

MIA Teachers Resources

Teaching the Arts Online Newsletter Focus Group

1/29/04 – Notes

Welcome:

- This is a focus group we are conducting for the Minneapolis Art Institute. The purpose is to help the MIA make the new online newsletter, “Teaching the Arts”, a better resource for teachers. The focus group results will be used by the MIA’s Teacher Resources staff to improve its usefulness.

A. Introductions and background:

1. Briefly introduce your self and tell us what grade and subjects you teach. Also, tell us if and how you have used resources from the MIA in the past.
 - [A total of eight art educators from the Twin Cities area participated in this focus group. Four taught at the secondary school level, and the other four taught within the K-8 level. One was an art therapist; another was with a home school organization. The MIA resources they have used include: field trips to the museum, ArtsConnectEd, classes, guided tours, lectures, student docent training, the Art Adventure program, the MIA library, the online newsletter, and VTS training.]
2. Tell me a little bit about your knowledge of the MIA collection – very, somewhat, not very knowledgeable?
 - Not asked
3. How many online newsletters to you receive? How do you use them? How does Teaching the Arts compare with others? (describe, list others for comparison)
 - [Of the 8 participants, 6 said they received one online newsletter, one person said she received six, and one person said she received none.]

B. General reaction to Teaching Arts

(Handout printout of first page, projected on screen)

1. Tell me your first impressions of this page of the newsletter.
 - Easy to read. It’s not cluttered.
 - Lots of white space
 - Colorful
 - Images connect nicely with the headlines
 - It’s well placed. You can skim the material quickly and know what you want.

2. What do you think the objectives are for this page?
 - An overview
 - A table of contents

3. Now I would like your reactions to some specific aspects of the page:
 - a) Amount of information
 - Great. It's not so cluttered.
 - But I'm wondering why there's so much white space between the world religions.
 - Grouped in categories
 - I knew it was on line and went to look for it. I went to the MIA home page, typed in "teaching the arts," and that link did not come up. I had to go through the back door, through the educator one. It was not easy to find.
 - I like the pictures, but it's a lot for the first page. A lot of web sites have five or six bars with more general topics. Maybe just have a "recent issues" button instead of listing them all on this first page. This is a lot for me to read through if I'm just looking for, say, a tour.
 - I like that I can look at the current issue in five minutes and then go back when I have more time.

 - b) Type of information/links
 - There's a lot there.
 - You can always go to the top and go to exhibits...you can pretty much maneuver your way anywhere you want to.
 - I like that you can access the old issues, too.

 - c) What other information might be helpful on this page
 - I like how it's blue and black. You can skim the blue...I learned to just read that.
 - I have not accessed the events for teachers yet. Is that more than we get in the hard copy?
 - They should let people know what's free. Make "FREE" in caps so it jumps out at you. And make sure your email address is protected.
 - Have button "register to receive this newsletter monthly" instead of having more text on this page.

C. Reaction to specific segment—"5 Facts About Indian Art"

1. Tell me your first impressions of this page/issue of the newsletter.
 - Nice.
 - Colorful
 - Easy to read
 - I like the "5."
 - I like the placement of the numbers.

- The visuals could be bigger.
 - I don't like the underlining. It makes it hard to read.
 - I like the underlining [others].
2. What do you think the objectives are for this topic?
- Makes it teachable. I've got five things; I can teach the kids five things. It's already organized.
 - Gives me direction and focus, so I know where I can go with this.
 - It helps you look at art in a different way – it's not only the spiritual figures of Indian gods – you think about how they're placed, how they depict religious ideas, clothing or jewelry.
 - We're being educated as well.
 - It allows you to go with the younger kids or the older kids – can pick according to age appropriateness.
3. Now I would like your reactions to some specific aspects of the page:
- a) Amount of information
- We'd link that to the world culture stories. It would be an enrichment.
 - I like how it's organized with the five sections. If you choose this one, you get three more.
 - It would be really nice for non-art teachers – history teachers – to be able to bring art in.
- b) Type of information and reading level
- This is more for the educators. This reading level, certainly for my students, would be too advanced. But for me, it's perfect – to educate me, so I can pass it along to them at their level of language.
 - It's okay for high school students [others agreed].
 - Might be nice if they put some references in there, a bibliography.
 - Other links.
 - And related children's literature – a reading list.
 - I like being able to magnify the pictures.
 - And to be able to print them out.
 - You can focus in on an image.
 - But with ArtsConnectEd, too, you can only get a portion of the picture if you zoom in on it. It would be nice to get a large picture of the whole thing that you could print out.
 - Yes, it would be nice to get it bigger.
 - It also helps when you're using the VTS method – when someone says something and you reinforce it visually.
4. Let's explore the "Activities" section
- a) Does this section give you enough direction? If not, how would you change it?

