

Art for Reflection and Change



Summary: This activity uses 2 drawings from the war in Ukraine as a tool to develop empathy. Art and poetry/writing are used as a tool for reflection on other people's experiences as well as a tool for reflection on one's own feelings.



Main age group(s) for activity or activities:
15-18



Time needed
2 x 45-minutes



Materials needed

Paint, markers, colored pencils, felt-tip pens, paper (any other material for drawing and painting)



Objectives

- By examining items and images created by children from war zones, this activity aims to help high school students develop a better understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by children living in conflict situations. Through this process, students will be encouraged to develop empathy for others and to see the world from different perspectives.
- Through this activity, students will understand the importance of art in reflection, healing and self-expression.
- To promote empathy and understanding towards children in war zones by encouraging students to explore and reflect on the experiences of others through art.

Resources

A Burning House

This is a drawing of a destroyed, burning house. I live on the fifth floor and I see a lot of burning houses. The red color represents the fire that makes a house go up in flames.

Whenever I take a walk with my family, I see many destroyed buildings with holes in their roofs. I often think about the people who lived there and who had to flee, having lost everything. When the war started, I began to worry about all the “booms” that make the windows tremble. Now, I am still afraid of shelling, but I hug my sister and our cat and that makes me feel better.

My sister is celebrating her birthday soon. I wish there wouldn't be any shootings on that day—we would go visit the circus and everything would be good on that day.

Sasha (F), b. 2008, Ukraine



Nyusha

A lot of people left our village during the war. Sometimes, they would ask my mom to take care of their animals while they were away. Because she felt sorry for them, mom took care of the animals even when they were on the other side of the village. We had a dog who was very scared of the shelling. He would always hide in the basement with us. He would accompany me while we ran to the basement and he would open the doors so that we could see our yard. Unfortunately, he was very old and soon died.

In 2018, we went to the seaside. There was no shooting and shelling at the seaside; everything appeared still and it was a good place to have a rest. We visited a theme park where we rode on the Ferris Wheel. I played a game and won a pig plush toy. I named her Nyusha. I wouldn't ever be able to give her up because heavy shooting may continue and I'm afraid that nobody would be able to return her to me. Instead, I decided to make a drawing of Nyusha for the Museum.



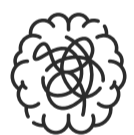
Karina (F), b. 2009, Ukraine

CATEGORIES



Themes

Being a child in war/everyday life in war, becoming and being a refugee, fleeing, escape, destruction, rebuilding (lives), resilience, children's rights



Emotions and feelings

Empathy, Loss and Grief, Hope



Types of objects

Images created by children



Methodologies

Writing, creating art

Short Background

Using art as a tool for self-expression can be an effective way to develop empathy because it allows individuals to express their emotions and experiences in a creative and nonverbal way. Art can transcend language barriers and cultural differences and evoke an emotional response from the viewer.

Through creating art, individuals can develop a better understanding of their own emotions and experiences, which in turn can increase their ability to understand and empathize with others who have gone through similar experiences. Art can also be used to raise awareness about social and political issues and can be a powerful tool for promoting social justice, healing and inspiring positive change.

Prep work by the teacher/educator

There is no extensive preparatory work required to implement this activity, only to prepare the supplies and materials. Since students are asked to reflect on their own emotions and experiences, it is important to create a safe space for this in the classroom. Teachers/educators should feel comfortable guiding the processes of self-reflection among teenagers and also group work in the classroom.

Teachers/educators can choose to introduce the war in the Ukraine to help contextualize the activities.

Activities

Step 1

Start by introducing Sasha's and Karina's stories to the students, the teacher/educator provides them with the stories and prepares the printed out versions of their drawings. Each student needs access to these (either printed or projected to the whole group).

Step 2

In a short brainstorm have the students answer the following questions:

- 1 What do you think Sasha and Karina were thinking and feeling when they created these drawings (making a distinction between thoughts and feelings)?
- 2 How do these images and stories make you feel? Can you explain why?
- 3 To what extent do these images and stories relate to your own experiences and/or emotions (to the extent the students are willing to share this)?

Step 3

Divide students into smaller working groups. Provide them with art supplies and ask them to write a joint poem or story in response to either Sasha's or Karina's story. Some students might prefer to make a drawing to accompany the story or poem. They should work towards a class presentation. These stories and/or poems do not need to be long, but the result of careful reflection.

After the students have created their own joint presentations (second class period), ask them to briefly present what they have created to the whole class.

Step 4

Have a class discussion about the importance of art in healing and self-expression, and how it can be used as a tool for empathy and understanding.

Possible Follow up Activities

Students can create an exhibition in class (or in a presentation folder) with the poems/stories they have created.

Another follow up activity can be for students to go onto the internet and find other art made by children during war. Smaller groups of students can each choose a different conflict and try to find examples of art by children (they might especially relate to art by teenagers of their own age). Have them discuss the search terms they used. The discussion can center on similarities and differences.