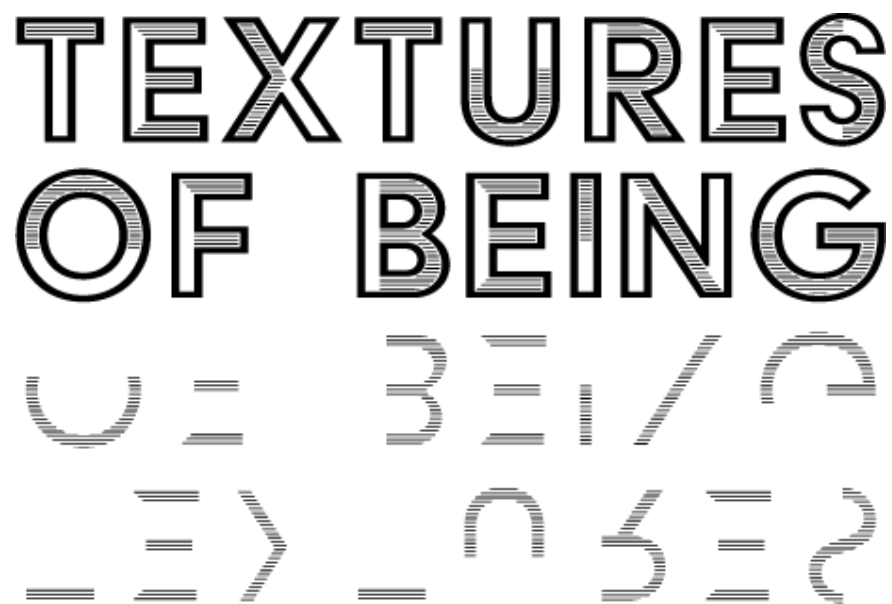


TEXTURES OF BEING



Sep 25, 2026 – January 16, 2027

CURRICULUM GUIDE

Contemporary Craft
5645 Butler Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15201
www.contemporarycraft.org

Curriculum Guide with Student Activities
Textures of Being
Sep 25, 2026 – January 16, 2027

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INTRODUCTION

ABOUT CONTEMPORARY CRAFT (CC)

“Engaging the public in creative experience through contemporary craft.”

Contemporary Craft aims to help people see the connections between creativity and daily life, highlighting the integration of hand, mind, and spirit. Presenting contemporary art in craft media by international, national, and regional artists since 1971, Contemporary Craft offers cutting-edge exhibitions focused on multicultural diversity and non-mainstream art, as well as a range of classes and community outreach programs. CC provides free, high-quality art experiences that showcase the technical and creative processes artists use to make their art.

ABOUT THE GUIDE

Textures of Being invites students to consider the body not simply as something we have, but as a site of knowledge. One that is shaped through relationships with materials, environments, and other people. This teacher's guide offers a variety of strategies to support students as they engage with the thoughtful and deeply personal works of art featured in *Textures of Being*. The resources are designed around the exhibition's central themes: disability as a relational, embodied form of knowledge; the ways our bodies shape how we experience and understand the world; and the role of art in fostering care, accessibility, interdependence, and community. Through close observation, creative response, and collaborative inquiry, students are invited to recognize that there are many ways of sensing, knowing, and being.

The guide is organized into three sections. The first includes **Pre-Visit Activities** that introduce key ideas students will encounter in the exhibition. The second provides **On-Site Activities** that encourage students to slow down, engage their senses, and respond creatively to the artworks through observation, poetry, movement, and discussion. The final section offers opportunities for reflection, creative response, and continued learning after the visit or for classrooms engaging with the exhibition remotely.

The **Pre-Visit Activities** encourage students to explore embodiment, sensory experience, accessibility, and interdependence before entering the gallery. A glossary of terms introduces vocabulary related to disability studies, contemporary craft, and inclusive language while strengthening visual literacy and critical thinking. Additional activities invite students to investigate texture, perception, and the many ways people navigate and understand the world through relationships with their bodies, materials, environments, and one another.

