

Human Connections: You, I, and the World SEL Tour

Note: This initial tour outline is for grade 3. Keep in mind you will probably cover only 4-5 artworks. For grades K-2, focus more on feelings and storytelling using works from different cultures.

Hello. I am happy to be your guide today for our tour called Human Connections: You, I, and the World. On our tour today I will invite you to look closely, think deeply, and talk freely about artworks that encourage us to have conversations about feelings, relationships, respect, empathy, self and others, collaboration, cultural pride, and kindness. (Pick out the ones for your tour).

If possible, It would be great if you have a pencil (those little pencils are just fine) and paper handy for students to write some responses and to do a little drawing.

Before we begin, I would like us to decide together how we will treat each other during the tour. What are some agreements you all have in place in your classroom to make sure that you are respectful to each other?

Now let's do a feelings check-in with this abstract painting by Yayoi Kusama that you have been looking at while we were setting agreements.

Artwork 1 (Abstract artwork)

Kusama Yayoi, Japan, 1929

Untitled, 1967, Oil on canvas

The John R. Van Derlip Fund, 2010.7, © Yayoi Kusama

Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)

1. Abstract artworks—these are artworks that do not attempt to represent accurate depictions of a visual reality but instead use shapes, colors, forms and gestural marks to achieve their effect—often express feelings.
2. Yayoi Kusama has made art for a long long time. She made artworks in this style over 50 years ago to help her feel better when she was feeling very stressed out. Making these marks helped her manage her feelings.
3. The marks in this abstract painting, including to spots and the web like lines Kusama calls infinity nets, can mean many different things to many different people.

Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)

1. What do you feel when you look at this artwork? What parts of the artwork impact how you are feeling? (Ask for a couple of students to share their responses)
2. Imagine this abstract artwork could make sounds. What sounds do you think it would make? What about the artwork makes you feel that sound? Take several responses and invite everyone to share their sounds together.
3. Let's draw some of these shapes for a moment. Look closely and continue to feel the painting while hearing a little bit about the artist and the artwork (inspiration, motives).
4. Yayoi Kusama has made art for a long long time. She made artworks in this style to help her feel better when she was feeling very stressed out. Making these marks helped her manage her feelings. How, if at all, does learning about the artist's perspective or artistic motivations impact how you feel when you look at the artwork? To yourself, think about what you do to manage your feelings when you are feeling stressed or out of control.

Artwork 2 (A strong image of two or three people interacting)**Rania Matar, United States, American, born 1964****Brigitte and Huguette, Ghazir Lebanon, 2014, Archival pigment print on baryta paper****The Anne and Hadlai Hull Fund, 2019.100.1, © Rania Matar. All rights reserved. Courtesy of the Artist and Robert Klein Gallery.****Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)**

1. Lebanese American photographer Rania Matar made this photographic portrait of the Lebanese artist Huguette Caland and her daughter, Brigitte. Matar's physical positioning of these sitters is also a tribute to them: Huguette Caland was a Lebanese artist who was renowned for her feminist abstractions of the feminine form.
2. Many details in Matar's photograph lend to its emotional power including their embrace and the visible tears in the younger woman's eyes.
3. Matar draws on her cultural background, cross-cultural experience, and personal history to create her photos. She focuses much of her work on exploring issues of personal and collective identity, especially through photographs of female adolescence and womanhood.

Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)

1. Describe what you see. How do you think these two women feel? What about their facial expressions suggests to you that they are feeling _____?
2. Let's all try to make the same facial expression as the mother. Now, let's also try to pose like her. How does her body language (posture, gestures) help show how she is feeling? What, if any, additional clues in the picture also support your observations?
3. What do you imagine might make this person feel this way? When, if at all, in your life have you experienced this feeling or emotion?
4. Let's do the same for the daughter. Do your best to move your eyes like hers and to copy her pose with particular attention to her hands. How does her body language (posture, gestures) help show how she is feeling? What, if any, additional clues in the picture also support your observations?
5. How does the artist show how the mother and daughter feel about each other?

