

ARTS LEARNING LAB @ HOME

You define it yourself



OVERVIEW

Make your own Dictionary! When you define words, you get to define yourself. We use words everyday to communicate, yet what a single word can mean to each individual can be so different. Join artists Alex Nichols and Mushi Wooseong James in defining a word and telling a story about that word in your life. In this workshop, participants will write their own definitions of a word chosen by the artists, write a short story about an experience of that word, and make a drawing of the experience.

OBJECTIVES

1. Participants analyze language, its context, and meaning.
2. Participants reflect on the ways life experiences shape their understanding of words.
3. Participants synthesize their word analysis and reflections into an accompanying drawing.

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

1.1 Creativity and innovative thinking are essential life skills that can be developed.

6.VA:Cr1.1 Combine concepts collaboratively to generate innovative ideas for creating art.

1.2 Artists and designers shape artistic investigations, following or breaking with traditions in pursuit of creative art making goals.

4.VA:Cr1.2 Collaboratively set goals and create artwork that is meaningful and has purpose to the makers.

6.VA:Cr1.2 Formulate an artistic investigation of personally relevant content for creating art.

2.3 People create and interact with objects, places, and design, and this defines, shapes, enhances, and empowers their lives.

K.VA:Cr2.3 Create art that represents natural and constructed environments.

2.VA:Cr2.3 Repurpose found objects to make a new artwork or design.

MATERIALS

- Standard white paper A4
- Rules
- Pen
- Pencil
- Color pencil

VOCABULARY

- Define: state or describe exactly the nature, scope, or meaning of.
- Life experience: experience and knowledge gained through living, often used to refer to different stages of life.
- Support: give assistance to, enable to function or act.
- Context: the circumstances that form an idea in terms that can be fully understood and assessed.

INTRODUCTION

Alex and Mushi introduce their collaborative work on the topics of communication and connection. Their artwork often takes the form of performance and video installation. Some of their collaborations center on the idea of isolating many different types of communication so that they can explore them at length and depth. Some of the projects are very durational and develop over the course of hours to years. Their current project, Dictionary, was inspired from their collaborations in which an argument occurred over words.

Workshop Description

When looking at the root of their argument the artists realized that much of the miscommunication simply came from a different understanding and context about the same words. It has to do with the way each artist perceives the same word and the life experiences that brought them each to their understanding. Often experiences in childhood will shape our understanding of specific words and the weight those words carry. Part of the Dictionary project involves exploring this place of miscommunication by reflecting on our individual experiences, sharing our contexts, and developing a sense of mutual understanding.

STEP 1

Using a ruler, piece of plain white paper and pen or pencil, draw out a box along the periphery of a piece of paper. Now divide the paper into sections. The first section only needs to be large enough to write out a word definition. The second section should be a bit larger, just enough to write out a short narrative. The remaining third section should be the largest and will act as the space to place a drawing.

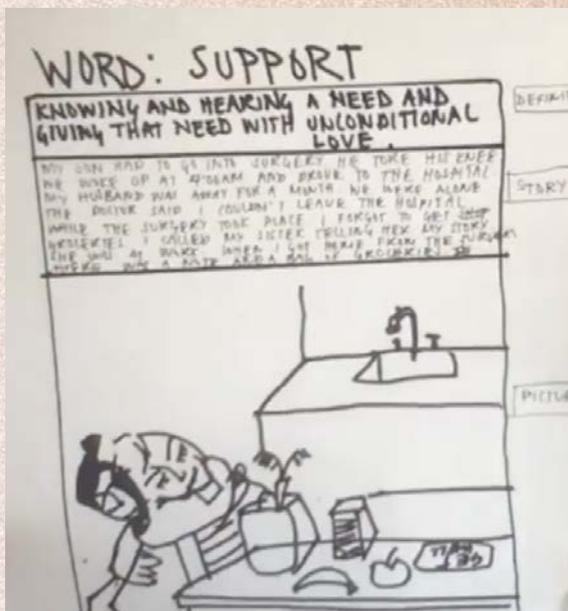


STEP 2

Participants will begin by considering the first word in the Dictionary project, support. Participants are asked to first define the word support based on their own understanding. You are encouraged to think about defining the word similar to a dictionary definition but from your own immediate understanding.

