

**Lesson Title:** Artist Statements: Context, Content, & Conversations

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**Overview:** Art and design students are almost always asked to write about their work, in the form of an artists' statement, at some point in their academic career. This is a skill that is crucial as they move from student to professional or practicing artist because it gives them the opportunity to reflect on their work, share concepts and develop their authority in their field, and, very importantly, discuss how their work builds on the work of others who share similar themes and/or processes. These descriptive texts provide additional context, insight, evidence, and background details that are otherwise difficult for viewers to identify or understand. This lesson describes the process linking the creative process to the research process for visual and fine art disciplines in order to articulate sources of inspiration, identify themes, and provide context for an intended audience. Pop culture is an accessible topic that most students will have some familiarity with, and so the lesson focuses on contemporary and pop artists who draw from several sources to create their bodies of work.

**Learning Outcomes:**

- Students will collaboratively research and mind map the work of one artist to identify the ways in which this artist is influenced by other art, disciplines outside of art, and contemporary issues, and culture.
- Students will consider and articulate who their work is in conversation with (other artists, theorists, etc.) and how they are building on the contributions others have made.
- Students will generate a mind map of themes, artists, and influences that pertain to their body of work in order to begin researching each one more thoroughly.
- Students will use further research to contextualize their body of work within cultural, social, artistic, and discipline-specific histories and contemporary practices/movements.

**Time:** 75 minute class period

**Background/recommended reading:** Meeks, Amanda. et al. *CREATE: Adapting the Framework to Studio Art disciplines*. College & Research Libraries News, [S.I.], v. 78, n. 10, p. 554, nov. 2017. ISSN 2150-6698. Available at:

<<https://crln.acrl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/16807/18383>>.

**Teacher Materials:** Whiteboard, dry erase markers, handouts with sample mind map and guiding questions for each student, computer/projector, create a collaborative google doc to track resources that students find during research

**Student Materials:** Computer, pen/pencil

**Preparation:** Have students find a statement by an artist they admire and respect and circle the "outside" influences the artist discusses in their statement. Bring printed versions of these

statements (with their mark up) to class. Send google doc link along with assignment prior to class.

### Session Instructions:

1. Introduction and discussion of lesson (10 min):
  - a. Ask: What is the purpose of an artist statement?
    - i. Have students discuss this question with a partner, share the example they brought in, and then ask for volunteers to share what they discussed with the class
  - b. As artists, it is important to recognize that context matters as much as content.
  - c. Discuss the importance of the “conversation” and the contextualization of their work within an existing conversation.
2. Collaborative Mind Mapping (15):
  - a. Ask: How many of you have created a mind map, or a concept map, before? What is a mind map? Write a collaborative definition on the board.
  - b. Provide each student with a handout with a sample, blank mind map for their reference and the guiding question of “Who is your work in conversation with and how are you building on the contributions they have made in your field?”
  - c. Introduce Janelle Monae and Beyonce and explain that the class will be creating a mind map of either Janelle Monae’s *Dirty Computer* OR Beyonce’s *Lemonade* in order to help contextualize it. Ask students to vote on which work they’d like to focus on. If group is large enough both artists can be covered by splitting the class into two groups.
    - i. By modeling the process of creating a mind map of another artist’s work students get practice for their own mind map.
  - d. Once students have chosen an artist, begin process of mind mapping by identifying themes and influences within the work, if students are less familiar with the work ask them to look the album up on Wikipedia to get a basic overview or refer to the [MICA LibGuide on Lemonade](#) if using that work. Create “nodes” on the board based on the themes and influences that the group discusses.
3. Collaborative Research (15 min):
  - a. Each node identified in the previous activity will be assigned to a group and each group will work on researching that node
    - i. Janelle Monae examples: afrofuturism, science fiction, LGBTQ identity, Prince, Intersectional feminism, Stevie Wonder, etc.
    - ii. Beyonce examples: Warsan Shire, Yoruba people, Octavia Butler, and Pipilotti Rist (Ever is Over All), Black Lives Matter, Malcolm X, Black women, feminism, etc.
  - b. Students should research their topic as it relates to the artist and make notes, define, highlight new ideas/concepts they find, and keep track of the resources they find as they go using the collaborative google doc.
  - c. Use the last few minutes to review the mind map and make connections between the concepts and ideas presented and fill in any gaps

- d. Now, using the mind map as a starting place for writing an artist statement on this work would be much easier. The context would further support the content and provide viewers with more information.
4. Individual Mind Mapping (25 min):
    - a. Ask: Did this exercise make you more confident in writing your own artist statement?
    - b. Have students use their worksheet or the blank side to start their own mind map. Take five minutes to have them brainstorm the themes, influences/influencers, processes, etc. that they would like to include in their artist statement. Generate as many ideas as possible, with the understanding that they may choose not to include every idea they jot down.
    - c. Have students research each node/idea on their mind map for the rest of the time and provide help as they need it.
      - i. Reminder of what resources are available to them through the library
      - ii. Reminder to keep track of their resources for a bibliography (if required or necessary)
  5. Wrap up (10 min):
    - a. Ask students to briefly (1 min) present their mind map to their neighbor and answer the questions on the front of their worksheet in doing so.
    - b. Open discussion about this process and writing their artist statements in general.

**Assessment:** Analysis of students' artist statements and/or a rubric developed in collaboration with the instructor (it needs to be discipline specific).