

Mindful: Exploring Mental Health Through Art

Fuller Craft Museum

TEACHER GUIDE

Overview

Designed for grades K-5, this guide provides a framework for preparing you and your students for a visit to the exhibition and offers suggestions for reflection and discussion, highlighting age-appropriate questions you might pose to students, along with basic background information for you to share.

The Fuller Craft Museum is a contemporary craft museum, and as such, this exhibit includes works of art from the five craft media: metal, ceramic, glass, fiber, and wood. You will learn more about contemporary craft during your tour of the museum.

Some of the narrative in this exhibition can be difficult for young people to understand or process without further discussion, but it's important for students to feel like they are a part of that discussion. We know that educating young people is one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences we can have. However, we live in a complex world where challenging issues can be difficult to teach and to learn. Rather than exclude young people from these conversations, we must ask them to explore their feelings and their knowledge on different subjects such as mental health, current world events, and social issues.

We look forward to welcoming you and your students!

Mindful: Exploring Mental Health Through Art

Exhibit Description:

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more people have a disability in the form of mental illness in developed countries such as the US than any other group of illnesses, including cancer and heart disease. One in four adults live with a mental health condition, yet this common illness is often hidden and not talked about. *Mindful: Exploring Mental Health through Art*, a touring exhibition created by the Society for Contemporary Craft (SCC), breaks down societal stigmas and offers an opportunity to encounter and understand mental health through the lens of contemporary craft.

Mindful explores the impact that mental illness is having on society, and the role the arts can play to both encourage positive self-expression and guide effective mental health promotion and treatment. Featuring more than 30 works created by 14 contemporary artists, *Mindful* examines creative responses to mental health conditions through the inclusion of artworks made by artists who

have been diagnosed with or affected by mental illness. The exhibition touches upon topics of anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts and tendencies, and PTSD and highlights a variety of techniques and forms.

Pre-visit Activities

Before visiting Fuller Craft Museum, we recommend that you and your students explore and discuss some of the ideas and themes in the exhibition. We have included some selected images from the exhibition, along with relevant information that you may want to use before or after your museum visit.

Thirty-Second Look

Activity Overview: Discovering the elements in works of art takes time. Use the following activity to prompt students to look carefully and to develop observational skills viewing a work of art.

Activity Objectives:

- To encourage close looking and improve critical visual skills.
- To highlight that spending more time with a piece of art is necessary to understanding it fully, even if it takes some patience.

Activity Steps:

1. Ask students how much time they think a person might spend, on average, looking at a work of art. Record their responses and discuss the factors they believe affect the amount of time they spend looking. After students have answered, reveal that the average amount of time people spend looking at one object in a museum is less than half a minute. Ask them if 30 seconds is enough time to spend with a work of art. Why or why not? Try the following experiment in small groups to test their answers.
2. Direct students to look at a work of art (in the classroom, use a poster or transparency) for thirty seconds. At the thirty-second mark, ask everyone to turn around and face away from the work of art (in the classroom, turn off projector or remove the poster).
3. Without looking back at the work of art, ask students to use their memories to answer questions based on their observations. Chart the words that students come up with to create a word bank. You might ask the following questions:
 - *What is the subject of the work of art?*
 - *How many (objects, people, etc.) are in the work of art?*
 - *How would you describe them?*
 - *How is each one dressed?*

- *What kind of setting is depicted?*
 - *Are there any animals in the work of art?*
 - *How would you describe them?*
 - *What sorts of colors are used in the work of art?*
 - *How many colors are used in the work of art?*
4. With students' interests piqued, have them look again at the work of art. Guide the students through a careful re-examination. Ask them how they would refine their "looking." Ask if there is anything on the list that isn't actually in the work of art. Explain that sometimes we believe we saw something when we didn't; or we might recall different colors than those actually used in the work of art. Ask them to explain how the detailed observation changed their understanding of what the work of art includes and depicts.
5. Ask students to explain their reactions to the work. Was their initial glance enough? Ask students if discussing and comparing observations with other people was helpful in understanding the work of art. Have the students explain their answers.

Discussion: What is craft?

