

Grades 9/10 Hong Kong Academy Protest Art—Collage and Mixed Media

Rachel Bignell, MYP/DP Visual Art, Arts and Cultural Events (ACE) Coordinator

In Grades 9 and 10, the students study the cause and effects of colonialism and imperialism. They also look at developments in and problems facing different countries. As a school in Asia, the students become aware that there are many issues that people may face in various locations on this continent as well as globally.

Students are strongly encouraged, even expected, to make connections between different curricular areas and apply their knowledge and understanding to different situations.

The protest art unit was planned to enable students to consider previous learning and use it to inspire their work, whilst raising awareness of a variety of issues of injustice around the world. The students were asked to consider the following questions:

- How do people respond to injustice?
- How can the arts be used to influence people?
- How does art impact on society?

Some of the students chose to look at issues they had encountered in other curricular areas and some chose to research areas of injustice about which they knew little.

A few Grade 9 students decided to look at child soldiers as, in Language Arts, they had started to read *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* by Ishmael Beah. They later presented their research in art and their artwork to their peers in Language Arts. Other choices included child prostitution, human trafficking, child abuse, poverty, racism, how people can be influenced by the media's depiction of women in relation to eating disorders and how pirated products can affect an economy.

Throughout the unit, we listened to examples of protest songs, noting the different ways that the arts can be used to give strong messages. The songs included "Behind the Wall" by Tracy Chapman, dealing with domestic violence. We also listened to "They Dance Alone" by Sting, which tells the story of the women who protested peacefully about the men who disappeared during Pinochet's regime in Chile by dancing with photographs of their fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons.

The fact that the students had complete autonomy in choosing, meant that, having carried out research on three different issues, they were all able to choose something about which they felt strongly.

Through their work, the students explored the following Areas of Interaction (IBMYP) or contexts:

Community and Service: Explore the use of art in and for the global community. Recognize how art can be used to help a community and individuals.

Health and Social: Recognize that art can be used to inform, make a statement and influence people. Understand how art may be used to positively change circumstances for people.

The students also aspired to demonstrate the following ‘Learner Profiles’ (IBMYP) attributes through their work:

Communicator: Use Art as a language to communicate issues of injustice.

Caring: Show empathy, compassion and respect towards the needs and plights of others, globally.

Principled: Through their work, develop a sense of fairness, justice and respect for the dignity of the individual, groups and communities.

Knowledgeable: Explore concepts of injustice and the resulting issues faced by individuals, groups and communities, globally.

The students engaged in research, planning, investigating, reflecting, creating and evaluating.

Students regularly shared their ongoing work with each other; this gave them an opportunity to inform their peers and also to receive valuable feedback.

The students wanted their art pieces to make a difference and were keen to explore ways of reaching a wider audience. They wrote artist statements to accompany their art pieces, which explain why they chose their issue, how they feel about it and how they would like viewers to respond.

One student said to me, “Action and change can start with just one person doing one small thing; it can grow as more and more people get involved and then things really start to happen!”