Introduction: Art and . . .

Art dwells at the core of human endeavor. Since the first humans picked up tools, there has been art—beginning with images sculpted, incised, or painted. We may not know for certain the purposes of the Paleolithic bulls and bison painted in the caves at Altamira, Spain, or Lascaux, France. But we do know that these artworks, dating from 15,000 to 10,000 years B.C., were somehow connected to the lives of these ancient people. They likely were more than mere representations. Many authorities believe that the images were regarded as magical, painted to ensure a successful hunt, for example.

Through the centuries, such connections between art and ideas have been ever present. The purpose of this book is to explore connections between the visual arts specifically and "ideas" that cut across the school curriculum. If "art and . . ." were a question, the answer would be "everything."

Some art, as we suppose was the case in the prehistoric cave paintings, serves ritualistic purposes, from ancient magic and later religious symbolism to modern counterculture iconography. Two- and three-dimensional images, in other cases, represent or describe reality, fantasy, and all points in between, from the mundane to the sublime. Art provides the currency of ideas.

Busy educators may well ask, Why should I take the time to structure lessons that connect art and ideas? How will so doing make my students better at math or reading or writing? One answer is that the visual arts offer an alternative cognitive conduit for learning. Most classroom content is understood by students through reading and listening, rather than seeing and doing. Teachers of all subjects—especially those who have noticed

that the visual learners in their classes are struggling, which often can be the case in academic classes—will find that this manner of approaching subject matter offers a pathway to understanding content that is effective for students with various learning styles. As arts education scholar Elliot Eisner at Stanford University puts it: "One cognitive function the arts perform is to help us learn to notice the world."[1]

Another answer to the harried educator's question is that connecting art and ideas makes visible the notion of *transference*—that is, the application of knowledge or information gained in one context to some other context. Most teachers have had the frustrating experience of trying to get students to apply a concept that they have supposedly learned in another class to a project or an assignment in their class. Transference is not automatic. Applying knowledge across contexts is a learned skill. Helping students make connections between art and ideas is one strategy for teaching and reinforcing the skill of transference.

All of this is not to say that art is not important in itself and singularly worthy of study: art *as* idea. We do well to remember Swiss painter Paul Klee's (1879–1910) admonition: "Art does not reproduce what is visible; rather it makes things visible." Art has the unique quality of being simultaneously communicative and significant both in itself and beyond itself. For example, Picasso's famous mural *Guernica* is a compelling painting for its composition—the use of line and texture, shape and volume—its visual artistry, in other words. But it also conveys and connects to "ideas," such as Picasso's outrage at the bombing of the Spanish city of Guernica and thus also to the historical events surrounding the Second World War; and from a perspective of art history, it places Picasso's work in the pantheon of Modern art. Composition, technique, symbolism, history—all are connections between art and ideas.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Ideas are starting points—for thought, discussion, reading, viewing, writing, and making. This book is a collection of starting points designed to help teachers and students connect the visual arts to ideas that ripple across the school curriculum.

Most of these starting points can be used in more than one subject. For example, the ideas in Chapter 10, "Art and Performance," draw on the work of French writer, artist, and filmmaker Jean Cocteau. There are connecting ideas that can be used in instruction related not only to drama (theater, film) but also to a range of subjects, from literature and mythology to religious expression and history. Performance techniques and theater

technology are other connecting points. Another example—Chapter 6, "Art and History"—refers to Margaret Bourke-White's post–World War II photographs, which can be starting points for studying history, war, biography, and portraiture, in addition to photographic technique.

Each idea chapter focuses on a featured artist and includes information about other artists, writers, scientists, and so on. Teachers can use the central idea as a theme around which to build one or a series of lessons. And teachers of various subjects can use the same starting points to structure different learning journeys. The intent of the approach is to stimulate instructional creativity rather than to provide a cookbook of preconceived lessons.

In a very real sense, these idea chapters are intended to be brainstorms on paper rather than in-depth treatments of any artist or subject. They should encourage thought, stirring up related ideas simply from reading the chapters and considering their content. But each chapter goes a bit further with the inclusion of Visual Thinking Questions and Suggested Reading.

The Visual Thinking Questions are framed at the teacher level, with the notion that teachers will translate these general questions into a form that their students, at whatever level, can understand. These questions serve as additional starting points, and teachers can develop related questions to further extend the ideas.

Likewise, the books in each chapter's Suggested Reading section, most published later than 1990 (and therefore, hopefully, widely available), are included for the teacher, primarily for background information prior to teaching. But many of the suggested books also are suitable for students, particularly those in higher grades.

Finally, each chapter includes references to images, such as paintings, etchings, sculptures, and photographs. The images referenced in **bold** on first mention denote that the image is available on the Internet. Although all of these images can be found in books, almost universal access to the Internet may provide them more readily. Each chapter's Online Images section makes accessing the images on the Internet a quick and easy way to provide background or develop lessons based on the chapter ideas. Of course, a drawback is that Internet addresses can be ephemeral. All of the image URLs were current at the time of writing. If readers find a dead link, they should be able to locate the image on a different Web site by using a search engine, such as Google or Dogpile, and entering the title of the work and the artist's name.

A word of caution about the online images: They are intended for reference only. Readers are advised to check for copyright restrictions before downloading or reproducing any of the images.

Finally, as a further aid to lesson planning and instruction, at the end of this book is an Idea Guide with three sections: a Subject Guide relating the various chapters to major school subject areas (such as language arts, mathematics, and social sciences), a Keyword Index to ideas that can be found in the various chapters, and an Artist Name Index to help readers find all of the references to the various artists mentioned in the book. Because the chapters are relatively short, the Idea Guide entries are referenced to chapters, rather than individual pages. All of these handy references will be useful in designing effective and thought-provoking lessons that connect the visual arts to subjects across the curriculum.

Note

1. Eisner, Elliot W. (2002). *The arts and the creation of mind*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, p. 10.