Picturing America: Principled Dissent and Democratic Practice
Teacher Training Conference

Presented by the University of Washington's Goodlad Institute for Educational Renewal and supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities

For middle-and high-school American history and Social Studies teachers at participating "Picturing America" schools

Wednesday and Thursday, July 21 and 22, 2010, with final session Saturday, November 6, 2010 (three full days, clock hours or academic credit available)

Sessions will be held at the University of Washington Bothell and the Seattle Art Museum

Taught by Linda Watts, Professor, American Studies, University of Washington Bothell; Tamara Moats, History faculty, the Bush School, Seattle and former UW Henry Art Gallery Curator of Education; Susan Casteras, Professor, Art History, University of Washington, Seattle; and Bridget Nowlin, Curator and adjunct instructor, Cornish College of the Arts, Seattle and former Henry Art Gallery Associate Educator.

This conference gives a stipend to all accepted teachers. There is a fee to take the program for credit.

For more information, or to receive an application, email picturingamerica@uwb.edu
Introduction

The NEH’s *Picturing America* School Collaboration Projects affirms the importance of incorporating art into the core school curriculum. Inspired by the masterpieces in *Picturing America*, we have designed our project based on visual art’s critical aesthetic, intellectual, and creative place in core curriculum. The program integrates learning about the selected masterpieces with how they convey the story of America—its events, people, conflicts, triumphs, diversity, ideals and democratic accomplishments—and uses this imagery to teach individual and collective responsibility for preserving a thriving democracy. Our project takes an interdisciplinary approach to how American art both reflects and shapes our social history, especially the civic concepts and principles underlying our democracy.

In the current climate, with its renewed popular interest in participatory democracy, youth stand poised to join national discussions. It is timely, then, that teachers have available to them compelling strategies for engaging students in civil and content-rich discourse about matters of consequence. Rather than depicting democracy exclusively as an ideal or a concept, we chose principled dissent as our emphasis, one that will help teachers and students to envision democracy as a set of practices conducted in daily living. Our curricular content comes to life through its links to decision-making and action. Such an approach has strong appeal for middle- and high-school students who are negotiating choices based on personal convictions. With this focus on both art and principled dissent, our conference will be an exciting and attractive opportunity for teachers, offering new approaches for teaching American history and democracy.

Visual art offers multiple ways of sensing, understanding, and learning that enhances and deepens conventional academic approaches. It stimulates the viewer to think in new ways and opens fresh pathways in the mind for understanding. Using art to illustrate and explore history is a new and important innovation in education, especially in the study of American history and democratic principles. This is at the core of our project. We will use Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) to deepen discussion of art, while building critical and creative thinking skills. Because of the VTS emphasis on multiple perspectives and respectful debate, its dialogue is a model of the democratic process, and can be used to analyze historical objects and primary documents.

Philosophical Approach

A signature feature of this effort is the intertwining of art and principled dissent as a lens through which to view key curricular concepts such as liberty, equality, and informed citizenship. This term is borrowed from historian John Gwaltney’s book, *The Dissenters* (1986). In the context of framing contemporary oral histories, he describes principled dissent as the act of standing up and speaking out for a point of view, however unpopular, on the basis of a belief or deeply held value. The concept of principled dissent is a unifying
thread running through much of American history, literature, and artistic expression. In *The Dissenters*, Gwaltney writes:

> The courage to maintain unpopular views is a vital resource in any society striving for plural democracy. Principled dissent, though a troublesome treasure, is the most vital of social fluids. Without it the free marketplace of opinions is an arid sham. Standing up and out for unpopular causes divides families, strains friendships, threatens jobs and even menaces lives. Nevertheless, a decent respect for difference of opinion is crucial for any society that really means to avoid the deadly extremes of total anarchy and the tyranny of the majority. (xviii)

Participants in this conference will consider this "troublesome treasure" in terms of rhetoric of discourse, and conceptualizations of reform/redress.

