

CURRICULUM

Writing Interpretive Labels

MUSEUM OF
CONTEMPORARY ART
CHICAGO

THE LONG DREAM
Nov 7, 2020-Jan 17, 2021
Griffin Galleries of Contemporary Art

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An experiment in label-writing as a practice of co-learning for community members, artists, museum staff, and visitors.

The Long Dream highlights themes related to equity and social change while experimenting with more equitable forms of exhibition-making. Rather than a single curator driving the creative decision-making for the exhibition, an interdepartmental team of staff worked together to bring the show into being. Throughout that already-unusual process, staff looked for opportunities to challenge the traditional hierarchies of exhibition-making even further.

Wall labels are a site of great power in an exhibition. Labels are often overlooked as neutral or objective information about artworks. However, the very subjective experiences and assumptions of the author absolutely shape the viewing experience. More than learning facts about the artworks on view, we hope that visitors to exhibitions will reflect on how these artworks relate to their own lives and are inspired with new ways of thinking about their own experiences. Labels written by community members can help model that kind of personal reflection.

Furthermore, the process of label-writing offers powerful opportunities for learning and building social belonging. What makes an artwork impactful or relevant? Museum staff can learn from youth and other civic leaders. Sometimes, an academic background in art history can get in the way of seeing other kinds of interpretations or connections. The artists in exhibitions can benefit from hearing directly from their fellow citizens about the impact of their work. Youth and community-members can learn new skills related to close-looking and writing about art. By learning

together, staff, artists, and community members build new bonds of belonging and support. We get to know one another, value our distinct and complementary skills, and create a foundation for ongoing mutual care and support.

We're publishing this curriculum so that others might benefit from this experimental process. While the particulars of this curriculum directly reference *The Long Dream* and staff at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the process itself is widely applicable. Other museums can use it as a blueprint. Teachers and students can use it to practice interpretive writing.

The creation of this curriculum was a collaborative process. Its primary authors are Grace Needlman, Manager of Family and Youth Programs, and Jeremy Kreusch, Manager of School Programs. Kelsey Campbell-Dollaghan, Director of Content Strategy, Nora James, Content Strategy Assistant, and Leah Froats, Editor contributed all of the content in sessions two and four. We're indebted to Andy Li, Coordinator of College and Career Programs at Marwen, and Natasha Mijares, Programs Manager at 826CHI for their partnership in shaping this curriculum. *The Long Dream* Public Address team, including Carla Acevedo-Yates, Marilyn and Larry Fields Curator, and Tara Aisha Willis, Associate Curator helped to shape the project. Special thanks to Gibran Villalobos, Assistant Curator, for coordinating civic practitioners. This would not have been possible without the advocacy, advice, and participation of Manilow Senior Curator Naomi Beckwith.

Project Overview

This experimental project invites Chicago youth and other civic leaders to write interpretive labels for an exhibition, *The Long Dream* (MCA Chicago, Griffin Galleries, Fourth Floor, Nov 7 - Jan 17, 2020). This is an experiment in label-writing as a practice of co-learning for community members, artists, museum staff, and visitors.

Against the backdrop of significant global and local shifts, and increasing civil unrest in Chicago and across the nation, *The Long Dream* invites Chicagoans to experience works by over 60 local artists and to see the city, and themselves, anew. The process of interpretive label-writing will build relationships between artists, youth, and museum staff and explore new ways of foregrounding youth voices in the public analysis and presentation of contemporary art. Museum staff will learn new ways to make meaning around the work of Chicago artists. Young people and civic leaders will learn new techniques for writing about art and make new connections with artists. Artists will gain new perspectives on their work by talking with young folks.

GOALS

This project intends to:

- Support youth and civic leaders in sharing their perspectives, experiences, and ideas in an authentic way within the exhibition.

- Reveal new processes and potential for collaborating with outside writers to expand interpretive museum practices.
- Increase youth agency to understand and engage with exhibition-making processes, including working with curators, editors, and artists.
- Positively impact participants' sense of social belonging by catalyzing relationships between youth, artists, museum workers, and educators.

YOUTH AGENCY

In doing this work, we prioritize the following principles:

- Emphasize and prioritize young people's voices. (ex. Ask writers, "what do you think of this artwork and how do you want to show it to others?")
- Understand this project as not only rethinking who is writing the labels, but rethinking the role of labels in general. Encourage everyone involved in the project to consider who reads labels and why, what is their relationship to authority and history?
- Understand the youth involved as experts in their own experience and treat them with professionalism and respect.

TIMELINE

Session 1 | Project Introduction

Thu, Sep 10 from 5-6:30pm

Writers meet with exhibition curators to learn about the big ideas and practice looking at and talking about works of contemporary art.

Session 2 | What is an Extended Label?

