

# **“What Goes Around Comes Around: Body Painting /Tattooing in Societies Past and Present”**

*Sheila White*  
*Lamberton High School*

## **Index:**

Overview  
Rationale  
Objectives  
Strategies  
Classroom Activities  
Bibliography  
Appendices

## **Overview**

This unit will focus on body painting and tattooing in order to help students understand the reasons for and significance of art, both in their own and other cultures. The curriculum unit is intended for the high school student in grades 9-12, and previous art experiences and or skills are not required. The purpose of this unit is to drive home the point that art is an integral if not inherent part of our everyday lives. Through the use of various types of media, resource materials, written research and art projects, the student will be able to make a connection between body painting/tattooing in their own society and in other cultures and time periods. At the end of the unit the student will be able to present a written report, an individual and group art project, which will be showcased in a culminating art exhibit and body painting demonstrations.

## **Rationale**

Body art has become a national phenomenon in American culture and society; therefore, I believe it warrants closer investigation in terms of its significance as a practice and an art form. “Tattoos nowadays however are becoming increasingly acceptable; there is not just one ‘type’ of person who may get a tattoo, there are no barriers of sex, age or class in tattooing.” (Delio 7)

Given the task to create a curriculum based on the visual arts and another discipline, I chose body painting/tattooing and the study of societies that practice this

custom. Many of my students have tattoos or know of someone (family, friend) who has tattoos. Current interest, familiarity and/or personal experience with the subject of body art will motivate students to study and make connections to this topic as an art form and its significance to various cultures.

I am interested in body painting /tattooing because my students are interested in this subject. I believe as an educator one must meet the student where they are, both intellectually and psycho-socially.

Being a veteran teacher of art in the inner city schools for over twenty-five years, it has become apparent that the subject of art has been thought of as a supplement and not a major staple in the students' educational program. Because of a lack of education or mis-education, this misconception about the arts and particularly the visual arts has prevailed in the educational system. Through this unit of study, I hope to provide fellow teachers and my students a thought-provoking multidisciplinary unit that will demonstrate the versatility of the visual arts and their value as a means to develop academic skills.

Standardized test scores have placed the majority of the students in my school, Lamberton High School, in the "below proficient" category in reading and writing skills. Therefore, the administrator has mandated that these skills be taught and utilized in each discipline. My curriculum unit has been designed to facilitate the development and application of these skills.

The initial project for my students will be to design and conduct a survey and interviews, in order to gather information about tattoo artists and those who wear tattoos. This task will encourage the student to practice their reading and writing skills.

Another requirement at this high school is the completion of a senior project, which involves the completion and presentation of a research paper. My curriculum unit will provide an opportunity to acquire research skills that will be needed for that project. The student will be asked to research and complete a 3-5 paged paper on one of the four culture groups that will be studied during the course of the curriculum. The student will then be asked to present the paper using the set guidelines provided by the school. Students will be asked to include samples of their particular cultures' body art designs, which will be shared with fellow students and utilized later in developing their own tattoo designs.

The four people groups that will be studied are as follows: the Native American, Asian, African, and European. For each people we will explore the history, examine the purpose and symbolism of their particular body art designs and make critical and aesthetic assessments through both intellectual discussion and hands-on art projects.

The selection of these groups was based on my belief that they are among the main ethnic groups that comprise the United States and have influenced the development of American culture.

In his article, "*Body Art As Visual Language*", Enid Schildkrout states that:

Body art is not just the latest fashion. In fact, if the impulse to create art is one of the defining signs of humanity, the body may well have been the first canvas. Alongside paintings on cave walls created by early humans over 30,000 years ago, we find handprints and ochre deposits suggesting body painting. Some of the earliest mummies known-like the "Ice Man" from the Italian-Austrian Alps, known as Otzi, and others from central Asia, the Andes, Egypt and Europe-.date back to 5000 years. People were buried with ornaments that would have been worn through body piercings, and remains of others show intentionally elongated or flattened skulls. Head shaping was practiced 5000 years ago in Chile and until the 18<sup>th</sup> century in France. Stone and ceramic figurines found in ancient graves depict people with every kind of body art known today. People have always marked their bodies with signs of individuality, social status, and cultural identity.

