



Telling Personal Stories Through Art

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Lesson Summary

In this lesson, students explore the connection between art and storytelling, focusing on how art can serve as an empowering, self-actualizing and even cathartic form of self-expression. The video clips provided in this lesson are from *Cutie and the Boxer*, an Academy Award®-nominated film about the chaotic and unconventional 40-year love affair and creative partnership between action painter Ushio Shinohara and his wife, Noriko, also an artist. Ushio, who punches canvases with paint-laden gloves, is famous in Japan and in Manhattan's art circles, yet wider recognition has eluded him. Noriko, 21 years his junior, put her artistic ambitions on hold to be a wife and mother--and an assistant to her demanding husband. Now, Noriko's acclaimed "Cutie" series of drawings, depicting the relationship between the title character and a volatile figure named Bullie, is turning their world upside down. POV offers a lending library of DVDs that you can borrow anytime during the school year--FOR FREE! Get started by joining our [Community Network](#).

Time Allotment

One to two 50-minute class periods, and one to two additional 50-minute class periods for presentations

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Determine how and when art can be used as a vehicle for self-expression Analyze the impact of art as personal storytelling on the artist and those viewing the art
- Recognize the merits and potential difficulties of presenting aspects of self in art that the public experiences
- Assess the need to present self in art and employ the most appropriate presentation medium

Prep for Teachers

On the strips of poster board, write one topic per strip as follows:

- Responses

- Resolution
- Benefits
- Difficulties

Post the strips in different locations around the classroom.

Supplies

- Film clips from *Cutie and the Boxer* and equipment on which to show them
- Chart paper, white board or a similar medium
- Medium- or large-size self-adhesive index cards or notepads
- Poster board, cut into four large strips (to be written on)
- Markers
- [Using Art Survey](#) handout

Introductory Activity

1. Divide students into small groups. Distribute copies of the [Using Art Survey](#) handout to students in each group. Have students review and discuss the questions. Invite each group to share its findings. Categorize student responses on a chart, such as a spider map. Ask: How do art and self-expression/storytelling relate to one another?
2. Tell students they will explore how stories can be told via art. Briefly describe the artists showcased in the film.
3. Show students all of the clips, in order. Either at the end of all the clips or pausing between each one, have students briefly discuss how art figures into the telling of a story and art's impact on the artist.

Prompts include:

- What is the relationship between Ushio and Noriko, as defined by their art and interactions?
- What do the differences in their art styles indicate about them as individuals?
- What story does Noriko tell as a result of her relationship with Ushio and her experience as an artist? Why does she tell this story now through art?
- How does this artistic storytelling experience affect Noriko professionally, personally, as an artist? Is the impact a positive one? Explain. (For example, does it improve her relationship with Ushio? Or, does it make her resentful?)
- How do Noriko's art and story affect Ushio and the art world? (And how does the art world's reaction reflect Ushio's views of Noriko as an artist and a partner?)
- How do Noriko and Ushio's art forms compare?
- How do their art forms seem to reflect their personalities and the ways in which they process the world and their lives?
- Why do you think Ushio's art gets more attention than Noriko's?

Learning Activities

After viewing the clips, distribute several index cards or portions of sticky note pads to students. Tell them they will have a chance to reflect and write their thoughts in response to one or all of the following questions (write these on chart paper for the class to see):

- **RESPONSES:** How do people, the artist included, respond to personal stories reflected in art?
- **RESOLUTION:** What forms of resolution emerge from these works? (For example, the artist is empowered; the audience is moved by the truth the story presents, etc.)
- **BENEFITS:** What are the benefits of using art for storytelling and self-expression? And who benefits?
- **DIFFICULTIES:** What might be the negative impact of such art--on the artist, on those associated with the artist and so on? Instruct students to reflect on each question, jot down brief thoughts and post those responses under the appropriate poster board strips. When students are done, tell them to select the category that they most want to address and to stand under that strip. Students sharing the same selection discuss their responses among themselves, with one person sharing a synthesis of their thoughts with the entire class.

Culminating Activity

Building on the clips and discussions, students then are asked to consider a story or related concept they would share via an art form of their choice. Students can do this individually; if they choose, they can first partner with a classmate to flesh out and map out their ideas, concepts and representations. Most important to this discussion is why this particular story can be best presented by some sort of art form. Invite volunteers to share what they envisioned for their stories and why they would present those aspects of their lives through art (considering impact, benefit and so on).

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Assign students to create their own work based on what they presented in class. Then have a class exhibition of their work, with opportunities to discuss how their work has affected them and addressed a particular life story.