Tue, Sep 15, 5-6:30pm

Writers learn about interpretive writing from Content Strategy staff and editors

Session 3 | Youth + Artist Group Interviews

Tue, Sep 22 or Thurs, Sept 24 from 5-6:30pm

Writers meet with the artists whose work they'll be writing labels for.

Deadline | First draft labels (80-120 words) due October 1

Session 4 | Editorial Refinement

Tue, Oct 13, Wed Oct 14, or Thu, Oct 8 from 5-6:30pm

Writer meet with editors and their peers for in-progress feedback

Deadline | Final draft (40-60 words) labels due October 21

Celebration and Reflection

After the exhibition opens on Nov 7, we'll meet to celebrate and get writers feedback on the project.

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Session 1

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2. Exhibition Informatio
Slides: Icebreaker and Access Needs
3. Talking about Art: Four Ways
4. Interest Survey

1. Session Outline

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understand the big ideas of the exhibition
- Understand the label-writing process and ask questions
- Practice looking at and talking about artworks

SESSION INTRODUCTION

This session introduces the big ideas of the exhibition and helps set our expectations for the label-writing project we are all working on. We will also spend time looking at artworks and get more comfortable talking about them.

Contemporary Art is the art of today. That means two important things. This is new art that very few people have written about or reflected on. As people living today, we all have expert perspectives to offer about these artworks. Our

hope is that contemporary art can help museum visitors reflect and make meaning that connects to and enriches their lives.

By inviting you, members of our community from outside the field of art history, to write the extended labels for this show, we are hoping to learn about new ways to make meaning around the work of Chicago artists.

AGENDA

1. Introductions and Icebreaker. Everyone introduces themselves.
2. Exhibition Information. Manilow Senior Curator Naomi Beckwith will introduce herself and the exhibition.
3. Talking about Art: Four Ways. In breakout rooms, writers will practice responding to artworks from the exhibition.
4. Access Needs. We will make a list together of any social, emotional, or practical accommodations we need.

Before next session...

- Fill out the interest survey so we can match you with artworks.
- Make sure you've submitted a bio and headshot.

2. Exhibition Information

KEY WORDS

Curator

This word comes from the latin “cura” meaning “to take care.” In the traditional sense, a curator is someone who oversees, researches, and cares for the objects in a museum’s collection. In a contemporary art museum, curators are responsible for creating exhibitions, selecting works to display, and writing explanatory essays and information about those exhibitions and artworks.

Exhibition

An “exhibit” or “exhibition” is a word for a particular display of objects. In the United States, history, nature, and science museums usually use the word “exhibit,” while art museums follow the more European tradition of calling these displays “exhibitions.” In less formal circumstances, exhibitions are often referred to as “shows.” There are many different types of exhibitions in art museums. Think of all the ways you could categorize art—by artist, date, medium, etc. All these could be different types of exhibitions.

At the MCA, you’ll most often see two different kinds of exhibitions. The first is an exhibition centered on the work of one artist. Curators often create those exhibitions in close conversation with the artist, and design them to tell some story about their art rather than trying to be comprehensive. The second kind is an exhibition based on a theme. The curator chooses a theme and looks for artwork that will expand and compliment that theme for the audience. Typically, the artists are not involved in the design of these exhibitions and they didn’t necessarily create the art with the theme in mind. In this case, the exhibition is a creative work by the curator.

Sections

Often, exhibitions are so large that it’s helpful to introduce another level of organizing. Everything in the exhibition was chosen because it fell under the main theme. Sections are like sub-themes or chapters in a larger story. They also correspond with the physical space of the museum, so as you enter new rooms or new areas you can explore more specific ideas.

THE LONG DREAM DETAILS

Curator

This exhibition was launched by Manilow Senior Curator Naomi Beckwith, but was curated collaboratively by many different people in the MCA’s Artistic Division, which includes the museum’s curatorial, learning, and content teams. This is a very unusual process for the MCA, and one of the things that makes this exhibition unique.

Exhibition

This is an exhibition based on a theme. The collaborative group of Artistic Division curators have explained that theme as follows:

Artists help us see our world more clearly. What aspects, which might have gone ignored in the past, can they help us see now?

Against the backdrop of a global pandemic and a renewed reckoning over racial justice and inequality, The Long Dream invites visitors to see the city of Chicago, the world, and themselves, through the eyes of more than 70 local artists whose work offers us ways to imagine a more equitable and interconnected world.

Named after the 1958 novel by socially committed author Richard Wright, The Long Dream brings together work by both emerging and established Chicago artists, and includes painting, performance, sculpture, video, and sound art. The exhibition extends beyond the gallery walls into

the digital space, culminating in a live arts event in January where artists from across the exhibition will share their work.