- They don't exactly have lesson plans, but there's still a lot to work with.
 - It's more about looking, asking questions. I like where they ask, "Where do *you* see different adornment?"
 - Who are they talking to there? For elementary, do they know the word *adornment*? "Where do you see?" sounds so young, then they use "adornment."
 - When it says "Click here," I always want to click on it. I want to see more.
 - At the bottom it says "Trade your description with someone else..." so it's obviously written for the student. ...But it's not real clear who the audience is on this page. It has nice ideas but it doesn't seem consistent.
- b) How adaptable to your, or your student's level is it?
- [See above]
- c) Have you used the "Art Collector" component before? Why or why not?
- It's a good thing.
 - Fun
- d) How have you used it? How would you suggest changing it?
- I haven't had students use it, but I sure could.
 - [Someone raised issue of appropriateness of using religious symbols within certain contexts— problems of mixing cultures – sensitivity needed, e.g., shields shouldn't face each other.]

D. Reaction to specific segment—"Object in Focus"
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1. Tell me your first impressions of this page/issue of the newsletter.
 - I like when they explain what it all means, what the artist was thinking.
 - I like how large it is, because the painting has so much in it.
 - Especially if they're doing one of those VTS observations. It reminds me of people in the group saying what they see in the painting. I don't mind the straight declarative sentences.
 - The image is much bigger – it's great. I have it set up in my classroom, and we use it, but it would be hard to see from 30 feet away.
 - It's difficult for me to show it to the class – unless I printed one out for each person.
2. What do you think the objectives are for this topic?
 - See above
3. Now I would like your reactions to some specific aspects of the page:
 - a) Amount of information
 - Seems just right

- The key ideas should be on the first page – or higher up, more readily visible.

b) Type of information

- I'd put the artist & title right under the picture.
- It's more accessible.

[Click on Key Idea]

- I like the key ideas not right next to the pictures – it kind of gives the answer away.
- The activities are more clearly written than the other one – definitely a lesson plan.
- It talks about the work more.
- Just enough information for each key idea [all agreed]
- I was able to read through the whole thing quickly.
- I didn't want to stop reading.

c) Reading level (probe for how it will be used – for self or for students, what students would it be appropriate for?)

- See above

4. Let's explore the "Activities" section

a) Does this section give you enough direction? If not, how would you change it?

- They're doable
- You can do it them in 55-minute segments.

b) How adaptable to your, or your student's level is it?

- Very.

c) Have you used the "Art Collector" component before? Why or why not?

- Do they have a bio of the artist?
- It would be nice to have other works by him – links.
- It's not that hard to get them off of Google.
- If they can't show them, could MIA just list his other works?
- History classes would really like this because it relates to some of the themes of the war.

d) How have you used it? How would you suggest changing it?

- Not asked

D. More detail on Teacher's use of the newsletter materials
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1. Which format (broad topic -5 facts vs. exploring a single work of art) do you find more interesting/rewarding?

- I like the Object in Focus – the image is larger, and the script is appropriate

for my kids' age level.

- But Indian Art – you wouldn't want one image, because it's a much bigger topic. It makes sense that there's a difference in their format.
- Both formats are useful. [all agreed]
- The advantage of the Indian art format is that we look particularly look at [unclear] and have five images to choose from.

2. What other topics would you like to see on this list eventually?

- What is their goal? What do they have in mind?
- How long will George Washington be accessible?

Good question. What do you suggest?

- If they take the time and go to the trouble to make this, they should archive it.
- We need to know the "expiration date."

Should they archive by school year?

- Yes, that would make sense.
- I don't know if doing it by year would make any sense.
- Do it by subject.
- I found ArtsConnectEd difficult at the beginning - not categorized the way we do it. We need Renaissance, Baroque, etc.
- Then cross-reference by topic and era.

Any other topics?

- Multicultural
- I'd look for more classical periods.

3. How have you used, or do you imagine you might use, these materials?

Curriculum uses:

a) As enrichment for early finishers?

- February is my big month – "I Love to Read" month, President's Day – we need George Washington, will talk about the myths of his life
- I start a new semester on Monday, will go from February through June. ...Classes are getting bigger, there's not room to bring in equipment, so students won't be doing PowerPoint presentations. I need to figure out how to get students connected to the Internet instead of them creating their own presentations.

b) Background for self?

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c) Research assignments for students?

- Instead of “Related Activities,” make them “Classroom Activities.”
- I’d like to figure out a way to use these in my classroom.
- I thought I’d use “The Skaters” as a model for student research.
- I called the MIA resource center – they don’t have slides or videos I can check out. I’d like to be able to check them out.
- Include a timeline so you can locate works of art in history.
- Yes – I’d like to know the dates of all that pottery.
- When I saw “The Skaters” was from 1932, I thought of how it was the same year that Dr. Seuss wrote *Mulberry Street*, etc – can connect various events in the year.
- Or the WWI poets, etc.
- The Web site should tell us where to find the work in the Museum – and is it currently on exhibit?
- Aren’t these always focused on the current exhibit?
- Yes – but what if you’re accessing it in the future?

[Showed Spanish version of Web page]

- My students write art history papers in Spanish.
- If you find something you like, can you find out if there are any existing lesson plans? Was it featured in a recent issue?
- Post information on former exhibitions.
- I guess we’re saying that all this information is valuable—don’t get rid of it.

