

# Who Belongs?

## Teaching Tolerance through Art



*Land of Reclamation by Shawn Skabelund.*

### **Pam Stephens**

**N**ot long ago, I was offered the opportunity to develop art-based teaching materials that deal with the concepts of bias, prejudice, and intolerance—three traits that have unfortunately been perpetuated throughout time. What immediately came to mind is the vile culture of bullying that seems to have invaded the fabric of many of our communities. What sorts of materials can be developed to help educators teach the value of accepting individual differences and living in harmony with those unlike ourselves? How can art help address issues of character building?

### **Researching Tolerance**

As with all art lesson planning, this one began with a perusal of national standards. It quickly became apparent that more standards addressed this topic than could be used. Beyond visual arts standards, social studies, language arts, and life skills standards

easily spoke to the intent of the teaching materials. It became a vetting process to include a scant few standards from content areas outside of art.

After standards were identified, the next step involved locating appropriate works of art to explore. As it turns out, a wide variety of master artists have created works that remind us to consider the unfortunate results of intolerance. The research was at once chilling and eye-opening, informative and heartbreaking. The underlying message of each artwork was the same: Bias, prejudice, and intolerance ultimately give rise to badgering, cruelty, and nonacceptance; that is, bullying.

### **Recalling the Past to Anticipate a More Tolerant Future**

About six weeks after starting this project, the end product was a thirty-four-page unit of art-based study titled “Recalling the Past to Anticipate a More Tolerant Future.” A link to the unit of study can be found at the

end of this article. It is my hope that teachers will utilize this material either in part or in full, adapting it to fit their needs, and adding or editing to make the unit of study stronger.

If you implement this unit of study in your classroom, please share any changes you make and the results of the lessons on the *SchoolArts* Facebook page. Open sharing of information is one way to promote the intrinsic value of art programs. I truly believe that the visual arts have the power to change social attitudes, and I ask that you contribute to this important conversation. ☺

*Pam Stephens is associate professor of art education at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, and a member of the SchoolArts advisory board. Pamela.Stephens@nau.edu*

### **WEB LINKS**

[tinyurl.com/3qs79lw](http://tinyurl.com/3qs79lw)  
[mcrel.org/conpendium/browse.asp](http://mcrel.org/conpendium/browse.asp)  
[shawnskabelund.com/](http://shawnskabelund.com/)