“Art in My Life”
An integrative assignment for Art History and first-year English

Leonard Green and Marissa Schlesinger
Kingsborough Community College, City University of New York
Spring, 2008

1. Overall Purpose and Goals for the Learning Community ................................................................. 2
2. Purpose of the Assignment ................................................................................................................. 2
3. Question the Assignment was Intended to Address ........................................................................... 2
4. Description of the Assignment ........................................................................................................ 2
5. Disciplinary Grounding ..................................................................................................................... 3
  5.1. English ......................................................................................................................................... 3
  5.2. Art ............................................................................................................................................... 3
6. Scaffolding in Courses ....................................................................................................................... 3
  6.1. English (Apps. II, IV-VII) ........................................................................................................... 3
  6.2. Art (Apps. III, VIII-IX) .............................................................................................................. 3
7. What Did We Notice? ......................................................................................................................... 4
8. Reflections and Assessment ............................................................................................................... 4
  8.1. Assessment of Student Work ........................................................................................................ 4
  8.2. Reflections on the Assignment ..................................................................................................... 5
9. Plans for Revision of Assignment .................................................................................................... 5
10. Related Teaching Material .............................................................................................................. 5
Appendix I: ENG 12 and ART 31 Linked Assignment ........................................................................... 6
Appendix II: ENG 12 - Analysis of Peter Schjeldahl’s “A Theft in Norway” or August Wilson’s “On Romare Bearden” ................................................. 7
Appendix III: ART 31 - Self-Reflective Paper Assignment .................................................................... 8
Appendix IV: ENG 12 - Discussion and Analysis: August Wilson, “On Romare Bearden,” Spring ’08 .......................................................... 9
Appendix V: ENG 12 - Explaining Wilson’s “On Romare Bearden” ..................................................... 10
Appendix VII: ENG 12 - Explaining Schjeldahl .................................................................................. 12
Appendix VIII: ART 31 - “Art and the Self” PowerPoint Unit ................................................................. 13
Appendix IX: ART 31 - Self-Reflective Paper Peer Review Guide ......................................................... 14
Appendix X: ART 31 - Self-Reflective Paper Assignment, Fall ’07 ....................................................... 15
Appendix XI: ART 31 - Self-Reflective Paper Assignment, Winter ’07 .................................................. 16
Appendix XII: ART 31 - Self-Reflective/Expressive Assignment, Fall ’08 ............................................ 17
Assignment Title: Self-Reflective Paper

Authors: Leonard Green, Department of English & Marissa Schlesinger, Department of Art

Institution: Kingsborough Community College

1. Overall Purpose and Goals for the Learning Community

This learning community is part of our Opening Doors, first-semester, LCs. It links English 12, a freshman reading and composition course, with Art 31, a one-semester art history survey, and Student Development 10, a freshman seminar that focuses on the college experience and college skills. The shared theme for the Art and English courses was The Power of Art. In this link students were asked to read, analyze and write about essays, articles and a novel that address this theme while also looking at, researching, analyzing, and discussing works of art in order to explore the theme. Questions considered in both classes included, “Why is art important to us as individuals and to society as a whole?” “How can art be used to propagate or subvert messages of power?” “What is beauty and how can it be used as power?” “How are the power dynamics of religion, class, and gender manipulated through art?” “What makes art controversial?” These discussions also contributed to the “Diversity” unit of the SD 10 curriculum.

2. Purpose of the Assignment

The assignment (App. I) was designed with the following goals:

• To make more salient for the students that reading and writing involve actively creating meaning
• To practice critical reading in order to provide the foundations for developing defensible written arguments about readings
• To practice descriptive writing in order to provide the foundations for developing defensible written arguments about artworks
• To make connections between texts, disciplines, the visual arts and personal experiences
• To recursively develop writing and critical thinking skills through meaningful revisions of essays

3. Question the Assignment was Intended to Address

“What role has visual art played in your life and how does that compare or contrast to the experiences of the authors you have read?”

4. Description of the Assignment

Students had already written two related essay assignments for the linked ENG 12 and ART 31 classes. In ENG 12, they wrote a paper explaining why either of two authors\(^1\) was transformed by the works of art discussed in their respective essays (App. II). In ART 31 they had to consider the role of art in their lives and to write about it from a personal perspective (App. III).

