Blue Man Lesson Lab

The Art and Science of Joy

The Joy of Haiku

Elementary School

Applying the Blue Man Creative Impulses

Documentation is fundamental to science. The work of the scientist often centers on developing empirical procedures for understanding our world. Documentation of the results of empirical procedures is a large piece of the scientific puzzle. The Blue Man is a creative scientist. The Blue Man observes, notes, and joyfully soaks in life. The Blue Man investigates experience through rhythm and sound, and documents discovery through music and movement. Joy is felt and shared in the Blue Man’s world, but can joy be documented? Can joy be artistically rendered? The Japanese art of haiku asks the poet to put simple structure and form to natural phenomena. The art form can also capture experience. This lesson will ask learners to become both scientists practicing the skill of documenting joy and artists creating a joy haiku.

Lesson Summary

Begin the lesson by asking learners “What is joy to you?” Ask learners to think about the following questions: When are you joyful or happy? How would you describe a joyful person in your life to someone who did not know her or him? If joy had a particular taste, smell, or sound, what would it be? Encourage learners to be as descriptive and specific as possible. As the learners brainstorm their list, as they provide their answers, edit their answers to one word. Guide the list to sufficient length for each learner’s thoughts to be represented, for a variety of words to be included, and for there to be many options available when learners write their haiku.

Once learners have brainstormed their joy words, explain they will be using this set of words to write a joy haiku. Continue the introduction by defining haiku. Explain that haiku have a very specific syllable structure. The first line of every haiku has 5 syllables, the second line has 7 syllables, and the last line has 5 syllables. It may be helpful to find and share examples of haiku. Use haiku examples that span a breadth of topics. The work of Basho, Shiki, and Issa can be a great place start an investigation of haiku.

After learners have been given this additional information, ask learners to revisit the original joy word list, giving learners the opportunity to add, edit, clarify, and describe the original list.
Continue the lesson by guiding learners to count the number of syllables in each word. Write the number of syllables next to each word on the list. (Or perhaps quickly break the learners into groups, assign groups words from the list, provide time to calculate, and ask groups to report out the syllable counts.) Once all words have been assigned a syllable count, walk learners through example haikus using those words. Be sure to create haiku that exemplify the variety of ways the haiku form is interpreted. Create example haiku that use only words from the list, and some that use both list words and others.

After completing an example haiku, ask learners to begin to write their individual haiku. Remind learners to stay within the perimeters of haiku, and be as descriptive and specific as possible. Ask learners to use at least 5 words from their haiku list within their haiku.

Once each learner has created a haiku, ask learners to read their haiku three times aloud to a partner. Ask learners to simply listen the first time they hear their partner’s haiku. The second time, ask learners to think about the technical aspects of the haiku. Does the piece stay within the perimeters of haiku? The third time, ask learners to think about the creativity of the haiku. In what ways does the haiku descriptively respond to the question, “What is joy?” Have learners share their answers to these questions with their partners.

After each learner has read their haiku aloud three times, and responded to the haiku reflection questions, ask learners to think about the haikus in general. Did common joy themes emerge? If so, what were those themes? As an exercise in documentation, did joy have a particular sight, sound, taste or feel? If so, what were some of the most powerful sensory images found in the haiku? What did they learn about themselves and their world by using the haiku form to document joy? Finally, what other topics might they be interested in exploring using the haiku form? These questions could be written in a Reflection Guide learners could be asked to complete individually, and then posed as a discussion in the larger group once learners have been given the chance to write their responses in the guide.

Connecting to Standards

- Reading Standards for Literature K-5 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
- Writing Standards K-5 Texts Types and Purposes
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening K-5 Comprehension and Collaboration, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language K-5 Knowledge of Language, Presentation of Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
- Language Standards K-5 Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use, Conventions of Standard English
WJOY

Middle School

Applying the Blue Man Creative Impulses

The Blue Man sounds joyful. Joy is in the beat of the Blue Man’s drum. Pipes and paint create joyful conversation. Synthesizers sing joyous melodies. Smartphones send joyful messages. Joy can be heard as pop culture references tickle audience funny bones. Joy permeates the Blue World. The Blue Man is a maestro of bliss, a conductor of happiness, a composer of musical pleasure. In this lesson, learners will create their own radio stations in which they will be like the Blue Man bringing joy to the world.

