

InsideArt, Fall 2015 — *A Family Affair*

Title

Picturing Families and Communities

Concept/Main Idea of Lesson

In this lesson, students will become familiar with the work of Corine Vermeulen, learn about the Detroit Mini Assembly Line process, and reflect on their own neighborhood and community.

Intended Grade Levels

Grades 9-12

Duration

1-2 days

Infusion/Subject Areas

Visual Arts

Social Studies

Curriculum Standards

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards

Visual Arts:

- VA.912.C.12: Use critical thinking skills for various contexts to develop, refine, and reflect on an artistic theme
- VA.912.C.1.4: Apply art knowledge and contextual information to analyze how content and ideas are used in works of art.
- TH.5.C.3.2: Use a photograph, sculpture, or two-dimensional work of art to inspire creation of an original scene or monologue.

Social Studies:

- SS.912.H.2.3: Apply various types of critical analysis (contextual, formal, and intuitive criticism) to works in the arts, including the types and use of symbolism within art forms and their philosophical implications.

National Standards for Arts Education

- Standard 1: Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes.
- Standard 3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas.

National Council for the Social Studies

- Culture: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.
- *People, Places, and Environments*: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

Common Core

- LACC.1112.L.3.6: Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.5: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C: Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.C
- Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.D: Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

Instructional Objectives

The student will:

- describe some of the works created by artist-photographer Corine Vermeulen through whole-class discussion;
- explain how the Detroit Mini Assembly Line process works through whole-class discussion;
- write a short story describing his/her neighborhood and community;
- develop visual and critical thinking skills through whole-class discussion and a reading and response activity.

Learning Activities Sequence

Teacher Preparation: Access the PowerPoint presentation, “Day 6: Picturing Families and Communities” and be ready to project slide 2 onto a screen {note that the slide contains two images; the second image has been animated to come in later}. Before presenting the lesson, read through the information in the “Notes View” of the PPT.

Attention-Getter: Visual analysis (compare and contrast) two images from Corine Vermeulen’s *Obscura Primavera* (2009-2014). Have students view and consider the first image on slide 2 and ask them to describe the people in the photograph:

- How old do you think they are? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What are they wearing?
- What kind of bag are they carrying?
- Where do you think they are going to (or coming from)?
- Where do you think they live?
- What do you think their relation is to one another?

Advance the PPT so that the second image on slide 2 appears. Allow students to view the image and ask them to describe the people in the photograph:

- How old do you think the girl is? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What is she wearing?
- Who is she carrying on her back?
- Where do you think they are going to (or coming from)?
- Where do you think they live?
- What do you think their relation is to one another?

Compare and contrast:

- How are the two images similar?
- How are they different?

Slide 3: These photographs were created by Corine Vermeulen, a Dutch artist who explores present-day conditions in the city of Medellin, Colombia in her series, *Obscura Primavera* (2009-2014). Over the past decade, the city of Medellin has undergone a profound transformation and Vermeulen explores some of those changes in her work. How might these photographs provide additional information about the city of Medellin?

Slide 4: Today we will explore some of her projects and consider how she examines and presents families and communities in various locations.

PowerPoint-Guided Presentation:

Slides 5 & 6: Allow students several minutes to view each image, guiding their viewing by asking them to describe the people in each and contrasting them with each other, finding similarities and differences.

Slide 7: Explain that the culmination of the *Obscura Primavera* project was the “Detroit Mini Assembly Line,” a process based on Henry Ford’s industrial process of automobile production.

Video:

Slide 8: Access the video, “Detroit Mini Assembly Line” (2:49), at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRSUIh1z_aQ and have students view (the video’s narration is in Spanish with English subtitles and describes the collaborative publication process). After viewing, ask students:

- Why do you think it might be important to the artist to use local labor in this production process?
- In what ways might the assembly line approach foster a sense of community?
- Based on the images you have seen thus far, what themes do you think the artist explores in her work?
- How does this process reinforce the theme of the artist’s work?

Slides 9: Display the invitation and ask students: Would you accept this invitation? Why or why not?