EXTENSIONS

1. **Nontraditional Art Forms:** People create art using very different mediums in rather creative ways. For example, Ushio uses boxing gloves to produce powerful paintings. Show Clip 1. Then have students take a look at other unique tools artists use to create works of art. For example, artist Tian Haisu uses roller blades:<http://www.fastcompany.com/3044983/the-recommender/rollerblading-meets-pollack-watch-this-artist-create-gorgeous-landscapes-on->

Have students research other artists who produce work with unusual elements. Here's a list to get them started:

- Kara Walker's sugar sculptures: <http://creativetime.org/projects/karawalker/>
- Chris Ofili's work with elephant dung: <http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/view/chris-ofilim>
- Seung-Hwan Oh's bacteria-eaten photos: <http://www.fastcompany.com/3037467/the-recommender/like-art-from-the-walls-of-carcosa-these-bacteria-eaten-photos-will-haunt-yo>
- Emil Lukas's art with maggots, bubble wrap and thread: <http://www.sfgate.com/art/article/Emil-Lukas-Art-from-maggots-bubble-wrap-and-6143282.php>
- Artists working with recycled materials: <http://beautifuldecay.com/2010/07/21/green-art-10-artists-working-with-recycled-materials/>

Encourage the class to think about other nontraditional ways to produce art: What would they use? How would they use it? Students can map out what they might produce. If time allows, have students create their own nontraditional art and present it to the class, or in a school art gallery.

Female Artists in their Own Right: Noriko experiences what many female artists who are married to famous male artists have experienced: setting aside their own artistic potential in order to support/promote their spouses; marginalization as female artists; coming into their own later and sometimes getting pushback from spouses whose art has been in the limelight. Students can further explore this historic challenge for female artists to determine whether this pattern continues to play out in the contemporary art world and whether female artists in general get the support, visibility and recognition they merit.

Sites to jumpstart thinking and research:

- BBC: [Female Contemporaries of Famous Artist Get Their Due](#)
- Huffington Post: [Love and Marriage, Artist Style](#)
- As-If Art + Life: [Ain't No Wifey--These Artists and Their Husbands: Part I](#)

Art as Movement, Art as Messaging: Art is always evolving, with new styles continuously emerging from art movements that often reflect the sentiments, current events and politics of specific time periods. For example, Ushio's work is part of the larger action painting movement, which flourished in the 1950s and 1960s.

Action painting is a style or type of painting that does not follow a certain pattern or flow. As an art, the paint is basically just splashed or smeared on to the canvas contrary to the other paintings in which the paint is carefully applied thus, creating a certain image of what the artist want to show. (Source: the-artists.org: "Action Painting" <http://the-artists.org/artistsbymovement/Action-painting>)

Show Clip 2. Ushio was a Neo-Dadaist, part of a group of artists who created work with an emphasis on the importance of the work of art produced rather than on the concept generating the work. The Neo-Dadaist movement was a precursor to pop art and was influenced by many avant-garde artists. Much of the art that was crafted as part of the Neo-Dada movement was made with everyday items. The work of Ushio and similar artists was often criticized as not being art.

Students can examine various art movements through time, with a focus on contemporary movements, to determine not only what influenced their establishment, but also how ideas about art change over time, and on a related note they can determine what art is and who makes that call. They can produce a journal on art movements in which they submit "peer reviewed" essays on this topic; as a focus, they might discuss how art should be approached and studied in school.

RESOURCES

Art History Timelines -

http://www.artfactory.com/art_appreciation/timelines/art_history_timelines.htm

the-artists.org: "Action Painting" - <http://the-artists.org/artistsbymovement/Action-painting>

The Comics Journal: "Shinohara Ushio's Action Cartooning" -

<http://www.tcj.com/shinohara-ushios-action-cartooning/>

The Hairpin: "Interview with *Cutie and the Boxer's* Noriko Shinohara" -

<http://thehairpin.com/2013/08/interview-with-noriko-shinohara/>

Japan Society: "Ushio Shinohara: Canal Street Cornucopia" -

http://www.japansociety.org/ushio_shinohara

The New York Times: "The Art of War" -

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/28/nyregion/the-art-of-war.html>

NPR: "'*Cutie and the Boxer*': Two Lives Entwined At Home, In Art" -

<http://www.npr.org/2013/08/18/212011972/cutie-and-the-boxer-two-lives-entwined-at-home-in-art>

Ushio Shinohara - <http://www.ushioshinohara.com/>

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