There is no culture in which people do not, or did not paint, pierce, tattoo, reshape, or simply adorn their bodies. Fashions change and forms of body art come and go, but people everywhere do something or other to "package" their appearance. No sane or civilized person goes out in the raw; everyone grooms, dresses, or adorns some part of their body to present to the world. Body art communicates a person's status in society; displays accomplishments; and encodes memories, desires, and life histories. Body art is a visual language. (Schildkrout 2001)

The following is a brief synopsis of the use of body painting/tattooing in the four ethnic groups that will be studied:

In the Native American culture body painting was used to denote a person's character or the achievements he accomplished as in hunting or battle. Native Americans used "...used tribal markings as a form of war paint, designed to intimidate and confuse the enemy." (Delio 64)

In the Asian culture body painting and tattooing had varied purposes and significance. "From a badge of rank they developed into the detested mark of social inferiority for those outside society, and later came to denote membership of a particular profession, but increasingly they were used for decoration."(Groning 210)

In the African culture, the various colors and patterns used in body painting are symbolic of such things as protection from evil spirits and rites of passage. “In many African societies people use their own skin as another medium for their creativity and artistic talents...Skin decoration shows a persons social rank and history, where he comes from and whom he belongs to and through it he also professes his religious faith.”(Groning 113)

In the European culture the ancient Celtic tribes used tattoo to intimidate their enemies; “... the Romans put tattooing for markings criminals and slaves.”(Ebenstein14) Tattooing was also used for identifying religious affiliations. For example, “...early Christians at first approved of tattooed signs of the cross on either face or arms...”(Ebenstein 14)

I hope to teach my students through this curriculum unit that art is an integral and inherent part of their lives. I also wish to teach my students that more similarities than differences emerge when we compare our own culture and cultures of other peoples, both past and present.

## **Objectives**

The Pennsylvania Academic Standards for the Arts and Humanities (P.A.S.A.H.) states that, “The arts represent society’s capacity to integrate human experience with individual creativity. Comprehensive study of the arts provides an opportunity for all students to observe, reflect, and participate both in the arts of their culture and the culture of others. Sequential study in the arts and humanities provides the knowledge and the analytical skills necessary to evaluate and critique a media-saturated culture. An arts education contributes to the development of productive citizens who have gained creative and technological knowledge necessary for employment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

With this philosophy in mind, I will endeavor to accomplish the goal of the P.A.S.A.H. Standards by utilizing several of its objectives. I will also include objectives that are mandated in the Lamberton High School mission statement which says, “The Lamberton High School seeks to holistically educate our students to write effectively, communicate fluently, problem solves accurately and use current technology proficiently, while preparing our students to excel in college level courses through rigorous instruction and appropriate supports”.

Therefore, the goals of this curriculum unit are to develop and promote the students' cognitive and creative skills through both academic and creative activities. The seven objectives that will be utilized to accomplish these goals are as follows:

1.) The student will be able to write, problem solve, communicate and use technology effectively. The activity of designing and conducting surveys, developing and completing a short research paper, collecting diverse cultural tattoo designs and creating an original tattoo design will accomplish this objective.

2.) The student will be able to work independently and cooperatively. The creative and academic activities and projects such as written reports, collages and a group mural will accomplish this objective.

3.) The student will be able to produce and perform academic and artistic skills. This objective will be accomplished through the development and completion of the various curriculum unit tasks including a culminating art exhibit with body art demonstrations to showcase the students' work.

The following objectives are the required competencies and skills of the Pa. Academic Standards for the Arts and Humanities (P.A.S.A.H.) that this curriculum will incorporate into its goals.

4.) The student will be able to analyze works of arts from different cultures and understand the historical influences that impact the creation of body art throughout the ages. Throughout the course of the curriculum students will observe, study, discuss and critique the art and culture of the different ethnic groups to be studied. Through planned field trips to museums, guest speakers, written and creative art projects, this objective will be accomplished.

5.) The student will be able to recognize, understand and analyze common themes in the body art of different cultures. The student will compile a portfolio consisting of design samples from the various ethnic groups studied as well as create their own original designs.

6.) The student will be able to critique works utilizing the elements and principles of design. Through group discussions and critiques of ancient and contemporary works of art, the student will be challenged to compare, contrast, analyze, interpret and evaluate the form, content and symbolism of the art form.

7.) The student will be able to evaluate his/her own art work as well as the art of their peers based upon artistic knowledge and experiences. Through participating in group

discussions and critiques, the students will be encouraged to interact with one another in meaningful dialogue.

