

Lesson Five – Good News – Emotions Can Bring About Much Needed Change in the World

“Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.”
– Mahatma Gandhi

CREATIVE ACTIVITY – Protest Art

Lesson Intention:

As we explored in the previous lesson, when intense emotions arise, it is important to learn how to witness and express them. However, there are some circumstances where the emotions are asking us to make a change in our lives or in the world. In this lesson, we explore this new way of thinking about the role of emotions. In her book *The Language of Emotions*, Karla McLaren argues that emotions provide information that is important for us to listen to and sometimes act on. We can ask each emotion a question, and gain wisdom from that reflection that helps us make changes to improve our lives. For example, McLaren explains that the question to ask anger is “What must be protected?” She explains that when we feel angry, the emotion is arising in order to signal to us that we need to create a boundary. In this way, anger comes with a message and rather than repress it, we can honor it for offering us wisdom and information about something we need to change. This lesson focuses more closely on the ways many emotions are tied to the problems and injustices in the world. **Rather than avoiding or denying these feelings, we can take action and create change around the emotions we feel strongly about.**

Social Emotional Learning Goals:

- Destigmatize emotions that are often labeled as negative by our culture.
- Raise awareness that students are not alone in their sadness or anxiety or challenging emotion.

Materials for Lesson:

- [Featured Video \(1\) – Simone Lawrence](#)
- [Additional Videos \(3\)](#)
- Lesson Plan (this document)
- [Lesson PowerPoint](#)

In Preparation for Lesson:

Prior to teaching this lesson, **watch the guest artist video** and create your own example of protest art.

Decide which materials will work best for your students and what to have ready for them to use. They could work digitally on their personal electronic devices (i.e. laptops, tablets, Chromebooks), or could use paper and a pen or pencil to draw, or even use magazines and newspapers to cut out words and images.

Featured Video:

Simone Lawrence describes the way she uses murals in order to make a statement about racism and inequality:

Additional Videos:

1. Stamy Paul explains why she founded Graffiti Heart, a nonprofit in Cleveland that supports the creation of street art and provides scholarships to student-artists.
2. Dr. Ofelia Scheppers shares her experience as a child being placed in an English as a second language class, though she was bilingual, and the way her emotions of anger and rejection drove her to become a teacher and education researcher. She explains that her work is her way of protesting the racism she experienced as a child.
3. Cordelia Zars explains that she channeled anger into writing a musical about the way boys are raised to ignore their emotions and this can lead to unhealthy relationships with women when they are older.

Lesson Plan:

Display the 'welcome slide' from the Lesson 5 PowerPoint as you begin.**Slide 1*

As discussed in the teacher training, remember to make the suggested language below authentic to yourself and meaningful for your students.

Launching the Lesson:

* *Slide 2*

Link today's lesson to the previous lessons by noting the way in which the previous lessons offered methods for identifying and expressing emotion. This lesson explores a new way to think about emotion – as information that asks us to make a change in our lives or in the world. Introduce the guest artist video by explaining that the guest artist will model today's creative activity and describe the way emotion came with a message for her.

Example of What You Could Say:

“We’ve had several discussions now where we have challenged the mainstream cultural tendency to ignore emotions and to hide them when we are feeling anxious, depressed, or having a difficult time. As an alternative to pushing emotions down, we watched a few artists share the way creative expression allowed them to stay present with difficult feelings and to express those feelings through writing, collage and photography. We explored the idea that ignoring emotions doesn’t make them go away, and trying to escape them only makes us feel better for a little while. Eventually emotions bubble up to the surface. One reason emotions continue to return is because they often come with messages that something isn’t working in our lives. The reason pushing these emotions away is often ineffective is because they come with important information about something we need to change. When we ignore the emotion, we do not make the necessary change. The guest artist today explains the way emotions inspired activism, and how the channeled emotions were turned into art.”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Play Guest Artist Video:

In this video clip, the guest artist describes the way emotions like anger and sadness are connected to inequality and racism. The emotions helped her decide to begin making protest art.

Before you play the guest artist video, remember to give students a description of the video content, so that they can decide if they would like to view the video. The video descriptions are listed above each video. Prior to playing the video, you will remind students- “Stories hold potential for various forms of connection to the lives of those who hear them. This story may connect deeply to others who have had a similar experience. In this video, (read the one sentence description that is above the video). At this moment, you may welcome that connection or you may wish to make a different choice to delay or opt out.”

Introducing the Creative Activity:

**Slides 3 and 4*

Invite students to remember the stories they described in their poems, letters, digital collages and photography. Next, students are encouraged to see if there is a problem in the community that needs to be changed, and if the emotions in their story point to this issue. As an example, if a student shared a story about a lack of food in their household, they might link that story to the larger inequality in America. Refer back to an earlier story you shared as an example. Connect your story with something you want to change in the world.

Example of What You Could Say:

“In our earlier lessons, you were invited to write a letter, compose a poem, create a digital collage and take photographs on a walk around the neighborhood. These creative projects allowed you to think about an experience in your life that has felt significant or had a big impact on you. As you call up these stories from your memory, let’s see if there is an emotion you can now think of that calls on you to take action or do something to create change. Does your personal story illuminate an issue that is a larger problem in the world right now? The guest artist helped us see the way a certain emotion inspired a creation of art to help bring about change. I looked back at my own stories to see if I could reflect upon something that would help me think of a change I would like to see in the world. I wanted to share with you what I created. Also, I wanted to share some more inspiring examples of different protest art around the world.”

Explain that it is now your students’ turn to create their own protest art. They will look for their inspiration by thinking about their own life experiences. The emotions embedded in these experiences might be messengers about something they want to change in the world.

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Example of What You Could Say:

"If, as you reflect on the stories you told in your creative projects, you do not discover a specific problem you would like to change, then think about something you feel very strongly about that is happening in the world right now. This can be the center of your protest art. You can either create your own drawing or painting to illustrate the injustice you want to protest, or you can choose a picture or photograph and add words to help illustrate your message."

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Creative Activity:

** Slide 5*

Students are invited to create a piece of protest art by using images they draw themselves or adding text to images they find on the computer. This activity should be given at least 15-20 minutes.

Lesson Closure:

Invite students to share their protest art with the class. Students are welcome to talk about why this topic brings up strong emotions, and they are also invited to share their own lived experience as it relates to their art. As always, students do not have to share if they are not comfortable doing so.

Supplemental Information:

If you or your students would like to learn more about the ideas in this lesson, additional resources and third party links are included below.

4. Throughout her book *The Language of Emotions: What Your Feelings Are Trying to Tell You*, Karla McClaren argues that emotions carry information about our lives. The book guides readers in uncovering these messages by asking each emotion specific questions. Through specific examples and stories, McClaren illustrates this interpretation of the role of emotion in our lives.
5. Street art has been a key form of activism in the movement for racial justice and the Black Lives Matter movement. The article in the *New York Times* called "[The Black Lives Matter Street Art That Contains Multitudes](#)" describes the role of art in New York City during the 2020 protests for racial justice.
6. Susan A Philips' book *The City Beneath: A Century of Los Angeles Graffiti* provides an academic look at the role of street art in social movements. In the book she argues: "Political graffiti is a critical intervention in urban space, especially as municipalities and police attempt to shut down the streets. Even after protests have dispersed, graffiti stands as a testament to the protestors' collective voice...The graffiti may soon be washed away, but not before it is documented, becoming part of history." (quoted in [Haider's article](#) for the BBC on the global reaction to the Black Lives Matter movement).