

Drawer Speaks Project

A Youth Interactive Multi-Media Art Installation

In collaboration with **FLOODWALL**

Teacher Information Packet + Lesson Plan



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About Floodwall

When Jana Napoli returned to New Orleans two months after Hurricane Katrina and the collapse of the levee system had ravaged her native city, she found the sodden and damaged remnants of people' s lives cast out on the sidewalks. Though they were signs of a painful salvaging of life by returning inhabitants taking stock of their homes, they represented as well the radical obliteration of their past. Every day for the next four months, Napoli wandered amid the rotting and moldy debris of the city' s neighborhoods, first instinctively and then deliberately, gathering household drawers. The 710 drawers that she retrieved, from dressers, kitchen cabinets, desks and bureaus, empty of their contents but suffused with memories, are the bricks of this installation.

Napoli constructs her installation in three ways. When it stands as a wall, 8 feet tall and stretching as much as 192 feet, Floodwall is a monument of immeasurable loss; when it lies in serried array on the floor like tombstones in a cemetery, it is a memorial, a sentinel of the past; and when it is configured as a room that envelops the spectator in close intimacy, it has the unutterable loneliness of deep mourning. At all times, this is Napoli' s floodwall against the erasure of the ordinary people and the everyday rhythms of life from which great cities are formed.

If the floodwalls of the levee system did not contain the rising waters, this one does not restrain its city either. Its stories spill out of these empty drawers still redolent with the textures of daily life — quotidian systems of order, sly and delicious secrets, dusty neglect, absent-minded forgetfulness, beloved mementos and childhood treasures. Napoli labeled each drawer with the address from which it was retrieved. Over the past three years, she and her colleague, Rondell Crier, have numbered, photographed and catalogued each drawer to create an interactive database which contains information about its condition, its provenance as well as the fate of the flooded household from which it was discarded. They have also begun to collect oral histories from the original drawer owners, a project that is on-going and grows daily wider with the migration of New Orleanians to other parts of the country. The audio recordings of these interviews form part of the exhibition, releasing poignant yet unsettling presences into this immense installation of aching absence.

**For more information about Floodwall and to access the
Interactive Database please log onto www.floodwall.org**

About Drawer Speaks Project

A Youth Focused Interactive Art Project

Floodwall continues to gain international attention, as a multi-media exhibition in the United States and Europe. In honor of the five-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, Floodwall would like to include the viewpoints of gulf region youth who have been affected by the storm. The Drawer Speaks Project intends to represent the views, stories, and “contents” of youth through the use of drawing, sculpture, photography and interactive technology.

Floodwall will provide youth from the gulf region supplies and asked to make a drawer from a simple cardboard box. Students will be asked to recreate or illustrate a drawer currently in their home, or one that existed before Katrina. Using simple materials of cardboard, brown paper, and black markers, students will draw the cardboard box into a drawer and illustrate significant contents. The contents can represent items that they would bring if evacuated in the future, special artifacts that represents their family’ s history, private possessions, or something that they might hide in a drawer.

Students will be photographed while holding these drawers, capturing unique and telling portraits of the youth of the gulf region. Hundreds images of students and their drawers will be included in the interactive map of the Floodwall, bringing representation and sensitivity to the youth effected by Hurricane Katrina. The work will share a visual story that communicates across language and cultural barriers. As the exhibition travels around the United States and Europe, there will be a youth outreach component organized to engage a local youth audience to participate in discovering the database and the gulf region youth documented. In this way, youth around the world will draw connections, deepen understanding and expand a world view through the universal language of image making.

Participation in the Drawer Speaks Projects will support gulf region students in a process of personal investigation and expression, affecting views and opinions on a global scale. Students have the potential to see themselves and their work as contributors to a contemporary international art arena. The experience and opportunity will honor the youth involved, inspire their creativity and empower them as artists with potential to participate in an influential contemporary exhibition of global proportions.

Lesson Plan

Time: 1–3 class periods – depending on depth

Age: grade k–12

Materials (provided):

- Cardboard Box
- Newsprint
- Vine Charcoal
- Thick Black Markers
- Glue Sticks
- Brown / Tan Construction Paper

Relevant Art Vocabulary

- Composition
- Space
- Positive/negative shapes
- Scale
- Value
- Color
- Contrast
- Illustration
- Public art
- Installation art
- Multi-media art

Conversation & Process

- In an age appropriate conversation, talk to students about the Floodwall Project, the approach, method, and impact the installation has on documenting and sharing personal stories of those affected by Hurricane Katrina. Talk to students about the role of a drawer, a container of personal contents and possessions of objects of significant value. Share with students that they are invited to participate in this monumental traveling installation Floodwall in the Drawer Speaks Youth Project. Utilizing the Floodwall website is a great way to guide students through a discussion about the project.
- Talk to students about different drawers, the styles, and designs and how the look of drawers has changed thought time, often referencing trends of furniture styles of the time. You can access the Floodwall website to look at different drawers documented in the interactive option on the site for examples. Ask students to think about the furniture in their home with attention to the details, grain of wood, knobs and other decorative and functional features are important to discuss.

- Ask students to make a sketch of the front of a drawer in their home. This could be from a drawer in any room in the house. Encourage students to draw in all relevant detail including wood grain and shape of knobs.
- Using the box provided and thick black markers, ask students to sketch out drawer face on the cardboard box. Remind them that these boxes will be photographed and to consider making thick lines and bold drawing with evidence of detail.
- Ask students to think about objects in the drawers in their room or home that are significant:
 - Objects that express their individuality
 - Objects that speak of their families history
 - Objects of things that they have had for years of sentimental value
 - Objects, that if evacuated, they would take with them
 - Objects that they would not want anyone to find or go through without their permission
- Next have students practice drawing these objects on newsprint and then transfer drawing to brown construction paper using the same thick line marker techniques mentioned above.
- Drawings can then be placed in the bottom of the drawer box. Object drawings can be collaged in the bottom of the box if needed.

Optional Writing Component

Ask students to do a creative writing assignment in reflection of their box and the contained objects that reflect the contents of their life. Experts of text could be included in the box sculpture if desired.

Sharing and Assessment

In a circle with shared agreements, have students take turns and talk about their art. Ask students how the use of pictures tells us about them. Inquire with your students about how they feel about their art being a part of an exhibition which communicates to an international audience.