## **Strategies**

I will begin teaching this curriculum unit with an introduction to body painting and tattooing from its earliest known existence to the present. Following the introduction, I will discuss the four ethnic groups that will be studied, which are the Native Americans, Asians, African and European societies. The students will explore this knowledge by completing a research assignment. For this project, the students will be divided into four groups. They will work on this assignment collectively; each member of the group will be delegated a task in the completion of this project. Students will be given literature on how to write a research paper and suggested resources to access in order to complete the project. A designated group leader will coordinate the functions of the group members and monitor their progress. The members of each group will be given time to report on information and discuss issues related to the completion of the assignment within their particular groups.

I believe working in a group setting will promote cooperative learning, listening and problem solving skills and appropriate social interaction within my students. Too often, my students exhibit poor listening skills, negative and/or inappropriate social interaction. I believe if students are given opportunities to work together on a common goal, they would be more apt to develop and exhibit positive behaviors.

Students will be given several art demonstrations throughout this curriculum unit experience on such topics as design, printmaking and collage. The initial art project will be to create an original tattoo design and to transform it into a stencil form for printing. During the subsequent weeks the student will be engaged in various art projects involving the themes of body painting and tattoo art. Projects such as stencil printing on the skin, paper and cloth, compiling a portfolio of tattoo designs of the different cultures, creating a collage utilizing original tattoo designs and a group mural will be displayed in a culminating art exhibit at the conclusion of the curriculum unit.

Educational programs, slide presentations, guest speakers, and selected T.V. shows (for example, the TLC cable station program “Miami Ink”) will be viewed, discussed and analyzed so as to better understand the meaning, purpose and process of this art form of tattooing. To better understand the historical and cultural contexts of the different ethnic groups and their art forms, several field trips to museums will be planned.

Through the use of written projects (research paper, student designed and conducted interviews and surveys) art activities (stencil printing, drawing, painting and collage) the student will satisfy both the Pennsylvania Academic Standards for the Arts and Humanities and the Philadelphia school district standards and objectives.

## **Classroom Activities**

### Lesson Plan I

#### Topic:

A research paper (on one of the four culture groups; Native American, Asian, African, European)

#### General Aim:

To be able to write a research paper using the prescribed Philadelphia School district format (see Appendix B).

#### Specific Aims:

- To be able to work independently as well as collectively.
- To be able to utilize a variety of resources (books, magazines, internet) to complete the task.
- To be able to include illustrations of art work within the completed paper.
- To be able to present a paper orally as well as in typed form.

#### Materials:

Research paper format and grading rubric, samples of exemplary research papers.

#### Procedure:

- 1.) Students will be given an Introduction to the history of body painting and tattooing.
- 2.) Students will be given an overview of four people groups that practice tattooing (Native Americans, Asian, African and Europeans)
- 3.) Students will be divided into four groups and assigned a particular people and culture to research.
- 4.) Students will be given the research format and grading rubric for a research paper. (see "Notes" for Research format and rubric)
- 5.) Samples of exemplary research papers and the research format/grading rubric will be discussed.
- 6.) Students will be asked to compile samples of their particular culture groups body painting and tattoo design art that will be included in the finished paper.

#### Evaluation:

Based on the research format procedures and the grading rubric in Appendix B, students will be able to accurately evaluate their finished project.

Time frame: Three weeks.

#### Standards:

This project will utilize the (P.A.S.A.H) standards of 9.2 Historical and Cultural Contexts, 9.3 Critical Response and 9.4 Aesthetic Response and the Standards and objectives of the Philadelphia School district on reading, writing and communicative skills.

#### Lesson Plan II

#### Topic:

Printmaking/Group Mural

Body art is a graphic means of expression, therefore to understand this concept the student will create a print which is also a form of graphic art and create a permanent record of the tattoo design.

#### General Aims:

- To understand the Elements and Principles of Design.
- To be able to understand the art form and process of printmaking
- To be able to create a group mural

#### Specific Aims:

- To be able to print the stencil on three surfaces (skin, paper and cloth)
- To be able to create an individual printed art piece as well as contributing to the printing process
- of the group mural, which will be composed of all the classmates' prints and drawings)

#### Material:

Pencils, paper, tracing paper, stencil paper, printmaking tools, newspaper, various art media, cloth and butcher block paper, scissors

#### Procedure:

- 1) Brief introduction and discussion on printmaking/samples of prints
- 2) Review the Elements and Principles of Design and Composition
- 3) Demonstration of Printmaking (stencil printing)
- 4) Student will create original tattoo design and convert it into a stencil form



5) Student will print the stencil design onto the mural paper, individual art piece, cloth and skin.