Sections

There are four sections in this exhibition:

Apparitions

We are all haunted. Our present is shaped by historical inequities and traumas. In this section, artists grapple with the spectres that have been with us, visibly and invisibly, since long before the present public health, economic, and racial crises. They confront history and examine the scars of conflict and exploitation on bodies and landscapes. They memorialize the dead. Directly or indirectly, they trace manifestations of oppression and injustice from the past into the present.

Anxiety and Intimacy

Anxiety is a part of the human condition. The works in this section are personal and intimate. They explore inner landscapes that are difficult to verbalize, employing art making as a way to process and interrogate moments of uncertainty. Some works reflect back on the body, showing how it becomes a repository of worries and fears. In others, the body is a site for countering these

harmful effects; a source of healing, compassion, and care.

Close at Hand

What can artists teach us about making do with what we have? In this section, artists experiment with found materials and focus on their own bodies and homes as spaces of artistic exploration. For instance, Alberto Aguilar's *Quarantine Regimen* is a series of daily drawings made during the pandemic. Andy Slater's *Limited Reach* is a soundscape that Slater, confined at home, recorded in his front yard. Working with whatever they have on hand, often in small spaces or under unusual circumstances, these artists find rich, unexpected sources of inspiration in the world around them.

Lucid Dreaming

How can you take agency within a dream? As events unfurl in chaotic and destabilizing ways, what offers grounding and hope? Artists in this section explore ways to find power in ourselves and our communities. We can take strength from our ancestors, honoring the past while imagining radical futures. We can get to know our neighbors, practice mutual aid, and care for each other. With courage and generosity, we can take an active role in transformational change.

ICEBREAKER

Tell the story of a time when you had a profound experience with a work of art. Where were you? How old were you? Who were you with? What else was going on in the world at the time?

What do you need to feel like you can be creative, yourself, respected, and taken care of in this space?

That's ongoing work. To begin, we want to make space for folks to name your needs. Go around to say some things you need to make this space together.

3. Talking About Art: Four Ways

When talking about art, it is important to prioritize the knowledge everyone already brings to the conversation. Contemporary artworks are not puzzles to decode. They are invitations and provocations to think differently and reflect. This exercise walks through a series of questions that consider four different aspects of an artwork's content and context. This process is adapted from one laid out by Alyss Broderick entitled "Read It Four Ways," a secular version of the spiritual practice *Lectio Divina*.

Process

Talk about what you see, paying particular attention to images or details that seemed to jump out or speak directly to you. Why did those images or details stand out to you?

Look for connections between this artwork and familiar or popular culture. Share connections you make between this artwork and other stories or media (books, movies, games, myths, fairy tales, news, etc.) Why did this artwork make you think of those stories, images, symbols, or characters?

Consider personal relationships to this artwork – connections to our own actions, experiences, behaviors, attitudes, beliefs or desires. How are the people, emotions, vibes, or moods featured in the artwork like you or unlike you?

Finally, contemplate whether there is a next step that the artwork calls you to. Is the artwork making an invitation to you? An invitation might be,

A call to pay attention to something or someone?

A call to act a certain way, a commitment to a better way?

A reminder to reach out to a person or engage with a group?

An invitation to learn about a particular topic, experience or idea?

A way to act more aligned with your values?

4. Interest Survey

We're going to assign you artworks to write labels for. To make sure that you're assigned artworks that you're interested in and excited about, we need a bit of info.

There are lots of different mediums, or types of art, in this show. Please let us know your preferences for each medium by giving each medium a number between one and four. (1 = VERY INTO IT. 4 = NOT SO INTO IT.)

- ☐ ☐ Painting
- ☐ ☐ Drawing
- ☐ ☐ Sculpture
- ☐ ☐ Photography
- ☐ ☐ Video

The Long Dream is divided into sections. Each section has a unique theme. Please let us know your preferences for each theme. Please rate your interest level in each section using the same number scheme.

- ☐ ☐ Apparitions
- ☐ ☐ Close at Hand
- ☐ ☐ Anxiety and Intimacy
- ☐ ☐ Lucid Dreaming

Is there any other information about your artistic interests that we should know when pairing you with artworks?

WHAT IS AN EXTENDED LABEL?

Session 2

1. Session Outline
2. Introduction to Interpretation
3. How to Write a Great Label
 - Slides: Label Reading Challenge
 - Slides: ARTNews and Simple Language
4. Editorial Process
5. Examples of Labels
 - Slides: Team Challenge Rules
6. Tips and Tricks for Beginning to Write
7. Interview Prep Worksheet

1. Session Outline

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Clarify the purpose and parameters of extended wall labels
- Learn how extended wall labels fit into the larger interpretation strategy for an exhibition
- Understand the writing and editorial processes

SESSION INTRODUCTION

Contrary to popular belief, artworks aren't often puzzles to be decoded. Labels aren't the answers to some kind of simple art mystery. Labels do, however, help people make meaning and better connect with artworks they may find inscrutable. How do they do that work?

