

BEAUTY OF WATER CURRICULUM 01

Creative Collaboration and Water
www.beautyofwater.org



INTRODUCTION

The course described here explores creative collaboration relating to water. It is appropriate for a wide variety of groups. Recommended learning modalities include presentations from subject matter experts, discussions, journals, experiential activities, and collaborative, hands-on creation of art in nature. Participants will develop greater capacity to work together, gain deeper understanding of and sensitivity toward nature, particularly water, expand worldviews, and become more engaged in learning. This curriculum is written for course leaders. It can also be used by self-organizing groups in which everyone is a leader.

COURSE OVERVIEW

The first phase of this two-month course involves visits by guests to the class who provide presentations and interactive activities from fields of expertise such as art history, fine art, water activism, and other areas. During this phase the class visits a local water body for experiential learning including site-specific art making. Participants keep personal journals and meet regularly as a group with course leaders. The course culminates in a multi-day workshop at a local water body where participants collaboratively make art that responds to the theme *appreciation for water*. The course may be adapted in a variety of ways.

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Beauty of Water is an international, collaborative art project on the theme of appreciation for water. This course, initiated by Liza Behrendt, and the project that it arose from are both called Beauty of Water. You are encouraged to adapt this curriculum as you see fit. If you name your course "Beauty of Water" we ask that you keep the focus appreciative and inspirational, and tell students about our project, including providing our website address, shown below.

Please make a donation to Beauty of Water representing 4% of your course budget. Thank you! Beauty of Water is a project of the International Humanities Center, a nonprofit public charity exempt from federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the US Internal Revenue Code. Visit <http://www.beautyofwater.org/donate.html> for donation information. For consultation contact hello@beautyofwater.org ...And send stories if you use this curriculum, we'd love to hear from you!

PURPOSE

This Beauty of Water course is designed for learning on individual and collective levels, with multiple purposes and outcomes. Participants will:

- investigate relevant ecological issues (water) from multiple perspectives, and integrate findings.
- explore and develop the role of creativity and art in today's world.
- discover and invent creative or artistic processes.
- experience the thrill of becoming part of something that is meaningful and larger than one's self.
- renew visceral connection with the element of water.
- make art in nature.
- grow learning capacity through action and reflection, as well as through taking responsibility for aspects of the course.

This course has a profound impact on how participants experience the world within and around themselves. Students awaken more fully to important issues, become more optimistic about engaging those issues, develop creative possibilities in artistic and non-art contexts, welcome working with others, and take more interest in their learning. Artists become more deeply connected to their processes, expanding truth within their work. Non-artists become more aesthetically aware, and feel more confident about their creativity.

PREPARATION

1. IDENTIFY, INVITE AND COORDINATE SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS:

Reach out to a variety of local subject matter experts in art history, conceptual art and/or eco-art, different types of environmental or social activism, water administration, environmental education, and professional performing and fine arts. If you do not already have connections in these areas, ask friends and associates, or check websites and online networks. Line up three to five guests to visit your program on different days, or bring several together for a panel discussion.

Alternative or Additional: Screen two films about water, available from your local library or a film rental agency. Suggested films: "Flow for the Love of Water" by Irena Salina, "1000 Days and a Dream" by P Baburaj and C Saratchandran, or "Jalamarmaram" by TK Rajeev Kumar. The latter two films are in Malayalam and have excellent visuals that go beyond language. The Andy Goldsworthy film, "Rivers and Tides" [<http://www.riversandtides.co.uk/>] is also highly recommended.

2. INVESTIGATE LOCATIONS: We will assume that you have a place for participants to meet, such as a classroom. Beyond that you will want to think about the water bodies in your area, such as any rivers, lakes,

ocean beaches, ponds, wetland marshes, or snowy areas. Find out which areas are appropriate for a site visit where students will make art, considering safety, accessibility, applicable fees, governing authorities, aesthetics, onsite materials, and preferences. You may want to choose one location for a day visit, and another location for a final workshop. Ideally participants will help you select the location(s).

