



From the Top at Carnegie Hall
Episode 11: "Jumping Through Hoopes"

Airing on PBS (check local TV listings)
Available online at pbs.org

Learning Activity

Title: *Inside Out Portrait*

Description: In this activity, students will explore what it means to express their own authentic voices by examining Shundeena Beard's relationship to the viola as a vehicle for self-expression. Through a free writing exercise, students will explore how they best express themselves, considering the important activities, experiences and relationships in their lives. They will then create a self-portrait using mixed media that reflect their internal, authentic self. *[Note that this interdisciplinary activity involves listening, writing, and creating visual art and may take several class periods if fully implemented.]*

Grade Level: 9-12 (can be adapted for younger students)

National Music Standard: 8 Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts



Shundeena practicing for a Native American Festival in her community

Background

In this episode 17-year-old Shundeena Beard talks about how she is able to express herself fully through her chosen instrument, the viola. After a rough start on the violin at the age of 9, Shundeena was introduced to the deeper, mellow member of the string family by her teacher and quickly fell in love. We see how the viola is truly her voice in a beautifully expressive performance of the Rebecca Clarke *Sonata for Viola and Piano*. In the hometown footage we learn more about the other important parts of Shundeena's life: her love of different languages and cultures, her diverse family including Navajo Indian heritage and her close relationship with her brother. All of these things have shaped her as a person and supported and inspired her musical development.

4) Now **students will create personal visual maps** to explore their own authentic voices. Give students large sheets of unlined paper and different color markers/pencils. Ask them to take 10 minutes working alone to list all of the ways they express themselves. This can include any type of activity. Instruct the students to write the first things that come to mind without judging what they write. They can be as messy or neat as they like – there are no rules about how to organize the words on the page. Here are some questions for them to think about:

- What things do you absolutely love to do where you can lose track of time? What feels easy and natural to you? What do you most love to do? Why?
- What are you really good at? How does it make you feel?
- What makes you unique? Is there anything that you wish people knew about you?

5) Ask students to look over their lists and **circle the one or two items that feel the most important** in terms of how they express themselves to the world.

6) On a new page, have the students quickly **write all of the places, people, things and ideas** that are important to them. They should work quickly without thinking too long about any one thing.

7) Now have students start to **connect their favorite mode(s) of expression and the other important elements in their lives**, just as they did with Shundeena. They can do this on a new piece of paper or use the same one. Students can follow the visual model on the board or make up their own system: lists, random/scattered, spiral, circles and lines, a spider web or tree branch structure... whatever seems right to them.

8) Invite students to **share** their self-portrait pages with the class.

Extra Credit! Have the students create a more finished portrait at home using this writing exercise as the starting point. Tell them that they are now going to organize all of the ideas from the brainstorming list into a portrait that communicates who they are and how they express themselves in the world. Supply students with poster board and let them know that they can use any visual media, personal objects, magazine photos, text, fabric or natural materials to create their internal portraits. These self-portraits should reflect the students' personal means of expression, interests and talents – who they are *inside* as opposed to what they look like on the outside.

Find out more!

About Rebecca Clarke and the viola

Born in England in 1886, Rebecca Clarke was unusual for her time in being a woman who had a performing career as a violist and composed some of the most beautiful works of the 20th century. As one of the few women of her era attempting to make a professional life in music, she faced many obstacles, including the reluctance of publishers to take on her compositions. Her music has been "rediscovered" since her death in 1979.

<http://www.rebeccaclarke.org/life.html>

<http://www.ambache.co.uk/women.htm>

About self-portraits

An excellent visual arts lesson plan for middle school on multimedia self-portraits is at:
<http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/lessons/middle/Shannon-sculpture.htm>



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