

Planning with Enduring Themes

Why are enduring themes important for art learning?

- Learning becomes more relevant for students when it is linked to ideas that relate to like.
- As a major repository of human values, beliefs, aspirations, occupations, and achievements, the arts have always been intimately connected to human concerns

How do I begin?

Choose an enduring theme with the following criteria in mind:

- What is the importance of the theme? Is it worth studying?
- How is the theme appropriate for my students? How does it relate to their present and future interests and needs?
- How does it relate to contemporary culture?
- How is this enduring theme represented in the arts?
- What topic might help to focus this enduring theme for study?
- How can it relate to art making?

Answering these questions will help you develop a rationale for teaching your enduring theme and the topic.

Once you have chosen an enduring theme, the next step is to develop a unit plan. This is a very basic description of this process.

Developing Knowledge Base- for teacher

- Brainstorm a list of concepts for the enduring theme. Select 3-5 concepts from the list.
- List possible connecting areas of knowledge; conduct research.
- List contradictions to the big idea/enduring theme.
- List important facts about the big idea/enduring theme.
- List common assumptions to the big idea/enduring theme.
- List common attitudes toward the big idea/enduring theme.
- List social issues associated with the big idea/enduring theme.
- List words associated with the big idea/enduring theme.

From this process, you can begin to hone your ideas and find a direction.

Developing Key Concepts and Essential Questions

“Key concepts and essential questions derive from the big idea that drives the unit- not from the specific artist and artworks” Sidney Walker, Teaching Meaning in Artmaking, pg. 103.

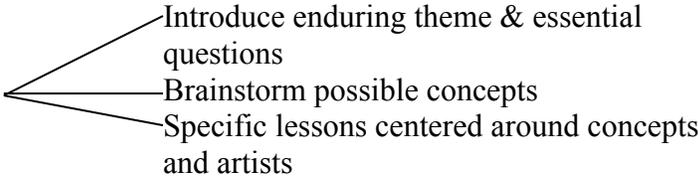
Key concepts are specific notions embedded in the enduring theme--- a way to “de-abstract” the enduring theme.

- Can be done in a brainstorming session in class, depending on the age of the students. (You have your ideas, but student input is great for 2 reasons: they may come up with something you haven’t thought about, and if they go through the process, they are more inclined to buy into the unit- they have helped develop it. Ownership)
- Also include art concepts based on standards (on your own, not with students)

Essential questions

- Synthesize several key concepts into a single broad idea, bringing focus. (list of 15 concepts can be grouped by similarity and distilled into...)
- 1-3 essential questions are generally sufficient (you can also have “sub”-questions that are particular to a certain lesson)
- Keep unit on track, reminding student and teacher of main purpose for the unit.

Developing Knowledge base- for students

1. Lessons before production 
 - Introduce enduring theme & essential questions
 - Brainstorm possible concepts
 - Specific lessons centered around concepts and artists
2. Art Production sessions derived from skills, media and standards.
3. Lessons between production sessions to shift gears and provide background for the next step. (i.e., Information on Expressionism, Howardena Pindell)