Artwork 3 (A work that required collaboration and a variety of skills to make)

Germany, Europe Table cabinet, 1560–70, Oak and pine veneered with partly stained and ebonized maple, plum, ash, with etched, blued, and parcel gilt iron. The John R. Van Derlip Fund, the John and Ruth Huss Fund for Decorative Arts, and the Walter C. and Mary C. Briggs Trust Fund, 2018.15a-x

Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)

1. This piece of furniture from the city of Augsburg in Germany is called a table cabinet.
2. The German table cabinet is filled with pictures including armored figures in close combat, slaying mythical creatures—including a unicorn and a dragon—or hunting wild animals. These scenes are set against a dense background of scrolling decoration and leaves, fruit, flowers, birds, and other creatures, as well as symbols of military might.
3. The table cabinet was prized in its time hundreds of years ago for the materials, scale, and complexity of its decoration. Every surface of this cabinet is veneered, which means pieces of wood were cut and attached to the main body, also made of wood. Several varieties of wood were cut and pieced together like a puzzle.

Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)

1. Let's look closely at the wooden table cabinet to see what we notice. What do you notice first? What drew you to that part of the cabinet? What words would you use to describe the cabinet?
2. Now that you have noticed so many details and parts of this cabinet, let's think about how much collaboration (working together) went into making it. Let's begin by thinking about all of the skills that were needed to make this. What skills are you thinking about? Let's consider a few: design, chopping the different woods, cutting the woods, tracing the design onto wood, building the cabinet, metalwork to make hinges, shelf maker for inside, and more.
3. A large team of people had to work individually and together to bring their unique skills to the project: designer, wood collector, wood cutter, assembler, hinge/metal work, etc. When you think about all of these jobs, which one do you think you would be best at? Which job would you most like to learn how to do?
4. Collaboration is great because it brings together everyone's talents to produce something wonderful. This is about teamwork. When do you work on a team / together with others? What are some of the talents brought to the team? It's good and ok that not everyone can do everything. Working together brings amazing results.

Artwork 4 (an artwork for looking at feelings)

Ancient Yoruba, Nigeria, Africa, Shrine head, 12th–14th century, Terracotta, The John R. Van Derlip Fund, 95.84

Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)

1. This artwork is a portrait sculpture of a royal woman from the ancient city of Ife, located in today's Nigeria in West Africa. A portrait is a type of artwork that shows a person or people and tells something about them. Look closely at this portrait sculpture made from clay.
2. Royal people in Ife often had artists create life-like portraits of themselves and family members. Although we no longer know the name of the woman we are looking at, people at the time would have known her and how important she was because of all the details the artist included.
3. The lines on her face, the rings of flesh on her neck, and her hairdo all show she is important. The lines following the curves of her face might be the shadows cast by a crown with a veil made from beads that hung in front of her face.
4. At one time this head was probably attached to a clay body that would have given us even more information about her status.

Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)

1. Take a moment to look at this portrait. What do you notice about this artwork? What do you wonder about it?
2. How do you think this woman is feeling? What do you see that makes you think that? What about their facial expression suggests to you that she is feeling _____? Let's all try to make the same facial expression as this person. Now, let's also try to hold our head upright like she is. What do you imagine might make this person feel this way? When, if at all, in your life have you experienced this feeling or emotion?
3. You were looking at the artwork for clues about how she is feeling. You noticed her eyes, mouth, and other details. How is looking at art for clues about feelings a lot like looking at a person next to you to figure out how they are feeling?
4. You might have interpreted the artwork differently based on your own experiences or even on how you are feeling today. It is totally okay to react to artworks and situations differently.

Artwork 5 (cultural pride and problem solving or conflict resolution)

Kongo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Africa, Power figure, 20th century, Wood, natural fibers, glass, metal, undetermined materials, The Christina N. and Swan J. Turnblad Memorial Fund, 71.3

Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)

1. This sculpture from the Democratic Republic of Congo in Africa is a power figure called nkisi nkondi (which means hunter). Although it might look like a man being punished or hurt, to its Kongo makers and users, this power figure was an important part of settling disagreements or taking care of other problems in their community.
2. The nkisi nkondi sculpture was essentially a container for a powerful spirit that was called on in times of need to keep peace. A chief consulted the figure to understand and resolve problems and to help them arrive at binding decisions for the benefit of the community. Each nail and blade, driven in to energize the figure's powers, represents an issue resolved with the help of the power figure.
3. The sculpture was made in the form of a hunter in order to reinforce that the spirit had the power to hunt for anyone who violated an agreement they made with others.

Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)

1. Look closely at the power figure. What do you see? What else do you notice? What do you wonder about?
2. Now, if possible, take the pose of the figure and copy his facial expression. How do you feel right now? What about this pose makes you feel this way?
3. The sculpture was made in the form of a hunter in order to reinforce that the spirit had the power to hunt for anyone who violated an agreement they made with others. What are some ways you settle disputes or differences? What kinds of contracts or understandings do you have with your community (families, friends, classmates)? How do you collaborate to make sure that everyone is holding up their part of an agreement?

Artwork 6 (an example of cultural pride)

Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) or Dakhóta artists Dance Blanket, c. 1840–50 Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) or Dakhóta artists Wool, silk, beads; needlework 53 × 62 × 7/8 inch (134.622 × 157.48 × 2.22 cm) The Robert J. Ulrich Works of Art Purchase Fund 2007.1

Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)

1. This artwork is a dance blanket made by a Dakhóta and/or Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) artist about 170 years ago. The artist(s) decorated the wool blanket with silk ribbons and small beads. Created at the end of the fur trade era, this rare blanket combines ribbonwork with beadwork, two very important and innovative decorative forms to Native Americans.
2. This dance blanket was created by and passed down through the descendants of Iháŋkthuŋwaŋna (Yanktonai) Dakhóta leader Wakíŋyaŋdúta (Red Thunder) and the prominent Dickson and LaFramboise fur trader families of early Minnesota history.
3. All of the materials used to create the dance blanket came through the fur trade industry. Family lore states that this blanket was made in 1845 in celebration of the first owners' marriage. Both Jane Dickson (b. 1820) and fur trader Joseph LaFramboise (b. 1805) were of mixed European and Native American heritages, which was commonplace for families involved in the fur trade.
4. Dakhóta designs frequently featured floral motifs, and it is possible that the designs in this blanket represent stylized Native plant species used for cooking or as medicine. It is not known if Jane Dickson created the beadwork herself, but based on the style, it was likely made by a Dakhóta woman.
5. The ribbon appliqué work is unattributed to a single Native nation, as many in the region were capable of doing such fine work. It is possible more than one woman worked on the blanket. With the ribbons, women created geometric patterns in a reverse-appliqué technique of sewing cut-out ribbon pattern onto a background of a contrasting color ribbon. The more complex the design, the more desirable and valued the object was to own and wear.
6. This blanket embodies the history of generations of both Indigenous and European fur traders. Many tribes today continue to use similar beadwork and ribbon appliqué to create dancing regalia for powwows. This dance blanket represents the powerful roles of women in the economy of their tribe as both artists and providers for their people.

Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)

1. Look closely at the dance blanket. What do you see? What details draw your attention? As you look, imagine a woman (or women) making all of these details with ribbons and tiny beads and thread. Describe the blanket.
2. Describe the designs. Which designs are organic? Which are geometric? What images do you recognize? What images do you wonder about? Why might these types of designs appeal to the Dakhóta? What kinds of things do you use plants for today? What kinds of things in your environment (outside and inside) inspire you?
3. Look at details of the designs. What materials do the artists use to make them? What do you see that makes you say that? Artists valued the materials for their unique qualities. Today, what might you value most about the glass beads? The silk ribbons?
4. Think about stitching all of these beads and sewing all of these ribbons to the wool blanket. What might have motivated the artists to put this much work and beauty into this blanket? What activities are important to you even though they are time-consuming and require a lot of patience? How does your commitment to those activities impact or affect other people? How do you feel when you have completed a difficult task and/or made something beautiful?
5. This dance blanket is a representation of the blending of Minnesota history, cultures, and ways of life. It is a symbol of the beauty that can come from the meeting of people. What are some examples today of people sharing aspects of their cultural identities, materials, and skills?

Artwork 7 (cultural pride and relationships)

Nayarit, Mexico, North America, House Group, 100–400, Clay, pigments, The John R. Van Derlip Fund, 47.2.37 artist, Mexico, House Group

Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)

1. This clay sculpture from ancient west Mexico is hundreds of years old. Yet, the activity and relationships it shows feel very relevant today. The artist of this sculpture shows people of all ages engaged in solitary and communal or social activities. You see people cooking and eating tamales in what appears to be a house.
2. The steeply pitched roof painted with geometric patterns gives clues to the appearance of the houses of the ancient Nayarit in western Mexico. However, archaeological evidence suggests the ancient Nayarit did not live in two-story dwellings. This leads scholars to conclude this sculpture is conceptual - meaning it represents ideas and beliefs, rather than an architecturally accurate depiction.
3. The Nayarit believed only a slight barrier separated the realms of the living and the dead. The lower level here is the underworld, where the activities of departed ancestors closely mirror those of the living depicted above.
4. The sculpture was placed in a tomb along with food, drink, and other offerings as a means of ensuring the living and the deceased remained connected.

Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)

1. This clay sculpture from ancient west Mexico is hundreds of years old. Yet, the activity and relationships it shows feel very relevant today. Let's look closely to see what is going on. What do you see? What details do you notice? What are some of the people doing? What sounds do you suppose you might hear if you were in this scene? Where would you like to be if you were in the scene?
2. What does this sculpture and its story say to you about the value of cultural traditions?
3. On the contemporary Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) in Mexico and Central America, families visit cemeteries to make offerings and feast, sing, and dance with the souls of their ancestors. This sculpture reflects similar beliefs. What are some cultural practices that you participate in? How do you tell other people about your traditions? How might you show them in a work of art?

Artwork 8 (feelings check in to wrap up tour)

Unknown Japanese, Japan, Asia, Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light, 12th century, Wood with lacquer and gold, The John R. Van Derlip Fund, 78.20

Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)

1. The Buddha was a famous teacher. Some people believed he lived in the most beautiful paradise (the Western Pure Land) in the world and that if they said his name over and over again they too could live there. He was very popular in Japan when this was made when life was pretty hard for people.
2. Amida Buddha (also called Amitābha) Pure Land is described in scripture as a place of boundless beauty. This sculpture would have originally served as the principal object of worship at a Japanese Pure Land temple, and would have been flanked by other sculptures.
3. This sculptor used the yosegi-zukuri technique, whereby parts of a sculpture are roughly carved from multiple blocks of wood. Those blocks are pieced together to form a complete sculpture that is then carved in more detail, hollowed out, and often covered in gold foil, as was the case with this Amitābha.
4. The sculpture includes many features that help us identify this as the Buddha including the extra lump on his head showing his wisdom, the urna or third eye symbolizing divine vision, his long ears (from years of wearing jewelry before he gave up material things), and especially the welcoming gesture of his hands.

Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)

1. Let's take a seat here. Take a few deep breaths. Focus on your feelings now. What are you feeling as you look at this artwork? What about it impacts how you are feeling? Write or draw your response. Discuss.
2. Look closely at the figure of Buddha. What details do you notice? What do you wonder about?
3. There are many different types of Buddhas. This one from Japan was made during a time in that country's history when people were very afraid about what would happen after death. The Amida Buddha offered them reassurance and hope for life after death in a special place called Paradise. How has the artist who made this communicated a sense of peace and hope? What is one act of kindness you will do today to offer someone hope or peace?
4. As we wrap up our tour today, let's check in how we are feeling now. What is one word that describes how you feel?

Tour Activities/Strategies

Choose a variety of activities or strategies that invite participation by as many students as possible, using different learning modalities:

Play or act out voices to hear how tone can express feelings. Take on poses to support understanding of how body language expresses emotions or feelings.

Encourage agreement and disagreement to support understanding that people experience situations differently. (This could include reactions to artworks in terms of feelings and interpretive comments related to what is going on in the artwork.)

Anticipate reactions in others in response to a situation. (Ask: “What’s going to happen?”)

Practice awareness and respect of groups and their cultures, including Dakhóta and Anishinaabe.

Practice conflict resolution and helping. (Ask questions like: “What would you do in this situation?” Or, “How might you help out this person if you were there?”)

Compare and contrast how students react to each work of art—which they like and don’t like, how they interpret the artworks differently or similarly, etc.

Have students “Turn and Talk” or “Pair Share” as a way to share ideas individually and then with the group.

Artwork Ideas

When feasible, give students some choice related to which artworks they will talk about, even if only once during the tour. Plan to include artworks in African, Americas (Dakhóta, Anishinaabe, and Latinx), and Asian/SE Asian (Hmong, Thai, Tibetan) galleries to support cultural pride and assets of different cultures, depending on the cultural identities of students in your groups.