

## Classroom Connection: Hair Ethnography as a Culturally Responsive Visual Art Lesson

*Culturally Responsive Teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning.*

–Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994)



*Hairprint.* See Lynnette M. Gilbert's Instructional Exemplar below for more information.

Art is storytelling and through art education we organically embody the fundamental framework of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), learning within the context of culture, student-centered instruction, culturally mediated instruction, reshaping the curriculum, and envisioning the teacher as facilitator (Ladson-Billings 1994). CRP allows our students to reach beyond the surface and connect to deeper meaning through visual storytelling. Geneva Gay, Professor of Education at the University of Washington-Seattle, states “stories are means for individuals to project and present themselves, declare what is important and valuable, give structure to perceptions, make general facts more meaningful to specific lives, connect self with others, proclaim the self as cultural being...” (Gay 2018).

HairStory is an art lesson that presents a perspective of storytelling around the positionality of hair. It was created in response to self-discovery through situating hair to connect to personal truths through exploring various media to examine the complexities of textures, movement, and meaning. From hats to headwraps to the glorious bald crown to straight, soft curls, kinks, coils, and all the textures in between, hair holds stories of culture, community, influence, and identity. This lesson is adaptable for grades 7-12 as well as community education and higher education.

## HairStory: Identity, Culture, and Representation

### Possible Big Ideas

Hair as Social Norms  
Hair as Oppression  
Hair as Celebration  
Hair as Marginalization  
Hair as Identity  
Hair as Acceptance  
Hair as Narrative

### Learning Objectives

The student will (TSW):

- Discover and reimagine self through the exploration of hair
- Investigate hair as a metaphor through positionality, rites of passage, liminality, and/or self-hood
- Develop the ability to communicate the concept of hair as “identity”
- Increase awareness and understanding of hair through viewing and discuss works of art by artists who use hair as subject matter
- Create a mixed-media visual HairStory demonstrating visual concepts of storytelling that examine hair as “identity” through various media

### BIPOC Artist Exemplars

Kenturah Davis <http://www.kenturah.com>

*Time and Place Have Had Their Say* (2019)  
*Everything That Cannot Be Known* (2019)  
*In Praise of Shadows* (2019)

Jessica Spence [www.jessicaspenceart.com](http://www.jessicaspenceart.com)

*Tawanda* (2016)  
*Sunday Evening* (2017)  
*Laid* (2019)  
*Fro Hawked* (2016)

Lorna Simpson <https://lsimpsonstudio.com>

*Stereo Styles* (1988)  
*Naturally Difficult/Released* (2017)

Jamaal Barber <http://jbarberstudio.com/identity-series>

*I Could* (n.d)  
*I Am* (n.d)

Rabea Ballin [www.rabeaballin.com](http://www.rabeaballin.com)

*Phillgood* (2008)  
*Coming of Age (after Ojekeire)* (2009)  
*Self Portrait* (2009)

*Journal of Folklore and Education* (2021: Vol. 8)

Black Hair as Metaphor Explored through Duoethnography and Arts-Based Research  
by Kathy J. Brown and Lynnette M. Gilbert

## Materials

Materials are choice-based. TSW explore three or more different media. Materials are to be seen as a tool to create as well as a means to tell their story. Material options include but are not limited to:

Paint (acrylic, watercolor, gouache, tempera)

Digital media (digital photography, Photoshop, digital drawing)

Graphite

Colored pencils

Inks

Chalk pastels

Oil pastels

Collage

Relief printmaking (linoleum block or collagraph)

## Instructional Resource Guidelines

(Based upon National Visual Arts Strands: Respond, Connect, Create, and Present)

### RESPONDING

- View artists. Discuss the different ways hair is displayed:
  - What does the image say about hair?
  - How does the artist use hair as a method of identity and individuality?
- View vintage ads and discuss how hair tells a story through style, posture, text, and textures.

### CONNECTING

Consider personal hair. How do you style your hair? Why do you style your hair? Do you identify with cultural connections to your hair? What is your hair routine or non-routine? Why? How do your hair and hair accessories speak to who you are, how you identify, your emotions? What do these relationships to your hair look like in a work of art? Reflect through journaling exploring different media, mark making, and thumbnails.

### CREATING

- **Voice** How will you tell your HairStory? How will you present it to the viewer? How will the various media assist in telling your HairStory?
- **Studio** Examine, Explore, Engage, and Develop a Visual HairStory.

### PRESENTING

Reflecting upon previous questions, identify key elements of your HairStory. Express the key elements through the connection of positionality and artistic choices.

### **Instructor's (Lynnette) Exemplar**

This is an example of a possible outcome based on the provided learner objectives. I created the exemplar based on my personal hair story. The piece is entitled *Hairprint*. I explain below how I examined each strand to create the piece.

**Media** Linoleum block print (fingerprints and portrait), chalk pastels, acrylic paint, alcohol markers. I purposefully selected media that I normally do not use together to work through the complex nature of my HairStory.

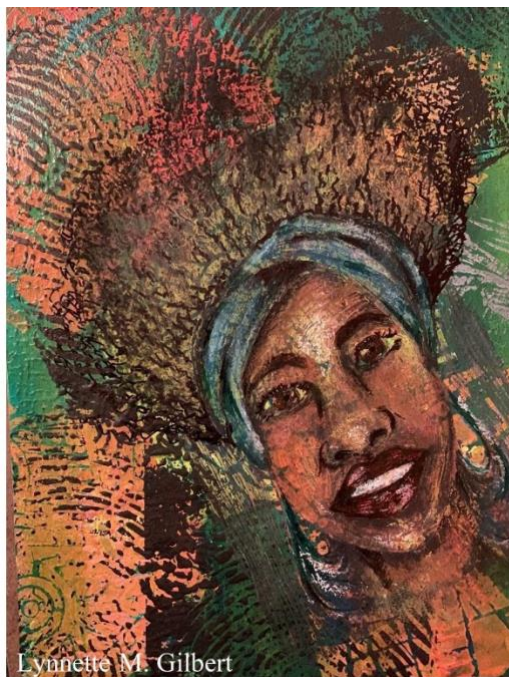
**Identity** Fingerprints, pathway stencils, and hair.

**Fingerprints as Hair** Fingerprints are the individual uniqueness of a person, setting us apart from everyone else. Through a pattern of whirls and lines, my fingerprints take on the pattern of the coils of the hair.

**Pathway Stencil** Roadmap journey of finding self


**Emerge** Acceptance. As the hair manifests into the fingerprints, self also emerges from the continuous journey of self-discovery.

This lesson creates space for students to express their hair culture through using mixed media. Society has for too long attempted to define our curls and coils and diminish our representation by defining beauty, from facial features to hair texture, in a negative light. This is an opportunity to share a method of teaching students how to define themselves and debunk the societal myths of African American hair.



Exemplar by Lynnette M. Gilbert, *Hairprint*. Mixed media (linoleum block print, acrylic paint, chalk pastels, alcohol markers). c. 2021

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