

ntroduction:



Inter: Re-Active - An Investigation Of Character:

From masks, to totems, to pixilated avatars, people throughout generations have invoked characters to explore the world that surrounds them. The attributes that are bestowed upon them are tools used by the characters to investigate, analyze and fall in love, in a world ruled by the imagination, but anchored in one common reality.

Using dolls, each one of them with their own cultural specificity, participants will embark on a journey of creating a "crew" of archetypal characters that would unveil the common ground that they live in - in this case, Los Angeles.

The curriculum that follows will present you with the process used by Onramp Arts and the Inter: Re-Active participants, to develop the history of a character and later translate it into a visual or literary medium of your choice.

The curriculum used to bring these "fictional" characters to life can be re-created by the teacher as a tool to explore historical figures as well as the formal elements of literature and theater.

hOOSE your doll:



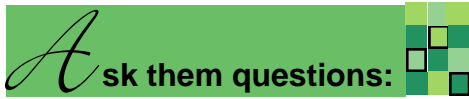
Ask your students to bring dolls from home. They can be a special super-hero, a teddy bear from the past, a doll from the family's ancestry and culture, any kind of doll.

Once students have gathered all the dolls in the classroom, place them on top of a table and pretend they are actors on a stage. Look at them carefully and discuss with the class their appearance and personalities, helping them to see the elements that compose and bring these dolls to life.

Have students each choose one of the dolls - not their own - and remind them that they will be taking a journey with the doll of their choice.

You will soon notice that the students will create personality traits specific to each doll, developing full characters. A private dialogue between the student and the doll will slowly start to emerge, allowing the students to see the first steps into the creation of a character. This will open the door to the fantastic and lead them to the second phase of the journey.

This process may appear to be too "playful" and "childish" to be introduced in a "serious" literature or history class; there is, however, no better way of learning than playing, and our job as teachers is to learn how to play "seriously," teaching our students along the way.



Once they have chosen their doll, the students need to bestow them with histories, fears, hopes and dreams that would allow them to create a full fleshed character.

The dolls of course, have an immediate technical function. A Barbie doll for example, may have been exclusively manufactured by Mattel to be Miss America and drive a convertible Corvette; the teacher's job is to help the students subvert these expectations, by placing the dolls in different contexts and in different situations.

Remind your students that what they see of their dolls, is only the tip of the iceberg to a complex mysterious universe, which now includes them as protagonists.

The following questions will help the students to create a character out of the "ready-made" dolls that they brought into class.

You can add more questions to the list, but make sure not to overwhelm your students. You will be surprised with the depth and complexity of their answers. (For Latino students, asking the questions in their primary language can be helpful).

- Give him or her a name and a nickname and tell us where it comes from.
Dale un nombre y un apodo y cuéntanos de donde viene.
- Where does he or she live? In what kind of a world, and in what kind of a place in that world?
En donde vive? En que tipo de mundo y en que tipo de lugar en ese mundo?
- Give him or her an occupation.
Dale una ocupación.
- Give him or her a mission in the world.
Dale una misión en el mundo.
- Give him or her a community to be a part of.
Dale una comunidad de la que pueda ser parte.
- Give him or her a sense of style.
Dale un estilo.
- Confide your character with secret information and powers.
Dale mensajes y poderes secretos al personaje.
- Make your character vulnerable.
Has que tu personaje sea vulnerable.
- Make your character funny but not stupid. Give him or her a comical attribute.
Dale humor a tu personaje, dale atributos cómicos.
- What's his or hers Achilles' heel?
Cual es su talón de Aquiles?
- Create a past for your character – a tragic but heroic one.
Crea un pasado trágico pero heroico para tú personaje.
- What makes him or her vain?
Qué lo hace vanidoso?
- Give him or her a person to love.
Dale a alguien que querer.



Discuss the answers:



Gather all your students in a circle and start to explore, one by one, the characters they've created. Analyze as a group the choices they've made for their dolls and the universes that they created for them. You will soon realize that the characters share many things in common – cultural relations, media influences, racial connotations.

