will reflect on their experience with the I-pad application.
4. The students will explore the term perception.

Concepts and vocabulary:

Harbisson is viewed differently by the world and he in turn views the world differently. The students will consider the term perception in terms of judgment and viewpoint. The students will experience first hand what it would like to wear an eyeborg though the use of the Sonified application on the I-pad.

Terms to explore:

Perceptions: perception is a term that can be used in a variety of ways but in relation to this lesson, the word perception relates to how people see you as a person and how you see others.

Teacher materials:

-Neil Harbisson's Justin Bieber's "Baby" painting

-Neil Harbisson's video of how his eyeborg depicts faces using sound (celebrity faces)

-Powerpoint of Neil Harbisson information. This includes his biographical information, the background behind the eyeborg and hi work with forming the Cyborg Foundation.

Student materials:

- I-pad with Sonified application
- Journal
- Pencil

Procedures (detailed step-by-step description including dialogue):

Introduction to artist:

Teacher will have the first slide of PowerPoint presentation up upon the students entering the room. The slide will be a photograph of the artist (and cyborg) Neil Harbisson.

“Why do you think this artist, Neil Harbisson, wears this device?”

Teacher will introduce artist using a PowerPoint presentation containing biographical information, information about his artwork, and information about his eyeborg.

The students will view art work made by Harbisson including Justin Bieber's “Baby” painting and Celebrity Faces (video)

The students will learn how the world views Harbisson when he wears his eyeborg and how he is perceived to be wearing/doing something devious.

The students will learn about Harbisson's Cyborg Foundation that promotes others to become cyborgs and about the limitations of Harbisson's cyborg work (only promoting the 5 senses)

Discussion:

The students will analyze the work of Neil Harbisson as a class using the following discussion questions:

“What would be some benefits of applying something directly to the body?”

“How would you feel about wearing a device like Harbisson's eyeborg?”

“Do you think Harbisson's eyeborg has changed his perceptions of the world around him? In what way(s)?”

“Do you think Harbisson's eyeborg has enhanced his life, and if so in what way(s)?”

“Is there any sense you would enhance using a device? Which one and why would you do so?”

“Does Harbisson's eyeborg paintings and video make you view the celebrities differently? How so?”

Activity:

Students will break into groups (depending on how many I-pads are available for use) and use the Sonified application (the Sonified application works like Harbisson's eyeborg, allowing the user to hear color and images).

-The students will view a person, location, and object using the application.

Reflection/Closure:

Students will reflect in their journal about their experience with the I-pad application using the following guide questions:

- How did you feel about using the application?
- How did you perceive a person, object, and location using the application verses using your normal vision and hearing?
- Do you see this application as an enhancement? Why or why not.
- Do you find value in using the application? In what ways?

Assessment/Closure:

The teacher will visually assess the participation of each student during the discussion and during the activity. The teacher will review the students' journals and provide constructive feedback to be used for their collaborative pieces (Lesson #5).