During their visit to *Textures of Being*, students are encouraged to look closely, move slowly, and engage thoughtfully with each artwork. The on-site activities emphasize sustained observation, sensory awareness, embodied learning, and collaborative meaning-making. Through **Slow Looking**, students practice careful observation and discover how meaning unfolds over time. **Sensory Poetry** invites students to respond to artworks through imagination and the five senses, while **Embodied Response: Creating Living Sculptures** encourages groups to communicate ideas through posture, movement, and collaboration. Together, these activities position knowledge as something that

emerges through relationships—with artworks, materials, our own bodies, and one another.

An additional goal of the exhibition is to encourage students to think critically about how our communities, institutions, and environments shape experiences of disability, accessibility, and belonging. The activities invite students to recognize interdependence as a shared human experience and to imagine more inclusive ways of living, learning, and creating together. While these activities are intended to complement an exhibition visit, they are equally effective as stand-alone classroom experiences when visiting the exhibition is not possible.

The activities support the English Language Arts Common Core Standards by encouraging vocabulary development, interpretation, discussion, reflection, and creative expression. They also align with the Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Arts and Humanities (Grades 5–12), referenced throughout the guide. Through interdisciplinary connections, *Textures of Being* encourages students to explore the intersections of art, identity, disability, care, and community while recognizing accessibility and inclusion as shared responsibilities that enrich us all.

CRAFT EXPLAINED

A craft is a skill, especially involving practical arts. It may refer to a trade or a particular art. The term is often used to describe the family of artistic practices within the decorative arts that are traditionally defined by their relationship to functional or utilitarian products (such as sculptural forms in the vessel tradition) or by their use of such natural media as wood, clay, glass, fiber, and metal. At Contemporary Craft, the focus is on contemporary works in wood, metal, clay, glass, found materials, and fiber.

DISABILITY, CARE, AND ACCESS

The artworks in this exhibition explore disability, embodiment, identity, and the many ways people experience and navigate the world. Art can help us express and understand experiences that are often difficult to put into words. Throughout *Textures of Being*, artists share deeply personal perspectives that invite reflection on care, accessibility, belonging, and the richness of human difference.

Some of the artwork may resonate with your own experiences or those of people you know. It may also challenge assumptions about disability and accessibility or bring forward difficult emotions and memories. We encourage visitors to engage with the exhibition at their own pace, take breaks when needed, and care for themselves, their bodies, and others throughout their visit.

If you would like additional support, accessibility information, or opportunities to continue the conversation, Contemporary Craft staff are available to connect you with appropriate resources and community organizations.

PART 1: PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES

Engaging with the pre-visit activities will help students build background knowledge and explore the ideas they will encounter during their visit to Contemporary Craft. These activities are designed to be flexible—not prescriptive—and can be adapted to fit the needs of your classroom, teaching style, and schedule. Whether used as bell ringers, sketchbook prompts, discussion starters, or integrated into existing lessons, they are intended to spark curiosity, encourage observation, and prepare students to engage thoughtfully with the exhibition.

A **Glossary of Terms** is also included to introduce key vocabulary related to the exhibition, disability studies, and contemporary craft, helping to build a shared language and deepen students' understanding before they enter the gallery.

