CONCENTRATION AS AN ESSENTIAL QUESTION

ART, BIG IDEAS, AND ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

For your next assignment you will be asked to identify a BIG IDEA, develop related ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS about that BIG IDEA, investigate your questions, develop an artwork in response to your investigation and tell about what you came to understand from your investigation.

But first consider, “What is Art?”

WHAT IS ART?

Let’s compare Grammar and Media.

* Grammar is the mechanics of *language*.
* Media is the mechanics of *visualization*.
* Grammar /Vocabulary is a conduit for thought. Expanding vocabulary expands opportunities for thinking about and writing out ideas.
* Media/Technique is the conduit for visualization of thinking. Expanding Media/Technique range and expands opportunities for thinking about and visualizing ideas.
* Writing some else’s written compositions is simply practicing grammar, vocabulary and penmanship.
* Copying some else’s visual compositions is simply practicing media, technique and composition.
* Writing or using media without idea or expression of original individual thoughts and perspectives (ideation) is simply practicing media.
* Copying others’ visual images is like rewriting the Gettysburg Address and saying, “Wow! Good job! I wrote this myself”.
* Skillfully rendered copy art is like skillful penmanship but neither is anything like invention. Neither one is ART because…
* **Visual Art is original ideation of idea through visual media**. Art, REAL ART, is therefore dependent on original individual investigation, perspectives and interpretation of ideas.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SAY THROUGH YOUR ART?

What you care to communicate through your art is YOUR artistic decision. While you may have a lesson on media that you need to address and you may have a concept that you are studying, the way you approach these through your art is your choice. Within an assigned or self identified concept, are BIG IDEAS.

WHAT IS A BIG IDEA?

* There are ideas and there are BIG IDEAS. Some very good Ideas might not be BIG IDEAs.
* BIG IDEAS have both concrete and abstract qualities.
* BIG IDEAS can be simultaneously dynamic and stable.
* A BIG IDEA can manifest itself on a large human scale and on a personal scale.
* A manifestation of a BIG IDEA from past times can stand as a metaphor for a contemporary manifestation of that same BIG IDEA.
* BIG IDEAS return throughout time repeatedly in new situations.
* A BIG IDEA is a defining condition that extends throughout time and place.

WHAT IS NOT A BIG IDEA?

* A big idea is not a specific personal or historical incidence.
* A big idea is not a specific social, political, religious or art movement.
* A big idea is not a specific art media/technique, dance form or musical style.
* Big Ideas are contained within these and exists beyond them.

WHERE DO I FIND BIG IDEAS?

Your teacher may select a BIG IDEA for the class to investigate. Or your teacher may ask you or your group to select a BIG IDEA. BIG IDEAS are everywhere in life. So you can start there! The College Board’s AP Studio Art Vertical Teams® teacher handbook provides a full page list of BIG IDEA examples. The best way to select a BIG IDEA is to consider the following:

SELECTING A BIG IDEA

Here are 3 possible ways to select a BIG IDEA. Ask yourself the following:

1. What BIG IDEAS are relevant to my life?
2. What artist(s) or art movements have I studied in art classes and what BIG IDEAS do they encompass?
3. What topics have I studied in other classes?

*Example A: Selecting a BIG IDEA for Artistic Exploration*

* What big ideas are relevant to your life?

*The movie the ‘Hunger Games’ might inspire the BIG IDEA of HUNGER. A weather event affects a neighboring town and suggests the BIG IDEA of COMMUNITY.*

* What artist(s) or art movements have you studied in your art classes?

*Maybe in your freshman Art I course you studied Surrealism. What big idea(s) exist within the art movement Surrealism?*

* What topics are you studying in other classes?

*You are studying vectors in math class. Vectors are about how things veer off to other places or things. Can you think of how real life situations veer off? What type of imaging would incorporate mathematical vectors and situational vectors?*

HOW DO I IDENTIFY BIG IDEAS WITHIN SPECIFIC CONTEXTS OR SITUATIONS?

Example B: What is a BIG IDEA in Surrealism?