Logistic and production aspects:

- a) Bookmarks on classroom computer for use online?
 - Minneapolis’ home page has a teacher resource that takes you back to art. It’s one of the 20 listed, so I can click on it right there.
 - You can do that with a class.
 - [unclear]

So there are technical difficulties, as always.
- b) Color or B+W printout for handout or file?
 - I’d do both
 - My school building is big. I’m not always near my computer, so I’d probably print it out.
- c) Computer lab assignment?
 - You could take a group into a computer lab, give them some objectives, and have them navigate through this. It gives them a different way of getting information. Plus kids these days—it’s probably their method of choice – to get in and click around.
 - You can give them the picture and ask them questions about it. With that, half the class was able to get into it right away...but you can always count on having some people there who know 20 times more than you do...

- I came from a computer-literate school and was shocked when I came to my new school and kids didn't know how to take out a CD from the computer.
- Kids could really learn a lot navigating through this.
- I still think it's for one student on one computer instead of bringing it into the classroom for all students to use at one time...I like to take this object in Focus, or maybe the Indian art, and make a lesson plan from it.
- I wonder if you could use the Art Collector and put these five images in your collection and then put them up on the screen...you build your own thing.
- Sometimes I have two or three people on one computer. They have a kind of communication where they talk to each other through the computers and they do "What do you see?" etc. (VTS)

E. Review the broadcast email message
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1. I'd like to go back to the broadcast email message and ask for some feedback on that before we finish up.

[Note: The messages were projected in the form of a Word document which had lost the formatting of the hyperlinks, probably contributing to the lack of recognition]

- I don't remember ever reading that.
- I don't either.
- I just went right to the newsletter, it seems like... Maybe I got it and just didn't see it.
- Is this the letter we would have gotten before we got any of the online newsletters?
- I just kind of skim it and click right away.
- All they need to tell us is "It's *here*."

How do you feel about:

a) Frequency

- Fine.
- There's so much there.
- And it takes a while to plan a lesson.
- More often would be overkill [all agreed]

b) Timing (mostly Thursday afternoons at present)

- That's fine.
- I print it out on Friday and take it home.
- Often you need to think about it. The weekend is nice for that.
- It would be nice if they could let us know what might be coming up next.
- That would be good [all agreed].
- They could have a "future issues" link.
- Then you could plan for the next week—or next month.

c) Tone of message

- Nice

- It's fine – businesslike and professional.
- Can you go back to her if you have a question?
- There is a way to talk to the people, to contact them.

If you wanted to contact MIA, would you call or email them?

- [Some said they'd email]
- It would depend on how much time I have and when I'm available during the day.
- Email is nice because you can do it when you have the time and can sit and think quietly about it. Then you don't have to sit on the phone with someone who you can't get off the phone with.
- People are very nice over there. I like to call them.
- I've called before, and I like to talk to a person.

F. Closing

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| <p>1. Any final comments, or unrealized opportunities you can think of?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I really like being able to access the information no matter where I am. I can be at the public library, or at school. At Minneapolis Public Schools, the way things are right now, we can be at a different school every year, and our mail isn't ever forwarded to us. So for me, my big change last year to a new building didn't have anything to do with this. I still get my information. • I like the fact that it's interested in our professional development—that it considers teachers a resource. And that it will continue on with our continuing education, and it's going to aid us in doing that. We're particularly concerned about that in our department. And it's very respectful of which, which we don't always get a lot of. So I like that. • It considers our lack of resources. I don't mind paying \$40 or whatever it is to take one of their classes...and you get a video, and you get a whole packet full of stuff. I just love taking their classes, because you <i>get</i> so much stuff. • And it's so useful. They <i>really</i> know what you need, and they give you what you need. • I like the ease [with which] I can go through this, because I'm not a computer person at all. I can do this. It's not confusing, it's not threatening. It's easy to find, user-friendly. • And it has a wealth of information—it's just <i>so</i> abundant. I really like that. And I'm really happy with the way it's presented. You could spend a lot of time just browsing through it. • I like getting a monthly reminder about looking at art, just something to browse for my personal interest. If I want to look at it or arrange for my students to look at it, that's possible. And I also like how parts of it are ready to use. I don't have to drag and drop all this, and put this together. I can send the students there as it is. • It's very user-friendly. • It's nice that the visuals are printable. • I like the ease. I went on last night to review what was there, and the ease, the |
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connections...I really liked the links. I can give the kids a website, let them know we'll be discussing it. It's something they can do in their homes. It's very transportable.

- You can always go search things, but this brings it to you.
- It's like bringing the Art Institute right into your office, or wherever you've got your email.
- I like the reminder, and so many different ways you could use it. You can send kids there, there's nothing inappropriate. I just wish there was *more*...When I went to the other issues, I wanted to see more, but I realize it takes time.
- I was impressed with how much they had done so far.
- It's really amazing that they've put so much together so quickly.
- This is well done.