

## **It Is Not Ok**

**Lesson Plan created by Sarah McCann**

**November 2009**

**Background:** This project came out of an experience that happened in the summer of 2009. One of my students was walking to the youth center that I was working at to help paint a mural. On her way to the center she was approached by a man in a truck who asked her for drugs and to get into the truck with him. Luckily he drove away when she said "no!", but she was shaken by the experience, as was I. The only thing that I could think of after hearing what had happened was, "IT IS NOT OK." From this starting point my own list went on. That led me to think about how we act in society. What are the rules that we live by and who created them? Laws are what govern our actions and legally the consequences of those actions, but for the most part we as individuals had little to do with the implementation of most laws. We are born into a society in which we are expected to act in a particular way. In addition to this, we are each born into a family, culture, spiritual belief, environment and set of circumstances, which form our values. From these values, we create standards that we live by and expect others to live up to, but these personal standards are rarely stated out loud. They are things that those close to us know about because we talk to them and they see the way that we live and act, but strangers and the majority of people that we come into contact with on a day-to-day basis have no idea of what we expect from them. I began to think that if we all had the place to voice our expectations, we as people living together could at least begin to understand each other, communicate to others what we need and know what others need from us. Where and how could a space be created for these expectations to be voiced?

While working with the Stadium School Youth Dreamers we had the opportunity to exhibit our work in a row of empty storefronts on Baltimore Street. We had done one installation in Spring 2009 and I thought that the location would be perfect for the "It is not ok" project. I contacted the developer for permission to use the windows and then started working with my students to create posters stating things that are not ok with them. The posters were installed on Baltimore Street on October 15, 2009. Unfortunately, one week later we were made to take the posters down as they were deemed "inappropriate for the business district" by parties that held power in the area. When we brainstormed what we should do about the project being censored, my students said, "Just leave them up Ms. Sarah." I knew that this was not a possibility, but thought that there must be other ways to expand the scope of the project. We decided to find a gallery to show the work, make small signs and ask businesses to post them in their windows all over Baltimore City and to reach out to other community groups to create, hang and submit posters to the project. We also decided to document all this work in a book and web project.

The following lesson is a plan for implementing this project in your own classroom or after school program. To submit work for the book, web and/or exhibition contact Sarah McCann at [sarahbmccann@gmail.com](mailto:sarahbmccann@gmail.com) or by phone at: 646-573-5509. Thank you for your interest!!!

**Motivation (10min.):** Introduce the project and how it got started. Show photos of “It is not ok” on Baltimore Street, read “It is not ok to hang unconventional art in downtown Baltimore.” Have students answer the following questions. See attached worksheet.

What do you think about the “It is not ok” posters?

How do you think the posters made people feel who passed by on the street?

Where would you hang posters so that people can see them?

Is it art? Why or why not?

Write down your own ideas for an “It is not ok” poster.

**Discussion (10min.): What is not ok?**

Ask students to talk about things that are not ok. Record on chart paper.

**Demo (10min.):** What makes a good poster?

Talk to students about composition, text, design and placement. You can use a variety of media to create posters. Be sure to demo medium as well.

**Activity 1 (40min.): Create posters!**

Have students choose one of their “It is not ok” slogans to make into a poster.

**Clean up (10min.).**

**Share (5min.).** Have students share with the group their poster.

**Reflection (5min.):** Why is it important to communicate to others how you expect them to act?

**Outcomes:**

Students will have read about a public art installation.

Students will have developed their own opinions about the project.

Students will have articulated their own standards and expectations.

Students will have learned design skills.

Students will have participated in the project “It is not ok”.

Students will have reflected on why it is important to communicate their expectations to others.

**Supplies:** Chart paper, worksheets, pencils, paper, markers, colored pencils, crayons, poster paint, brushes, buckets for water, paint pens, glitter, sharpies, collage material, sample fonts, stencils, etc.

**Vocabulary:**

**composition** – how the various elements are arranged on a page

**text** – written or printed words; typically forming a connected piece of work

**design** – an arrangement of line or shapes created to form a pattern or decoration

**placement** – the action of putting something in a particular place

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

What do you think about the “It is not ok” posters?

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How do you think the posters made people feel who passed by on the street?

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Where would you hang posters so that people can see them?

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Is it art? Why or why not?

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Write down your own ideas for an “It is not ok” poster:

IT IS NOT OK TO \_\_\_\_\_

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**I CAN: A companion piece to the "IT IS NOT OK" project**  
**Lesson by Sarah McCann**  
**November 2009**

**Background:** After having the "It is not ok" project censored in Baltimore City I began to think about the statement, "It is not ok" as being something limiting. The project was about standards and boundaries, but as it stood on its own it seemed to be about limiting oneself. I thought that it needed a companion piece that was about expanding boundaries and possibilities. We do need to limit ourselves, but we do not want these limitations to define who we are, we are also all of things that we can possibly do. My first thought was that the companion would be "It is ok", but this seemed to also speak of limits and of someone outside of ourselves allowing us to do something, instead I thought the companion piece must be, "I can."