Thoughtful protest and active listening are mainstays within a democratic society. By exploring the concept of principled dissent, students can consider questions of consequence, such as those articulated by Ralph F. Young in *Dissent in America*:

> What is dissent? Is dissent unpatriotic or deeply patriotic? Is dissent reserved for those with moral grievances whose chief desire is to persuade in the United States to live up to its ideals and to ensure that the nation is truly a land where 'all men are created equal,' or can dissent be used for more selfish purposes? Are both Susan B. Anthony and Timothy McVeigh equally dissenters? Does dissent ever become treason? Does dissent ultimately change society by offering new ideas, new perspectives, or does dissent merely confirm the status quo by providing a relatively harmless way of letting off steam? (xxii)

Citizens need help cultivating the skills necessary to encounter differences respectfully. They also benefit from opportunities to develop effective ways to speak out when they believe differently than those around them, articulating the basis for dissent and the principle(s) underlying such a stance. By working closely with artistic images such as Rockwell’s *Freedom of Speech*, or Bingham’s *The Country Election*, teachers will build their capacities to engage students in dialogue with the resonant issues those works evoke. In this way, the conference emphasizes the relevance of these artistic statements to key issues within students’ own lives.

The program focuses on one of education’s most fundamental responsibilities: to instill in youth the understandings and responsibilities of the democratic character. Because we seek to nurture an informed, tolerant, and socially committed citizenry, our recurring theme is individual and collective responsibility for preserving democracy. This is explored through historical presentations, practiced in artwork discussions, and expressed in collaborative unit planning. Our project enlarges upon *Picturing America’s* democracy theme as we help middle- and high-school educators develop the ability to steward our democracy.
Content of the Project

Using the study of art as a catalyst for learning in academic subjects, the conference provides an exciting and innovative teaching approach to promote civil and spirited discourse using the interplay of artistic works, historical documents, and democratic practice. It is based on three compelling elements: our principled dissent theme, visual thinking, and the Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements.

Our intended outcomes for participants include:

Increased teacher understanding of the connection between art and the American experience. Participating educators will expand their knowledge of the nation’s artistic heritage and the essential elements of visual art; use art as a bridge to historical themes in core subjects; become adept at teaching about American democracy and principled dissent; become familiar with Picturing America masterpieces and local art resources; acquire and apply new teaching strategies including VTS; and write a new American history curricular unit.

Established, on-going collaboration between our teachers and humanities experts. Our conference team includes a professor in American history and interdisciplinary studies, a professor in art history, a former museum educator now a high-school history teacher, and a museum educator/visual resources curator versed in methods of looking at art. This group of humanities scholars and educators, and the Seattle Art Museum director of education, team up to provide a rich balance of interdisciplinary expertise in art, history, and teaching. This team will collaborate intensively with our teachers to catalyze new thinking about history, civics, social studies, and art curriculum.

Expanded discussion about and innovative use of Picturing America images by WA State educators. Our educators will use Picturing America resources to develop exemplary one-week instructional units that will change the way they teach and their students learn. They will create sustained change by sharing their new curriculum; teach other colleagues about using artworks to teach history; and make use of larger professional communities, including museums, to enhance their teaching. Their units will emphasize students’ higher-order thinking skills which include understanding the implications of images, being able to investigate images and analyze their inherent values, and to look at underlying assumptions embedded in images. This will develop visual literacy and allow imagination to be interwoven through the process of being “critical,” with reasoned responses combined with imaginative ideas. This approach is the cornerstone to the new curriculum teachers will create using Picturing America.
Access to rich scholarly resources and primary materials. Participants will be exposed to an array of humanities scholars who will guide intellectual inquiry into the issues of art, democracy, and principled dissent. During break-out sessions, teachers will have one-on-one contact with these scholars to explore Picturing America images in greater depth, and to discuss curriculum connections with these artworks, events, and themes in American history. Our second-day session at the Seattle Art Museum will present its extraordinary resources, both original objects and scholarly research, and introduce the SAM director of education. There will be a session devoted to close reading strategies for primary historical documents, and several art discussion break-out sessions in the galleries. Teachers will also receive a resource notebook of primary sources and documents, as well as ideas for additional scholarly connections in text and image.

