

A Dinner Party of Their Own:

Who am I? Where am I going? What makes me unique? These are all queries of adolescence. Our students are growing up in a challenging, frightening, confusing world and need time to reflect on their personal journeys to adulthood.

My first encounter with Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*, and the history of its inception and creation, impressed me. Imagine what a huge undertaking this was! Imagine the thought and planning that went into each place setting. Now ... imagine art students creating a dinner party featuring autobiography plates.

My high-school "Introduction to Fine Art" students began their journey toward this goal by discussing Judy Chicago's outrage with the lack of attention paid to women for their contributions to society. My students were shocked when I told them about the history professor who told Chicago's college class that women had made no contribution to history.

They were intrigued and impressed by her resolve to create an artistic memorial honoring women's roles in history, art, medicine, education and society. And, they were eager to share their knowledge of the familiar names on the place settings in Chicago's work. Our discussions of the women represented served as a springboard to discussing choices students have made to shape their present and future selves.

The next step was for students to generate lists of their hobbies, activities, achievements, talents and milestones in their sketchbook/journals. Of course, the lists included favorite foods—they *are* teenagers! Thumbnail sketches accompanied the lists. Students discussed their lists and shared their sketches, revising plans to their satisfaction. Over time the plates have become known as "autobiogra-



The art I see is like dreams.
Everything is seen in many different ways—
A bunch of emotions that are expressed in colors.
Colors that are in warm and cool hues
Showing anger and happiness.

~ Steven ~

Steven enhanced his plate with pastels.

phy plates" and future students ask if they will be making "those awesome plates" when they take the class.

At this point, I gather students and demonstrate the clay construction techniques they will use. The plates are made of white clay and bisque-fired, and color is then added in a variety of ways. I begin discussing and demonstrating the slab method by rolling out a slab. I use an expanded polystyrene (EPS) foam plate as a

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will ...

- analyze the meaning(s) of Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* and relate it to their own work.
- apply the elements and principles of art to plan their work.
- apply various media and techniques with appropriate craftsmanship, sensitivity and confidence to express their artistic intentions.
- assess their work using thoughtful processes.

MATERIALS

- Book: Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*. Penguin Books, 1996.
- Sketchbook/journals
- Pencils/pens
- White clay and clay tools
- Extruders and rolling pins
- EPS foam plates
- Burlap mats
- Watercolor sets
- Acrylic paints
- Brushes
- Water containers
- Pastels
- Oil Crayons
- Cotton swabs
- Neutral paste shoe wax
- Spray polyurethane
- Small mounting papers
- Glue pens

Tribute to Judy Chicago

by Rose-Ann C. Chrzanowski

draped mold to form the plate shape, trimming the excess clay around the rim of the mold.

Next, I show students how to use a combination of slab, pinch pot, additive and subtractive sculpting, sprinkling the demonstration with the vocabulary of clay construction: slip, scoring and slurry. I then model using extruders to create spaghetti, ribbon, candy and other items called out by my students.