This workshop type of setting will allow you to explore these issues using their characters as a springboard. You can discuss the ideas of types, archetypes and stereotypes, the influence of the mass media in our daily life, the projection of violence in our communities. Refer to Standards 3.0 Literary Response and Analysis.

Your students, without them even knowing it, will analyze the world around them through their own perspective, as you help them to deconstruct and understand the characters they've created.

See examples of student answers:

Life in Crescent Court

The Eye of the Sea



Build their story:



Having discussed their answers, we can now begin to build a story.

Encourage your students to use their answers as "research" into the story that they will write. They'll be surprised to know that half their job is already done, and they'll like that. You see, they have intuitively gone through the process of outlining a narrative, of sketching events and relationships that will later on become part of a larger universe: a story. Refer to Standards 1.0 Writing Strategies.

It is interesting to note that creative writing classes attempt to achieve this end through different means. Our process un-locks the student's imagination, allowing them to recognize that the process of creating a story is quite natural to them.

Now, everyone can write a story, but not everyone trusts that their choices and fancies are the right ones to take. Refer to Standards 2.0 Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics).

We need to help students trust themselves, assisting them to connect their prior knowledge to current activities.

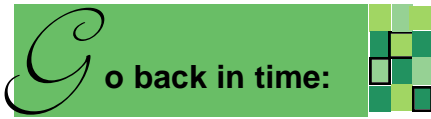
Once the story has been written, the teacher can explore different ways to translate it into a selected medium : theater, video, or to continue fleshing out the story as a literary work.

Inter: Re-Active participants used Flash Macromedia - a vector based graphics tool for the web - to animate their story.

Student examples:

Life in Crescent Court - written story/flash

The Eye of the Sea - written story/flash



Now, let's go back to the beginning and start this process once again, this time presenting the students, not with dolls, but with historical figures.

Depending on the class and the historical period that you are teaching, you will present your students with historical figures, American abolitionists and members of the civil rights movement, apartheid resistance leaders from South Africa, Latin-American liberators and have them choose one of them to explore and investigate.

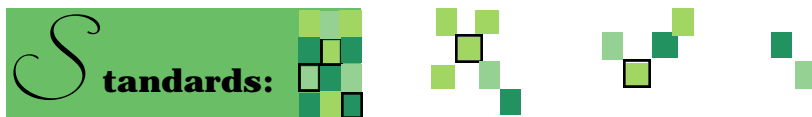
You must provide each figure with a brief biographical statement, so that the student can choose the one that he or she is most interested in developing.

Then the student must answer the same questions answered with the dolls, this time, delving into some historical research in order to find the answers.

Back in class you must create a workshop type of environment to discuss their findings. It's important to note that if some students choose the same historical figure, their answers will differ depending on their individual experiences or knowledge. These differences will allow us to analyze the subjectivity of history and the way we "read" into it, as we look back into the past.

The students, without even knowing it, will be teaching one another and learning about history through their own eyes, using their own perspectives. You will help them to guide their findings, anchoring them at certain moments, but always allowing them the freedom to "discover" history by themselves.

As a final step, they must gather all their research and write an essay on the person they choose. At this point, this far away character that existed somewhere in history has become alive for them, since the students actively participated in finding who they were. Refer to Standards 2.0 Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics).



The following are standards taken from the California History-Social Science Content Standards for California Public Schools and the English-Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools. They are all standards which are covered by this project. They can be more emphasized and expanded by individual teachers.

History-Social Science Content Standards

Chronological and Spatial Thinking

- 1.Students compare present with the past, evaluating the consequences of past events and decisions and determining the lessons that were learned.
- 4.Students relate current events to the physical and human characteristics of places and regions.