Extended labels serve two basic purposes: (1) giving new information and (2) making an artwork relatable. The first purpose is straightforward. It is

almost an extension of the "tombstone" information given for every artwork. Critical facts in an extended label give an artwork context. The second purpose of an extended label is to make connections. The most urgent connection to be made is to the themes of the exhibition, but can also encompass connections to the contemporary world or human experience. Weaving both purposes together in few words requires creativity, insight, and artistry.

AGENDA

1. Intro to Interpretation + Extended Label Best Practices. Interpretation and Editorial staff Kelsey Campbell-Dollaghan, Nora James, and Leah Froats explain what interpretation is and what makes a great extended label.
2. Practice: Style + Voice. For this part of the session, we will practice getting comfortable with our own voices and styles.

Before next session...

- Watch for an email with detailed information about three artworks. Read this information carefully.
- Complete an interview prep sheet for each artwork.

2. Introduction to Interpretation

KEY WORDS

Interpretation

Interpretation is how the story of an exhibition is told to the public. It's focused on how visitors experience an exhibition. This story includes: the exhibition title, didactic materials (like labels), signage and navigation tools, media, web-based materials, live tours and programming, interpretive spaces, and visitor research. The Interpretation team works closely with other departments in the museum, especially Design and Editorial, to help communicate the ideas of artists and curators to visitors.

Big Ideas

For every exhibition at the MCA, the Interpretation team identifies a "Big Idea." This is a single, clear statement about what they want visitors to walk away from the exhibition knowing or understanding. The Big Idea is a key piece of a

Visitor Experience Plan, which is a document put together by the Interpretation team describing, in more detail, the museum's intentions for what visitors will think, feel, and do in the exhibition.

Tombstone Label

A little label that says: the title of the artwork, name and birth/death dates of the artist, year the work was created, materials used, and who owns the work. Tombstone information is always needed and doesn't change.

Extended Label

Extended labels add more information than is included in the tombstone label. Extended labels tell more of the story of the artwork. Extended labels change all the time based on the exhibition the artwork is in and what story the exhibition is trying to tell.

THE LONG DREAM DETAILS

Interpretation

Interpretation for *The Long Dream* is being led by a cross-departmental team including: Carla Acevedo-Yates, Kelsey Campbell-Dollaghan, Nora James, and Grace Needlman. Kelsey and Nora work on Interpretation for all of the MCA's exhibitions. As an Editor, Leah Froats works closely with the Interpretation team. Leah will be the main editor offering comments and helping you refine your writing during this project.

Big Ideas

The Big Idea of *The Long Dream* is: This exhibition celebrates Chicago artists, whose work offers us

opportunities to process the historic social, economic, and public health crises of our time. Their art invites us to see ourselves, and the world around us, more clearly.

Extended Label

There are about 30 artworks getting extended labels in the exhibition. Every single one of those labels will be written by youth and civic leaders instead of the exhibition curators. Unlike typical labels, these labels will be celebrating the unique voices that brought them into being by including a by-line (an indication of the author's name).

3. How to Write a Great Label

A great label is...

- Concise. It is short and clear.
- Informative. It gives information about the artwork.
- Relatable. It helps visitors relate to the art and to the story of the exhibition.

Concise

A great label packs a lot of information into a short, clear package. For your first draft, we'll ask you to write around 120 words. For the final draft, we'll work with you to edit your label down to just 40-60 words.

Why do we keep labels so short? MCA visitor research suggests that visitors read a greater portion of a label when the text is shorter, and that the average time an MCA visitor spends reading an intro panel is 30 seconds

Why is clarity important for labels? It's easy to make people feel dumb when they are visiting a museum. People of all different ages and backgrounds come to the MCA from all over the world. If our goal is to help them connect personally with a work of art or an idea, we need to write in a way that many people can understand. Of course, there's no such thing as a universal writing style, but our editors can help us write in a way that communicates clearly to a relatively broad audience.

Informative

There are some pieces of information about how/when/why an artwork was made that a visitor won't be able to understand just by looking

at the work. In fact, there are lots and lots of pieces of information that could be shared about any given artwork. Choose which pieces of information are most important for the visitor to understand in order to understand the artwork. Give new information that can't be learned from the work itself. This includes anything puzzling or mysterious about the artwork. Prioritize information that relates to and supports the Big Idea of the exhibition, rather than giving general information about the artwork or artist.

Relatable

Contemporary art is about contemporary life, and museums are places for people to come reflect on their experiences and gain inspiration to take back out into their daily lives. Your labels can help museum visitors make connections between the artworks they see and their experiences in the world. Keep in mind that the Big Idea and Sections of the exhibition are also in place to help the visitor make connections. Relating your label to those larger themes and ideas in the exhibition can help underscore those connections. Most importantly, visitors will learn how to connect their experiences to the artwork and exhibition themes by watching you do it. By animating your label with your voice and unique experience, you'll give visitors permission to connect with the work of art through their unique experiences too.