Leading Questions:

- *What do you think craft is?*
- *What do you think of when you think of craft?*
- *What kinds of materials do you think craft objects are made out of?*
- *Is there anything in your home that you think could be an example of "craft"?*

Craft can be defined in many ways! Before World War II, craft was primarily about functional objects, like kitchenware and furniture. In the last 70 years, styles, techniques, and meanings of craft have expanded. What remains is the connection between the maker and the object. Every craft object has the mark of the crafts man or woman who made it rather than being identical to other objects like those made in factories.

There are five common craft media: ceramics, metal, wood, fiber, and glass. Today's craft artists are increasingly combining these materials and testing the limits of what craft means to them and their viewers. This exhibit includes works from all five craft media and many pieces that incorporate multiple different materials.

Reference Glossary

When talking about difficult topics like mental health, it is important to have an arsenal of relevant vocabulary. The following is a short glossary of some terms that are relevant to the exhibition:

Abstract: artwork that does not represent an object, place, or person in the physical world.

Anxiety: a feeling of nervousness or worry that persists.

Context: the theme of and the environment in which a work was created such as, physical setting, historical time, social setting, political climate, etc.

Creative process: the process an artist takes to create a work of art.

Depression: a condition of general emotional dejection and withdrawal.

Geometric vs. Organic: geometric shapes are manmade such as polygons or rectangles. Organic shapes are free forms and irregular shapes found in nature.

Literal: art that involves at least some form that is recognizable e.g. a bird, train, or person.

Medium: materials such as: blown glass, watercolor etc., used to create an artwork; or a category of art such as drawing, painting, or sculpture.

Narratives: a spoken or written account of connected events; a story.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): a clinical diagnosis to describe a set of reactions/symptoms, typically arising after exposure to a traumatic event.

Psychology: the science of the mind, mental states and human behavior.

Resiliency: the ability to bounce back after stress or adversity.

Texture: the surface quality of an artwork usually perceived through the sense of touch.

Trauma: a deeply distressing or disturbing experience.

Uncensored: speaking, writing, or creating without limitation or influence from others.

Looking at and Talking About Art in *Mindful*

Let students know that the Museum is a safe space where they can talk about difficult topics represented in this exhibit. The exhibit addresses subjects such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, and suicide. Although these topics are difficult, they are also extremely prevalent, and it is important to educate younger students before they are further exposed to the negative stigma surrounding common mental health problems.

Questions for the galleries

These questions will allow students to practice their critical visual skills and understand the works in the exhibit more fully.

- ***What's going on in this piece of artwork?***
- ***What do you see that makes you say that?***
- ***What else do you see?***
- ***How do you feel when you look at this piece?***
- ***What is the art work made out of?***
- ***What markings and words do you notice, if any?***
- ***Can you identify any familiar shapes in the artwork?***
- ***Do you like looking at this piece? If so, what do you like about it?***
- ***Do you not like looking at this piece? If so, what don't you like about it?***

Exploring these questions in the galleries relates to the following MA academic standards in the arts for grades 4 and below:

1.3 (Methods, Materials, and Techniques) Learn and use appropriate vocabulary related to methods, materials, and techniques.

2.4 (Elements and Principles of Design) For shape and form, explore the use of shapes and forms in 2D and 3D works. Identify simple shapes of different sizes, for example, circles, squares, triangles, and forms, for example, spheres, cones, cubes, in the environment and in artwork.

5.1 (Critical Response) In the course of making and viewing art, learn ways of discussing it, such as by making a list of all of the images seen in an artwork (visual inventory); and identifying kinds of color, line, texture, shapes, and forms in the work.

5.2 (Critical Response) Classify artworks into general categories, such as painting, printmaking, collage, sculpture, pottery, textiles, architecture, photography, and film.

5.3 (Critical Response) Describe similarities and differences in works, and present personal responses to the subject matter, materials, techniques, and use of design elements in artworks.

