Curriculum Unit Rationale:

Current Trends in Popular Culture

Sarah McNeely

Arte 703

Introduction

Over the past six years I have become fascinated by the culture of my students. Why are certain items popular? What does one need to wear to be considered "cool?" The things that they value are so different from my own personal values, so this curriculum unit is an attempt to further my understanding of my students' culture.

Defining Culture

As Storey (2006) states, "An obvious starting point in any attempt to define popular culture is to say that popular culture is simply culture which is widely favored or well liked by many people."

Taking this definition and my natural curiosities about my students, I asked them which items they considered popular. I began to formulate my curriculum unit based on their responses to my questions about items they considered popular. We came up with the following list: music, dance crazes, shoes, electronics (cell phones), social media, and emojis. The items that my students chose to represent popular culture certainly define who they are and truly guide their day to day lives. Strinati (2004) speaks of postmodernism with, "Popular cultural signs and media images increasingly dominate our sense of reality, and the way we define ourselves and the world around us."

Relevance

By allowing my students to select the items that they consider popular, they will automatically take interest in the project. Fiske (1989) speaks of the pleasures derived from making one's own meaning, saying, "Pleasure result from this mix of productivity, relevance, and functionality,

which is to say that the meanings I make from a text are pleasurable when I feel that they are my meanings and that they relate to my everyday life in a practical, direct way."

I hope to engage my students in a way that they find pleasurable. But I also think that developing a critical eye for these popular culture items is important. Sienkewicz (2013) comments, "The value of teaching students to look critically goes beyond an academic exercise confined to the parameters of any particular academic field. Recently, scholars of visual culture, film theory, art education, and history have all contended that learning to look critically is vital to a student's ability to succeed in an increasingly visual world."

Striving for that fourth approach to popular culture, Alvermann and Moon (1999) explain:

> Grounded in feminism, postmodernism, and cultural studies, this approach attempts to address the issues of analysis, pleasure, positioning, and audience so that balance is created in the classroom. Using an aggregate approach, teachers recognize popular culture as a real, authentic, and influencing part of students' lives, holistic and separate from their school experiences and from the adults around them (Buckingham, 1998; Luke 1997). Therefore, teachers acknowledge several crucial points: the expertise that students bring to the learning environment, the pleasures that popular culture produce for students, and the multiple readings that students produce from popular culture. But within this approach, teachers also embed the critical analysis of media texts to enable students to read from broader perspectives. (p.27)

As I attempt to actively engage my students in something they take interest in, I am reminded by Kinney (1993) that:

Extensive attention has been given to understanding the nature of adolescent

identity, but little consideration has been given to the everyday social experiences and

processes by which the content of teenagers' self-perceptions are formed and remain

stable or change within educational settings.

I hope that the incorporation of student interest and popular culture will engage students

in a way that I never have before. Student interest will guide the curriculum as we move forward

in this process of discovery and making meaning together.

Conclusion

By embracing popular culture, I will connect with my students. Duncum (1997) says,

"Mass media images saturate our lives, structuring much of what we know beyond personal ex-

perience. We live through visual images as much as we do language."

Student motivation is a big part of keeping students engaged. Using student interest to

guide my practice should ameliorate that battle. Perry (2007), after a conversation with a col-

league about middle school enthusiasm said, "My students are not excited about all the acade-

mics of seventh grade, but they are excited about their social lives, popular culture, rap music,

video games, and horror flicks. This realization, along with an understanding of multiple litera-

cies, can be a valuable tool for teachers across the curriculum."

Keeping my students interested and motivated is sometimes a challenge. By embracing

the items from popular culture that the children relish, I believe I can engage them in a way that I

never have achieved before.

References

Alverman, D.E., Moon, J.S., & Hagood, M.C. (1999). *Popular culture in the classroom: Teaching and researching critical media literacy*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. (pp. 22-40).

Duncum, P. (1997). Art Education for new times. *Studies in Art Education*, 38(2), 66-79.

Fiske, J. (1989). *Understanding popular culture*. Boston: Unwin Hyman. (pp. 49-68).

Kinney, D. A.. (1993). From Nerds to Normals: The Recovery of Identity among Adolescents from Middle School to High School. *Sociology of Education*, 66(1), 21–40.

Perry, T.. (2007). Talking Time: Adolescent Voice in the Middle School Classroom: Can You Dig It?. *The English Journal*, *97*(1), 109–112.