For this assignment, students were instructed to revise both previous essays into one composition that discussed how their experiences compared with that of the author they focused on in their English essay.

---

They were asked to consider similarities and differences, and to discuss these in a thoughtful way with a clear thesis statement and a unifying conclusion. Specificity was required, both when discussing the art from their personal experiences and the essay that they read in English. Sources had to be cited.

One copy was submitted to Professor Green with previous English drafts attached, and one copy was submitted to Professor Schlesinger with previous Art drafts attached. An additional revision was required in the English class and graded by that professor alone. An additional revision was optional in the Art class and was graded by that professor alone. These final revisions were expected to address issues of interdisciplinary integration as well as any discipline-specific comments made on the linked draft.

Scaffolding assignments were graded by the individual assigning professor. The first draft of the integrative assignment was read by both professors and grades were assigned during a grading conference. In most cases a common grade was agreed upon, with variations in cases of extreme disciplinary imbalance. Each student, therefore, received comments from both professors on the same draft. The comments addressed both integration and disciplinary grounding. Subsequent drafts were submitted to, and read and graded by, the individual professor based on his or her own comments.

5. Disciplinary Grounding

5.1. English
   To effectively complete the assignment, students worked on the following ENG 12 skills:
   - Finding and evaluating organizing ideas of a reading
   - Summarizing selected passages from readings
   - Quoting from readings
   - Identifying sources
   - Making generalizations, drawing inferences and conclusions
   - Relating texts to personal experiences
   - Making connections between interdisciplinary experiences
   - Revising essays for development and clarity

5.2. Art
   To effectively complete the assignment, students worked on the following ART 31 skills:
   - Writing descriptively about a work of art
   - Contextualizing artistic works within social and historical events
   - Making connections between individual elements of an artwork and its overall affect on a viewer
   - Separating the intentionality of the artist from the individual reception of an artwork

6. Scaffolding in Courses

6.1. English (Apps. II, IV-VII)
   - Students wrote an informal art autobiography
   - Students read and analyzed texts through individual and collaborative assignments
   - Students wrote informally about the readings to practice critical analysis
   - Students drafted formal summaries of the assigned readings (peer and teacher reviewed)
   - Students revised and integrated drafts into a linked assignment for both classes

6.2. Art (Apps. III, VIII-IX)
Students participated in a series of presentations and discussions focusing on the emotionally evocative and politically expressive nature of visual arts
- Students wrote informally about related personal experiences
- Students drafted a formal essay focusing on the impact of art in their lives (peer and teacher reviewed)
- Students revised and integrated drafts into a linked assignment for both classes

7. What Did We Notice?

Although this was one of our earlier written assignments for the semester, the final revision of the work came in at the semester’s end, serving as an informal “capstone” experience. The most successful papers exhibited disciplinary grounding in both Art and English, and did so with an intellectual maturity largely absent in earlier assignments.

In the last revision, many of the students finally were able to bring to fruition many of the diverse English skills practiced all semester (e.g. essay D\(^2\)). The students’ use of the art historian’s basic building-block – descriptive writing – evolved from simple lists of descriptors to meaningful formal analyses that spoke to the theses of the papers (e.g. essays B, C). Even in essays still demonstrating weak English writing skills (e.g. essay E), by final draft voices had crystallized and a poignancy was present that was absent at first (e.g. essays A, B, D, E).

By this stage we noticed students alluding to a metacognitive awareness of the demands of the assignment, (e.g. essay A) and purposeful integration was successfully achieved in most papers by the final revision, despite that fact that the students initially protested the impossibility of the assignment.

8. Reflections and Assessment

8.1. Assessment of Student Work

This assignment was ultimately successful in prompting richly integrated work. “Quoting,” whether from the cited authors or from an artwork (in the form of clear, specific descriptions), functioned as a crossover tool\(^3\) demonstrating the students’ awareness of the similarities between written and visual texts. Through their exploration of the resonance of racial and ethnic identity (e.g. essays A, E) or loneliness (e.g. essay B), for example, the students were successful in making profound connections both between their experiences and those of the authors about whom they wrote (e.g. essays A, B), and between their lives and the visual arts (e.g. essays C, D). In a few remarkable instances, these assignments purposefully integrated other Art and English work, from non-linked assignments and readings, resulting in true capstone investigations of our learning community theme: the power of art.

