

NEWS BREAK

Sunday's News Break selects an article from Tuesday, May 10, 2016 of The Seattle Times e-Edition for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions. **Please remember to always preview the content of the article before sharing with your students.**

Article: Lack of art hurting empathy (Editorial, A13)

Pre-Reading and Vocabulary

1. Before you read this article, read the following definition for the word 'empathy':

“the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.”

How do you think that art can help build empathy? How might a lack of art hurt empathy?

2. **Vocabulary: Match the words to the numbered definitions in the chart below.**

A. absolutism	1. high-sounding language with little meaning, used to impress people
B. bombast	2. something a person or a thing is able to do
C. capability	3. deserving or having special recognition for achievement, for example, poetry
D. diatribes	4. boiling something down to its essence — its most important part
E. discourse	5. a wicked or illegal act.
F. distilled	6. of, relating to, or concerned with the art of speaking or writing
G. fraught	7. the belief that there are absolute standards for morals, and that certain actions are absolutely right or absolutely wrong
H. generalization	8. A sharp, steep drop
I. indraw	9. communication of thought by words; talk; conversation
J. laureate	10. assuming that something is true all of the time because it is true some of the time

K. misdeed	11. characterized by reaction
L. precipitously	12. an angry and usually long speech or piece of writing that strongly criticizes someone or something
M. reactionary	13. inspiring, grand, excellent, or impressive
N. rhetorical	14. drawn in or inward
O. sublime	15. causing or affected by great anxiety or stress

Comprehension

1. What honor has the author received from the state of Washington?
2. What is “negative capability” as described by Keats?
3. What does Czeslaw Milosz believe is “the great enemy of humanity”? Why?
4. What does the author mean by “inhabit uncertainty” and how does this contrast with “generalization”?
5. What is Washington ranked nationally in terms of state funding for the arts?
6. Explain the difference between a “dialogue” and a “diatribe”?
7. How does the author believe that the arts promote empathy?

Additional Activities

1. Discuss your answers to the comprehension questions. Do you agree that the arts promote empathy? Why or why not? Are there other ways to build empathy besides the arts? Is empathy important, why or why not? Write a journal entry describing a time that you had empathy.
2. Create a found poem (a poem that “borrows” lines, words, or phrases) from the text of the article.
3. Individually or as a class, complete the following activity:

Using the following word bank, fill in the correct synonym for each missing vocabulary word in the article.

wordiness
ability
rants
discussion

purified
troubled
simplification
inward

crimes
sharply
verbal
inspiring

Lack of art hurting empathy

By TOD MARSHALL

IN my first months as Washington state's poet laureate, I've participated in many events and heard poems by published and unpublished poets. I've seen audiences of a few hundred and audiences of nine. I've witnessed joy and grief, as well as confusion and understanding on the faces of people around me.

Poetry — art — can show us how we are connected to another person's version of what it is to be human and can allow for those moments when, as Elizabeth Bishop wrote, we take "A sharp, _____ breath, / half groan, half acceptance, / that means 'Life's like that. / We know it (also death).'"

It's _____, really, to see a diverse group of people listening to one another, really listening, and then sighing, smiling or (from time to time) sobbing. Sometimes all at once.

I think that many people in Washington hunger for more of these encounters, glimpses into how others feel, think and live: a sense of what Gwendolyn Brooks called "life _____." Why? I don't know for sure, but John Keats, a working-class poet from 19th-century England, wrote about "negative _____" in a letter to a friend, and perhaps this concept is relevant. Keats thought that negative capability was necessary for creative thinking — it's a state where we are "capable of being in uncertainties. Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reading after fact and reason."

So many cultural forces shove us toward immediate certainty: from quick trivia fixes via smartphones to the _____ of talk radio. Fewer people seem willing to dwell in a cloud of unknowing — of "maybe," "could be" and "I dunno." Think about the difficulty in saying, "I'm unsure. Let me get back to you on that in a few days," or the last time that you heard, "I don't understand this, but that's OK. I want to live with it for a while."

Unsurprisingly, political _____ has regressed to literal brawling in arenas and rioting in the streets. Dialogue about race and gender is equally _____. Czeslaw Milosz, Nobel laureate, poet and survivor of the Warsaw occupation, asserted that the great enemy of humanity was _____ — the quick answers that a Google or a wiki might give. As long as instant certainty prevails, then the slick slide to generalization will be open, and that descent leads to misunderstanding and _____.

Mystery and doubt can check reactionary thinking, and the arts can help us inhabit uncertainty. Unfortunately, arts funding in our country has declined _____. According to the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, Washington is currently ranked 46th in the nation in state funding of the arts. Washington's per capita support is just 16 cents compared to neighbors Oregon (51 cents) and Idaho (46 cents). The highest? Minnesota (\$6.26). Lowest? Arizona (\$0).

Time spent on the arts in classrooms is also declining. A 7-yearold study by ArtsWA told us that 33 percent of elementary students in our state are getting less than one hour of arts education per week, a number that I'm sure has only diminished since that report was issued.

What if the prevalence of _____ over dialogue connected to a lack of art in our lives? What if the ability "to exist in a state of uncertainty" connected with poetry and the other arts could foster empathy and understanding? What if listening to music and making sculptures, and engaging in creativity and experiencing creativity would allow for a counter energy to absolutism, for an awareness of differences without judgment, for those sighs and sharp indrawn breaths

when we can hear the mysterious rhythms of someone else's life? What if (since we so love our sciences) we tried an experiment during which every one of us spent daily time focused with the arts?

I don't know the answer to that question, but I know that recently, at a poetry event in Olympia, I heard many readers share their poems. Some readers performed high-energy raps. Other readers shared quieter poems about childhood. One reader quoted Emily Dickinson, another Kendrick Lamar. Everyone engaged perspectives not their own; everyone sighed and laughed, breathed with half-groans and half acceptance, which is, of course, the stuff of which empathy is made — a mysterious quality that seems harder and harder to find.

From 2016 to 2018, Tod Marshall is Washington state's poet laureate, a program sponsored by Humanities Washington and ArtsWA. He teaches at Gonzaga University.

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Answer Key to Vocabulary

- A. 7
- B. 1
- C. 2
- D. 12
- E. 9
- F. 4
- G. 15
- H. 10
- I. 14
- J. 3
- K. 5
- L. 8
- M. 11
- N. 6
- O. 13

Answer Key to Comprehension Questions

1. What honor has the author received from the state of Washington? **To Marshall is Washington's poet laureate.**
2. What is "negative capability" as described by Keats? **Negative capability is a state where we are able to be comfortable with uncertainties.**
3. What does Czeslaw Milosz believe is "the great enemy of humanity"? Why? **Czeslaw Milosz believed that the great enemy of humanity was generalization, because it leads to misunderstanding and misdeed.**
4. What does the author mean by "inhabit uncertainty"? **Inhabiting uncertainty is to be comfortable with mystery and doubt.**
5. What is Washington ranked nationally in terms of state funding for the arts? **Washington is currently ranked 46th in the nation in state funding of the arts.**

6. Explain the difference between a “dialogue” and a “diatribe”? **A dialogue is between two people, a rant is one person talking without listening.**

7. How does the author believe that the arts promote empathy? **The arts help us to see more than one answer and to engage with perspectives that are not our own.**

Answer key to Additional Activity 2

1. inward
2. inspiring
3. purified
4. ability
5. verbal
6. wordiness
7. discussion
8. troubled
9. simplification
10. crimes
11. sharply
12. rants