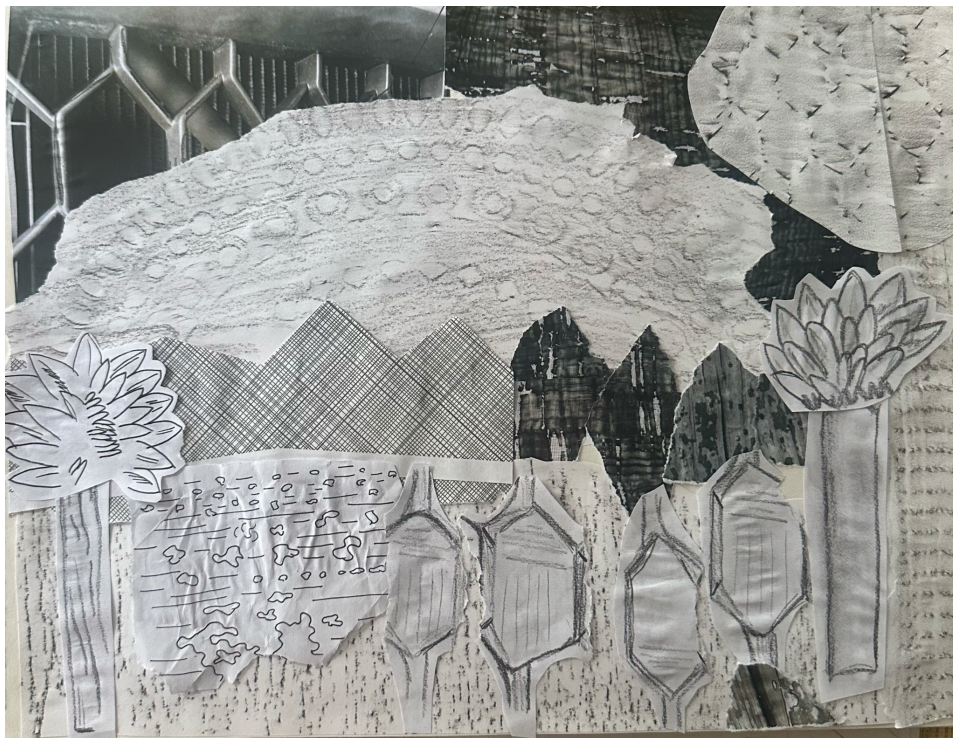
PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY 1

Texture Scavenger Hunt

Students collect small objects, photograph, sketch, or describe textures they encounter at home, school, or outdoors.

Guiding Questions

- Which textures feel comforting? Challenging? Unexpected?
- Which textures do you notice most often?
- How do different textures influence your mood or behavior?



Found photos, Frottage (Crayon/ Graphite Rubbing), and Tracing collaged on cardstock

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY 2

Sensory Mapping

Students document moments throughout the week when one sense (touch, taste, sight, smell, or hearing) becomes especially important. Students can track the sense and the sensation in a sketchbook or journal, post-it notes, or a calendar tracker.

Then, invite students to use their data to reflect:

- color-coded graphs
- maps
- journals
- abstract drawings
- timelines

Then compare—not to find a "correct" experience—but to recognize sensory diversity in your classroom community.

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Sense							
Sensation							

Example Guide

Sense	Sight	Hearing	Sight	Taste	Smell	Touch	Hearing
Sensation	Bright Lights	Birds Chirping	Friends Red Shirt	Thai Food Leftovers	Wet Dog	Dog Fur pets	Fire Alarm

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY 3

Ways of Knowing

Invite students to complete simple tasks using different approaches.

For example:

- Identify an object by touch alone
- Navigate a familiar classroom while listening closely
- Communicate a story without speaking for two minutes
- Describe an object without naming it

Reflection:

- Which strategies felt natural?
- Which felt unfamiliar?
- Did anyone solve the task differently?

The goal isn't the simulation of disability but the recognition of multiple ways of gathering information.

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY 4

Material Conversations

Set out unfamiliar materials:

- velvet
- Burlap or woven cloth
- wood
- aluminum foil
- clay
- wire
- felt
- rubber/ plastic
- wax

Without making anything, students simply interact with them.

Group Journal/ Reflection Questions:

- Which materials invite you?
- Which resists you?
- Which reminds you of memories?
- How does your body respond?

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY 5

Hidden Differences

Students anonymously answer prompts on pieces of paper:

- Something that helps me learn...
- Something people don't know about me...
- Something that makes school easier...
- Something that makes school harder...

Shuffle and read responses aloud.

This emphasizes that many experiences are invisible and potential shapes of connection.

Hidden Difference Sentence Starters

Something that helps me learn...
Something people don't know about me...
Something that makes school easier...
Something that makes school harder...

Cut on Bold Line

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Ableism: Attitudes, beliefs, practices, or systems that value certain bodies and minds over others, resulting in discrimination or barriers for disabled people.

Accessibility: The design of spaces, information, programs, and experiences so that everyone can participate as fully and independently as possible.