\(^2\) At the time of writing we await IRB approval to quote from student writing. References to five samples of student work, labeled as essays A through E, are provided in the anticipation that approval may be forthcoming. At such time a final appendix of excerpts will be attached.

\(^3\) “Crossover tool,” “resonance,” and “aesthetic synthesis” are used herein to define integrated learning, after Veronica Boix Mansilla, Project Zero, Harvard School of Education.
8.2. Reflections on the Assignment

This assignment comes at the end of a long line of development and is most closely related to ART 31 assignments from the Fall ’07 (App. X) and Winter ’07 (App. XI) sessions. Those assignments relied upon the same readings in ENG 12 as this assignment does but integration was merely implied and the previous versions were only supported and graded by the Art professor. The Fall ’07 assignment hoped to encourage the students to find and use a personal voice, in that it was framed as a letter, but it simultaneously stifled true individual expression by tethering the students to the textbook⁴. The assignment’s greatest weakness seems to have been that it sought personal connections to artwork that did not necessarily exist (i.e. “You may want to explain to your recipient why you made a recent decision, persuade him or her to make a decision, or reveal something about yourself.”) The Winter ’07 assignment dropped the letter structure as it was found to result in a stilted product. This revision also attempted to loosen the content requirements somewhat by asking the students only to “find art that makes you think about yourself,” but the preservation of the textbook focus once again resulted in writing that was often a forced product with only a few successfully, purposefully, integrated essays resulting.

Despite the challenges of the assignment, we remained optimistic. The students did begin to connect the visual arts with their personal lives to some extent, and they also began to appreciate the experiences of the authors they read on a more personal level. Once the assignment was re-designed with explicit integration and support was actively provided in both the Art and English classrooms, the results vastly improved. We are happy with the present state of the assignment, and especially so with the quality of the student work produced in response to it by final draft. Nonetheless, we are actively reviewing, rethinking, and revising.

We continue to question how to elicit more integrated early drafts. Typically we notice the first draft is an awkward conglomeration of the two foundation papers without transitions and, oddly, with their earlier depth removed. It requires another draft or two to bring the depth back and suture the two into one. Addressing this is our primary objective for assignment revision.

9. Plans for Revision of Assignment

We intend to provide more scaffolding opportunities in Art 31. In order to facilitate the student process of self-discovery, and to invite aesthetic synthesis, self-expression in the visual arts will be actively explored through informal writing and artistic creation, prior to the formal written assignments (App. XII). We also intend to bring the Student Development course more directly into the process, by integrating the autobiographical writing already done in that class.

10. Related Teaching Material

The subsequent twelve appendices represent previous and current states of this assignment, and look ahead to the future. Unless otherwise specified, all included material is from the Spring 2008 semester.

Appendix I: ENG 12 and ART 31 Linked Assignment

Required length: 3-4 pages typed, double-spaced

You have written two related essays assignments for your linked English 12 and Art 31 classes. In your English class, you had to write a paper explaining why either Peter Schjeldahl or August Wilson was so transformed by the works of art discussed in their respective essays. In your Art class you had to consider the role of art in your life and to write about it from a personal perspective. Now, you are being asked to write a thoughtful essay that links these two assignments.

Revise your two papers to form one composition that discusses how your experience with your chosen art piece compares with what Wilson or Schjeldahl argued about their experiences. Are there similarities or differences between your experience and the experience of the author you wrote about? Try to compare the experiences in a thoughtful way and to discuss what makes them either similar or different.

To complete this assignment you will have to decide how to combine the two separate papers into one unified paper with a clear thesis statement and unifying conclusion.

Your essay should be specific when discussing both the art from your personal experience and the essay that you read in English. Remember to cite your sources.

You will hand in 2 copies of this essay: one to Professor Green with your previous English drafts attached, and one to Professor Schlesinger with your previous Art drafts attached.
Appendix II: ENG 12 - Analysis of Peter Schjeldahl’s “A Theft in Norway” or August Wilson’s “On Romare Bearden”

Choose One:

1. What main point does Wilson make in his essay, “On Romare Bearden”? What does Wilson’s essay imply about the purpose of arts in his life? Be sure to carefully explain what the essay reveals about why Wilson feels as he does about the arts. Do not assume that your reader is familiar with the essay. It is your responsibility to summarize the author’s main ideas and to provide your reader with a context for understanding your discussion.

