

InsideArt, Fall 2015 — *A Family Affair*

Title

What's in Your Fridge?: Status Symbols and Socioeconomic Status

Concept/Main Idea of Lesson

In this lesson, students will become familiar with the terms status, status symbol, and socioeconomic status and how various types of items serve as status symbols that communicate one's level of wealth.

Intended Grade Levels

Grades 9-12

Duration

1-2 class periods

Infusion/Subject Areas

Visual Arts

Social Studies

Curriculum Standards

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards

Visual Arts

- Create works of art that include symbolism, personal experiences, or philosophical view to communicate with an audience. (VA.912.O.3.1)
- Analyze the impact of social, ecological, economic, religious, and/or political issues on the function or meaning of the artwork. (VA.912.H.1.1)

Social Studies

- Analyze how images, symbols, objects, cartoons, graphs, charts, maps, and artwork may be used to interpret the significance of time periods and events from the past. (SS.912.A.1.4)
- Analyze political, economic, and social concerns that emerged at the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century. (SS.912.A.7.12)

National Standards for Arts Education

- Standard 3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas.

National Council for the Social Studies

- Standard VII: explain and demonstrate the role of money in everyday life
- Standard IX: explore ways that language, art, music, belief systems, and other cultural elements may facilitate global understanding or lead to misunderstanding

Common Core

- SS.912.S.3.1: Describe how social status affects social order.
- SS.912.S.4.2: Identify major characteristics of social groups familiar to the students.
- VA.912.H.1.1 Analyze the impact of social, ecological, economic, religious, and/or political issues on the function or meaning of the artwork.
- VA.912.O.3.1: Create works of art that include symbolism, personal experiences, or philosophical view to communicate with an audience.

Instructional Objective

Students will:

- explore the terms status symbol and socioeconomic status during a whole class discussion;
- explain the historical and socioeconomic significance of Frazier's (2007) *Grandma Ruby's Refrigerator* during a whole class discussion;
- investigate and describe how various types of items serve as status symbols that communicate messages about socioeconomic status during a whole class discussion;
- create a photograph of a material possession they own that serves as a status symbol and analyze what they believe this image communicates about socioeconomic status;
- create a photograph of their own/someone else's refrigerator or other material possessions;
- produce a written analysis of the ways the photograph of the image serves as a status symbol and communicates information about socioeconomic status.

Learning Activities Sequence

1. Activate the PowerPoint. On slide 1, go over the essential question and objectives of the lesson.

Essential Question

How do items and personal possessions communicate information to others about you?

Instructional Objective

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 - explain the historical and socioeconomic significance of Frazier's (2007) *Grandma Ruby's Refrigerator* during a whole class discussion;
 - investigate and describe how various types of items serve as status symbols that communicate messages about socioeconomic status during a whole class discussion;
 - create a photograph of a material possession they own that serves as a status symbol and analyze what they believe this image communicates about socioeconomic status;
 - create a photograph of their own/someone else's refrigerator or other material possessions;
 - produce a written analysis of the ways the photograph of the image serves as a status symbol and communicates information about socioeconomic status.
2. **Attention-Getter: Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS).** Advance to slide 2. Ask students:
 - What's going on in this picture?
 - What do you see that makes you say that?
 - What more can we find?

Show them the title of the photograph, date taken, and artist's name

Ask students:

- What does the title add to your understanding of what is going on in the picture?
3. Advance to slide 3. Read to students:
Relentlessly documenting encounters with Grandma Ruby (b.1925-2009), Mom (b.1959) and myself (b.1982) enables me to break unspoken intergenerational cycles. We are wrestling with internalized life experiences, perceptions of ourselves and familial personas informed by sociopolitical baggage. All of my photographs are created in Braddock, Pennsylvania, a historical steel mill town from America's Industrial period. It is home of Andrew Carnegie's first Steel Mill, The Edgar Thomson Works, which still functions today. Grandma Ruby, Mom and myself grew up in significantly different social and economic climates in Braddock. Grandma Ruby witnessed Braddock's prosperous days of department stores, theaters and restaurants. Mom witnessed the steel mills close and white flight to suburban developments. I witnessed the War on Drugs decimate my family and community.