Accommodation: A change or support that helps remove barriers so people with disabilities can fully participate in school, work, and community life.

Art Therapy: an integrative mental health and human service profession in which clients, facilitated by an art therapist (a master's level art therapy degree is required for entry-level practice) use art media, the creative process, applied psychological theory, and human experience to improve cognitive and sensorimotor functions, foster self-esteem and self-awareness, cultivate emotional resilience, promote insight, enhance social skills, reduce and resolve conflicts and distress, and advance societal and ecological change.

Assistive Technology: Tools, devices, or software that support people in everyday activities, communication, mobility, learning, or creative expression.

Asymmetrical: not identical on both sides of a central line.

Belonging: The feeling of being accepted, respected, valued, and included within a community.

Borders: an outer part or edge; boundary.

Boundaries: a line that marks the limits of an area; a dividing line.

Care: The practice of supporting ourselves, one another, and our communities through empathy, respect, shared responsibility, and relationship.

Concept: a form of illustration where the main goal is to convey a visual representation of a design, idea, and/or mood.

Contemporary: belonging to or occurring in the present

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.

Disability: A natural part of human diversity that may affect the way a person moves, communicates, learns, senses, or interacts with the world. Disability can result from the interaction between an individual's body or mind and societal barriers.

Disability Justice: A movement led by disabled activists that works toward equity, collective access, interdependence, and the inclusion of people with multiple marginalized identities.

Embodied Knowledge: Understanding gained through bodily experience, movement, sensation, memory, and lived experience rather than words alone.

Embodiment: The lived experience of being in a body and how our bodies shape the ways we perceive, move through, and understand the world.

Empathy: The ability to understand and appreciate another person's experiences and perspectives with openness and respect.

Figurative: describes artwork—particularly paintings and sculptures—which are clearly derived from real object sources, and are therefore by definition representational.

Functionality: the purpose of the materials and how they contribute to the purpose of the artist and the audience.

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

Inclusion: Creating environments where everyone feels welcomed, valued, respected, and able to participate fully.

Interdependence: The understanding that people rely on one another in different ways throughout life. Interdependence recognizes connection and mutual support as strengths.

Intersectional: referring to the interconnected and interdependent worldview regarding the nature of the relationship between various social categorizations and movements

Invisible Disability: A disability or health condition that may not be immediately noticeable to others but still affects a person's daily life.

Juxtapose: the state of being close together or side by side (in action or thought).

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

Lived Experience: Knowledge gained through personal experience rather than observation alone.

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

Metaphor: something used, or regarded as being used, to represent something else; emblem

or symbol.

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

Neurodiversity: The idea that natural differences in how people think, learn, process information, and experience the world are valuable forms of human diversity.

Political: of or relating to the government or the public affairs of a country

Privilege: a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group of people

Prescriptive: founded on, or determined by prescription or by long-standing custom

Public installation: the act of installing or the state of being installed in a space open to all persons in the community

Public policy: the principles, often unwritten, on which social laws are based

Reframe: frame or express (words or a concept or plan) differently

Reuse: process of giving apparent waste an artistic or practical second use, and in doing so draws attention to the issues of overconsumption and pollution; also known as upcycling.

Sculpture: a three-dimensional art form representing figurative or literal subjects

Sensory Experience: How people receive and respond to information through the senses, including sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste, movement, and balance.

Sensory Processing: The way the brain organizes and responds to information received through the senses. Everyone processes sensory information differently.

Social action: individual or group behavior that involves interaction with other individuals or groups, especially organized action toward social reform.

Symbol: a thing that represents or stands for something else, especially a material object representing something abstract

Textile: a cloth or woven fabric

Universal Design: Designing environments, products, and experiences so they are usable by as many people as possible without needing later modifications.

Value: An element of art, value refers to the lightness or darkness of a color. Value becomes critical in a work that has no colors other than black, white, and a gray scale. For a great

example of value in action, think of a black-and-white photograph. You can easily visualize how the infinite variations of gray suggest planes and textures.