Especially youth, who are constantly told what they cannot do, need to have a place to voice everything that they *can* do. Having worked with the Youth Dreamers I have seen what youth can do as I am sure many teachers, after school program providers, parents, friends and adult allies have seen. The Youth Dreamers as an example were a group of middle schoolers who saw a problem, decided that they had a solution and then worked for 8 years to fundraise, buy a house, renovate it and open a youth center! Young people are amazing and we should listen when they tell us what they can do. Adults are too. In fact if people had the chance to articulate all they can do and then had the support to do it, the world would be a much more productive place.

I began creating "I can" posters with my students with the Youth Dreamers and again we began looking for spaces to hang our work and for others to share the project with. It will also be a web and book project and an exhibition. If you would like to participate in the project, the following lesson is a plan for implementing this project in your own classroom or after school program. As an individual, you can also just create your own! To submit work for the "I can" book, web and/or exhibition contact Sarah McCann at [sarahbmccann@gmail.com](mailto:sarahbmccann@gmail.com) or by phone at: 646-573-5509. Thank you for your interest!!!

**Motivation (5min.):** Introduce the project and how it got started. Show examples of “I can” posters.

**Definitions of design elements (10min.):** Each group will be given a word to define from the dictionary and creating their own definition in “kidspeak”, students will then share.

**Activity 1 (10min.):** What makes a good poster?

Each team of students will choose an image of a poster (see below for books). They will then decide on one poster that they like and present to the class what they think is good about it. See attached worksheet.

**Brainstorm (10min.):** Students will write down as many things as they can do on the attached worksheet, then they will choose one and sketch their poster on newsprint.

**Activity 2 (40min.): Create posters!**

Once students have sketched their poster, they will be given a sheet of Bristol board to create it. Students that finish early may make an additional poster.

**Clean up (5min.).**

**Share (5min.).** Have students share with the group their poster.

**Reflection (5min.):** Why is it important to communicate to others everything that you can do?

**Outcomes:**

Students will have learned some design elements.

Students will have articulated what they think makes a good poster.

Students will have learned design skills.

Students will have participated in the project “I can”.

Students will have reflected on why it is important to communicate all that they can do to others.

**Supplies:** Chart paper, worksheets, pencils, paper, markers, colored pencils, crayons, poster paint, brushes, buckets for water, paint pens, glitter, sharpies, collage material, sample fonts, stencils, etc.

**Vocabulary:**

**composition** – how the various elements are arranged on a page

**text** – written or printed words; typically forming a connected piece of work

**design** – an arrangement of line or shapes created to form a pattern or decoration

**placement** – the action of putting something in a particular place

**shape** - the outline of an area or figure

**color** - the property possessed by an object of producing different sensations on the eye as a result of the way the object reflects or emits light

**font** - a set of type of one particular face and size

**Books to look at for poster images:**

Cushing, Lincoln. Revolución! Cuban Poster Art. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2003.

Designer Posters. Rockport: Rockport Publishers, 1996.

Durant, Sam, ed. Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas. New York: Rizzoli, 2006.

Foster, John. New Masters of Poster Design. Beverly: Rockport Publishers, 2006.

Names: \_\_\_\_\_

**Describe the poster:**

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**What elements are part of the composition?**

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**What is the message of the poster?**

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**What do you like about the poster?**

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**How could the poster have been improved?**

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## **Design Elements:**

**composition** – how the various elements are arranged on a page

**text** – written or printed words; typically forming a connected piece of work

**design** – an arrangement of line or shapes created to form a pattern or decoration

**placement** – the action of putting something in a particular place

**shape** - the outline of an area or figure

**color** - the property possessed by an object of producing different sensations on the eye as a result of the way the object reflects or emits light

**font** - a set of type of one particular face and size



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Why is it important to communicate to others everything that you can do?*

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Why is it important to communicate to others everything that you can do?*

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Name:

*Why is it important to communicate to others everything that you can do?*

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Why is it important to communicate to others everything that you can do?*

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Name:

*Why is it important to communicate to others everything that you can do?*

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**"It is not ok" and "I can"**  
**a community arts project facilitated by Sarah McCann**

**DEED OF GIFT-PERMISSION FOR USE**

I hereby give permission to Sarah McCann to use my artwork, name and photographic likeness as part of the "It is not ok" and "I can" projects. I understand that all work I submit will be used to complete these projects, for educational and promotional purposes related to the projects, including, but not limited to: exhibitions, web pages and books. Images may be utilized in print or electronic form in publications, web sites, press releases, or promotional materials related to or resulting from these projects.

I understand that the resulting projects are the property of Sarah McCann, and may be exhibited in gallery and museum settings.

I hereby consent for value received and without further consideration or compensation to the use (full or in part) of all art-work and photographs made by or of me, in whole or in part, of such art-work and photographs for the purposes of illustration, broadcast, or distribution in any manner.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Please Print**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent/Guardian if participant is a minor.**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (W) \_\_\_\_\_ (H) \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_