Between our three generations we not only witnessed, we experienced and internalized the end of industrialization and rise of deindustrialization.

4. Advance to slide 4. Show the video John Fetterman Reviving Braddock video from the beginning through 5:45. This will serve as a review of the lesson titled *Rust Belt Realities* or can serve to provide a baseline understanding of the town where LaToya and Grandma Ruby are from.
5. Advance to slide 5. Ask for a volunteer to read the definition of one term and engage students in a conversation about the term. Repeat. Emphasize the connection between each term (social class, status symbol, socioeconomic status, social stratification)
6. Advance to slide 6. Ask the question:
 - What are some status symbols common at our school? (if needed, modify images to reflect your school)

Say:

Status symbols are everywhere and some are very obvious. Examples include one's car, jewelry, clothes, houses, and items inside a house. For example, an entry-level model Rolls-Royce (costs approximately \$250,000) costs more than Toyota Yaris (costs approximately \$15,000). Therefore, status symbols are useful in measuring social class.

Everyday items, such as items found inside your house, can also communicate messages about one's status and SES, among other things. Let's take a slightly different look at status symbols and SES by looking at the inside of people's refrigerators.

7. Advance to slide 7. Slides 7-10 show photographs taken by artist Mark Menivar. For each slide ask students:
 - What do you see?
 - What determinations can we make about the person who owns this refrigerator?
 - What evidence did you use to make these determinations?
8. Advance to slide 11. Remind students that when making determinations about someone's SES based on an item, in this case contents of a refrigerator, we need to take into consideration other variables such as time of month, food inventory, other food in the home, take-out and eating out, and eating patterns.
9. Advance to slide 12. Ask students:
 - What do you think is inside Grandma Ruby's fridge?
 - What evidence did you use to make this determination?
 - In what ways may the various items and décor serve as status symbols?
 - Why do you believe Frazier/Menivar selected the refrigerator as the subject of their work?
10. Advance to slide 13.

What's in Your Fridge Activity: Have students create a photograph of their own/someone else's refrigerator or other material possessions and analyze in what ways they believe this image serves as a status symbol and communicates information about socioeconomic status. Final project will include a digital or print image of the item along with a written analysis. These can be shared with the class using a gallery-walk format.

11. **Closure: Stand and Share.** Ask students:
What have you learned about the ways items and personal possessions communicate information to others about you?

Evaluation

- *What's In Your Fridge?* Project
- Class participation (e.g., VTS, stand and share)

Optional Extension Activities

- Have students create a chart that documents the country of origin for their items from the *What's In Your Fridge* project.
- Have students read the following article and take pictures of the contents of various fridges and interview the owner's about their decision-making when purchasing the items found in his/her fridge: <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30720662>
- Help students develop an understanding of how much groceries cost by having them track their family's grocery spending for a period of time. Students can show this data in a variety of ways (e.g., budget, graph)

Materials and Resources

- PowerPoint Presentation
- LC projector
- Computer
- John Fetterman Video
- Cameras needed for project (students can use their own cameras, if available)

Internet Links

- Visual Thinking Strategies: <http://www.vtshome.org>
- LaToya Ruby Frazier: <http://latoyarubyfrazier.com>

References

Frazier, L. R. (2014). *The notion of family*. New York, NY: Aperture.

Hughes, M. & Kroehler, C. (2011). *Sociology: The core*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Medley-Rath, S. (2014). *What your your fridge says about your social class*. Retrieved from: <http://www.sociologyinfocus.com/2014/10/15/what-your-fridge-says-about-your-social-class/>

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PopTech (2009). *John Fetterman: Reviving Braddock*. Retrieved from: http://poptech.org/popcasts/john_fetterman_reviving_braddock