Visibility: The ways people, identities, or experiences are seen, represented, or recognized in society.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Humanities Grade Level: 6-12

PA Academic Standards for the Arts and Humanities

9.2.8 Historical and Cultural Contexts – Grade 5-12 A, D, E, F, G

A. Explain the historical, cultural, and social context of an individual work in the arts.

Students examine how a work of art reflects the time, place, culture, and society in which it was created.

D. Analyze a work of art from its historical and cultural perspective.

Students interpret artworks by considering the artist's background, historical events, cultural influences, and intended meaning.

E. Analyze how historical events and culture impact forms, techniques, and purposes of works in the arts.

Students explore how social movements, technology, traditions, or historical moments influence artistic expression.

F. Know and apply appropriate vocabulary used between social studies and the arts and humanities.

Students use discipline-specific language to discuss artworks, history, culture, and artistic processes.

G. Relate works in the arts to geographic regions.

Students recognize how place, environment, and community influence artistic traditions and practices.

9.3.8 Critical Response - Grade 8 A, D, G

A. Know and use the critical processes of the examination of works in the arts and humanities.

Students observe, describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate works of art using appropriate art vocabulary and evidence

D. Evaluate works in the arts and humanities using a complex vocabulary of critical response.

Students use discipline-specific vocabulary to discuss and evaluate artworks thoughtfully and respectfully.

G. Compare and contrast critical positions or opinions about works in the arts and humanities.

Students recognize that artworks can be interpreted in multiple ways and support their own viewpoints with evidence while listening to and respecting differing perspectives.

9.4.12 Aesthetic Response – Grade 12 A, B, D

A. Evaluate an individual's philosophical statement on a work in the arts and its relationship to one's own life based on knowledge and experience.

Students consider an artist's ideas, intentions, or philosophy and reflect on how those ideas connect to their own experiences and beliefs.

B. Describe and analyze the effects that works in the arts have on groups, individuals, and the culture.

Students examine how art can influence emotions, challenge assumptions, inspire dialogue, and contribute to cultural understanding and social change.

D. Analyze and interpret a philosophical position identified in works in the arts and humanities.

Students identify and interpret the broader ideas or worldviews expressed through works of art.

PART 2: ON-SITE ACTIVITY

The Artists and the Contemporary Craft team have been busy designing and creating an amazing experience for you and your students. Of course, the focus of your visit is the works of art, the expert facilitation, and the series of opportunities to respond to the art while you visit the exhibit. This curriculum guide section is meant to provide support and enhancement along the way.

During your visit, we encourage you to document and share your experience and perspectives by engaging with the Response Station at the exhibit as well as using the following hashtags:

General *Textures of Being* Hashtag: **#TexturesofBeingCC**

SLOW LOOKING: ATTENDING TO THE WORK

Many museum visitors spend only a few seconds looking at a work of art before moving on. *Textures of Being* invites us to do something different—to slow down, become attentive, and notice what unfolds through sustained observation. The Slow Looking activity is inspired by Harvard Project Zero's work on careful observation and thoughtful interpretation (Tishman, 2018).

Choose one artwork and spend three to five uninterrupted minutes looking without reading the wall label or artist's statement. Rather than searching for a single meaning, allow yourself to become curious about the materials, textures, colors, forms, and sensations the work evokes.

Afterward, discuss with a partner or small group:

What do you see?	What do you wonder?
• What is the first thing that catches your eye? • What materials do you notice? • What colors, shapes, or textures stand out? • Where does your eye travel around the artwork?	• What questions do you have about this artwork? • Why do you think the artist chose these materials? • What story might this artwork be telling?
What do you notice after looking longer?	Make a connection:
• What small details did you miss at first? • Does anything surprise you? • What do you think the artist spent the most time making?	• Does this artwork remind you of a place, object, memory, or experience? • How does this artwork make you feel? • If this artwork had a sound, texture, or weather, what would it be?

Only after this conversation should students read the artist's statement. Rather than comparing "right" and "wrong" interpretations, consider:

- What surprised you?
- What did the artist help you notice differently?
- How did your observations connect with the artist's perspective?