2. What main point does Schjeldahl make in his essay, “A Theft in Norway”? What does he mean when he asserts, “They stole our picture…” (4)? Be sure to carefully explain why the author feels as he does about the Munch painting. Do not assume that your reader is familiar with the essay. It is your responsibility to summarize the author’s main ideas and to provide your reader with a context for understanding your discussion.

Guidelines

- Introduce your reader to your topic and be sure to name the author and essay you will discuss.
- Give your paper a main claim or thesis.
- Use your paragraphs to support and explain your thesis. Remember that each paragraph develops only one supporting idea, so try to give each paragraph a clear, single topic sentence and focus.
- Use several quotations to support your assertions about the reading, about one quotation per paragraph. Follow our rules for introducing, paraphrasing, and analyzing, quoted passages.
- Bring each paragraph to a clear conclusion and provide transitions to the next step or stage of your discussion.
- Give your paper a summarizing conclusion.
- When finished with your draft, give your paper a title.
- Your paper should be between 2-3 typed pages.
Appendix III: ART 31 - Self-Reflective Paper Assignment

Required length: 2 pages (approximately 500 words,) typed, double-spaced

In your English class you have read essays in which the authors reflect personally on the impact of art in their lives. You have been asked to consider those essays and to delve deeply into one of them in order to explore the experience of the author. Now it is your turn to consider the role of art in your life and to write about it from a personal perspective.

Reflect on the role of art in your life. Choose a specific artwork that has had an impact on you. Your essay will be a personal essay in which you discuss the artwork specifically and explain how and why it relates to who you are.

Your essay should focus on the specific artwork that you choose. Use that artwork as a tool to express yourself: always tie what you are saying about yourself back in to the artwork. Feel free to define “artwork” broadly! Be specific about the artwork, and clearly indicate where and when you encountered it.

You should not need to research this paper at all, since it is a personal paper, but if you choose to incorporate what you have read elsewhere, please review the information about quoting, summarizing, and paraphrasing at this web site:

http://www.writeseite.cuny.edu/sitemap.html

Remember to:
- Discuss the artwork specifically
- Explain how and why the artwork relates to who you are
- Tie the artwork in to whatever you are saying about yourself
- Proof-read and spell-check your paper
Appendix IV: ENG 12 - Discussion and Analysis: August Wilson, “On Romare Bearden,” Spring ’08

1. In a close reading exercise, look at paragraph one. Go through the paragraph and underline or mark key words or phrases that indicate why discovering Bessie Smith was so important for Wilson. Make an effort to mark only the key words or phrases. If you are underlining almost everything, you are missing the point of this exercise. Try to isolate the most important points from the rest of the paragraph.

2. Wilson says that his discovery “gave me a history” (5). He does not, however, explain why he might feel the need of a history. Can you infer why he, an African-American, might feel the need of a history?

3. Try to summarize the main ideas of paragraph one. (A summary provides a brief, condensed restatement of an author’s main ideas, using the summarizer’s own words.)

4. Find and underline the sentence in the second paragraph that you think explains best why Bearden’s art was so important to Wilson. Put into your own words (paraphrase) the idea the underlined sentence conveys.

5. Examine paragraph four. Explain why Bearden’s art is so significant to Wilson. According to Wilson, what does Bearden’s work accomplish? Find a quotable passage and discuss what it is telling us about Bearden’s work.

Informal Writing

Write a letter to Wilson in which you express your own thoughts and feelings about the experience he has described in his essay. In developing your letter, try to quote at least once from the essay and be sure to explain in your own words what Wilson values about art.
Appendix V: ENG 12 - Explaining Wilson’s “On Romare Bearden”

A Working Draft, 1-2 pages

In your own words, explain August Wilson’s “awakening.” Writing your paper, be sure to use supporting evidence from the reading.

- Give your paper a good thesis and introduce your reader to the topic of your paper. Be sure to name the essay and author that you are writing about.
- Make sure you organize your ideas into clearly ordered paragraphs.
- As you develop your explanation, use at least two quotations from the reading to back up your ideas. Be sure to discuss and explain how the quoted material makes the point you are trying to assert.
- Give your paper a conclusion.