Sienkewicz, J. (2013). Critical Perception: An Exploration of the Cognitive Gains of Material Culture Pedagogy. *Winterthur Portfolio*, 47(2/3), 117-138

Storey, J. (2006). *Cultural theory and popular culture* (4th ed.). Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press. (pp. 1-12).

Strinati, D. (2004). *An introduction to theories of popular culture* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge. (pp. 204-226).

Curriculum Unit Theme: *Current Trends in Popular Culture*

Teacher: Sarah McNeely

Grade Level: Middle School, 6th-8th Grade

State Visual Art Goals: VA7-1.1, VA7-1.2, VA7-2.3, VA7-3.1, VA7-4.3, VA7-5.1, VA7-6.1, VA7-6.2, VA7-6.3

State Media Arts Goals: MA7-3.1, MA7-3.2, MA7-3.3, MA7-3.4, MA7-3.5, MA7-4.1, MA7-4.2, MA7-5.1

State Language Arts Goals: Reading Information Text 7.1

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

The purpose of this unit is to explore items of popular culture, the reasons why they are popular, and the historical importance of these items. I would like to challenge students to think about these popular trends with a more critical lens while exploring the creative possibilities within these trends, applying visual art concepts, indicators, and vocabulary. By completing this curriculum with my students, I hope to make discoveries about their culture and form a deeper connection with my students.

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: *Song Parody (3 class periods)*	"Tracphone bling" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbFazq0r-jQ Weird Al Yankovic "White and Nerdy" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9q-YF9DZPdw	-What makes popular music popular? -Define parody and discuss the role of humor -What is the song writing process like? -Why is this song catchy? -Who does this music appeal to? Why?	Students will work in groups to create their own song parodies. 1. Select a familiar tune 2. Count syllables 3. List key concepts 4. Sing until your words FIT	Students will learn about the construction of a song, analyzing a familiar tune and rewriting to make a new song.	Group critique as groups perform their songs for the class (performances can be live or recorded).

Lesson 2: *Dance crazes (2 class periods)*	Bet you can't do it like me Challenge https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hl0aTooA90 An overview of historical dance crazes: http://www.stereogum.com/1818783/the-week-in-pop-watch-us-whip-through-the-history-of-dance-crazes-from-chubby-checker-to-silento/franchises/the-week-in-pop/ Top 10 dance crazes: http://watchmojo.com/video/id/11382/	-How do dance crazes catch on? -Which dances do you know/recognize? -When and where do you do these dances?	As a class, we will view a variety of dance crazes. I will allow students to demonstrate/dance along with the ones they know. Dances should be either recorded to present to the class or performed live.	Students will view historically important dance crazes and then be challenged to come up with their own "new move" to incorporate into a known dance.	• observe students performing dance move • observe students during the process of composition • discuss with students their own work and the work of others • peer assessment and self-assessment.

| Lesson 3: Shoes (indicate the number of class periods) | Recognizing logos Kahoot https://play.kahoot.it/#/k/e53567e4-316c-424c-ab9c-e84c120dd81e

OMG Shoes https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zIkNGq-NMxU

Make your own custom Nike shoes http://www.nike.com/us/en_us/c/nikeid

PBS Idea Channel "Do Knock-Offs Prove the Value of a Brand?" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWh-f42Hdeq0 | -Why are certain shoes popular?
-Are certain shoes better than others?
-Why does having name brand shoes matter?
-What does a logo represent? | Students will choose their favorite popular shoe brand and research the history of the company.

Students will design their own shoes in a clay form, first sketching their idea, then sculpting it from clay, and painting their final designs. | Students will learn about the design history of their chosen shoe brand.

Exploring social/cultural identity through brand choice/design analysis | Students will complete a self assessment/ rubric that will also be graded by teacher. |

Lesson 4: *Kids and cell phones* *(3 class periods)*	PBS Idea Channel "Are cell phones replacing reality?" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AXIAM7dTTg CBS News "Kids with cell phones: How young is too young?" http://www.cbsnews.com/news/kids-with-cell-phones-how-young-is-too-young/ Dr. Seuss/Political Cartoons http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/political-drseuss/dr.html	-What are essential electronic items? -Which brands do you prefer? Why? -Should middle school kids have cell phones? -How old should someone be before they get a cell phone?	-Students will respond to a writing prompt: Should middle school students be allowed to have cell phones in school? Why or why not? Explain your argument. -Students will then create a political cartoon that expresses their viewpoint on the topic	-Influential advertising -Political cartooning -Persuasive essay writing	Students will use a graphic organizer for their writing.