Slow Looking Tracking Sheet: Textures of Being

Student Name:

Date:

What do you see?	What is the first thing that catches your eye? What materials do you notice? What colors, shapes, or textures stand out? Where does your eye travel around the artwork?	
What do you notice after looking longer?	What small details did you miss at first? Does anything surprise you? What do you think the artist spent the most time making?	
What do you wonder?	What questions do you have about this artwork? Why do you think the artist chose these materials? What story might this artwork be telling?	
Make a connection:	Does this artwork remind you of a place, object, memory, or experience? How does this artwork make you feel? If this artwork had a sound, texture, or weather, what would it be?	

Collective Found Poem: Textures of Being

Many of the artists in *Textures of Being* invite us to think about how our bodies help us understand the world. Rather than describing exactly what you see, this activity encourages you to respond to an artwork through your senses and imagination.

Sensory Poem

Many of the artists in *Textures of Being* invite us to think about how our bodies help us understand the world. Rather than describing exactly what you see, this activity encourages you to respond to an artwork through your senses and imagination.

Choose one artwork that captures your attention. Spend a few minutes looking closely before writing.

Complete the prompts below.

This artwork looks like...

This artwork sounds like...

This artwork feels like...

This artwork smells like...

This artwork tastes like...

Finish your poem with one final line:

This artwork reminds me...

or

This artwork makes me think about...

There are no right or wrong answers. Your poem is a personal response to the artwork and reflects how you experience it

Voices of Being in the Gallery

Working in groups of three to five, each student selects one artwork that resonates with them.

Without discussing the artworks at first, each student writes:

- one word
- one phrase
- one sensory description
- one feeling
- one question

Inspired by the artwork.

The group gathers their words and arranges them into a collaborative free-verse poem. Students may repeat words, rearrange lines, or leave pauses to emphasize rhythm and meaning.

The resulting poem becomes a collective response to the exhibition rather than an explanation of any single artwork.

Sense Poem Tracking Sheet: Textures of Being

Student Name:

Date:

One Word	
One Phrase	
One Sensory Description	
One Feeling	
One question	

Student Name:

Date:

One Word	
One Phrase	
One Sensory Description	
One Feeling	
One question	

Student Name:

Date:

One Word	
One Phrase	
One Sensory Description	
One Feeling	
One question	

Voices of Being Tracking Sheet: Textures of Being

Student Name:

Date:

This artwork looks like...	
This artwork sounds like...	
This artwork feels like...	
This artwork smells like...	
This artwork tastes like..	
Option 1) This artwork reminds me...	
Option 2) This artwork makes me think about...	

Embodied Response: Creating Living Sculptures

Many artists in *Textures of Being* explore how our bodies shape the ways we experience, understand, and connect with the world. This activity invites students to respond to an artwork through movement rather than words, encouraging close observation, collaboration, and creative expression.

Working in small groups, choose one artwork that resonates with your group. Spend a few minutes looking closely at the work before discussing your observations. Rather than recreating the artwork, create a living still sculpture using only your bodies to capture the ideas, emotions, or relationships you see. Think about how posture, gesture, spacing, and balance can communicate meaning without speaking. Please also be mindful of your body's positioning in the gallery so as not to harm any of the works.

As you plan your sculpture, consider the following questions:

- What stands out to you about this artwork?
- How might this artwork be expressed through the body?
- Where do you notice connection, support, or distance?
- What emotions or ideas are suggested through posture or movement?
- How can your group work together to create a shared response?

Once your group has created its sculpture, hold the pose for 20–30 seconds while classmates observe silently. Afterward, invite observers to share their responses:

- What do you notice?
- What relationships do you see?
- What emotions, ideas, or stories come to mind?
- What details make you think that?

There are no right or wrong interpretations. Just as each artist communicates through materials and making, each group's living sculpture offers a unique way of responding to the artwork through the language of the body.

POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

POST-VISIT ACTIVITY 1

My Everyday Supports

Brainstorm with students everything that supports them throughout a normal day.

Examples:

- glasses
- headphones
- elevators
- captions
- backpacks
- phone reminders
- shoes
- favorite pen or object
- friends
- routines

Then discuss: We all rely on support. What does this tell us about independence?