3. BUDGET: Budget considerations include travel expenses and honoraria for presenters, pay for course leaders, facility and equipment costs such as renting an LCD projector, storage if needed, art materials beyond found objects, and costs associated with documentation, such as website production, writing, printing, filming, editing and photography. You might provide journals and writing utensils to your participants, as well as meals on workshop days, depending on the resources of your program and population. Leaders and presenters are often eager to participate, and might donate their time. If you have a culminating workshop, remember associated expenses such as lodging, food, transportation, and materials.

4. REGISTER STUDENTS: Let students know that this course is integrative, bringing diverse ideas and fields of learning together; they will work together creatively; the group experience will be fun. Some students may only wish to attend the presentations, which is fine. It is important for water site visits and group check-ins, however, to include only those who show genuine commitment toward participating.

5. DEVELOP ACTIVITIES: Offer activities that help participants begin to conceptualize working with water, and working in collaboration with each other. For example, ask students to work in small groups to design on paper a sculpture that incorporates water. For inspiration, visit the website of artist Ned Kahn (see nedkahn.com). Design activities that expand upon the films you screen or on material introduced by visiting presenters. Collaborate with the presenters on these ideas if possible.

6. KEEP THE FINAL WORKSHOP IN MIND: Culminate the course in a multi-day onsite workshop or variation thereof. Notice student interests, capacities, and development as a group, as you hone in on workshop plans. Involve participants in the workshop planning process. They may be able to work out many of the logistics ahead of time with little input on your part, which will result in a sense of ownership of the learning experience. Still, you will want to keep aware of progress along the way.

SCHEDULE

Here is a sample schedule, below. Yours may differ from this. Note that time is an important consideration. This course could be offered in a concentrated period. However, participants' learning may emerge with

greater integrity if they have time to digest the material they have been exposed to. To help with integration we strongly recommended that you have students keep a personal journal, more on this below.

| | PRESENTER(S) | ACTIVITIES |
|--|---|---|
| First month: 11th | Course leaders | Introduction, why we are doing this series, questions, comments, student expectations, leader expectations, introduce journal keeping, discussion, group agreements. |
| Check-in during the week with course leaders and students as a group. Discuss anything students are more aware of since starting their journals. Provide information about upcoming visiting lectures. | | |
| 18th | Art historian / curator | Presentation on current art movements including eco-art; water and art; artistic collaboration; slideshow, activities. |
| Check-in during the week. Have willing students share from journals. This is a great time to screen the Andy Goldsworthy film, "Rivers and Tides." | | |
| 25th | Course leader and collaborators | Visit to a water body, with planned <i>and</i> spontaneous activities to explore ways of perceiving, connecting with subject, relating to site, collective expression, group ritual making, eco-art making. |
| Check-in during the week, share learning. | | |
| Second month: 1st | Water scientist / environmental educator | Presentation on the water situation worldwide and locally, hopeful or positive developments, discussion of role of art in water management. |
| Check-in during the week, share learning, plan for workshop. | | |
| 8th | Water activist film screening and talk-back with filmmaker | The role of film in activism, film as art, collaborative aspects of filmmaking, additional film screenings as appropriate, including any available student-made films. |
| Check-in during the week, share learning, plan for workshop. | | |
| 15th | Professional, environmentally aware, well known artist | Presentation of personal creative process in relation to subject matter and in relation to environment, experience with artistic collaboration, discussion, activities. |
| Check-in during the week, share learning, finalize plans for workshop. | | |
| 22nd-26th | Five-day onsite workshop at a water location. Participants co-develop activities. Collaborative works are produced. | |

ENHANCEMENTS AND VARIATIONS

There are numerous ways to adapt this curriculum. Here are some possibilities:

- Have panel discussions. Include members of the community.
- Alert the media before you begin the water site visit or workshop, and be sure to bring a photographer, as a stunning visual story is likely to emerge. You might also want to produce a catalog in some environmentally sustainable way, documenting the course.
- Combine the workshop with public works projects to beautify your community and engage more people in your coursework.
- To connect to your first site visit location, offer this activity for enhancing sensory perception: Participants pair up with a partner. One partner wears a blindfold and the other leads that student around the space. While watching carefully for safety, the non-blindfolded partner offers experiences such as walking over varied terrain, touching plants or water, and so on. Both partners keep silent, as language tends to keep us in the cognitive realm and we are hoping to stimulate learning through additional senses. After 20 minutes, switch partners. After both partners have taken a turn being blindfolded, have a group discussion about the experience.
- To stimulate collaboration and creativity, tell stories in a circle with each person contributing one sentence. Have students listen carefully and affirm each creative contribution along the way. This can be adapted and played as a theater game, with each group member contributing to the scene spontaneously. Again, be sure to affirm the creative input from each contributor to the scene.

TIPS FOR COURSE LEADERS

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH: The juxtaposition of information from different fields related to art and water will cause confusion among some participants at some point. This is a healthy and necessary condition for learning and for widening worldviews. Disorientation opens opportunities for re-orientation. This process may be subtle yet is profound, and it is well worth the time it takes. Stay patient and open to whatever comes up among the participants. Facilitate in such a way as to encourage full exploration while not losing sight of the themes of water and creativity.

INTEGRATION WITHIN PARTICIPANTS: The pattern of action and reflection, involving journal writing, experiential activities, discussions, and substantive input from local experts, creates a rich and special field of learning that is unlike traditional styles. Learning will come forth through individuals, small groups, and the larger group of participants, as well as through guest presentations. The learning will be deeper if there are lots of opportunities for expression, and if reflection time is valued.

FACILITATING CREATIVITY: Art students as well as non-art students have infinite creative possibilities when invited to make something artistic, yet

they may feel stuck. You can seed the art making process with some of your own visions, or you can step back and allow participants' ideas to flower in an empty space. If you need some help, call upon open-hearted artists to help you get things flowing. Show the Andy Goldsworthy film to provide a view of some ways to work with nature and art.

FACILITATING COLLABORATION: In general, as people collaborate, a natural sense of connection arises, bringing forth ideas that are less available to individuals. Collaboration invites us to move beyond the boundaries of the self. A very special feeling will become present among members of a well connected group.

Collaborating in nature weaves us more closely to the natural world as well, increasing our sensitivity to many living systems that we are a part of. This is a wonderful experience that participants will thoroughly enjoy.

If your group is getting stuck around collaboration, gently invite the quieter voices to contribute their ideas to the larger group, and make sure they are witnessed. Sometimes there are dominant presences that take center stage without realizing what has been left behind. The whole group will probably benefit by taking a moment to get a new perspective.

Also, you can break the larger group into smaller groups, even pairs, to initiate collaboration. Once two people are working together it may become easy for groups to combine and continue working collaboratively.

Some cultures and communities are more familiar with operating within a group or collective, and there are different definitions of what collaboration is. In general, modern cultures celebrate individuals for their solo contributions, and collaboration challenges this structure. For this reason alone some people may not be attracted to this course, and that is okay. Others will be eager to try it. It will soon feel natural and fulfilling.

BACKGROUND

This curriculum was first offered at the Raja Ravi Varma College of Fine Arts, located in Mavelikara, Allapuzha district, Kerala, South India. Guest presentations began in July of 2008 and were offered periodically over the next two months. Half of the school's 160 students of painting, sculpture, and applied arts attended one or more of the six presentations, and twenty-two fourth-year students came to the first water site visit. A core group of seven dedicated students and two artist-lecturers, plus the Beauty of Water founder and an artist host, created a five-day onsite workshop in the backwaters of Ernakulam to culminate the learning series. Six major site-specific works were collaboratively created with locally obtained, eco-friendly materials in response to the theme *appreciation for water*. Images and stories from this workshop are available online [<http://lizabehrendt.blogspot.com/2008/10/back-from-backwaters.html>] and a workshop journal has been published on the ezine Matters of Art [<http://mattersofart.net/features/features223.html>].