Lesson Summary

Begin this lesson by asking learners what songs make them think of joy. It might be helpful to play two or three songs to help learners think about their song choices. Encourage learners to think about a variety of musical genres: old, new, pop, country, classical, and children’s, for example. Encourage learners to think about this list as a play list that could be created on their smartphone or computer.

Once a group play list has been brain stormed, let learners know they will be disc jockeys at a radio station, WJOY. This radio station is created to spread joy in the world. The task of the learners will be to create 5-7 minutes of programming focused on joy.

Continue the lesson by breaking the learners into groups. Groups should be comprised of 3-5 learners. Ask learners to appoint the following roles: a Leader who is responsible for making sure all group members participate; a Timekeeper who makes sure the group is aware of how much time the group has to complete the task at hand; and a Scribe, who records group ideas. All learners will be Program Directors and Disc Jockeys.

Once groups have been established, remind learners they are responsible for 5-7 minutes of programming on WJOY. Programming can include: reviewing books about joy (both fiction and nonfiction), playing songs about joy, highlighting good things happening in the world, focusing on joyful people, telling the story of natural wonders, and/or discussing accomplishments in sports, for example.

Groups must first make a programming list that details what will be included in the 5-7 minute segment. Once the programming list has been determined, make sure groups divide researching, writing, and recording tasks evenly.
Segments will need to meet several requirements. Each segment will need to be recorded. Each segment will need to include 3 types of content. Only one song can be used within each segment. Make sure each story fits within the 5-7 minute segment timeframe. The programming segment will be evaluated on accuracy, completeness, attention to detail, and creativity.

Once the groups have recorded their respective segments, have each group share their segments with the larger groups.

After each group has played their segment, have a concluding discussion focused on the following questions: What new things were learned about joy in the segments? What new things were learned about the world in the segment? Were there similarities and differences in segments? What could future segments about joy include?

Connecting to Standards
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading K-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
- Reading Standards for Literature K-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
- Writing Standards 6-12 Text Types and Purposes, Research to Build and Present Knowledge, Range of Writing
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading 6-12 Conventions of Standard English, Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
- Language Standards 6-12 Conventions of Standard English, Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
- Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

Documenting Joy

High School

Applying The Blue Man Creative Impulses

Both science and art are full of questions. Sometimes the simplest questions are the hardest to answer. Challenging questions abound within the simplicity of the Blue Man’s world. The Blue Man asks audiences to consider fundamental questions about human experience. What does it mean to connect with the world? What is fun? About what am I curious? How does a loud drumbeat make me feel? When do I smile? Why? These questions often fall prey to the commotion of the day-to-day.
These questions are often lost within the pursuit of the next best thing. These questions are often considered less important than other questions. These questions are important. This lesson gives learners the opportunity to respond to the Blue Manesque question, "What is joy?" through creating a short documentary.

Lesson Summary

Begin the lesson by introducing learners to the concept of documentary film. Two examples of documentary film-focused classroom resources include:

Nathan Schultz and Dan Richardson’s Unit Plan for Documentary
http://teachingmedialiteracy.pbworks.com/w/page/19924124/DocumentaryFilm

POV's Documentary Appreciation and Filmmaking Lesson Plans by Jennifer Merin
http://documentaries.about.com/od/introtodocumentaries/a/Povs-Documentary-Appreciation-And-Filmmaking-Lesson-Plans.htm

Introducing the concept might include showing a short documentary clip and discussing nonfiction filmmaking. Using examples from popular documentary can be a powerful window into the documentary genre. Guiding questions for a discussion of documentaries might include: What are distinguishing characteristics of a documentary film versus other forms of film? Compare and contrast documentary film and reality TV? What is the role of a director/screenwriter/actor within documentary film? How are scripts used in documentary film?


Give learners 15 minutes to reflect and respond to the 20 Questions. Once the 20 Questions have been completed, have a general discussion about what learners discovered about joy during the exercise. Was it difficult to think about joy? Did any main ideas about joy become evident during the exercise? What questions were the easiest to answer? Why? What questions were the most difficult to answer? Why?
After the general discussion, ask learners to choose one of the 20 Questions. Let learners know each learner will be responsible for producing a brief (5-7 minute) documentary about joy based on the chosen question.

