

Editor's Letter

When people first walk into my artroom, they usually look up. I have the ceiling strung with rows of colorful cutout banners from Mexico, Chinese paper lanterns, and various mobiles, all gathered on my travels. On my walls I have embroidered hangings from India, Guatemalan appliqués, and other folk art. It was my interest in folk art that initially drew me to the intriguing commonalities in art from cultures around the world.

As works of art reflect the cultures in which they are created, I believe art presents a most effective medium through which to consider our commonalities. The visual language of art provides access to the interpretation of ideas, values, and concerns from cultures both contemporary and historic, even without the knowledge of a written or spoken language.

In *Education in a Multicultural World*, Ernest Boyer defines true multicultural education as that which affirms the sacredness of the individual while recognizing the universal nature of all peoples. By locating a common ground, Boyer suggests that a curriculum based upon cultural similarities encourages deeper understanding. Boyer characterizes this common ground as the human commonalities—eight universal cultural concepts shared by people throughout the world.

Works of art from any culture can be studied through an investigation of these themes. It is important to include in every art curriculum visual culture, folk art, popular art, artifacts, crafts, and functional items, as well as “fine art.” Commonalities can also include gender, age, disability, language, religion, social class, economic status, and political concerns.

Approaching art through Boyer’s commonalities requires students to apply critical and evaluative skills, to compare and contrast numerous perspectives, and to examine stereotypes, cultural assumptions, and students’ own prejudices. You can learn more about the human commonalities on pages 46–47 and at schoolartsonline.com.

What can you do? One approach is to first focus on the cultures represented in your own school and community, adding other perspectives where applicable and pertinent.

Another approach is to focus on a theme, investigate its expression in art in a number of cultures, and have students interpret the theme. And, one of the most valuable things you can do is to travel. You will never look at the world in the same way. I hope I run into you on the road!



Nancy in front of the Uncommon Market in Austin, Texas.

Boyer's Human Commonalities

1. All of us experience the cycles of life.
2. All of us develop symbols.
3. All of us respond to the aesthetic.
4. All of us have the capacity to recall the past and anticipate the future.
5. All of us develop some forms of social bonding.
6. All of us are connected to the ecology of the planet.
7. All of us produce and consume.
8. All of us seek meaning and purpose.

Nancy Walkup, Editor