Slide 10: *The Walk-in Portrait Studio (Detroit, 2009 - 2014)* was initially set up in a formerly foreclosed house in North Detroit, by Corine Vermeulen (photography) and Femke Lutgerink (story collecting). Vermeulen conceived of the project as a way of introducing herself to the community where her friends had recently purchased a house at a foreclosure auction. She explained: “It was like baking an apple pie and saying, ‘Hi, I’m your new neighbor.’” Vermeulen and Lutgerink solicited people to come in to the studio via flyers and posters, and “a fair amount of courting on the streets.” From Tuesday April 14th until Saturday April 18th, 2009 the Walk-in Portrait Studio on 13106 Klinger Street opened its doors from 11 AM – 5 PM. Inspired by the famous Walker Evans photograph of the License Photo Studio in New York, they set out to create a studio on Klinger Street. Over the course of five days, around 85 people had their portraits taken in exchange for a story about the neighborhood. People could pick up their portraits, free of charge, a week after they were photographed.

Slides 11-13: Share selected images from the *Walk-In Portrait Studio (2009-2014)*.

Facilitating a class discussion by asking:

- Why do you think that on her web site Vermeulen has the photographs organized by location in the neighborhood?
- Describe the facial expressions of the subjects. Why do you think the photographer selected images with little or no smiling? Do you think the subjects were asked to not smile?
- What are some parallels that you see between Vermeulen’s work in Detroit and in Medellin?

Reading & Response: (slide 14) Photocopy the stories that were collected from the subjects in *Walk-In Portrait Studio* (there are 20 stories; photocopy all or selected ones). Give each student a different story and have them write five follow-up questions they would like to ask the person about his/her neighborhood. Other writing options include drawing or writing a response to the subjects' narratives. Students can also be encouraged to share the most interesting points of their subjects' stories with their classmates.

Listening: Have students listen to the audio files of each of the narratives in the "Reading & Response" activity (http://www.dia.org/portrait_studio/cove1.3.html#). Students can listen while following along with the text or listen while viewing the photograph of each subject. This listening activity can be done in conjunction with, or before or after the "Reading & Response" activity.

Closure: Think-Write-Pair-Share: If you could photograph and collect a story from someone in your neighborhood, who would it be? Why do you think s/he would make an interesting subject? How would this person's photograph and story represent your community? [Note: This writing activity can also serve as closing Exit Ticket.]

Evaluation

Homework: Ask students to write a short (one-page) story about their neighborhood or the person they selected in the closing activity. As an option, they can take and include a photograph of a place or person within their neighborhood to accompany their story. Alternatives could also include a drawing, poem, or other creative representation.

Optional Extension Activities

Option 1: Direct students to the complete collection of images in *Walk-In Portrait Studio*. Have students describe the neighborhood based on the various groups of people in the series.

Option 2: Have students research Vermeulen's *Your Town Tomorrow* (2007-2012), which documents Detroit's shifting social and geographic ecologies, exploring new forms of urban life. Although documentary in nature, these images are not meant to survey a Detroit 'as is,' serving instead as reflection of the contrasts and inconsistencies inherent in everyday life.

Option 3: Allow students to view Vermeulen's work, "Picturing Families," completed during a twelve-week residency in Tampa's University Area, an unincorporated, census-designated area that is home to an ethnically diverse population, many of whom live below the poverty line. In addition to portraits of University Area residents, Vermeulen produced a portfolio of documentary photography inspired by the neighborhood. These images are expected to "expand and complicate perceptions within Tampa Bay of life in the University Area, a neighborhood known colloquially as 'Suitcase City' because of the transience and poverty associated with it." Ask students to explain why these images would serve to "expand and complicate" people's perceptions of the area.

Materials and Resources

Computer, Projector, and Screen

Audio speakers

Internet connection (alternately, download and save youtube video clip ahead of time)

PowerPoint Presentation: *A Family Affair* (Day 6: "Picturing Families and Communities")

Stories (20) from *Walk-In Portrait Studio*.

Paper and pencils/pens for student writing

Internet Links

Corine Vermeulen. (2015). <http://www.corinevermeulen.com>

Design Tripper. (2011). *Meet: Corine Vermeulen*. <http://www.designtripper.com/2011/06/meet-corine-vermeulen>

9338campau.com. 7: *Corine Vermeulen*.
http://9338campau.com/artists/7_Corine_Vermeulen.pdf

References

Mazzei, R. (2009, June 17). Right place, weird time. *Detroit Metro Times*.
<http://www.metrotimes.com/detroit/right-place-weird-time/Content?oid=2195142>

Vermeulen, C. (2015). <http://www.corinevermeulen.com>.

Walking Distance Exhibition Catalog, Accessed June 29, 2015.
<http://2739edwin.com/walkingdistancecatalog.pdf>