Evaluation:

Students will participate in a group critique of finish work.(see Appendix B- Additional Notes for grading rubric)

Time frame:

The time frame for this project is two weeks.

Project extension:

If time permits student can create a wearable art piece utilizing their cloth prints.

Standards:

All the ( P.A.S.A.H.) standards will be utilized: 9.1 Production, Performance and Exhibition of the Visual Arts, 9.2 Historical and Cultural Contexts, 9.3 Critical Response and 9.4 Aesthetic Response (see appendix).

### Lesson Plan III

Topic:

Collage/Montage

This lesson supports and reinforces the concept of symbolism, which is tantamount to the creation and meaning of body painting and tattooing. The creation of this art piece will produce a permanent art expression using the students' tattoo design.

General Aims:

- To be able to understand and utilize the Elements and Principles of Design
- To be able to understand the art form of a montage and a collage its similarities and differences.
- To understand and appreciate the work of renowned artist Romare Bearden.

Specific Aim:

To be able to incorporate printing process with collage methods and media To be able to create a montage or collage.

Materials:

Paper, printmaking equipment, markers, colored pencils, pencils, crayons, scissors, assorted collage materials (found objects ie. beads ,seeds, buttons etc.) variety of papers (construction, tissue papers) and magazine/newspaper clippings.

Procedure:

- 1) Brief introduction and discussion on collage and montage
- 2) Show examples and discuss the works of Romare Bearden
- 3) Demonstration on the making of a collage and montage
- 4) Discussion of the Elements and Principles of Design
- 5) Student will decide to create a montage or a collage.
- 6) Students will gather materials and start work

Evaluation:

Students will participate in a group critique of finish work. (see Appendix B-Additional Notes for grading rubric.)

Time frame:

The time frame for this project is one week

Standards:

All the ( P.A.S.A.H.) standards will be utilized: 9.1 Production, Performance and Exhibition of the Visual Arts, 9.2 Historical and Cultural Contexts, 9.3Critical Response and 9.4 Aesthetic Response (see appendix).

## **Bibliography**

### Scholarly resources

Rubin, Arnold, ed.: *Marks of Civilization: Artistic Transformations of the Human Body*, Los Angeles: Regents of the University of California, 1988.

A compilation of the history and culture of five diverse people groups and their use of body painting and tattooing.

Fellowes ,C.H., *The Tattoo Book*, Princeton: The Pyne Press, 1971.

A short history of the strange custom of tattooing.

Delio, Michelle, *Tattoo: The Exotic Art of Skin Decoration*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

This book explores the tattoo as an art form. The book speaks about everything from the professional tattoo artist and client relationship to the history of tattoos.

Groning, Karl, *Body Decoration: A World Survey of Body Art*, London , The Vendome Press,1998.

A compilation of the history and culture of eleven people groups and their use of body painting and tattooing.

Caplan, Jane, *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

The history and practice of tattooing in Europe.

Ebensten, Hanns, *Pierced Hearts and True Love*, London:Shenval Press, 1953.

An illustrated history of the origin and development of European tattooing and a survey of it's present state.

Atkinson, Michael, *Tattooed: The Sociogenesis of a Body Art*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2003.

A book about tattoo enthusiasts who give the reader an understanding of the pride and problems that result from their decisions to wear permanent body decorations.

Lees-Mascia and Sharpe Patricia ed., *Tattoo, Torture, Mutilation, and Adornment*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1992.

This volume combines a theoretical sophistication with attention to a variety of fascinating case studies, that illuminate the predicament of the body in post modern culture.

Featherstone, Mike, *Body Modification* ,New York,London, Sage Publications, 2000.

This fascinating collection explores the growing range of body modification practices, such as piercing, tattooing, branding, cutting and inserting implants, which have sprung up recently in the west.

Kuwahava , Makiko, *Tattoo: An Anthropology*, New York, Berg Oxford International Publishers Ltd.,2005.

The history and culture of tattooing practices of the Tahitian people.

Schildkrout, Enid, *Body Art As Visual Language*,

[www.nmnh.si.edu/anthro/outreach/anthnote/Winter01/anthnote.html](http://www.nmnh.si.edu/anthro/outreach/anthnote/Winter01/anthnote.html),2001/2006  
Resources on body art, including painting, scarification, sculpted hair

## Student Bibliography

Gilbert, Steve, *The Tattoo History Book*, New York: Juno Books, 2001.

This book contains excerpts from artists, physicians, anthropologists, and more; those excerpts range in dates from Ancient Greek and Roman times to present.

Caplan, Jane, *Written on the Body: The tattoo in European and American History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

This book examines the cultural history tattoos in Europe and America from antiquity to present.

Gay, Kathyly and Whittington Christine, *Body Marks: Tattooing, Piercing and Scarification*, Brookfield: Millbrook Press, 2002.

This book provides an overview of the various types of body modification including tattoos. It covers historical aspects as well as practical approaches to safety and precautions to be aware of.

#### Websites

Crowe, Caroline and Schiller, Margo, *Collection Selection/Assessment Subject Area: Tattooing*, [www.slais.ubc.ca/courses/libr559f/03-04-wt2/projects/M\\_Schiller/p...,2004/2006](http://www.slais.ubc.ca/courses/libr559f/03-04-wt2/projects/M_Schiller/p...,2004/2006)

A collection of resources from books to magazines and links to other websites on the subject of body painting and tattooing.

Schildkrout, Enid, *Body Art As Visual Language*,

[www.nmnh.si.edu/anthro/outreach/anthnote/Winter01/anthnote.html,2001/2006](http://www.nmnh.si.edu/anthro/outreach/anthnote/Winter01/anthnote.html,2001/2006).  
Resources on body painting and tattooing, scarification and sculpted hair.

## **Appendix A-Selected Content Standards**

Pennsylvania Academic Standards for the Arts and Humanities

### *9.1 Production, Performance and Exhibition of Visual Arts*

9.1f-To analyze works of arts influenced by experiences or historical and cultural events through production, performance or exhibition.

### *9.2 Historical and Cultural Contexts*

9.2l-Identify, explain and analyze common themes, forms and techniques from works in the arts.

### *9.3 Critical Response*

9.3a-Explain and apply the critical examination processes of works in the arts and humanities (Compare and Contrast, Analyze, Interpret, Form and test hypotheses, Evaluate/form judgments)

### *9.4Aesthetic Response*

9.4a-Evaluate an individual's philosophical statement on a work in the arts and its relationship to one's own life based on knowledge and experience.

## **Appendix B-Additional Notes**

*For lesson plan I, we will use the following definition of the research paper:*

The research paper is a summary of what others have already said or written on a given subject. Therefore in preparing a research paper, you will be making use of information that is already known, rather than adding anything new to existing knowledge or opinion. Nevertheless, there is room for originality in your selection and organization of the material in your presentation and expression, and in your general conclusion.

To get a thorough understanding of the subject, the student should read from many sources. Sources of information may be:

- Reference Books (use one encyclopedia)
- Magazine articles
- Journal articles
- Newspaper articles
- Textbooks
- Audio-visual materials
- Interviews
- Internet sources.

### *Directions for Writing a Quality Research Paper*

1 .Cover page:

A. Title of your research is to be placed halfway down the page.

B. Your name, date, and advisory number are to be placed on the bottom right side of the page.

2. Outline - a practical outline for a research paper has the following parts:

- A. The Topic Question or Issue
- B. The Title

The Introduction

- A. Background
- B. Problem or Issue

2. The Body

- A. Major Point
- B. Major Point
- C. Major Point, etc.

3. The Conclusion

- A. Summary of the most important points
- B. Answer to the question, solution to the problem, restatement of your opinion

4. Works Cited

*Grading Rubric*

- An advanced paper would include all of the information requested, have only a few mistakes in grammar or spelling, use a varied vocabulary, and demonstrate proficiency in writing skills.
- A proficient paper would include the same components as the **advanced** paper, but it might have a few more errors.
- A basic paper would have some important information missing and far too many errors in grammar and/or spelling. The paper reflects a certain lack of concentration and/or organization.
- A below basic paper reflects little effort or care.

*For lesson plan II and III we will use the following grading rubric:*

The art projects will be graded on how well it does or does not demonstrate the following: Clarity of thought or personal expression, mastery of media, awareness of composition, overall neatness and craftsmanship and creative presentation.

An exceptional art project would show original thought in design, mastery of media, awareness of composition, overall neatness/craftsmanship and creative presentation.

An average art project will show an attempt to create an original expression of art, but lacks definite focus, adequate mastery of media, somewhat aware of composition, overall neatness and craftsmanship fair, somewhat creative in presentation.

A below average art project would show lack of focus ,inconsistent or lack of clarity of thought ,no original expression, poor mastery of media, not aware of composition, poor craftsmanship, lacks neatness, incomplete work .