When using quotations, the following rules will be helpful.

- Introduce quoted passages with phrases like: Wilson argues...
  Wilson writes...
  According to Wilson...

Sample quotation

Wilson says, “In Bearden I found my artistic mentor and sought, and still aspire to, to make my plays the equal of his canvases” (6).

- Indicate the page number in parenthesis and follow the punctuation order for quotation marks, parenthesis, and periods as demonstrated above.
- When you quote, explain in your own words what the quotation means and how it support or fits into your discussion.
Appendix VI:  ENG 12 - “A Theft in Norway,” Peter Schjeldahl: Questions for Analytic Reading

Peter Schjeldahl is a professional art critic and a writer for The New Yorker magazine. As a professional writer, he understands that the rules for writing an essay can be quite flexible. This, however, makes his work somewhat difficult for many readers fresh out of high schools where they have been taught that an essay thesis has to be in the first paragraph of an essay or that an essay should have five paragraphs.

Here are some questions that might help us understand how the author has organized and expressed his ideas.

1. If Schjeldahl’s thesis or main point is not in his first paragraph, where is it? And what, then, is the purpose of his opening paragraph?

2. Keep a careful ear open for the author’s tone. He often very quietly but clearly implies a clear difference between what he himself believed and what he reports others to believe. As readers, we have to infer how his own beliefs differ from the belief he reports others to hold. Find an example of this in the essay’s fourth paragraph. He implies that “most people” were not upset by the painting’s theft. Why, according to Schjeldahl, weren’t they? How does their thinking differ from his?

3. Find another example where we must be careful to distinguish between what Schjeldahl himself believes and what many others believe or think.

4. What is the author’s reason for distinguishing between the “image” and the actual “unique, handmade object”?

5. Look for language in paragraph six that conveys just how important Munch’s painting is to the author.

6. In paragraph eight, Schjeldahl quotes a passage Munch has written about the experience his painting tries to convey. Look at the last sentence of the quotation and then explain in your own words the feeling Munch was trying to express.

7. Schjeldahl asserts that “The picture is not personal” (3). But earlier he has said it represented “Munch’s effort to convey a persona event” (2). Can you explain this apparent contradiction or paradox?

8. What does the author mean by “They stole our picture…” (4)? Why, according to the essay’s argument, is the picture “ours”?
Appendix VII: ENG 12 - Explaining Schjeldahl

A Working Draft, 1-2 pages

In your own words, explain why Peter Schjeldahl thinks Munch’s painting, *The Scream*, is so important. To support your explanation, use supporting evidence from the Schjeldahl essay.

- Use at least one quotation from the reading to back up your assertions. Be sure to discuss and explain how the quoted material makes the point you are trying to assert.

- Make a meaningful connection between Schjeldahl’s ideas about Munch and at least one of the two accompanying readings assigned for you to read with the Schjeldahl reading.

When using quotations, the following rules will be helpful.

- Introduce quoted passages with phrases like: Schjeldahl argues...
  Schjeldahl writes...
  According to Schjeldahl...

Sample quotation

Schjeldahl says, “*The Scream* and other Munch originals changed my life when I saw them in a big show at the National Gallery in Washington in 1979” (2).

- Indicate the page number in parenthesis and follow the punctuation order for quotation marks, parenthesis, and periods as demonstrated above.
- When you quote, explain in your own words what the quotation means and how it support or fits into your discussion.
Appendix VII: ART 31 - “Art and the Self” PowerPoint Unit

The complete 41 slide PowerPoint presentation is attached as a separate PDF file. The file does not provide the contents of the attendant in-class lectures and discussions.
Appendix IX: ART 31 - Self-Reflective Paper Peer Review Guide

Read your partner’s paper carefully. When you are finished, respond to the paper you are reading using the response guide presented below. Put your responses on a clean sheet of paper and give it to the paper writer.

1. Introduction and artwork. Does the paper start well? Does it clearly introduce the topic, the writer, and the artwork to be discussed? Do you know what the paper is going to be about? Does the writer have a clear main point or thesis?

2. Does the essay make good use of the artwork to support its argument? Does it describe clearly, providing a clear and objective explanation of what the artwork looks like? Does it indicate where and when the writer encountered the artwork?

