ARTS LEARNING LAB @ HOME

Let Suffering Speak
OVERVIEW

Create your own sound sculpture for healing self-expression. Join artist Elana Mann in letting our voices and bodies rumble, clatter, and blast. Participants will learn how to make musical instruments and megaphones using simple household materials. The workshop will culminate in group sound-making.

OBJECTIVES

1. Participants create sound instruments as a form of listening and amplifying voices for well-being.
2. Participants reflect and respond to another through the practice of group sound-making.
3. Participants analyze the science of sound waves, megaphones, and their own inner voice.

RELEVANT CALIFORNIA ART STANDARDS SUGGESTED FOR GRADES 1-6, CAN BE MODIFIED FOR ANY GRADE LEVEL

3 Artists and designers develop excellence through practice and constructive critique to reflect on, revise, and refine work over time.

1. VA:Cr3 Use art vocabulary to describe choices while creating art.
2. VA:Cr3 Discuss and reflect with peers about choices made in creating artwork.

10 Through artmaking, people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge, and experiences.

4. VA:Cn10 Create works of art that reflect community cultural traditions.
5. VA:Cn10 Apply formal and conceptual vocabularies of art and design to view surroundings in new ways through artmaking.

11 People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.
5.VA:Cn11 Identify how art is used to inform or change beliefs, values, or behaviors of an individual or society.
6.VA:Cn11 Analyze how art reflects changing times, traditions, resources, and cultural uses.

**MATERIALS**

- Thick white paper, *(you can download the megaphone picture we will use here and print it out or recreate it)*
- Dried rice/beans/rocks
- Scissors
- Paint
- Paint brush
- Toilet paper
- Toilet
- Paper tube
- Tape

**VOCABULARY**

- **Healing Self-Expression**: the act of speaking one’s true feelings that creates a feeling of well-being and affirmation.
- **Group Sound-Making**: the tradition of coming together to perform, express, and communicate through sound.
- **Passive sound technology**: analog or non-digital technology that relies on physical tools and structures to achieve desired effects.
- **Amplify**: increase the volume of (sound), and cause to become more marked or intense.
- **Well-being**: the state of being comfortable, happy or healthy.
- **Inner Voice**: inner monologue, the perception of our thoughts taking on a conversation like quality.
- **Sound Wave**: a wave of compression and rarefaction, by which sound is propagated in an elastic medium such as air.
Elana Mann discusses her work as a practice of listening and amplifying voices that often go unheard in our society. The artist expresses that there are many reasons voices can go unheard. Sometimes people are quieter, sometimes people are tired of advocating for themselves constantly, and sometimes people are saying things that others do not want to hear. For Elana Mann the role of the artist is to listen to these voices and promote their message by amplifying them in the figurative and literal sense. When we listen to others it creates empathy where we can understand what the other person is experiencing, creating opportunities to support and uplift others’ truth. Just as important is the act of listening to our own inner voice and expressing our own truth, the more we listen the more we understand ourselves and our own needs the more we can generate a feeling of well-being. The two sculptures participants will make are related to Elana Mann’s artistic practice and exhibition, Years of Wonder, redux, at 18th Street Arts Center. Part of the exhibition is a series of uniquely designed ceramic maracas each with a healing self-expression or a political statement written on them. The ceramic maracas are often brought to protests or used in collaboration with musicians and participants in group sound-making performances.

**STEP 1**

Participants will begin by creating a megaphone out of paper. Using a piece of paper or the printable template, participants will first start by decorating their megaphone. Participants can use any materials they like for their decoration. Markers, colored pencils, and crayons are great materials to get started with. Participants are encouraged to be as expressive and creative as they want keeping in mind the practice of listening and amplifying.
When participants are finished decorating they will then use their scissors to cut out the megaphone shape. Megaphones are forms of passive sound technology that rely on the science of sound waves. When we normally speak sound waves are dispersed in open space limiting the volume of our voice. When using a megaphone sound waves are not lost in open space but are instead concentrated into a narrow opening that expands outward, effectively amplifying our volume. This is due to the sound waves bouncing back and forth within the cone shape of the megaphone. Elana Mann shares that the first known megaphone was created by a Jesuit scholar during the Renaissance named Athanasius Kircher. The scholar, Kircher, was known for developing different forms of passive sound technology including a version of the modern intercom.