Historical Interpretation

- 1.Students show the connections, casual and otherwise, between particular historical events and larger social, economic, and political trends and developments.
- 4.Students understand the meaning, implication, and impact of historical events and recognize that events could have taken other directions.
- 5.Students analyze human modifications of landscapes and examine the resulting environmental policy issues.

11th Grade American History and Geography-Continuity and Change in the 20th Century

- 11.11 Students analyze the major social problems and domestic policy issues in contemporary American society.

English-Language Arts Content Standards

Reading

- 2.0 Reading Comprehension (Focus on Informational Materials)
Students read and understand grade level appropriate material. They analyze the organizational patterns, arguments, and positions advanced.



<contd.>

Listening and Speaking Strategies

1.0 They deliver focused and coherent presentations of their own that convey clear and distinct perspectives and solid reasoning. They use gestures, tone, and vocabulary tailored to the audience and purpose.

Arts Standards

Inter: Re-Active utilizes three primary models for interdisciplinary arts instruction: inquiry-based presentation, critical analysis, and creative production. A representative sample of activities listed below correspond directly to the Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools as indicated in parentheses.

- 1) Inquiry-based Presentations on the history of western participatory art models provide students with information about those works but also about the accompanying ideological, social and economic histories of various art movements. Presentations on the history of landscape, self-portraiture, and genre painting complemented by presentations on contemporary artists work in new media will facilitate students' manipulation of color, shape and spatial design in their work (*Artistic Perception: 1.6: Compare and contrast similar styles of art work done in electronic media with those done in traditional visual arts materials*)
- 2) Critical analysis of various art works emphasize written and oral critiques through which students will explain their understanding and appreciation of contemporary images, and dramatic situations and story-telling as evidenced in new media, film and literature (*Connections, Relationships and Applications: 5.5: Investigate and report on the essential features of modern or emerging technologies that currently affect or will affect visual artists and the definition of the visual arts*)
- 3) Creative production activities in the classroom and in the laboratory increase students' technical skill by incorporating traditional techniques (drawing, photography, dance, etc.) in the learning of new techniques. (*Creating, Performing and Participating in the Visual Arts: 2.5: Create an expressive composition focusing on dominance and subordination*).



Gianni Rodari, THE GRAMMAR OF FANTASY, EXCERCISES ON FANTASY

Trigger Happy : Videogames and the Entertainment Revolution By Steven Poole. Arcade Publishing, 2000.

Joystick Nation : How Videogames Ate Our Quarters, Won Our Hearts, and Rewired Our Minds by J. C. Herz. Little Brown & Company, 1997.

The Culture of the Gun- Rights and Violence Robert Bliwise, Duke Magazine, March-April 2001

"From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games" Justine Cassell(Editor), Henry Jenkins (Editor), MIT Press, 1998.

Evaluating Creativity Making and Learning by Young People Edited by: Julian Sefton-Green, Rebecca Sinker, Routledge Press, 2000.



<http://splotch.media.mit.edu/wise/wise.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/zoom/cast/ray/index.html>

<http://www.jasonproject.org/>



Inter: Re-Active: youth, gaming and the American social imaginary
An OnRamp Arts Project Presented by a consortium of partners including Belmont High School and Los Angeles Educational Partnership (LAEP), and produced by OnRamp Arts in association with University of California (UCLA & UCI), Inter: Re-Active is an innovative media literacy project for high school students emphasizing critical analysis of media images of violence and the creation of a digital response to those images. This project is supported by the Department of Education, California Arts Council and the Streisand Foundation. Artists, writers and designers, as well as project participants have been instrumental in conceptualizing projects and writing of curriculum to distribute the Inter: Re-Active project to other learning communities. The following individuals have contributed to the online presentation of Inter: Re-Active Level 1 project:

Stephen Metts- Project Director
Jessica Irish- Creative and Technical Director
Juan Devis- Project Content Director
Brian Gibbs- Curriculum Consultant
Barbara Golding- Project Coordinator
Yolanda Salazar- Lead Teacher
Mayura Kona- Web Designer