Once learners have chosen one of the 20 Questions on which they wish to focus, ask them to reflect on the following questions: Why did they choose that particular question? If the question were a story with a beginning, middle, and end, what would that story include? If that question had several important images or pictures, moments that could tell the story without words, describe those images? The answers to these questions should form the foundation for a brief documentary plot synopsis and storyboards that will guide the creation of the documentary.

The next step in creating the documentary is writing a plot synopsis. The plot synopsis should highlight the action of the story. In writing the synopsis, encourage learners to include a beginning, middle, and an end. Action does not necessarily have to be linear and/or chronological. The main focus should be on including as much detail as possible. The plot synopsis will help to define character and setting, in that who is involved in the story and where the story is occurring will be central to the story, and to the documentary.

Plot synopsis should be used to guide the creation of storyboards. Each learner should create 5 storyboards to visually represent the primary images of the documentary. Storyboards can be literal drawings of particular moments of the documentary, or collages of images that provide a more abstract understanding of the documentary, for example.

After plot synopsis and storyboards are completed, learners can begin to produce their documentaries. Encourage learners to use whatever resources they have available to produce their documentary. Access to high tech cameras and editing equipment is not necessary. Technical precision is not the major point of the lesson. Documentaries will be evaluated on completeness, attention to detail, and creativity.

Once learners have created their documentaries, provide an opportunity for them to be viewed by the entire group.

Following viewing, conclude the documentary lesson with the following questions: What similarities and differences exist between the documentaries? How joy is represented? Do any common themes about joy emerge within the documentaries? Would it be easier to document joy in a fictionalized form? Was it difficult to document joy? Are learners more aware of joy in their day-to-day lives now that they have thought more about it?

*Connecting to Standards*
• College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading K-12: Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
• Reading Standards for Literature K-12: Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
• Writing Standards 6-12: Text Types and Purposes, Research to Build and Present Knowledge, Range of Writing
• College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading 6-12: Conventions of Standard English, Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
• Language Standards 6-12: Conventions of Standard English, Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
• Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12: Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
Blue Man Learning Lab

The Blue World

Blue Words, Old Words, New Words

Elementary School

Applying the Blue Man Creative Impulses

The Blue Man speaks volumes with no words. He speaks the language of music. He communicates a percussive truth that invites head bobbing, body shaking, and bigger-than-life smiling. His face poses questions, acts humorously, and reacts in total concert with his full body. If the Blue Man talked, what would he say? How would he say it? What would it sound like? Would the Blue Man use words? Would the Blue Man use sentences of movement punctuated by gyration? The purpose of this lesson is not to develop a Blue Man language. The Blue Man does very well outside the bounds of words. Rather, this lesson will provide learners the opportunity to explore communication by developing new words that, like the Blue Man, push boundaries of text and language.

Lesson Summary

Begin the lesson by asking learners to brainstorm a list of outrageous words. Ask learners to prepare for the discussion by having 5 of the most outrageous words they know written down. Encourage learners to include words that sound like what they mean, describe something specific, and/or identify something important. Make sure word lists have nouns, verbs, and adjectives. It is not necessary for the words from every learner’s list to be present on the general list of words.

Once a general word list has been generated, ask learners to look for patterns amongst the words. Start by categorizing words as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. When categorization is difficult, ask learners to think about the word on the basis of how the word is generally used. Once all words have been categorized ask learners to combine syllables of two of the words to create a new word. Once a new word has been created ask learners to define the new word. For example, the words dolphin and tiger could be combined to become dolphger, and the word could mean a large striped cat who lives and breathes underwater and communicates with high pitched sounds. Another word could combine forgetful and happy to become forgappy, and be defined as being so amused and joyful yet having no idea why. Another word could combine homework and broccoli to become homewoccoli, and be defined as an awful tasting dessert that comes with math problems to solve.
Once you have brainstormed and defined a few new words, let learners know they will be asked to establish groups. Groups should be comprised of 3-5 learners. Ask learners to appoint the following roles: a Leader who is responsible for making sure all group members participate; a Timekeeper who makes sure the group is aware of how much time the group has to complete the task at hand; and a Scribe, who records group ideas.