STEP 2
Participants will now glue and tape together their megaphones along the dotted line. If using a plain sheet of paper participants can also just create a cone shape and overlap the ends of the paper. Elana Mann shares that another piece of sound technology the paper megaphone can be used for is called an ear horn. Historically ear horns are used to amplify sound for listening. Before there were electronic hearing aids, ear horns were used by people that were hard of hearing to amplify the sound around them. Once complete, participants are encouraged to test their completed work as both a megaphone and ear horn.
Participants will now create a sound instrument called a shaker. There are many ways to create a shaker including the use of a cup, paper towel tube, plastic box, or any other container. For today participants will use a toilet paper roll. This sound instrument is meant to cultivate a practice of listening. Participants are encouraged to think about listening to the sounds and voices of those around us, oftentimes those around us have a lot of helpful information and ideas to share. Elana Mann shares the science of listening and how our ears work. Sound goes around the curves of our ears leading into our inner ear where sound vibrates our eardrums. Our brains then decode these vibrations to derive meaning. We can test this by cupping our hands behind our ears listening to the way sound is amplified by the increased curvature of our palm. Participants begin by decorating the outside of the shaker similar to their megaphones. Try adding a phrase of healing self expression similar to Elana Manns ceramic maracas. This can be anything participants have on their mind whether it’s personal, political, or spiritual.
Participants will then create paper cutouts in order to seal the ends of their shakers. Start by creating a circle slightly larger than the opening of the shaker. Place one end of the shaker on a piece of paper and draw a circle around the circumference about 1 inch from the edge of the shaker. Do this a second time and then cut out each circle. Wrap one circle around the end of the shaker and using a piece of tape or glue seal the opening. Elana Mann adds context for the importance of listening by sharing part of their experience working with different activist groups. The artist expresses that the inner voice is perceived by our brains as the loudest noise and part of listening to others includes quieting down the inner voice. Just as important is listening to the inner voice and really allowing space for an inner dialogue to take place. This awareness of the inner voice can help us as individuals in cultivating the ability to join other people in movements for change.
Participants will then consider options for materials that can create different sounds in our shakers. Elana Mann shares that researchers have expressed that what we hear affects our brain’s neurology. Social and cultural biases can influence who we listen to more and how we perceive what it is they are saying. We are very susceptible to the sounds and voices we hear around us, the messages that get repeated most frequently, good or bad, are often the ones that have the strongest effect. That is why it is important to really listen to different stories and different perspectives so that our brains don’t get stuck in understanding the world in only one way. Participants can now start to experiment with the different noise making materials for their shakers. Insert different ratios of rice, beans, or rocks and listen to the different types of sound you can get from your shaker. When participants have found the sound they like they can now use the remaining piece of paper to seal the last end of the shaker. Participants now have a perfect sound shaker instrument.
WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

STEP 7

As a culminating activity participants are encouraged to participate in a group sound-making performance! Pick a phrase that reflects how you’re feeling and the thoughts you would like to express in your performance. Follow along with your group or Elana Mann using the shaker and voicing your phrase in order to speak your truth and hold space with others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do we listen to others?
- Why is it important to listen to others?
- Why is it important to listen to ourselves?
- How do we cultivate a practice of listening to our inner voices?
- How can we amplify our voices?
- How can we amplify the voices of others?
- How does a megaphone amplify sound waves?
- How do our ears perceive sound?
- How can group sound-making and collectivity generate feelings of well being?
- In what ways do the voices and stimuli around us shape our perceptions?
- Why is it important to listen to a diverse range of voices?
SUGGESTED FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES

Learn more about the use and history of group sound making instruments and passive sound technology by visiting different museums and spaces that specialize in sound art. There are several options in the southern California region including Elana Manns exhibition *Year of Wonders, redux* that will be on view through July 2021 at 18th Street Arts Center’s Airport campus at the Santa Monica airport. See and interact with Elana Mann’s ceramic protest maracas and learn about the ways the artist uses sound technology to connect with others. The exhibition includes video installations with Mann’s collaborators and prints that discuss the power of the human voice. Part of the exhibition includes a large-scale 3D model of a multi person sound instrument traditionally used in protests. Additionally visit one of Elana Manns inspirations for sound technology at the Folk Music Center in Claremont, CA. The Folk Music Center is a museum and shop that offers a wide array of instruments and sound making tools from around the world, each with its own cultural intentions, history, and significance.

RELATED RESOURCES

- Online link to schedule a visit to Elana Mann’s exhibition or get a digital tour of *Year of Wonder, redux*.
- Website and video for the Folk Music Center, a museum and store in Claremont California that specializes in the history of folk instruments throughout the world.
ACCESS AND EQUITY

Teachers and parents can consider their role in modifying workshop instructions in the following ways:

- Vocalize and provide visual examples for expected technical and physical outcomes for all tasks. When explaining how sound waves can be amplified cup your hands around your mouth in the shape of a megaphone to physically show how sound can be intensified. To show how we listen to sound, cup your hand behind your ears and explain that the sound is circling around the curves of the ear and is amplified by the cupping action. Write down options for phrases and feelings that can be written on shakers such as joy, fear, strong, and any other possible expressions.

- Incorporate analogies and context about mental health, well-being, group support, and the practice of listening to and amplifying voices. To explain why it is important to listen to others, have a discussion about how it feels good to tell others how we are feeling and what we are going through in our lives. Explain how it feels good to listen to others so that we can help them when they are going through difficult times. Provide examples from your own life that students and participants can connect with. This can be a simple analogy about how talking to a friend uplifted you during a hard day or how participating in a group activity was fun because you were able to listen and be listened to.

- Check for understanding and comprehension of complex ideas by providing time for questions and discussions. Use the list of proposed discussion questions or modify them to meet the specific needs of your student or participant. If necessary, provide extra time for specific technical tasks including the decorating of shakers and megaphones, or the cutting and pasting of paper. Encourage experimentation with sound making materials for shakers, and provide alternatives to group sound-making performances depending on the comfort level of students and participants.
ABOUT THE ARTIST

Elana Mann explores practices of listening and amplifies voices that are yet unheard, with the goal of building equanimity in ourselves and increasing equity in our world. She creates artwork that brings a greater consciousness to the listening and speaking we practice in everyday life. Mann received her BFA from Washington University in St. Louis, and her MFA from California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA. Mann has had recent solo exhibitions at Lawndale Art Center, Artpace San Antonio, Pitzer College Art Galleries, Commonwealth & Council, and Otis College of Art and Design. Selected group exhibitions and screenings include The Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, The Hirshhorn Museum, the Orange County Museum of Art, and REDCAT. She has been commissioned to create socially engaged artworks by Montalvo Arts Center, the Getty Villa, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.
Arts Learning Lab @ Home is a series of live online arts classes for kids and families schooling from home. These hands-on artmaking workshops (which are posted as on-demand videos after each workshop) are led by professional artists in residence at 18th Street as well as members of our national and international artist community. The workshops are taught in both English and Spanish for those teachers that are bilingual, and are live translated in both English and Spanish. The workshops cover a range of fun, hands-on, and participatory ideas that connect with larger social issues.

You can visit more lessons at [http://18thstreet.org/allathome](http://18thstreet.org/allathome)

Founded in 1988, 18th Street Arts Center is one of the top 20 artist residency programs in the US, and the largest in Southern California. Conceived as a radical think tank in the shape of an artist community, 18th Street supports artists from around the globe to imagine, research, and develop significant, meaningful new artworks and share them with the public to foster radical imagination, empathy, and positive social change.