Colors of a Creative Culture

a film by David Zucker

Ideas for Teachers and Community Leaders

Colors of a Creative Culture introduces us to artists in and around the city of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. In the film we see them engaged in community arts projects designed to counteract the visual pollution of graffiti and commercialism by filling public places with colorful hand-painted art. In both street interviews and studio interviews, the artists reveal their thinking about the value and importance of public art – how it breaks down barriers, how it brings art to people who might otherwise have little access, how it keeps the art rooted and creates a sense of purpose. We see children and adults joining professional artists in arts activities in a mood of fun and celebration. We hear a parish priest invoking parallels between spirituality and artistic expression, and speaking of the need to bring art to where the people are. One of the artists explains, "It's important to have art on the streets, because it breaks down the idea that art is something underground, out of reach of most people." "Street art is important," another comments, since "not everyone can pay to get in a museum or has the money to travel." All of the artists' actions and comments reflect the ways in which art can draw depth and meaning from the community that nurtures it. As the priest observes, "Our creation originates in the life we live."

Vibrant art and music, bright-eyed children, and engaged and creative adults, all in this distinctive Afro-Brazilian cultural context – these things are inherently inspiring. They also give rise to thoughts and ideas that go beyond this particular context. Because it is very much community-oriented, the film has the potential to be particularly motivating for people who work as teachers, community leaders, and parents. On this page you'll find a few thoughts on how *Colors of a Creative Culture* can work in the classroom or in other community contexts. What follows here are several topics for discussion following a viewing of the film, with an emphasis on ideas which might lead to group projects or other actions and activities.

Topics for Discussion about the Film, and Possibilities for Action

Each community -- in Brazil, in the United States, and elsewhere -- has its own cultural heritage, history, economic realities, and physical characteristics. Is the city of Salvador, where the film takes place, very different from your community? What do the people there share in common with your community, and what are the differences? Given these characteristics, would the arts projects depicted in the film work well in your community?

What are the differences between public art, graffiti and display advertising?

In many places and cultures, creative work is most often rooted within the context of surrounding points of reference such as community, ritual and belief, politics, or cycles of nature. In some European and American art, by contrast, there is a stronger component of individualism, a sense of the artist as the lonely visionary, and an emphasis on purely personal self expression. Are these two orientations incompatible? Does one have greater validity than the other? Do artists in your community tend to reflect one approach more than the other?

In this film, everyone seems to take part, including both trained artists and people young and old with no training at all. Is artistic training important? Is it a problem that some of the people doing the painting have no training in visual arts? Should there be a clear delineation between people who are seen as artists and people who are not, or are we all artists?

The artists and young people in *Colors of a Creative Culture* combine self-expression with community improvement using paints and brushes. Are there other, similar activities that could serve the same purpose? Would your community be better suited to different sorts of activities?

A few ideas: If the creative re-painting of public places isn't really needed in your town, then how about …

A day that emphasizes open-air music and community music groups; maybe some open-air theater or other performances.

A day that emphasizes community-based art, but with temporary displays and installations rather than permanent.

Other forms of visual art, such as sculpture. Would a single community-designed and -built monument or sculpture be better than painting?

How about creating new public spaces, such as designing a park or children's playground?

 Or creatively designed and decorated benches, bus shelters, or other useful public structures?

Could something take shape as a community-based writing project, perhaps leading to a book or newsletter, both from and for the community? How about a photography project?

Is there a way to take the creative energy seen in the film and channel it into plantings of greenery, or even something as prosaic as litter pickup?

And if you do litter pickup, consider this: is there potential for art work based in recycled materials? For example creating instruments & music made from found objects or designing fashion accessories for performance costumes.

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Cool, Creative, Constructive