Try and read the artwork's extended label below in 30 seconds.

J.B.S. Chardin, born in Paris, had his first art instruction from his father, a master cabinetmaker. In the 1713, he began his academic training, and achieved his first recognition in 1726. He was elected a member of the Académie Royal in 1728 and thereafter exhibited at the Paris Salons. He specialized in still life and genre and was championed by the encyclopedist Diderot. There are several extant versions of this subject, which features a plaster model of Pigalle's famous work. The Hermitage painting is closely related to Minneapolis's and has a provenance reaching back to Catherine II. It may well be the original Salon of 1769 work, though both pictures are signed and dated 1766. Neither should be confused with the Moscow canvas entitled *Attributs des arts avec un tête de Mercure en plâtre*, which shows a bust of Mercury, since this is not Pigalle's Mercury but, instead, a cast of famous antique portrayal of the messenger of the gods. Recent studies suggest that Minneapolis's painting may in fact be a replica Chardin executed as a gift for Pigalle himself.

Were you able to learn anything about this art work from the label?

Or did you get lost in the ample text?

Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin
French 1699-1779
The Attributes of the Arts and the Rewards Which Are Accorded Them, 1766
Oil on canvas
The William Hood Dunwoody Fund 52.15
The Minneapolis Institute of Arts



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'Your Labels Make Me Feel Stupid'



BY GAIL GREGG July 1, 2010 12:00am



Just a few years ago, a visitor curious about Frank Lobdell's *15 April 1962*, in the Oakland Museum of California, could have scanned its wall label to read this description of the painting: "A tightly coiled form struggles against the confines of the canvas. Thick paint, hot colors, hard lines, and a gouged surface reinforce the sense of uneasiness. They express the artist's view of the human condition as a struggle for meaning and dignity."



The Tiger

by Nael, age 6

From *They're Singing a Song in Their Rocket*

The tiger
He destroyed his cage
Yes
YES
The tiger is out

Simple language
is not bad!

4. Preview of Editorial Process

We are lucky to work with a team of awesome editors whose job it is to balance readability with style. Along the way, you will work with them to figure out how to make sure your labels are communicating clearly while also expressing your unique voice. Editors will meet with you to hear about your intentions and creative vision for your labels so that, when they are editing, they make sure to honor your voice.

Editors will balance two core priorities in editing your writing: maintaining the integrity of your voice and ideas and communicating in a way that is clear and accessible for a broad museum audience, with the ultimate goal of helping visitors engage with artworks.

Note that your text will receive both copyediting and proofreading, which will consist of mechanics of writing, specifically grammar, spelling, punctuation, and treatment of words; applying the MCA style to the text (such as capitalization, hyphenation, abbreviation, treatment of titles and numbers); as well as looking at word repetition,

sentence structure and variation, rhythm, cadence, and overall readability

Here are a few things to keep in mind about the editorial process:

- You're going to be meeting with the artists whose work you're writing about, but they won't be giving you feedback on your writing.
- You'll be getting edits right from the editors. They're here to make the process accessible and collaborative. It should not feel like you're getting graded or critiqued by unknown, powerful figures in the shadows.
- The intention of Session 2 was to introduce the expectations and process for writing your labels. If you have questions, please ask, so we can make the expectations and process clearer!

5. Examples of Labels

GREAT LABELS

Here are some examples of great labels.

Example 1 | Great labels are concise.

Judy Ledgerwood
(American, b. 1959)
Composition in Yellow and Grey, 1987
Oil and encaustic on canvas

Judy Ledgerwood is a Chicago-based painter who is known for vivid, abstract works. Here, with a stormy color palette and fluid brushstrokes, Ledgerwood conjured an ominous seascape that evokes both the awe-inspiring beauty and power of the open ocean.

(from the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago)

39 words

Example 2 | Great labels are informative.

Ivan Albright
American, 1897-1983
That Which I Should Have Done I Did Not Do (The Door)
1931-41
Oil on canvas

Ivan Albright considered *The Door*--a powerful meditation on a life unlived--his most important work. The artist spent weeks collecting props for

the elaborate painting: a marred Victorian door found in a junkyard, a faded wax funeral wreath, and a tombstone for the doorsill. Once he arranged these objects, Albright spent a decade painting the composition, covering every inch of the surface with the intricate and obsessive detail that characterizes most of his work. With the inclusion of a wrinkled, aging hand that rests on the carved doorframe, *The Door* is a profound and modern memento mori that encourages a consideration of the brevity of human existence.