STEP 3

Below the definition of the word “support,” in the second section of the paper participants are asked to consider their own life experiences when they first encountered the word and concept of support. What first gave you that understanding? Who was involved in this story? How did this early life experience make you feel? In short story format, write out the narrative that brought you to this understanding of support. Remember everyone has different life experiences and therefore will have a different understanding of the word support. This project is designed to give participants the space to share their own unique perspective.



Workshop Description

STEP 4

After writing your life experiences and personal definition of “support,” you will make a drawing to visually capture aspects of your story. You are encouraged to experiment with different drawing styles and compositions. You can include atmospheric elements such as a setting or draw free floating people or objects that help communicate visually your definition of support.

STEP 5

After you have carefully considered your definition of support, the artists take time to ask everyone to share their perspectives. Alex and Mushi emphasize that part of the idea behind the dictionary project is to share and communicate in order to come to a greater understanding of each other. Take turns sharing your drawings, narratives, and definitions. When sharing, each person can share comments about how each drawing and narrative connected with them.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do we develop personal definitions?
- How do early life experiences shape the way we think about language?
- What are ways we can better work through miscommunications and misunderstanding?

SUGGESTED FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES

Now that participants have had time to participate in Alex and Mushi's Dictionary project, they can start to expand their own personal dictionary. Begin to think about your dictionary as a sketchbook and journal. When miscommunications occur or when participants feel the need to explore a new concept they can follow the protocols Alex and Mushi have established. Begin by analyzing how the miscommunication occurred. What words were used that created the conflict. Write down a series of words. The word that stands out the most or carries the most weight can be explored first. Participants start by writing their understanding of the word. They then reflect on their own life experiences that brought them to this understanding. Finally they sketch out the narrative with symbols, patterns, shapes, and representative drawings that will embody their understanding. As a last step, participants can reach out to the people they have had a miscommunication with and share their experiences. More often than not participants will find a greater understanding of themselves through this process and will allow others to better understand them as well.

RELATED RESOURCES

- Conceptual art and language resource from the Museum of Modern Art- https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/themes/conceptual-art/language-and-art/
- TED Talk presentation by illustrator Alex Solis on the importance of visual communication- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=619omCQf_J8

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 creating the initial outline and cross sections model the use of a ruler or straight edge. Use discussion questions to help elicit responses related to the Dictionary exercise. When drawing, provide examples of acceptable forms of mark making including stick figures, simple outline drawings and symbolic imagery. Emphasize that the drawings do not have to be representational.
- Provide analogies and context about communication, language, definitions, and the process of sharing life experiences. Explain why it is important to share our understanding of words. Use the provided list of questions to have a discussion about the importance of sharing when working through miscommunications. Explain how it feels good to listen to others so that we can help when friends and loved ones are going through difficult times. Provide examples from your own life experiences that students and participants can identify with. Keep discussions in relation to the Dictionary exercise and any word you are defining as a group.
- Check for understanding and comprehension of complex ideas by providing extra time for questions and discussions. Modify discussion questions to meet the specific needs and background knowledge of your student or participants. If necessary, provide extra time for specific technical tasks including drawing, writing, or vocally sharing responses. Encourage experimentation with drawing and possible use of mixed media art supplies depending on the comfort level of students and participants.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

ALEXANDMUSHI is a collaboration between Alex Nichols and Mushi Wooseong James. They are conceptual artists based in San Francisco examining humanity's central theme: connection. Two names, two people and in between all the bodies of work are thousands of conversations. Their work is a testing ground where projects become entry points into the boundaries of ourselves to see the ways in which two people can forge a connection. Taking the other's reality into account is critical to challenging the constructs we are born into. As conceptual artists, their work exists in the realm of social practice, performance, and documentation of durational process.

ABOUT ARTS LEARNING LAB AND 18TH STREET ARTS CENTER

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>

Founded in 1988, 18th Street Arts Center is one of the top 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.