Conference Structure

Our program structure provides an integrated and interdisciplinary approach with multiple session styles: lecture, presentation, interactive VTS discussion, and individual consultation. Our faculty will contribute expertise in American history, American art history, VTS, close reading strategies, curriculum development, classroom teaching, and teacher professional development. Sessions will include presentations in American history, art history, principled dissent, and document readings. The conference centerpiece is a focus on Picturing America, and continuing intensive work with those images. In break-out sessions, participants will practice VTS experientially with conference leaders and each other. They will learn visual literacy principles of analysis: posing questions and dialogue about the images; exploring text and subtext; and investigating how these images express American history. They will have extensive time to collaborate on their new curriculum, select images, and outline unit goals. On our second day, held at the Seattle Art Museum, teachers will work with the museum’s resources in American art, and practice VTS dialogue with original objects in the galleries.

During the late summer and fall, teachers will use Blackboard networking software to consult with conference faculty about their curriculum, as they are finishing and presenting it in the classroom. During our third conference day in November, all participants will return after having experimented with their units. Volunteers will present their curriculum, share their accomplishments and challenges, and receive feedback from conference leaders and colleagues. All educators are required to attend this third session as it is essential for our goal of systemic change in curriculum and teaching methods, as well as for creating a polished unit.
Participants’ Learning

Teachers will acquire new classroom techniques in dialogue methods and analysis using VTS’, an enlightened and widely used method of art inquiry. It empowers viewers to trust their own observations and interpretations about works of art. Facilitators ask students to articulate their responses and use evidence to support opinions and reasoning. Student response drives all observations, and information is woven into the discussion as it is asked for, at a time when it can be best retained. Questioning begins very simply by asking students “What is going on in this artwork?” and allows the discussion to follow a logical but creative progression. The idea is to elicit information throughout the discussion, and guide the questioning to places that illuminate meaning and reveal deeper ideas within the artwork. Skills developed through looking at art transfer readily to other academic areas. VTS develops students’ communication skills, teaching them to articulate and support their ideas with evidence and respectful debate, and to modify their ideas based on collaborative thinking.

Our teaching team will explore several Picturing America images in depth, and present lessons for each, that participants can use in developing their curricular units. We have curated a group of eight images that work together to emphasize and explore principled dissent, democracy, and deeper ways of looking at American history. They progress from narrative to abstract, with increasing analytical challenge. Those images are: John Singleton Copley, Paul Revere; Grant Wood, Midnight Ride of Paul Revere; Alfred Caleb Bingham, The County Election; Winslow Homer, The Veteran in a New Field; Matthew Gardner, Abraham Lincoln; Norman Rockwell, Freedom of Speech; and John Karales, Selma-to-Montgomery March. These artworks are excellent images to teach visual literacy principles of analysis: posing questions and dialogue about the images; exploring text and subtext; and investigating how art expresses American civic concepts and principles underlying our democracy. Teachers will use these images to guide students to become visual thinkers, to recognize distinctive details, develop meaning, and employ collaborative discussion. Teachers will also be encouraged to use other Picturing America collection artworks, and be expected to use its Teacher Resource Guide.

Classroom Application

Our teachers will be trained to teach with the above artworks and to use those images to illustrate and support historical ideas, events and concepts. They will design a one-week curriculum unit that can be used repeatedly, and will be applicable to other core subjects such as civics and economics. Units will blend American art and history with the elements of
principled dissent as an essential democratic value, and will reflect a repertoire of proven teaching strategies, sound assessments, and a wide variety of local resources. Our partnership with the Seattle Art Museum will extend the classroom to the use of original objects.

Application to Washington State EALRs
Our project addresses several Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements. It is designed for teachers of U.S. history and government which also includes civics, economics, art, and communication.

Social Studies EALR 1: Civics - The student understands and applies knowledge of government, law, politics and the nation’s fundamental documents to make decisions about local, national, and international issues and to demonstrate thoughtful, participatory citizenship. Application: Using the Picturing America painting Freedom of Speech, teachers explore our theme of principled dissent and democratic practice. From this, teachers could present the classroom process of respectful debate and dialogue as it has been used in their VTS process, and then research how it is used in the political process.

Social Studies EALR 4: History - The student understands and applies knowledge of historical thinking, chronology, eras, turning points, major ideas, individuals, and themes on local, Washington State, tribal, United States, and world history in order to evaluate how history shapes the present and future. Application: Using Picturing America image, The Veteran in a New Field, teachers explore a more nuanced and sociological view of the American Civil War. They can use its symbolic elements to study how an artwork can express the multiple issues and complex consequences of a major historical event.