(from the Art Institute of Chicago)

106 words

Example 3 | Great labels are relatable.

Apsaalooke (Crow) artist
Infant boy's coat, c. 1890
Buckskin, cloth, glass beads, sinew

This exquisitely beaded coat was most assuredly made with intentionality--a work of art to adorn a special young boy with love, care, affection, and protection.

(from the Frist Art Museum)

25 words

EDITED LABELS

Here are some examples of labels before and after the editing process.

Example 1 | Keep sentences short and clear.

First Draft: The Lost Boys, 1993
Acrylic and collage on unstretched canvas
Collection of Rick and Jolanda Hunting

For much of the early 1990s, children were a dominant, recurring presence in Marshall's paintings; they point to an important didactic dimension in the work of an artist who, as a professor at UIC's art department here in Chicago, was hailed as a seminal influence on generations of art students. The first of a series of complex multi-figure paintings, Marshall has frequently

referred to *The Lost Boys* as a breakthrough work akin to *De Style*, another vignette of everyday black male life. The painting's eponymous boys may be seen as the countless young black lives lost to inner city violence, specters hinted at in the 9mm bullets and "Police Line Do Not Cross" garland creeping up the Tree of Life.

120 words

Edited Draft: The Lost Boys, 1993
Acrylic and collage on unstretched canvas
Collection of Rick and Jolanda Hunting

For much of the early 1990s, children were a recurring subject in Marshall's paintings. The lost boys depicted here may represent the countless young black lives lost to inner-city violence. Symbols of childhood—the arcade car ride, toy balls, and letter blocks—are interspersed with signs of violence: the 9 mm bullets and "Police Line Do Not Cross" garland creeping up the Tree of Life. The scene is based on a story Marshall read in the Los Angeles Times about a boy shot by police in his home when his toy gun was mistaken for a real one. The tragedy is hinted at in the pink toy gun in the center figure's left hand.

114 words

Example 2| Explain specialist terminology and use concrete language.

First Draft: ZuZaZaZaZaZa, 1994
Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas mounted on board
Takahashi Collection

This early variation on Mr. DOB shows him with limbs reminiscent of Mickey Mouse and a mischievous, toothy grin. Murakami has silhouetted him against a solid background in Nihonga style, floating on a stylized spray of white liquid. This fluid has the look of Japanese woodblock prints by

Hokusai, but also the frozen action of anime graphics as found in the classic film *Galaxy Express 999* (1979).

67 words

Edited Draft: ZuZaZaZaZaZa, 1994
Acrylic and silk screen on canvas mounted on board
Takahashi Collection

Murakami gave this early variation on Mr. DOB limbs that look like Mickey Mouse's and a mischievous, toothy grin. While referencing contemporary pop culture, the artist also draws on traditional Japanese painting Nihonga, silhouetting the figure against a solid background and depicting a stylized spray of white liquid. This fluid recalls the roiling waves in woodblock prints by nineteenth-century Japanese painter and printmaker Hokusai Katsushika, as well as the frozen action of anime graphics found, for example, in the classic film *Galaxy Express 999* (1979).

85 words

TEAM CHALLENGE

Step one (5 mins)

Decide on a popular movie everyone in your group knows and likes.

Step two (10 mins)

Write a short description that both gives people a sense of the plot and evokes some of the feelings that made you appreciate the movie.

Step three

Each group shares out their description and the other groups guess which movie they were writing about.

ONE RULE

Since this is just for fun, don't mention the title, main characters, actors who play them, or other easily identifiable names of people or places.

6. Tips and Tricks for Beginning to Write

Scale your writing. Ask yourself,

- What points are critical/vital to convey the Big Idea/Key Messages of the exhibition and how this work fits?
- What points would you like to see go in if there is room?
- What points could you take or leave?

Tell the story of this artwork. Ask yourself,

- Where, when, how, by whom, and why it was made?
- What parts of this story are most important for making meaning around this artwork?
- What parts of the story can you understand by looking at the artwork, and what parts are missing?

Consider how you feel about this artwork. Ask yourself.

- What about it are you drawn to?
- What does it remind you of in your own life?
- What do you hope museum visitors will think about when they look at it?

Call someone you know well (or just imagine you're talking to them). Describe the work of art and what you find inspiring about it. Sometimes saying things straight from your brain is the best way to find the right words.

7. Interview Prep Worksheet

PERSONAL REFLECTION

You can learn a lot from a work of art just by looking closely and thinking. Before considering any contextual information, re on the artwork from your point of view. What did you notice, think, and wonder when you looked closely at this artwork?

Tell your story of encountering this artwork. What about it are you drawn to? What does it remind you of in your own life? What do you hope museum visitors will think about when they look at it?

FACTUAL QUESTIONS

There are some things you can't know about a work of art just by looking at it. Are there any facts that you would like to know about this art work? Think about the following themes, and write some questions that seem appropriate to this work.