Think about a past or current lesson on Surrealism. One observation when viewing Surrealist paintings is the unusual, abnormal, contradictory and/or unexpected juxtaposition of disparate images and the effect these have on personal resonance. Some make you feel odd, some make you feel uneasy. The images connect you to the real while disconnecting you from reality. So one resulting BIG IDEA manifested in Surrealism might be…

“Dissonance”

(A tension or clash resulting from the combination of two disharmonious elements. An inconsistency between situations or the beliefs one holds, or between one's actions and one's beliefs. Retrieve 2014 from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dissonance)

WHAT IS AN ESSENTIAL QUESTION?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

* Ask about where, when, how and why the BIG IDEA was manifested in past situations or events.
* Ask about where, when, how and why the BIG IDEA was manifested in contemporary situations or events.
* Ask questions core to Big Ideas.
* Require investigation.
* Require personal responses and through those establish personal connections.
* Inquire about the qualities of large scale manifestations.
* Inquire about the qualities of individual level manifestations.
* Probe and compare the extent of similarities and differences across multiple manifestations of the BIG IDEA.
* Have no clear right or wrong answers, are open-ended, and lead to more questions.
* Can be *OVERARCHING* (Looking at an encompassing scope of the BI)or *TOPICAL (Looking at more specific conditions within a BI)*
* ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS are thoughtful inquiries about a BIG IDEA.

HOW DO ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS HELP TO LINK BIG IDEAS ACROSS TIME, PLACE AND DISCIPLIN?

How do “BIG IDEAS repeat throughout time”?

When you consider the qualities and parameters of a BIG IDEA, and you consider what is going on in your world, you can begin to link the BIG IDEAs to your life. Below are an example of Social Dissonance and an example of Personal Dissonance. How do these two examples “link”?

Example C: ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS about Surrealism might be:

* What disharmonious or contradictory conditions did the Surrealist artists experience?
* Prior to Surrealism was there any art that had unusual, abnormal, contradictory and/or unexpected juxtaposed images?
* What disharmonious or contradictory conditions did those prior artists experience?
* What other evidence of the Surrealist time period, outside of artworks, indicated personal or social dissonance?
* What events or situations exist today that contain disharmonious or contradictory conditions?
* How would I visually communicate my ideas about these conditions?

HOW DO EQs LEAD TO MORE EQs?

Let’s follow up on the TOPICAL ESSENTIAL QUESTION, “What events or situations exist today that contain disharmonious or contradictory conditions”?

Example D: Contemporary Social Dissonance

Most Americans want themselves and their fellow Americans to have decent paying jobs and the prospect for upward financial mobility. Most Americans want inexpensive goods and services. To have inexpensive goods and services Americans need to buy goods from countries that pay people less than subsistence wages, OR… Americans need to manufacture these goods and services in the US and pay people below subsistence wages. BUT...Most Americans want good paying jobs in order to pay for goods and services. So while many Americans state that they rue immigration, they employ workers from other countries who are willing to take jobs at subsistence wages. BUT… Many children of the immigrant workers are American born citizens. These young Americans are in need of above subsistence goods and services like food and education to become healthy and productive citizens who will eventually want well paying jobs to buy inexpensive goods and services.

* What are the contradictions in this situation?
* Who experiences the resulting social dissonance?
* In what ways is this social dissonance manifested in social groups and in life events?
* Do all social groups experience the dissonance in the same way?
* In what ways might this social dissonance manifested in the arts?
* In what ways is this social dissonance similar to those experienced by the Surrealist?
* In what ways is this social dissonance different from those experienced by the Surrealist?
* How could I visualize what I have come to know and feel?

Example E: Contemporary Individual Dissonance

Bobby’s brother has mild cerebral palsy. Bobby wants to play baseball with the cool kids. Today Bobby is responsible for his brother after school and takes his brother to baseball practice. Bobby experiences that the cool kids are not so cool to his brother. This is a contradictory and unexpected human event.

* Who experiences this individual dissonance?
* In what ways might this individual dissonance be manifested in the individuals’ lives and life events?
* Do all of the individuals in this situation experience dissonance in the same way?
* In what ways has individual dissonance been portrayed in the arts?
* In what ways has individual dissonance been portrayed in Surrealism?
* In what ways is this individual dissonance similar to those experienced by the Surrealist artists?
* In what ways is this individual dissonance different from those experienced by the Surrealist artists?
* How could I visualize what I have come to know and feel?

OK, I THINK I GET THIS, BUT CAN YOU GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE OF HOW THIS WORKS IN REAL LIFE?

Example G: A Real Progression.