Once groups have been established. Ask groups to complete 3 tasks: 1. Create 10 new words with definitions using the list of 20 words. 2. Write a letter (either business or personal) using the 10 new words. 3. Choose a song and use the 10 new words in a verse of lyrics for the song. Use examples of new words to guide creation of new words. Think about a specific type of letter, such as business or personal letter, to guide letter writing. Learners will need to determine the easiest way to access the song that will provide the melody to their lyrics. Use at least 5 new words in each of the two items (the song and letter) making sure to use all 10 words between the two. That avoids having the song and letter be too similar.

Once letters have been written, ask each group to share their letters. Letters will be evaluated on completeness, clarity, and creativity.

Once songs have been chosen and lyrics written, ask each group to share their songs. Lyrics will be evaluated on completeness, clarity, and creativity.

Following letter and songs being shared, a concluding discussion could include the following questions: What was the easiest part of creating and using new words? What was the most difficult part of creating and using new words? What are other uses for new words? What role might other languages play in the development of new English words?

A possible extension of this lesson could be to ask groups create a 5 step dance sequence and use those movements in a dance performed to the song to which they had previously written lyrics. This would give learners the opportunity to communicate using movement rather than words.

Connecting to Standards
- Reading Standards for Literature K-5 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
- Writing Standards K-5 Texts Types and Purposes
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards K-5 for Speaking and Listening K-5 Comprehension and Collaboration, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards K-5 for Language Knowledge of Language, Presentation of Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
Drums
Middle School

Applying the Blue Man Creative Impulses

The beat of the drum is the heartbeat of the Blue Man. Pipes pulse. Groove shares space with wide open eyes. In the Blue World people move together with energy not bound by culture. In the Blue World people are embraced by something no bigger than the tilt of a head, and louder than the cheer of 1000 sports fans in a stadium. In the Blue World time means nothing and heart means everything. Into that world, drums of all types bang in discordant unity. This lesson will allow learners to explore the world of drums in order to better understand the cultural connection of the Blue World to the world in which we live.

Lesson Summary

Begin the lesson by viewing the video of the Blue Man performance with Kodo. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Augycj4Z4U4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Augycj4Z4U4). The video lasts approximately 6 minutes. Ask learners to watch the video with the following guiding questions in mind: Describe the drums that are being used in this video? If they know the specific kind of drum, what is it? How are the drums being played? How would you describe this video to someone who has not seen it?

Following viewing the video, discuss learner responses to the guiding questions.

After discussion guiding questions, let learners know they will be asked to establish groups. Groups will be comprised of 3-5 learners. Ask learners to appoint the following roles: a Leader who is responsible for making sure all group members participate; a Timekeeper who makes sure the group is aware of how much time the group has to complete the task at hand; and a Scribe, who records group ideas.

Once groups have been established, let learners know they will be asked to become travel writers writing about drums from around the world. Prepare several examples of travel writing from Conde Nast Traveler, Fodors, Lonely Planet, and Let’s Go to show learner groups the task at hand. When having groups look at travel writing, ask them to consider the following questions: What is the purpose of travel writing? How does travel writing differ from other forms of writing?

All travel writing tasks will be able to be accomplished with pen, paper, and basic Internet access. Internet access is the key to researching the cultures of the respective drums.
Each group of learners will be asked to focus on one type of drum. Have the names of a variety of drum written on 4x6 notecards to ease the instrument selection process. Consider allowing learners to also choose other types of interesting percussion instruments in addition to drums, if they so choose. Examples of drums and other percussion instruments include: dafl, dholl, axate, balaphone, bougarabou, brekete, caxixi, djembe, bata, tingsa, singing bowls, rain sticks, cajon, herrara, and maracas. A great resource for types of drums is the Glossary of World Percussion, [http://www.drummagazine.com/hand-drum/post/the-glossary-of-world-percussion-instruments/P2/](http://www.drummagazine.com/hand-drum/post/the-glossary-of-world-percussion-instruments/P2/). Make sure drums and percussion instruments from around the world are represented on cards. To insure that all continents are represented in the lesson, it might be helpful to write drum/percussion instrument names on different color cards that correspond to continents and have learners choose cards of different colors.