PROCESS:

MATERIALS:

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY:

HISTORICAL CONNECTIONS:

SYMBOLISM:

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES:

WRITER + ARTIST GROUP INTERVIEWS

Session 3

1. Session Outline
2. Interview Process

Slides: Team Art-making and Access

Needs Review

3. Preliminary Research Example

1. Session Outline

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Writers and Artists will feel connected to the larger network of people involved in making this exhibition
- Writers will connect with artists and clarify relevant conceptual and contextual information about the artworks in the exhibition.
- Artists will better understand how their work fits into the themes of the exhibition

SESSION INTRODUCTION

Making meaning is a balance between considering the artist intent, viewer's response, and contextual information. Each aspect is a legitimate force that powerfully shapes an artwork. Researching an artwork involves investigating each, and attempting to grasp the interplay and dialog between those forces.

These conversations are intended first and foremost to establish human connections and build trust in the label-writing process. Additionally, these face-to-face meetings are an opportunity to

clarify any factual questions and deepen conceptual understanding.

Small group interviews will be scheduled over the course of a week. Before meeting artists, writers will have received images of the artworks they are writing about, as well as some preliminary research conducted by MCA staff. During the interview session, writers and artists will meet in a zoom call with a facilitator. They will proceed through a series of open-ended questions to help build connection and understanding.

AGENDA

1. Introductions + Icebreaker.

Everyone introduces themselves. We'll have a warm-up challenge to make sure we're all feeling good and having fun.

2. Group conversations.

In breakout rooms, writers and artists will have a conversation with a facilitator.

Before next session...

- Write your first draft labels. Each draft label should be about 80-120 words.

2. Interview Process

INTRODUCTION/ICEBREAKER

Go around, introduce yourselves. Names, pronouns, and tell us about your earliest memory of making art. What was the first piece of art you ever made?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

You can learn a lot from a work of art just by looking closely and thinking. Writers, what are some of the things you first felt, noticed, thought about, or wondered when you looked closely at this artwork? Artists, what do hope museum visitors will feel, notice, think about, or wonder when they look at the artwork?

THE PUZZLING OR MYSTERIOUS

Sometimes, there are some things you can't know about a work of art just by looking at it. Artists, is there any information a viewer might need to fully appreciate this artwork? Things that cannot be learned just by looking at the artwork itself?

EXHIBITION THEMES

The MCA Artistic Division created the themes of this exhibition and placed the works in those themes. Based on the conversation so far, writers share how you see this artwork fitting into that theme. Artists, how do you see your work fitting into this theme?

CHECK OUT

Writers and artists share a one word check out -- one word to represent what you'll be thinking about after departing.

TEAM ARTMAKING

Take turns each person on the team describing something they see (without using the name of the thing, I-SPY style.)

While that person is describing, everyone else draws what they hear in a collaborative drawing.

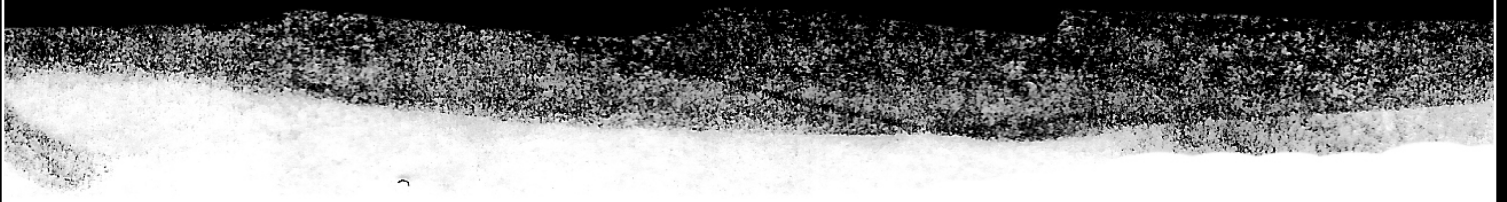
At the end, we'll share back with the full group.



What do you need to feel like you can be creative, yourself, respected, and taken care of in this space?

Based on the needs we named from last time, were there any "GLOWS" or "GROWS" from this session?

Places where we GLOWED or met those needs? Places we need to GROW or work to better accomodate you?



3. Sample Artwork Information

Amanda Williams, b. 1972

Artwork title: "What black is this you say?—"It's easier for young black men to rip an entire ATM out of a bank drive-thru machine and crack it open to get to the money than it is for them to get a job, Bank Account or Loan from that same bank"—black (study for June 3)"

Year created: 2020

Materials list: Watercolor on paper

Dimensions: 7 x 10 in.