Invited to create works of art: drawings, collages, and clay replicas convey reflection on interdependence.

POST-VISIT ACTIVITY 2

Hands-on Activity: Wearable Textures

Many works in *Textures of Being* discuss invisible disabilities and the attempt to quantify unseen pain and hardship. Pieces like Patrick Bell's *What Brings You in Today? (II)* and Lydia Wickham's *baseline* grapple with these themes through the industry standard Wong-Baker FACES Pain Rating Scale, and the distillation of experience into a single emotion. One way artists attempt to deal with this disconnect through texture and materiality. These mediums help us understand how textures can help communicate our emotions to others.

Utilizing the Wong-Baker faces, students will be tasked with creating a wearable pin that expresses one of the emotions on the scale. By exploring materials through touch, students will be tasked with finding a range of textures that influence their emotions. While a cotton ball may evoke a sense of comfort and softness to one student, for others it may trigger a wispieness that sticks to rough fingers like spiderwebs. Students will use these mundane materials to create a brooch out of textures that speak to them in one way or another in a piece of wearable art.

Follow up suggestion: Once students have had time to create their brooches, try swapping with a neighbor to experience their textures. Are you able to guess where on the scale this brooch represents? How might your experience with the texture differ from your neighbor's?

Materials

- Box of textures (beads, plastics, wire, yarn/string, etc)
- Scissors
- Laser Cut brooch setting
- Pin backs
- Needles available
- School Glue (or wood glue)

Directions

1. Pick the brooch of your choice
2. Discover and play with textures and determine how they make you feel
3. Attach your textures to the brooch using glue
4. Layer and overlap the can sections on top of your brooch until you find a layout you like
5. Finish your brooch by either sewing through exposed holes, or sandwiching with wood glue to attach the ring of your brooch
6. Be as creative as you can!



Wong-Baker FACES® Pain Rating Scale



0

No
Hurt



2

Hurts
Little Bit



4

Hurts
Little More



6

Hurts
Even More



8

Hurts
Whole Lot



10

Hurts
Worst

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

Please complete this form after you use these materials. We appreciate your input, as it directs our future educational materials.

- 1. Please share one sentence or expression that describes your reaction to these materials:**

- 2. Explain how you used this material with your students:**

- 3. How do you think your students would describe the exhibit and the activities you completed from this packet:**

- 4. How much class time did you devote to these materials:**

- 5. Did this packet of materials provide you with sufficient background information and ideas, and in what ways:**

Thank you for your time and feedback!

Please send this completed form to the Education Department, Contemporary Craft, 5645 Butler Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15201, or by email:

thestudio@contemporarycraft.org

CREDITS & REFERENCES

This curriculum guide was developed by Eric Anthony Berdis and the Education Department at Contemporary Craft, along with the artists from the exhibition, who provided materials, images, inspiration, and statements for use.

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Wagner, B. J. (1976). *Dorothy Heathcote: Drama as a learning medium*. National Education Association.

Additional Website Resources:

Disability Resource Center Pittsburgh: <https://www.pittsburghpa.gov/Resident-Services/ADA-Disability-Rights/Disability-Resources-Center>

Guides to Slow Looking:

- 1) Tate Museum: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/guide-slow-looking>
- 2) Thinking Museum Podcast [what-is-slow-looking-and-how-can-i-get-started](https://www.thinkingmuseum.org/what-is-slow-looking-and-how-can-i-get-started)
- 3) Museum of Modern Art: <https://www.moma.org/visit/itineraries/slow-looking>

Living Sculpture:

- 1) Anthony Waratah, the Stone Stockman: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtklgG8XTC4>
- 2) Drama-Based Pedagogy University of Texas <https://dbp.theatredance.utexas.edu/teaching-strategies/statues>
- 3) Theatre of the Oppressed, Centre for Applied Theatre:
<https://centerforappliedtheatre.org/theatre-of-the-oppressed/>

Sense and Mind Mapping:

- 1) Silent Sense: <https://mindmapinspiration.com/silent-sense/>
- 2) Walking Lab: <https://walkinglab.org/mapping-senses-memories/>