| Lesson 5: Social Media (4 class periods) | Socality barbie https://www.instagram.com/socalitybarbie/?hl=en Fake instagram http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/19/fashion/instagram-finstagram-fake-account.html | -Are teenagers losing their social skills? -How does social media effect your life? -What social media do you use? -How do you use social media? -How could you improve social media? -Have you ever been catfished? -How many of you talk to people the you do not know in real life on social media? -How do you portray yourself on social media? | -Students will explore how social media has changed their lives -Students will consider ways that individuals can manipulate viewers or subscribers | -Venn diagram comparing real self versus online persona -Illustration/mixed media collage of how you portray yourself on social media versus how you are seen in real life | Written reflection/journal entry on the topic: "Why would you choose to represent yourself differently in social media versus your real life?" |

Lesson 6	Uptown Funk in emoji https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUutvk-Im61A	How many of these do you know? TMTH SMH LOL 🙇 BTW BRB CU 🙅 👍 IDK 🙌	-Students will translate a poem, lyrics, or a fairy tale into emojis	-Explore emotions and how they can be represented with simple images, historically and present day	-Students will provide a rationale for their new emoji design
Emojis (2 class periods)	Smithsonian magazine, "Who invented the smiley face?" http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/who-really-invented-the-smiley-face-2058483/?no-ist	-What emojis would you like to see?	-Students will draw/paint a new emoji	-symbolism	
	Smile, You're Speaking EMOJI http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2014/11/emojis-rapid-evolution.html	-Which emotions are not represented?	-Students will use pixlr.com or Picsart to add emojis to a historically significant work of art		
	Can you solve these emoji puzzles? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUpJc-MTlf8E				
	Katy Perry "Roar" lyric video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9SeJIg-WRPk				

Lesson # 6
Title: The Evolution of Emojis

Grade: Middle School, 6th-8th grades
Teacher: Sarah McNeely
Length: 2, 80 minute class periods

State Visual Art Goals: VA7-1.1, VA7-1.2, VA7-2.3, VA7-3.1, VA7-4.3, VA7-5.1,
VA7-6.1, VA7-6.2, VA7-6.3

State Media Arts Goals: MA7-3.1, MA7-3.2, MA7-3.3, MA7-3.4, MA7-3.5, MA7-4.1,
MA7-4.2, MA7-5.1

Objectives:

The student will identify symbolic representation through the use of emojis.
Students will develop an understanding of the way emojis have changed communication.

Concepts and vocabulary:

Emoji-a small digital picture or pictorial symbol that represents a thing, feeling, concept,
etc., used in text messages and other electronic communications and usually part of a
standardized set
Symbolism-the use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities.
Design- the arrangement of elements or details in a product or work of art

Teacher materials:

Computer/projector
Printed emoji flash cards

Student materials:

Student journals/sketchbooks
Electronic device with access to emojis (cell phone, iPad, iPod, or computer)
Song lyrics or poetry
Tempera paint

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

Introduction

The teacher will begin by showing the trailer for *Inside Out,* beginning an open discussion about emotion, it's role in our lives, and how different emotions are represented in the movie.

Inside Out
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WIDYqBMFzfg

Day One

The teacher will then show the following YouTube video that uses emojis to represent different TV shows, movies, and songs while the children guess aloud their meaning.

Can you solve these emoji puzzles?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUpJcMTlf8E

Students will read the following article and reflect on the invention of the smiley face and it's evolution to modern day emojis.

Students will choose a poem, song, or fairy tale to represent with emojis.

Day two

Smithsonian magazine, "Who invented the smiley face?"
http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/who-really-invented-the-smiley-face-2058483/?no-ist

The history of Emojis
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tf0PLOexjc0

Teacher will use emoji cards to provoke student thought regarding their meaning and what they could symbolize. Students will then brainstorm emotions or symbols that are not currently represented in the emoji keyboard. Students will sketch his or her own emoji, then create a final painting of their new emoji.

Assessment/Closure:

Students will provide a written rationale for their new emoji design.

Learning center/ back up activity (if any):

• Emoji Selfies using Facecon http://thespeechroomnews.com/2015/04/emoji-selfies-social-activities.html
• Recreating emojis through photography.

- Students will use pixlr.com or Picsart to add emojis to a historically significant work of art.