Exhibition section: Lucid Dreaming

Description from the artist: Black Out Tuesday, which encouraged supporters to post a black square as their Instagram (IG) feed on June 2, 2020, was originally initiated by music executives Brianna Agyemang and Jamila Thomas, Senior Director of Marketing at Atlantic Records as a way to call attention to injustice in the music industry and show solidarity with global protests about

racial injustice and police violence sparked by the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. Over 28 million IG users posted a plain black square along with the hashtag #blackouttuesday. Frustrated by what felt like a trivial reaction and co-option of the complexity of the issue, I began using my own feed to offer prompts that challenge what exactly so many people were demonstrating solidarity. My long standing practice of conceptualizing color as a way to ask questions about how we collectively assign social value led to the series--What Black Is This, You Say? I offer daily variations on the color black and by extension, blackness; assigning prosaic names for the different signifiers of identity. The series has become a study for larger translations of the work.

View at:

<https://www.instagram.com/awstudioart/>

EDITORIAL REFINEMENT

Session 4

1. Session Outline
2. Introduction to Editing
3. Review Process

1. Session Outline

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Refine writing to even more effectively communicate intentions
- Receive and integrate feedback about clarity and style
- Ability to distinguish between grammatical/factual corrections and stylistic suggestions

SESSION INTRODUCTION

Editorial review is an important part of the label writing process. Curators typically receive feedback on their labels to address clarity, reading level, grammar, style, etc. Those curator labels don't usually have an author listed (which is where they will fundamentally differ from your labels) so they are obliged to adhere to the MCA style. You have much more flexibility to play with your style and voice. The editorial process can help you clarify and enhance the uniqueness of your voice.

Despite the fact that your labels do not need to adhere directly to MCA style or attempt to speak in the institutional voice, they will need to be copy edited. How can these experts help you improve your writing without sacrificing the authenticity of your work?

AGENDA

1. Introduction. We'll reintroduce ourselves to one another and check in.
2. Label Review. We'll work together to refine your writing to even more clearly and specifically convey your intentions.

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

- Copy-edits: Review edited labels and accept edits or ask questions.
- Content: Implement one change based on the feedback you got to make your label more personal, specific, or urgent.
- Let us know if you have other questions or want to talk through anything in more detail.
- Send us an email letting us know you're done editing.
- If there are any small copy-editing changes, we'll make those, trusting you to trust us.

2. Introduction to Editing

KEY TERMS

Editor

Editors will balance two core priorities when reviewing writing and suggesting changes: maintaining the integrity of your voice and communicating in a way that is clear and accessible for a broad museum audience. A good editor will always focus on helping the writer say what the writer means. The editor's goal is to help the writer connect with the visitor in the way they intend to.

Copyediting

Copyediting is a process of revising written material to improve readability and fitness for its purpose, as well as ensuring that text is free of grammatical and factual errors.

Reading level

How long are the sentences? How many syllables do the words have? Are they common words or rare words? All of these factor into the accessibility of a piece of writing. A reading level is a way to determine how complicated or sophisticated a text is, and it's usually aligned by grade level in school. The average American reads

at a 7th-8th grade level, even though the average American has also graduated high school. It's not a good versus bad. Everyone wants to sound smart, but it's important not to alienate visitors when doing so. As the old saying goes, you don't need to use a complicated word where a simpler one will do.

Style

Even though there are "rules" for how to write, there's still plenty of room for artistic freedom. Everyone's writing is different, and what makes it different is the choices they make when they're writing: the words they use, the structure of their sentences, their descriptive technique.

Some institutions like the MCA have a style guide. There are also more widely used style guides that professionals use across entire industries, like the AP Style Guide for journalists. They contain even more specific rules that transcend grammar and fact-checks: rules like when to capitalize something, or how exactly to refer to specific idea or concept. They aren't meant to erase individuality. They are tools that help everyone who writes for that institution make consistent choices in their writing.

3. Review Process

BEFORE SESSION, WRITERS

Review your labels and the labels from your assigned partner. Be prepared to talk about each of the following questions:

What was most important for you to convey about this work?

What grammatical/stylistic/copy-editing choices are distracting from or confusing your intention?

What makes this label especially strong?

How could this label be even stronger?

Is there one place where it could be even more personal or specific?

BEFORE SESSION, EDITORS

Make in-line copy edits using the “suggest” feature. Write particular questions for each label based on some of the above questions.

DURING SESSION, EVERYONE

You’ll have time to look at each label. For each label, we’ll ask:

Writers,

What was most important for you to convey about this work? Are there any specific questions you have for the group about this label?

Everyone,

Choose one of these questions to respond to

- Are there any grammatical/stylistic/copy-editing choices that are distracting from or confusing your intention?
- What makes this label especially strong?
- How could this label be even stronger?
- Is there one place where it could be even more personal, specific or urgent?

Editors,

Share and walk through your copy edits.

MCA
CHIC
AGO