3. Does the essay clearly connect the artwork to the writer’s personal experience? Does it explain how and why the artwork relates to who the writer is?

4. Are there clear and effective paragraph transitions that facilitate the logical development of the paper from paragraph to paragraph?

5. Are you ever unclear about the meaning of a sentence, a concept, or idea presented by the writer?

6. Does the writer clearly distinguish voices in the paper? Are you ever uncertain about whose point of view you are reading, whether it represents the paper writer or another author?

7. Praise what you really like about the paper. Let the writer know when he or she has done something really well.

8. Let the writer know when you think changes, clarification, or further explanation may be needed.

9. Look carefully at the conclusion. Does the conclusion follow from the evidence and argument developed in the paper? Do you believe the writer has adequately established his or her point?

10. Provide suggestions for a revision.

---

5 This peer review guide is based on a similar guide developed by Professor Green and used in the English 12 class.
Appendix X: ART 31 - Self-Reflective Paper Assignment, Fall ‘07

Required length: 3 pages, typed, double-spaced, approximately 750 words.

You will read two essays in which a writer responds to art: Peter Schjeldahl’s “A Theft in Norway,” and August Wilson’s “On Romare Bearden.” Then it is your turn to respond to art from a personal perspective.

Write a letter to a friend or family member in which you discuss an artwork in the textbook that you respond to, whether positively or negatively. You may want to explain to your recipient why you made a recent decision, persuade him or her to make a decision, or reveal something about yourself.

Your letter you should focus on the artwork you choose and use it as a tool to express yourself. Describe what you think the artwork says about your subject. Support your argument or revelation with evidence from the artwork. Please make at least one reference to the readings in your letter.

The goal of this assignment is for you to look at diverse artworks in your textbook (A History of Western Art by Laurie Schneider Adams,) to choose an artwork that resonates with you, and to express your feelings about the art in writing.

Be specific about the artwork, and clearly indicate which artwork you are discussing, by listing the title, artist, date, and textbook figure number.
Appendix XI: ART 31 - Self-Reflective Paper Assignment, Winter ‘07

Required length: 2 pages (approximately 500 words,) typed, double-spaced

In class you read the essay, “On Romare Bearden.” In it the author, August Wilson, discusses how Romare Bearden’s art contributed to Wilson’s feelings about himself, and how Bearden’s art had an impact on Wilson’s writing. Now it is your turn to find art that makes you think about yourself, and to respond to that art, in writing, from a personal perspective.

Choose any artwork in the textbook that makes you think about yourself and/or your experiences. Your essay will be a personal essay in which you discuss the artwork specifically and explain how and why it relates to who you are.

The goal of this assignment is for you to look at diverse artworks in your textbook (A History of Western Art by Laurie Schneider Adams,) to choose an artwork that resonates with you, and to express your feelings about the art in writing.

Your essay should focus on the artwork you choose. Use that artwork as a tool to express yourself: always tie what you are saying about yourself back in to the artwork.

Be specific about the artwork, and clearly indicate which artwork you are discussing, by listing the title, artist, date, and textbook figure number.

Only the textbook and your own feelings should be consulted for this paper, no other sources.

You should not need to research this paper at all, since it is a personal paper, but if you choose to incorporate what you have read in the textbook, please review the information about quoting, summarizing, and paraphrasing at this web site:

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/563/01/
Appendix XII: ART 31 - Self-Reflective/Expressive Assignment, Fall '08

Can you express who you are without using words? Your challenge is to design a “tattoo” that reveals one or more important things about yourself.

You may draw it, paint it, make a collage from photos and clippings, or any other creative means you prefer, as long as the final product is a two-dimensional image that fits on one 8.5” x 11” piece of paper.

You must also write an explanation of your “tattoo” in approximately 500 words. Your explanation must tell us why you chose the image(s) that you did, and why you chose the colors, lines, and arrangement of elements that you did.

You may also include an additional 250 words talking about the experience of choosing your images. Was it easy? Was it challenging? Did you change your mind before settling on the final choice? If you really got this tattoo, where would you put it, and why?

Your image must be handed in, in class and your explanation must be written on your individual page of the class Wiki. You may also upload a digital version of your image to your Wiki page. If you cannot, I will do it for you.