DAVID P. BRADLEY

Pow-Wow Princess in the Process of Acculturation
Let's Look & Learn

Beyond the Beads and Feathers: Portrait of a Culture

"To be an artist is to seek the truth." ~ David Bradley

National Standards

1. Creating and evaluating a range of styles, media, symbols, and ideas.
2. Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and culture.
3. Reflecting upon and assuming the characteristics and merits of the student's work and the work of others.

Pow-Wow Princess in the Process of Acculturation

David P. Bradley, 1990
acrylic on canvas, 48 x 36" Museum Purchase

Vocabulary

Acculturation
The process of adoption, by one cultural group, of the customs, traits, traditions, and values of another group with which it has been brought into contact. Acculturation can be distinguished from assimilation because it is one in which one group adopts its culture to another, which dominates it economically, politically, and socially, rather than a merger of identities taking place.

Culture
The predominant behavior patterns, creative endeavors, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought of a particular group, organization, or society.

Symbolism
The practice of representing ideas by means of attributing significance to objects, events, or relationships. For instance, a dog might represent fidelity, a ring marriage, or a rabbit's foot luck.

Introduction

An important event at the contemporary Pow-Wow is the crowning of a Pow-Wow Princess. To be a Pow-Wow Princess one must be a Miss Indian USA or a great honor. A Pow-Wow Princess has to be of great character and public poise, and represents her tribe by standing and dancing at various other Pow-Wows and functions. A Pow-Wow Princess or Miss Indian USA is chosen to represent her tribe or nation, most "walk through life in a good way," carry herself with dignity, and have a good attitude. What do you think might be the criteria for choosing the homecoming or prom queen at your school? How do you think Miss America is chosen? How does this compare to the criteria for a Pow-Wow Princess?

Art Connection

Why do you think Bradley chose a Pow-Wow Princess as a symbol of culture?

Choose an image or symbol that you feel best represents the personality of the values of your culture.

Time (the artist writes):
Two hundred years ago American Indians did not live by the clock, instead, the "ticking of time" was measured by the heartbeat, which is symbolized by the beat of the drum. Units of time were measured by night and day, the months from new moon to new moon, and the cyclical return of the seasons.

Art Connection

How does your culture measure time today? How did your culture measure time 200 years ago? How would your life be different if you didn't live by the clock? Is time an issue in your culture?

Webb (dollar bill in clock):
Traditionally, American Indians did not use money to buy the things they needed, they either created what they needed from nature, traded one object for another, or gave away their goods to someone in need. The prairie in the painting has several elk teeth worn in her cape. A Native tradition gathered these elk teeth, which were not easy to come by, but for her wife or daughter. These symbolized that the wearer was well dressed and well loved.

Art Connection

What do we think people wear in your culture? What objects might one own that indicate they are wealthy or well loved? Is wearing money or the right clothes important in your life?

Spiritual Guidance (blue bird):
According to Bradley, the blue bird on the princess' shoulder is a "sacred bird, kind of a guardian angel, as she moves into the future among the dominant society and the modern world."

Art Connection

How does your culture depict the idea of a guardian angel or spiritual guide? Is this an important concept in your life, see this image in your portrait.

Honesty and Respect (indians):
In the American Indian tradition, tobacco is a sacred herb used to show honesty and respect. Whether making a verbal agreement, forming an event, asking a favor, or offering a prayer, the tobacco smoke rises (puffs of the words of that prayer will be received in a kind and respectful way). To offer tobacco in this traditional way is to pay an Ultimate respect to that which you are asking.

Art Connection

How does your culture use an agreement? Does your agreement other than to honor the agreement?

Art Connection

How do you feel your culture is based on trust, honesty, and respect? If so, how would you symbolize that trust? If not, what image could you use to represent that (Native Life?)

Pop Culture Icons (End of the Trail):
The "princess" wears an image of End of the Trail on her face. In refers to a sculpture created by James Earle Fraser for San Francisco's 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition. This iconic figure is most famous in the use of the most recognized symbols of the American West and has been widely reproduced in books of popular culture. By many it is seen as a source of national memorials to a great and violent people. To some American Indians, however, it is seen as a negative stereotype.

Art Connection

Why do you think the artist included this image in his painting? What image from pop culture could you use in your portrait that either misrepresents or presents stereotypic of your culture?

Visual Art Production

Use the tools and explore you have identified to create a portrait of your culture. Follow up your art making with a class discussion of the concepts and images in your resulting portraits. Create an artist statement to describe your artistic process and intent. Collaborate with your fellow artists to create an exhibition of your work in your school and/or community.

Making Connections

Teachers: Although the curriculum in this Learning Module is designed for older students, you are encouraged to adapt the material to your students' ages and ability levels.

In this painting, Bradley uses symbolism to present a multidimensional portrait of his culture and how it has been influenced by the mainstream. Let's look closely at the concepts Bradley is portraying and the images he uses to convey these concepts visually.

Family (Mama Lila)

Bradley often creates paintings that portray great works from art history. Why do you think he chose to portray Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa in creating his "Princess" portrait? Can you think of other portraits from art history he might have painted (not as effective)? Do you think using humor is an effective way to communicate a message?

Art Connection

Research the artwork in the exhibition Indian Flavors, which was organized by the National Museum of the American Indian Smithsonian Institution (see www.nma.si.edu/events/indianflavors). Note how the artists use humor to make positive images and humorous approaches to viewing Native American cultures. Find ways you can incorporate humor and parity into your portrait.

ABOUT THE ART

The contemporary painting is a portrait of a young American Indian woman who has been crowned a Pow-Wow Princess. The painting is a parody of the "Mona Lisa" with visual references to Leonardo da Vinci's portrait, pop culture, and American Indian traditions. As with most of Bradley's works, it is a narrative painting that tells a story using images that have meaning. It is a symbolic portrayal or presentation of a culture, which presents a truth behind Indian stereotypes and a new perspective on how society has affected the traditional American Indian culture.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

David Bradley (b. 1946) is a contemporary artist who was born in Fresno, California, and grew up in both Minneapolis and the north woods near the White Earth Indian Reservation in Minnesota. As a child living in Minneapolis, the social service system split up his family, and Bradley was put to live with four different families. At age 14, he fought his way out of the system, lived on his own, and eventually was reunited with his family and the rest of his experiences with his own Ojibwe people and a "sense of vision" from what he describes as a transformative experience living with the people of Central America.

Because of these experiences, Bradley has always felt strongly about Indian rights issues. The character he paints are often portrayed as parade's of great works of art and characterized by mixed race identity, social and political symbolic and social commentary. He uses symbols and visual humor to make serious statements about each issue as the attempted cultural genocide of American Indians, and the American mainstream culture's gross disregard for the Earth's natural resources.

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