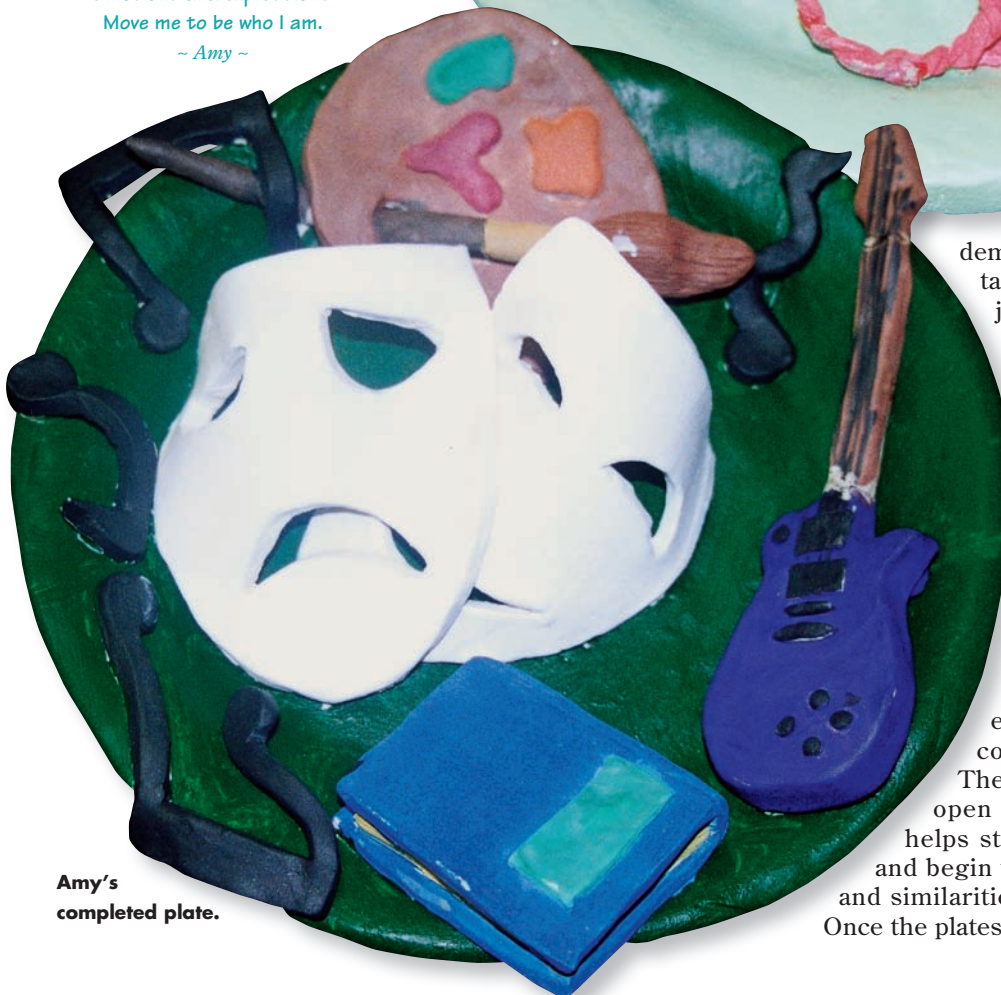
As I visit groups to check progress and understanding, I hold small group or individual demonstrations as requested. For example, a question about

Paulo used a combination of watercolor and acrylics to achieve the look he wanted.



Music is the light of my life;
Art is the form of my being.
Mixed in a palette of tunes,
Emotions and expressions
Move me to be who I am.

~ Amy ~



Amy's completed plate.

making roses led to my announcement of a demonstration at a particular worktable, and all interested students joined the group.

During the art-production process, students discover ways of manipulating clay and share their discoveries with their classmates. Students talk about the objects they are creating for their plates. They ask and answer questions about the items and their significance.

They exchange stories about experiences the objects represent and begin to discover experiences they have in common with their classmates. These social interactions create an open atmosphere of sharing that helps students learn about each other and begin to understand their differences and similarities.

Once the plates are bisque-fired, students begin

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DINNER

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to plan the method(s) they will use to add color. Because my classes are introductory-level survey courses, we don't use glazes, but apply color with a variety of media. Students may choose from watercolors, acrylic paints, pastels, oil crayons or any combination thereof.

Once again, students gather for a demonstration of the materials. I use a slab of fired clay to show them wet- and dry-brush watercolor techniques, and acrylic paint applied full strength or diluted to make a wash. I demonstrate applying pastels and oil crayons directly onto the plate or using cotton swabs or fingertips for a softer look. I encourage them to experiment with brushes as well.

To seal the pastel, I show students how to rub neutral paste shoe wax into the chalk as a fixative. Students who prefer a shiny finish may take their plates to the courtyard outside the art room and spray them with a coat of polyurethane.

When students are satisfied with their creations, we talk about expressing the ideas included on the plates in words. In order to keep the writing loose and free, students are encouraged to use free-form poetry. Once they write the poems, students key them in on the computer choosing fonts that reflect their personal style. The poems are printed out, cut apart and mounted. The plates are then exhibited on a cloth-covered table as place settings with the poems serving as place cards.

Student learning is assessed through written reflections. Students write in response to prompts that ask them to reflect on the following: the project as a whole; difficulties they encountered; what they would change about the work and why; their strengths and weaknesses in the process; plans for improvements; and plans for future endeavors in the same media. Students are able to critique their own work in this way and I enjoy reading their reflections and gaining insights into the students.

The students are proud of creating a "dinner party" of their own, and are thankful to Judy Chicago for the inspiration. ■

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