

Affecting Images: A Guided Self-Reflection Document for a Trauma-Informed Art History Classroom

Editors' Note: This guide was originally published in October 2023 as part of the series "Hard Lessons: Trauma, Teaching, Art History" in *Art Journal Open*. For additional information about trauma-informed pedagogy and its potential role in the art history classroom, please consult the full article and the larger "Hard Lessons." The editors encourage the use of this guide in tandem with the larger discussion of trauma-informed pedagogy—its definition and its potential role in the art history classroom—in the full-length article found here: <http://artjournal.collegeart.org/?p=18497>.

—Jenevieve DeLosSantos and Kathleen Pierce, Series Guest Editors

Guided Self Reflection

Below, you will find a three-part self-guided reflection document. It was designed specifically with art history education in mind, focusing on the affective role of images and how the choices educators make in the selection and framing of images can help to support students as they encounter potentially activating subjects. We offer a series of guiding questions to both encourage reflection on past teaching and support scholar-teachers in developing their own trauma-informed approach. We especially hope to promote reflection around how we select images for the art history classroom, as well as the particular images one might choose. While these questions may be particularly useful when considering images with potentially activating content, they are also useful when applied more generally. In our own development of these questions, we have in part looked to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the national agency whose guidelines have most robustly informed academic discussions about trauma-informed pedagogy. SAMHSA identifies six key principles for trauma-informed care: safety (S); trustworthiness and transparency (T); peer support (PS); collaboration and mutuality (CM); empowerment, voice, and choice (EVC); and cultural, historical, and gender issues (CHG) (and which we here expand to include other aspects of

identity and lived experience).¹ Recent scholarship has emphasized a seventh principle: resilience, growth, and change (R).² To facilitate engagement with this reflection document, we have used these initials to identify where questions connect to particular principles. While these principles might seem abstract and challenging to tie to specific aspects of pedagogy, such as choosing images, we hope this guiding document bridges that gap.

Each of the three parts includes a series of questions designed to help you critically consider the images you include in your teaching within a trauma-informed framework that still aligns with your learning goals. You may scroll down for the web version of this guide, or download a PDF version here, which includes dedicated space to make notes, brainstorm, and record your reflections. We have designed this document so that you might implement it into your preparations to the degree that you would like or are able, whether in relation to a single image, one day’s lecture, or your broader approach to image selection throughout the semester.

Part One: Choosing Images

What are you hoping to elucidate by including these images in your course materials? To set up this section, begin by considering the following self-reflection questions:

1. Focus on Learning Goals:

- What is the overall goal of your lesson or lecture?

- How do the images you are considering serve these goals?

- Are there other images that could serve these goals?

2. Focus on Images:

- How do you plan to frame your discussion of these images? Are you highlighting issues of style or formal analysis? Are you using the images to illustrate vocabulary terms? Are you exploring historical context? Will you be exploring how these images or objects aid in developing tropes, stereotypes, iconographic patterns, constructions of identity, etc.?

- Do you have ample time in your class to discuss these images, or do you have to move quickly through your content? Will a particular image be a core case study, or are you using one of these images as a quick example?

- What does this image say about race, gender, sexuality, class, age, religion, ability, or other facets of identity and lived experience? Spend time here reflecting on these topics as they might resonate in the past as well as the present, even if they are not what you intended to emphasize in your lesson. (CHG)

- Does the image's subject matter or context evoke violence? (S)

- Was this image made without the subject's consent? Will you discuss consent in relation to image production? (T) (CHG)

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- Will you explain or explore with students *why* you have chosen to include this image? (T) (S)

- What implicit biases might you bring to the discussion of this image and how can you prepare yourself to address them? (T) (CHG) (R)

- Will you allow time for student responses, questions, and/or objections? (EVC) (R)

3. Reflection: After considering the above questions, do the learning goals for your class align with the responses above? If you find that your learning goals do not allow for examination of the themes you've identified, consider including some of the alternate images you identified above, or, modifying your class to frame these images in a way that acknowledges their content and leaves space for student responses and reflection. If you do not have the option of changing set images or the pace of your course, might there be a way to invite asynchronous reflection, engagement, or opportunities for students to offer their reactions?

Part Two: Classroom Environment

How does the structure of your classroom help to facilitate engagement with images? To set up this section, begin by considering the following self-reflection questions:

1. Focus on Learning Goals:

- What is the overall goal of your lesson or lecture, and how does the structure of your lesson or lecture, as well as your classroom generally, support those goals?

- How does the community that you have built in your classroom support the goals of your lesson?

- Are there factors beyond your control that may impact your classroom community (such as roster size, seating arrangements and furniture, or material conditions of your campus buildings)? What are some ways you might address these challenges, either in class or asynchronously?

- Are there additional activities you might bring into your lecture or lesson to support these goals?