Social Studies EALR 5: Social Studies skills - The student understands and applies reasoning skills to conduct research, deliberate, form, and evaluate positions through the processes of reading, writing, and communicating. Application: Using Picturing America image, The County Election, teachers can focus on the voting process as it relates to democracy and principled dissent, and use the painting to understanding the origins of American voting.

Arts EALR 4: The student makes connections within and across the arts, to other disciplines, life, culture, and work. Communication EALR 1: The student uses listening and observation skills and strategies to gain understanding. Communication EALR 2: The student uses communication skills and strategies to interact/work effectively with others. Using VTS, our program will be an excellent way to explore art through respectful debate, and thus develop communication skills, as well as explore the interdisciplinary connections of art and life.
On-going Teacher Networking

Our project will produce influential teacher-leaders, able to extend the value of using art as an essential component of education’s fundamental purposes in a democratic society. At the same time, the project provides continued support for participants to model through their own work the practices they recommend to their colleagues. An electronic networking site will supplement continued learning and revision. On this site teachers post and respond to lessons, share photos of units, and provide each other with feedback. It also connects participants with the resource faculty and staff.

Project Faculty and Staff

Our staff reflects an interdisciplinary mix of content scholarship, teaching expertise, and administration needed for effective project presentation, evaluation, and dissemination. 

Project Director: Linda Watts, professor of American Studies in the Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences program at UW Bothell, will serve as project director. She oversees our project, contributes the core academic voice, designs the concepts of teaching of democratic and principled dissent ideas, gives the keynote lecture, and leads a demonstration of close reading strategies. Watts is the author of The Encyclopedia of American Folklore (2006), and is co-author of two volumes in the Social History of the United States series (2008).

Conference Faculty: Tamara Moats is responsible for directing and teaching the VTS training and curriculum development. She is both a museum professional and classroom teacher, previously curator of education at the University of Washington’s Henry Art Gallery where she used VTS in the gallery and teacher training. She teaches art history and history using artworks at the Bush School Upper School. She has the combined experience of museum education, high school and university teaching; designing teacher training institutes; and writing curriculum. Bridget Nowlin serves as VTS instructor, and provides design and logistical support for the conference. She is a museum educator, has taught college-level art history and studio classes, and is an expert VTS trainer. She is Visual Resource Curator at the Cornish College of the Arts with a vast knowledge of digital image resources. Susan Casteras is a professor of American art history at UW Seattle and will lecture on how artworks combine artistic invention and fiction with the realities of the battlefield and political circumstances. She will address how teachers might explain creative interpretations of historical fact. Casteras is a former curator at the Yale University Art Gallery and author of over 10 books on late 19th-century art.

Institutional Context

UW Bothell (UWB) hosts this project as an integral part of its strategic priority for strengthening connections between the campus and K-12 schools in northern Puget Sound. UWB brings
several strengths to the project with its core interdisciplinary curriculum and academic preparation across the arts, humanities, and social sciences. This provides a rich foundation for linking university faculty and programs to K-12 teachers with interest in integrating study of visual arts, history, and social studies. The project benefits from both this interdisciplinary expertise and UWB’s dedication to ongoing dialogue with K-12 faculties. The administrative and participant support of the project will be managed by the Goodlad Institute for Educational Renewal, located at UWB and designed to foster formal collaborations among university faculty, K-12 educators, and community organizations. The Institute focuses on education for democratic citizenship, which aligns with the purposes of the Picturing America School Collaboration Program.

The Seattle Art Museum joins UWB in supporting our project and will host a full day of conference activities in the museum. Its American art resources augment Picturing America curriculum, and provide a broader context for discussion of American art.

**Eligibility and Selection of Participants**

The application comprises a questionnaire and statement of interest and goals, and requires a supporting signature from the school principal. Criteria will include strong support from the school principal; commitment to completing the 3-day program; enthusiasm for developing and implementing the instructional unit; and willingness to participate in dissemination. We will give priority to applicants from “Picturing America” participating schools, as well as those who apply as a team from a single school and articulate plans for providing school leadership.

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1 For more information on Visual Thinking Strategies, see http://www.visualthinkingstrategies.org/index.html