

ARTBEAT – Teachers’ Notes

The Performer

ARIA award winning Mic Conway has a broad range of performing and writing skills and has worked extensively in music, theater, film and television.

He has toured across Australia and overseas and is perhaps best known for his work in “Captain Match Box Whoopee Band”, “Circus Oz” and “The National Junk Band”. He has compered, acted and written music for various film and TV shows.

He has regularly appeared on children’s TV including “ABC for Kids”, “Humphrey Bear”, “The Wiggles Movie” and “The Wiggles TV shows” + DVD’s (as several characters and as the voice of Wags the Dog).

‘How to Make Music with just about anything’

– DVD & Booklet

Easy to make play instruments from around the house Mic shows “how to do it” in a very entertaining way!

Lots of stuff you might throw out, turns into incredible sounds. Leaves, rubber gloves, card board, funnels, handsaws, bottle tops, drinking straws, tin cans and lots, lots more. Included is a “How to” booklet with descriptions and drawings. Find out more on Mic’s website www.micconway.com

Artbeat attempts to challenge our preconceptions about art. It is about how we perceive art and attempt to break down the barriers between art and everyday life. It also looks at the link between visual art and the other art forms including music and asks the questions –

What is art? Where is art? What is the use of art? What is art communicating?

If we start by asking students, “what is art?” we can get some interesting answers, ranging from a drawing, painting or sculpture to bits of junk, ‘food objects’, animation and even the performing arts.

Show various pictures of famous artworks from classical paintings to Duchamp’s ‘Urinal’ or ‘Bicycle wheel on a stool’ and discuss the diversity.

Art History

From the beginning of humanity, art has been used to communicate ideas, stories, myths, legends, emotions, religion, beauty, feelings etc.

For centuries many people didn’t read or write so an artist’s job was significant – to tell important stories using pictures – hunting and gathering, religion, myths and legends etc. Artists were used to bind and perpetuate various cultures and ideas.

Discuss the similarities and differences between ancient and modern art.

Modern and Abstract Art

Abstract art is often vilified by some who don’t understand it as ‘childish’ or ‘unskilled’. All pictures (figurative or abstract) are made up of colours and shapes. Abstract art uses colour and shapes to often communicate emotions e.g. bright colours = happy, dark = sad, jagged shapes = angry etc. It suggests ideas and yet it doesn’t look like anything – clever?

Show examples of abstract art and see if there is a consensus about the idea or emotions expressed.

“Art is in the eye of the beholder”

Because art is a way of communicating ideas, it is fascinating to see how people interpret art in different ways. For example, students may have different opinions about what they see when shown abstract art – they are looking at the same piece yet seeing something different to the person next to them. So art is not just what the artist says it is, it is also what the viewer makes of it.

Discuss “Art is in the eye of the beholder” using various abstract art and also some classic visual illusions (two faces/ vase etc). Also discuss Picasso’s thought provoking and provocative statement “art is a lie that tells the truth.”

Pick a subject or an object and ask the students to use art to visualize their interpretations – then discuss the differences and/or similarities in each of their work.

“Art can be a picture in a frame, but often it is a lot more”

Visual art is sometimes seen in isolation (e.g. hanging on a wall) but is more often seen in combination with other art forms. For instance, if we watch TV or film we can often see combinations of acting, dance, set, costume design, music, camera work, lighting etc. Art also appears in schools, supermarkets, magazines and newspapers etc.

Discuss what components of these categories make them art.

Show some pop art i.e. Andy Warhol’s “Campbell Soup Tins” – is this art? Is advertising art? Are comic books art? Is “The Simpsons” art? What makes them art?

For centuries traditional materials like paint, charcoal, pencil, paper, canvas clay, stone etc were used to make art. Early 20th Century Marcel Duchap, proclaimed that art can be made with anything and since then a huge variety of materials have been used (show examples). So the possibilities of materials are almost infinite. As soon as a new material appears someone is likely to use it to make art.

Magrite caused a sensation when he depicted a smoker’s pipe and then wrote under it “This is not a pipe”. There was uproar in the art world, but what was he trying to say? Maybe ‘This is not a pipe, it is a picture of a pipe’ i.e. art is an illusion.

So art is an illusion used to communicate. It uses colour, shape, various materials and forms. Often it is part of the everyday life we live in and tells us something about ourselves and our society. Art is ubiquitous, it is everywhere. We can’t avoid it even if we try so understand that and enjoy.

Pre or post show activities

- Show some different styles of art and ask students to make a picture in a chosen style.
- Ask students to make an abstract painting in a chosen emotion i.e. angry, sad, funny but have no figurative shapes.
- Ask students to combine 2 or 3 art forms into a presentation.
- Ask students to make something out of ‘untraditional’ materials i.e. everyday objects, commercial packaging, rubbish etc.

Extra Information

Mic has recently recorded a CD and two DVD’s + booklet called “How to Make Music with just about anything” and you can also check out his website www.micconway.com

Young Australia Workshop

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