Students were taught a media lesson and then asked (working in small groups) to select a BIG IDEA from another course for investigation, to develop overarching & topical essential questions, and to develop an artwork that addressed one of these questions.

A student told the teacher that her group was going to base their art work on the BIG IDEA of the Underground Railroad. The teacher’s response was:

*The Underground Railroad is a historical event that manifests several BIG IDEAS but is not a BIG IDEA itself.*

*Reread the definition of big idea. Can you think of any big ideas that are manifested in the historical event known as the Underground Railroad?*

*The collaborative learning group (CLG) discussed the problem. Within the historical event of the Underground Railroad they identified the following BIG IDEAS: Slavery, Freedom, Civil War, Exodus, Immigration, and Hunted. The students selected “Exodus” as their big idea.*

*Under the BIG IDEA “Exodus” the CLG developed the following Overarching essential questions:*

* *Why do people flee from their homes?*
* *Why did the American Slave’s risk their lives for exodus?*

*From these Overarching Essential Questions students developed the following Topical Essential Question:*

* *What other historical examples are there of people fleeing?*
* *What individual level examples are there of people fleeing?*
* *What do people risk for exodus?*
* *What do they lose? / What do they hope to gain?*
* *How do they decide where to flee to?*
* *What happens when they get to where they wanted to go?*
* *Do they get to where they wanted to go?*
* *Do they get to what they wanted life to be?*
* *How are these many exoduses similar?*
* *How are they different?*
* *How do these things relate to the Underground Railroad Exodus?*
* *How can I visually communicate what I know and feel about Exodus?*

Individuals gravitated to towards a question that mattered most to them. To answer their selected question each student researched written documents, image searches, and discursive inquiries of past and contemporary examples of exodus and the exodus of the Underground Railroad. Each student explored visual ideas through experiments, and sketches and/or photo-sketches. They used their investigations and the lesson’s media/technique to develop ideation to address their personal response to their question.

HOW WILL THE INVESTIGATION OF BIG IDEAS THROUGH ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS AFFECT MY ARTWORK?

Once you have investigated a BIG IDEA through Essential Questions, you need to consider what you want to say about the BIG IDEA. Since BIG IDEAS are **BIG** and their manifestations are infinite, it is usually not a good idea to try to say everything you know about a BIG IDEA in one artwork. Return to your investigation of the ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS and be guided by one of them. Create or appropriate visual reference materials and then **develop** **your own original composition** that visualizes how you feel about what you think about the BIG IDEA. When you use media for the inventive visualization of your own idea you are making original ART!

THE BI/EQ “BREADTH” SCAFFOLDING IN ACTION

Example F: AP Studio Art embedded BI/EQ “Breadth” Assignment

* Students were given a medium/technique “Breadth Lesson”.
* Students read & discussed the above information on BI’s and EQ’s, and interacted & explored Big Ideas.
* Students were given the following assignment.

Assignment

1. \*In small groups collaborate to:

* Select a BIG IDEA from another course for investigation:
* Brainstorm for an Overarching Essential Questions about the BIG IDEA.
* Brainstorm for Topical Essential Questions about the BIG IDEA.

1. \*Individually select a Topical Essential Question and with the Lesson Medium/Technique:

* Investigate
* Experiment/Plan/Discover
* Respond & Improve
* Decide
* Create

1. \*In small groups:

* Share
* Critique

1. \*Individually reflect by asking:

* Concept: What did I discover and come to understand about the Big Idea? What about that understanding is eternal?
* Media/Technique: What did I discover and come to understand about the use of media /technique to communicate my ideas about the Big Idea?

1. Voice: What did I say to others about how I felt about what I discovered and came to understand about the Big Idea?
2. Self Assess Using the Assignment Rubric

CONCENTRATION AS AN ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Now it’s your turn!

Look at the Big Idea you want to investigate.

Develop Essential Questions

Research, sketch, plan to address these EQ visually!

**(C + M/T = V) = EU**

***CONCEPT (Student’s individual investigation of Essential Questions and Internalization of the BIG IDEA)***

***+ MEDIA (Student’s individual application of the media lesson taught in this lesson)***

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***= VOICE IN IDEATION (Original statement made about the concept (BIG IDEA) with the lesson media/techniques)*.**

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**= ENDURING UNDERSTANDING**