Material scavenger hunt

Many of the pieces in *Mindful* use multiple different materials. For younger students, focusing on these various media can help them look closer at the art work in question. Look out for the following pieces for this exercise:

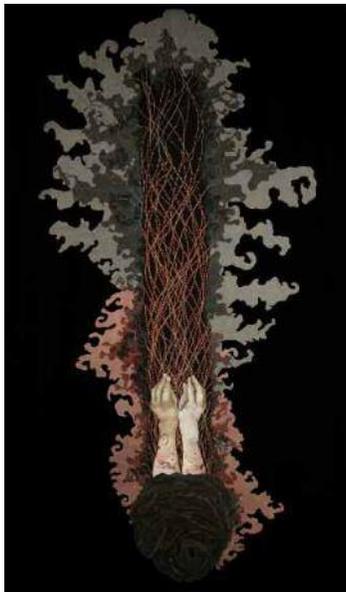
- **Rose Clancy, *All for Naught, Forget Me Not*, 2015**



- **Meredith Grimsley, *Same Old Wounds: Family Legacy*, 2015**



- **Meredith Grimsley, *Foundress*, 2014**



- **Grace Kubiilus, *Junk Bones*, 2014**



- **Grace Kubiilus, *Oh How I Love You*, 2014**



When you and your students are looking at these pieces, ask them what materials they can see before they look at the label or you read the label to them (which has the materials used on it). These works of art use everything from handmade paper and coffee filters and bookshelves and Barbie heads. This exercise allows them to look closely at the piece without the preconceptions put in place by reading the label first.

After your Visit

Have the students discuss their experiences. Ask them how they felt about what they saw or if they have any questions. Make sure to keep communicating with students even after the visit is over.

- ***What did you think about the museum?***
- ***Is there anything that really stood out to you?***
- ***How did the exhibit make you feel?***
- ***What did you like?***
- ***What did you dislike?***
- ***Do you have any more questions or thoughts?***

Making Art

Many of the pieces in the exhibit have ceramic elements. Clay is a great simple material for students to experiment with. The following activity uses clay and relates to the exhibit.

A Mindful Memory

Clay is a great medium with which to explore and regulate our emotional states. Due to its kinesthetic qualities, playing with a ball of clay can help us relax or focus. Clay can also help us retrieve a memory and use it to restore our sense of well-being. The created object can serve as a reminder to return to that sense of ease and rest.

Materials: Only clay for each student is necessary for this activity.

- Suggestions for K – 2 students: Crayola Model Magic clay
- Suggestions for 3 – 5 students: Air-dry clay

Playing with Clay

Invite students to sit comfortably in a chair with a ball of clay in their hands. Ask them to close their eyes, if that is comfortable, and just play with the clay. Invite them to become aware of their breathing and slow it down by breathing deeply in and out as they continue to squeeze the clay in their hands.

Next, as eyes remain closed, invite students to become aware of various shapes they might make with the clay in their hands. Have them reflect on the feeling of different shapes in their hand. How is a triangle different from a square?

After some time, ask them to open their eyes and shape the clay into different shapes again; this time as they watch the process. Suggest they try rolling the clay into a tube or flattening it with the palm of their hand. Ask students to reflect how they feel in their body during this process. Ask: does your heart rate slow or speed as you play with the clay? Did you become more relaxed or excited? Did you enjoy molding the clay into shapes? Does the process of manipulating the clay bring up memories of any kind?

Creating a Memory Object

Now ask the students to close their eyes again (or alternatively find a spot in the room to rest their gaze.) This time, as they play with the clay, invite them to bring to mind a happy event or peaceful place; one which holds fond memories. Invite them to use all of their senses, in their imagination, to bring this memory to life.

Ask: what would you see there? What would the temperature on your skin be like? Who is with you and what are they doing? What scents or smells are in this place? What sounds do you hear? What makes this place or event pleasant for you?

Now invite students to think about a simple object or symbol that reminds them of that place or event. What would it look like?

Ask them to open their eyes and mold their clay into a shape like this object or symbol. Don't worry if the clay doesn't look like your mind picture. It will serve as a reminder just for you.

Additional Resources

What is Mindfulness?

The dictionary defines mindful as a state of attentiveness or awareness. Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and a founder of the mindfulness approach in psychology says mindfulness is “paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally, to the unfolding of experience, moment by moment.” Mindfulness practices are thought to be helpful for stress because they bring us gently out of the clutter of our distractions into the beauty of the present moment. The arts (both the creating of and the witnessing of) have been a source of *mindful* activity long before there was a term to describe it. We invite you and your students to step into the present moment as you experience the art in this exhibition.

Online Resources:

<http://www.artnews.com/2017/03/14/mindful-exploring-mental-health-through-art-at-virginia-museum-of-contemporary-art-virginia-beach/>