Once all groups have chosen a drum/percussion instrument, explain they will be asked to be travel writers. The will be asked to write an article intended to persuade the audience to travel to the part of the world where they would hear their drum/percussion instrument. The article needs to include: a description of the cultural context of the instrument, a picture or drawing of the instrument, and a fictionalized description of a performance of the instrument.

All group members need to be involved in the research and writing process.

Ask learners to present their article to the larger group. Presentations will involve summarizing the article, and sharing visual and/or audio documentation of the instrument gathered during the research process. Travel writing products will be evaluated on completeness, clarity, and creativity.

A possible extension of this exercise could be for learners to develop materials in pen and paper, and then build blogs to share content.

**Connecting to Standards**

- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading K-12  Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
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• Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

1991

High School

Applying The Blue Man Creative Impulses

Blue Man Group grew out of series of “happenings.” The first televised “happening” was called “Funeral to the 80's” which involved a group of people painting themselves blue and taking a casket of various pop culture references, music and art to Central Park and lighting it on fire. MTV covered the event. Many more "happenings" occurred before the Blue Man Group officially started in 1991. Blue Man Group started as an organic, creative, critical, physical and funny reaction to the society and culture of the 80’s. The Blue Man created art in a specific world. Humor grew from the humanity of the Blue Man reaching out to the world. Into what world did the Blue Man enter? Who was famous? What was invented? What did people watch? To what did people listen? What made people laugh? Connection was central to the Blue Man then. Connection is central to the Blue Man now. This lesson will offer learners the opportunity to research history, explore culture, and interpret texts by connecting a few of the dots of the original Blue Man world.

Lesson Summary

Begin this lesson by brainstorming a short list of current famous people. Take 4 or 5 names. Once several names are provided, choose one name to explore. Try to choose the name that has the most potential for discussion. Ask learners to briefly describe the biography of that person, including their biggest accomplishments. Then ask learners to say the most recent accomplishment of that person. Encourage the use of smartphones and other classroom resources to fill in the information, if needed. Once one famous person has been fleshed out given the previous questions, ask learners to think about the name of another famous person connected to the first person. Answer the same questions for the second famous person. This time, describe how that person is connected to the first famous person. Continue this activity connecting at least 4 famous people—first person to second person, second person to third person, and third person to fourth person.

Following this exercise, ask learners the following questions. What were some of the accomplishments of the people explored? In what ways were people connected? Did it get harder to connect people the more people had been considered?
Following the activity, let learners know they will be exploring the year 1991, the year Blue Man Group officially started, using the same approach. They will be investigating 1991 to figure out what connections existed among people at that time and further understand what connects people today.

Continue the lesson by asking learners to divide into pairs. Give each pair a large sheet of white paper. Ask learner pairs to divide the large sheet into six columns. In the first column, ask learners to write three things: the name of a famous person from 1991, a brief biography of that person, and what they accomplished in 1991. In the second column ask learners to write 4 things: the name of a famous person connected to the famous person identified in the first column, a brief biography of that famous person, what they accomplished in 1991, and their connection to the first famous person identified. In the third column ask learners to write 4 things: the name of a famous person connected to the person identified in column two, a brief biography of that famous person, what they accomplished in 1991, and their connection to the first famous person identified in column 2. Continue this exercise through 6 famous people.

Make sure learners know they are only asked to connect famous people in the adjacent (immediately to the left on the page) column. Learners will need Internet access to conduct research.

Once the list activity has been completed, ask learners to create a visual representation of their lists. The visual representation needs to capture how each famous person is connected. The visual representations can be collages, sculpture, pictures, for example. Each visual representation will need to have a label that outlines the famous people who are part of the representation, and a general statement about their connection.

Visual representations will be evaluated on completeness, clarity, and creativity.

Once learner pairs have created their visual representations, ask them to share their representations with the large group. Following visual representations being shared, a concluding discussion could include the following questions: What are some distinguishing features of 1991? If you had to choose three adjectives to describe 1991, what would they be? Based on the famous people selected, what did it mean to be famous in 1991? In what ways has fame change since 1991? In what ways has culture changed since 1991?

Connecting to Standards

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• Writing Standards 6-12  Text Types and Purposes, Research to Build and Present Knowledge, Range of Writing
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• Language Standards 6-12  Conventions of Standard English, Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
• Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12  Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity