



Women, Power and Politics
U.S. Grade 12 Curriculum (ages 17–18)

- I. **Guiding Parameters:** Women, Art and Politics
- II. **Relevant 12th Grade Standards:**
 - a. Explain how civil society makes it possible for people, individually or in association with others, to bring their influence to bear on government in ways other than voting and elections.
 - b. Understand the obligations of civic-mindedness, including voting, being informed on civic issues, volunteering and performing public service, and serving in the military or alternative service. Explain how civil society provides opportunities for individuals to associate for social, cultural, religious, economic and political purposes.
- III. **Objectives:** Students will accomplish the following:
 - a. Learn additional ways to participating politically beyond voting and elections
 - b. Analyze art as a vehicle for political influence by women around the world
 - c. Learn how to participate in a democratic political system
 - d. Evaluate the effectiveness of various forms of political participation
- IV. **Learning Skills:** Compare and contrast, analytical thinking, research and assessment, writing, reading comprehension, public speaking and presentation.
- V. **Main Resources:** [Youth Communicating Through Art](#), [Picturing Power](#), [Confronting Ugly with Ugly](#), [Emancipated Woman—Build Up Socialism!](#), [Political Art in the Female Form](#), [Dictating Democracy](#), [Cartoon As a Political Manifesto](#), [Taking Up Space at Greenham Common](#), [Neither Whores, nor Saints](#), [Body As Art](#), [Intimate Symbols of Power](#), [Body As Strategy](#), [The Solidarity Quilt](#), [Intimités Afghanes](#), [Picturing Breast Cancer](#).
- VI. **Additional Resources:** [Dictating Democracy](#), [Painting Power and History](#), [Malaysia’s Star Everywoman](#), [Vote Art for Change](#), [Painting Power and History](#).
- VII. **Six Classroom Activities:**



Inspire, Teach and Celebrate: Communicating Through Images

- a. Introduction activity: What counts as art?
 - i. Brainstorm: Have students engage in a five minute quick-write, listing the types of things, materials and crafts that constitute “art” and discussing whether or not art has a purpose outside of aesthetic value.
 - ii. Discuss: As a class, first discuss the thoughts and opinions of students expressed in their quick-writes. Next, follow up with a discussion of the role of art in politics. Discussion points may include:
 1. Can art be used to communicate specific ideas, opinions and goals pertaining to a political agenda?
 2. Can this type of art be controversial? Can you think of any examples?
 3. Is this type of communication powerful enough to generate action and change? If not, what is the point?
 - iii. Apply: Have students read [Youth Communicating Through Art](#) and write a short reflection on how art was used in youth communities of California, Ghana and the Netherlands as a political mechanism to transcend personal and cultural borders and restrictions.

- b. Compare and Contrast : How are images used around the world? Read [Picturing Power](#), [Confronting Ugly with Ugly](#), and [Emancipated Woman—Build Up Socialism!](#)
 - i. Quick write: How is imagery used in each story?

- c. Consider: Discuss as a class:
 - i. How are images used in these stories to communicate?
 - ii. What are some advantages of using imagery to convey meaning? (E.g., emotional appeal, reaching people who can not read, overcoming language barriers, educational resources, etc.)
 - iii. What are some drawbacks?

- d. Discuss: In small groups, talk about one of the following stories:
 - i. Read [Picturing Power](#). How do political posters preserve history? How are images used for information and movement-building purposes?
 - ii. Read [Emancipated Woman—Build Up Socialism!](#) How are images used as political propaganda? What do these



- images say about the role of women? How do the posters convey political change?
- iii. Read [Confronting Ugly with Ugly](#). How are images used for public education? What impact did the specific use of these images have? (E.g., billboards, public service announcement, tourist theme, etc.)
- e. Report: Have each small group share their discussion outcomes with the class.
- i. What is the unifying factor in these stories?
 - ii. How are these images used for political mobilization?
- f. Write: Consider the following questions and write an essay in response, providing concrete examples:
- i. How have women used art and imagery to communicate political goals and ideas?
 - ii. Can art catalyze political participation? How and why is it effective?

Invoking Thought: Empowerment Through Inquiry

- a. Consider: Read [Political Art in the Female Form](#).
 - i. Assess: Did artist Anahi DeCanio stimulate inquiry through her work? Is using artwork to make people think a form of civic engagement? Should art have an effect on the viewer?
 - ii. Quick-write: Ask students to write down their reactions to the work.
- b. Analyze: After the class reports back their findings from the previous activity, collectively analyze Anahi DeCanio's work from [Political Art in the Female Form](#).
 - i. Pass around images or project images of the artist's work and collectively consider the work's content.
- c. Discuss: As a class discuss Art, Gender and Politics
 - i. Did artist Anahi DeCanio invoke inquiry through her work? Explain.
 - ii. How does the artist's use of the female form impact the viewer's perspective? Does it promote gender equity and understanding?
 - iii. Is making people think a form of civic engagement?
 - iv. How can civic engagement be used to empower people?
 - v. How is empowering people related to political participation?



- d. Create: Using Anahi DeCanio's work as an example create a collage. Be creative!
- i. Based on readings and discussions in class, choose a topic of discrimination and/or disenfranchisement that you care about. (E.g., gender, race, class, sexuality, etc.)
 - ii. Your piece should illustrate the following questions:
 1. How will your work of art provoke thought for the viewer?
 2. What will the art piece say about you?
 3. Does your art piece give insight into your political opinions and stance?
 4. How will your art piece empower people to take action?
 5. Do you feel your art piece has the potential to offend anyone? Why or why not?
 6. Include a paragraph description of your concept with your collage.
- e. Share: Hold a class exhibition. Invite other classes to participate.
- i. Answer questions and present your work to viewers.
 - ii. Take notes of people's reactions.
 - iii. Were you successful in conveying your message?
- f. Reflect: Organize a debrief discussion in class.
- i. What were some reactions to your work?
 - ii. Were you surprised by anything?
 - iii. What did you think of the assignment? How did it inform your ideas on political participation?
 - iv. How can art be used as a medium to inform and empower people politically?
 - v. How can art allow those who have been politically silenced in their communities to have an active voice?

"I Wish to Say": Empowerment Through Advocacy

- a. Think: Read [Dictating Democracy](#). How does Sheryl Oring's *performance* empower everyday people to have their voices heard? Does her gender and appearance influence her viewers? How are women demonstrating leadership in innovative ways and creating change?



- b. Create: As a class, choose one female elected official (local or statewide).
 - i. Individually create/choose postcards with a message considering the following questions:
 1. What are some struggles women are facing today?
 2. Are women changing politics? How?
 3. What do you want to see changed in the next 10 years?
 4. What do you wish to say to the elected official?
 - ii. Mail the postcards to your official
- c. Examine: How are satire and humor used in [Cartoon As a Political Manifesto](#)?
- d. Think: Would you consider Catherine Beaunez's work a form of political participation? How did she use cartoons to advocate for women in French society? Is there a risk that satirical humor could result in controversy? How can controversial art make a political statement?
- e. Create: Use these resources to create a cartoon that highlights a current event.
 - i. <http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/comic/>
 - ii. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/historyofus/teachers/pdfs/segment9-2.pdf> (look at page 9)
- f. Share: Send your cartoon to your local and/or school newspaper.

Body as Strategy: The Female Form as a Political Statement

- a. Consider: In small groups, discuss one of the following stories:
 - i. Read and listen [Taking Up Space at Greenham Common](#).
 1. How did the Greenham women use their bodies as a political tool?
 2. What was the Greenham women's political philosophy?
 3. How is gender mentioned in this story?
 4. Do women lead differently than men?
 - ii. Read [Neither Whores, nor Saints](#)
 1. How did the Women in Black use their bodies to educate the public and make a political statement?
 2. How did they use their clothing and the female form to symbolize their cause?



3. How is gender mentioned in this story?
 4. Is biology destiny?
 - iii. Read and watch [Body As Art](#).
 1. How does the artist use her body as a canvas to create awareness and make a political statement?
 2. How is identity mentioned in this story?
 3. How is gender mentioned in this story?
 4. Did the video and performance have an effect on the viewers? How?
 - iv. Read [Intimate Symbols of Power](#) and examine the paintings.
 1. What is your reaction to Joyce Polance's paintings?
 2. How does the artist use herself and the female form to make a political statement?
 3. How is gender mentioned in this story?
 4. How does the artist challenge symbols and stereotypes of power?
- b. Report: (to the class)
- i. In what ways did women use their bodies to make a political statement?
 - ii. What did they have in common? What was different?
- c. Reflect: Visit the FORUM thread [Body As Strategy](#). Read the following quotes:

In "Laugh of the Medusa," Helene Cixous writes, "We've been turned from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike them with that stupid sexual modesty...." And later adds, "Why so few texts? Because so few women have as yet won back their body. Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reverse-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word 'silence', the one that, aiming for the impossible, stops short before the word 'impossible' and writes it as 'the end.'"(Christina Boufis, [Body As Strategy](#))

My body is the only thing that I own... I react, interpret and question the clichés and stereotypes with which I am faced... (Ingrid Mwangi, [Body as Art](#))

Women have the right to choose autonomy over their own bodies, their emotions, minds and money. (Women in Black, [Neither Whores, nor Saints](#))



- d. Discuss: Write a blog entry in response to the following questions:
- i. How did the concept of owning one's body or of having autonomy over one's body come up in the readings?
 - ii. Is using one's own body to make a political statement empowering women? Why or why not?
 - iii. Why is using one's body as a strategy particularly resonant with women? What are the pros and cons for a woman who decides to use her body as a canvas for a political message?
 - iv. How effective is the body as a vehicle for social change?

Solidarity Quilt: Envisioning Change

- a. Think: Read [The Solidarity Quilt](#). Is quilting a form of art? How does the solidarity quilt reflect a political message? Does this quilt also present a message of protest? If so, how? Is protest a form of political involvement?
- b. Create: Each student take the same size paper and create something (e.g., picture, quote, poem, lyrics, story, etc.) that reflects a specific stance or opinion concerning a political issue he or she feels strongly about. Paste all sheets together in the form of a giant paper quilt and hang it on the wall.
- c. Share: Have students present their "patches" to their fellow classmates, and explain how each patch represents their personal political involvement.
- d. Discuss: Engage in a class discussion concerning how solidarity quilts play an active role the communities that create them.
 - i. Consider the role of solidarity quilts in the community building and self-held traditions.
 - ii. How can the unification of a community lead to political action and change?

Conclusion: Women, Art and Politics: Envisioning Global Change

- a. Reading: Zapatista Women, Theatre Aquarium, Painting Power and History, Political Dreams for Women, Toolkit, [Intimités Afghanes](#), [Picturing Breast Cancer](#).



- b. Discussion: After exploring many different ways in which women activate art as a political vehicle, consider how effective these campaigns are.
- i. Can art be a tool that wields power, provides agency, and gives a voice to members of a community? Support your answer with examples from the different readings you have explored.
 - ii. How can art create positive change within communities? Do you consider generating awareness and information a form of positive change? Consider the readings suggested in this section.