



Self: Explorations of Identity

Activities: Grades 9-12

1. Read the label for Brian Kershisnik's *The Rescue*. Consider the symbols and metaphors of this painting. A symbol usually represents an idea or something abstract, while a metaphor communicates ideas by comparing one thing to another. Kershisnik painted this scene soon after he found out his dad had lung cancer, and chose to paint an image of two men fighting off a lion. The lion's attack of the man's chest can be seen as a symbol for the life-threatening pain felt by Brian's father caused by lung cancer. Notice the younger man, who is attempting to save the other figure without success. This could be viewed as a metaphor for how Brian felt when finding out his father had cancer -- wanting to help, but also feeling powerless.

ACTIVITY:

- As seen in *The Rescue*, artists sometimes use symbols and metaphors to communicate their ideas or experiences. Find another metaphorical work in *Self* and search for metaphors or symbols. Write down the symbols you can find. How has the artist used symbols or metaphors in this work? What do you think they mean in context of the artwork? What types of symbols or metaphors would you use to display your identity or experiences?
2. The artists in this exhibition use factors like gender, culture, sexual orientation, diverse abilities, and family relationships to explore their identity. Many of these issues are socially relevant and generate varied opinions. Carefully evaluate each image from *Self* and select a piece that influences you to think about a social issue differently.

ACTIVITY:

- Use this experience to write how the artwork impacted you.
3. As we learn and grow, our identity develops and can even transform. What type of experiences do these artists show that display their growth as a person or artist? How can loss contribute to a person's progression (think of loss of a loved one, loss of innocence, etc)? Achievements?

ACTIVITY:

- Find an artwork in the exhibition that you believe explores the idea of growth and write a journal entry responding to the work.
4. Consider the works by Michelle Franzoni Thorley. She uses the qualities and history of her family to explore her own identity. Notice how she uses environment and clothing to communicate her ancestry. Do some of your own research to discover more about the visual culture of your ancestors.

ACTIVITY:

- Apply what you have learned to make an artwork inspired by your ancestors' cultural, geographical, or social history.

Additional Resources:

- For prompts 1-3, consider watching this video to learn more about the work of *Self* artist Ryan Moffett: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEieLbkvc8E>
 - For prompts 2 and 4, you can watch this video of *Self* artist Fidalis Buehler to see how cultural ties impacts his work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbB55Ulm65A>
 - In prompt 2, you explored how art can influence the way you think. Does art really have the potential to make change in the world? See this video from the Tate Museum in London for additional perspectives: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/tate-exchange/can-art-change-society>
 - Artist's perspective: *Self* artist Emily McPhie blogpost on participating in this exhibition: <http://www.emilycmcphie.com/blog/2019/8/13/explorations-of-identity>
 - "Art and Identity in the work of Lorna Simpson" - <https://youtu.be/dNk098ffjLM>
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Utah State Core Standards:

Secondary Visual Arts - (Level 1 and up)

Strand: CREATE (L1.V.CR.)

Students will generate artistic work by conceptualizing, organizing, and completing their artistic ideas. They will refine original work through persistence, reflection, and evaluation.

Standard L1.V.CR.1:

Use multiple approaches to begin creative endeavors.

Standard L1.V.CR.6:

Apply relevant criteria from traditional and contemporary cultural contexts to examine, reflect on, and plan revisions for works of art and design in progress.

Strand: PRESENT (L1.V.P.)

Students will analyze, interpret, refine and select artistic work for presentation. They will convey meaning in the manner in which the art is presented.

Standard L1.V.P.2:

Analyze and evaluate the reasons and ways an exhibition is presented.

Standard L1.V.P.3:

Analyze and describe the impact that an exhibition or collection has on personal awareness of social, cultural, or political beliefs and understandings.

Strand: RESPOND (L1.V.R.)

Students will understand, evaluate, and articulate how works of art convey meaning for the observer, as well as the creator.

Standard L1.V.R.1:

Hypothesize ways in which art influences perception and understanding of human experiences.

Standard L1.V.R.2:

Analyze how one's understanding of the world is affected by experiencing visual imagery.

Standard L1.V.R.3:

Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts.

Strand: CONNECT (L1.V.CO.)

Students will relate artistic skills, ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.

Standard L1.V.CO.2:

Describe how knowledge of culture, traditions, and history may influence personal responses to art.

Language Arts

Writing Standard 2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.