2. Focus on classroom environment or structure:

- How have you worked to establish a sense of community in your classroom? Have you developed classroom norms³, discussed expectations for classroom discussion and behavior, provided opportunities for students to engage with one another, and/or employed content warnings? If you have not, how would you describe your classroom community? Do students feel comfortable participating? Do they seem open to collaboration? Do you sense that they feel open to approaching you as the instructor? (CM) (EVC) (T) (S) (R)

- How do you plan to facilitate your lesson in the classroom? Will you be primarily lecturing, using active learning, employing group work, or hosting a group discussion? How do you plan to frame your discussion of these images? In what ways have you considered accessibility in designing your lesson?⁴ (CM) (PS) (S)

- Is there an opportunity in your teaching of this image to invite student collaboration? (CM)

- How have you communicated to students that they can share their own perspectives on an image or topic? How can you support students in self-reflection activities as well as group reflection activities? (ECV) (R)

- Has there been anything in recent news or on campus that might impact your students' interpretation or experience of either a work or a topic of discussion? Have you acknowledged this as a group? What is at risk in having this dialogue or in *not* having this dialogue? (T) (S)

- Do you feel prepared to effectively host a potentially divisive conversation? How will you manage a hot moment or support students who might have misspoken or made a mistake? (CM) (PS) (S) (R)

- If a student opts out of a discussion because of an image you select, how will you support that student? Or are there ways to encourage students to support each other in discussing the image/topic? (PS) (S) (R)

3. Reflection: After considering the above questions, how do the conditions you have created in your classroom and through your pedagogy align with the learning goals you have identified above? If you find that your learning goals and classroom environment are not mutually constitutive, consider how the seven principles listed above might help you to build community and increase a sense of belonging among your students. Examples might include developing in-class exercises, designing asynchronous activities, or facilitating group discussions.

Part Three: Self-Assessment

What have these questions and the reflection they have prompted revealed about your teaching—past, present, and future? How do you wish to develop your approach to teaching with a trauma-informed lens from here? Consider the following self-reflection questions:

- Reflecting broadly, what went well about your teaching of the images you selected? What might you do differently next time?

- How efficacious were your learning goals? Might you adjust them next time?

- What did you learn about the experiences and perspectives of your students? Would you modify your plan for student engagement, participation, and reflection next time?

- How did this reflection help to elucidate your own biases or assumptions about the material you teach?

Notes:

¹ Office of Readiness and Response, “Infographic: 6 Guiding Principles To A Trauma-Informed Approach,” *Centers for Disease Control*, September 17, 2020,

https://www.cdc.gov/orr/infographics/6_principles_trauma_info.htm.

² Janice Corello, “Examples of Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning in College Classrooms, March, 2020, <https://traumainformedteachingblog.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/examples-of-titl-in-college-classrooms-3.2020-color-3.pdf>; For multiple teacher-scholars’ definitions of these principles, see Janice Carello, “Trauma-Informed Teaching & Learning General Principles,” March 2020, <https://traumainformedteachingblog.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/titl-general-principles-3.20.pdf>; Janice Carello, “Examples of Trauma-informed Teaching & Learning in College Classrooms,” March 2020,

<https://traumainformedteachingblog.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/examples-of-titl-in-college-classrooms-3.2020-color-3.pdf>; Karen Costa, “Trauma-Aware Teaching Checklist,” *100 Faculty*, <https://docs.google.com/document/d/13yiEXjdErGoaOEh1M2hZtaq2tyfL8woY3tfYI3s30ng/edit>;

Mays Imad, “Leveraging the Neuroscience of Now,” *Inside Higher Ed*, June 2, 2020; and Mays Imad, “Our Brains, Emotions, and Learning: Eight Principles of Trauma-Informed Teaching,” *Trauma-Informed Pedagogies: A Guide for Responding to Crisis and Inequality in Higher Education* eds. Phyllis Thompson and Janice Carello (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

³ For a resource that explores “classroom norms” in higher education, see “Getting Started with Establishing Ground Rules,” Center for Teaching Innovation, Cornell University,

<https://teaching.cornell.edu/resource/getting-started-establishing-ground-rules>.

⁴ As scholars, theorists, and activists have long argued, art history and art historical education often inhere ableism through their reliance on vision and sight. Concerns around accessibility in the art history classroom also extend to the resources with which we ask students to engage, the physical spaces (and even their representations) we ask students to occupy and study (such as museums or architectural spaces), and beyond. Although this topic is much larger than the scope of the current project, we want to acknowledge the role that disability may play in students’ traumas and encourage educators to frame images, objects, and spaces with attention to inclusive language and an acknowledgement of accessibility concerns that can help students to feel seen and validated in addition to ensuring students with diverse disabilities have equitable access to our courses. For a range of perspectives on accessibility and art history pedagogy, see: for the possibilities opened up by the digital (regarding both reproductions of images and web-based access to resources), see Nancy Um, “Teaching the Practices of Art History in the Age of Abundance,” *Art Journal Open*, 2022 and Beth Harris and Steven Zucker, “Making the Absent Present: The Imperative of Teaching Art History,” *Art History Pedagogy & Practice* 1, no. 1 (2016): 1-7; on the possibilities opened up by Open Educational Resources, specifically, see Sara Ishii, “Art History, Open Educational Resources (OERs), and Social Justice-Oriented Pedagogy: Adaptations to Introductory World Art History Survey Courses,” *Art History Pedagogy & Practice* 7, no. 1 (2022); for meaningful integration of lessons from disability studies for the teaching of architectural history, see “Disability Studies and

[Architectural History](https://www.sah.org/conferences-and-programs/sah-connects/2020/disability-studies-and-architectural-history),” workshop held by the Society for Architectural Historians, featuring participants Gail Dubrow, Laura Leppink, Sarah Pawlicki, Aimi Hamraie, and Perri Meldon, 2020, <https://www.sah.org/conferences-and-programs/sah-connects/2020/disability-studies-and-architectural-history>; for a discussion of art history’s often unexamined vision-centered approach, see Yayoi Mashimo, “Multi-Sensorial Pedagogy for Art History Education: Integrating the Collective Wisdom of People Who are Blind and Have Low Vision to Reconsider Conventional Academic Norms,” *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* 13, no. 3 (2019): 305-322.

Additional Bibliography

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