

ACTIVITY TITLE: Speak Up! Posters for Change

Activity Code: ncWITEC03



 DURATION	60-75 minutes
 AGE RANGE	13-14 years
 TOPICS	Creativity Art Inclusion Civic Engagement Visual Communication Cultural Exchange



Description of the project

In this collaborative, research-based arts activity, students will design and create impactful posters on social issues that matter to them, such as kindness, environmental justice, inclusion, gender equality, or cultural heritage.

The project combines civic expression with artistic methods as students analyze historic and contemporary activist art, especially works by women and culturally diverse creators to inspire their own designs. They will explore the power of color, symbolism, slogans, and composition to convey inclusive and powerful messages that challenge bias and promote empathy.

Through sketching, feedback rounds, and optional digital tools like Canva or Padlet, students will iterate their posters collaboratively, emphasizing cultural respect and visual clarity. Final pieces will be presented to peers and displayed both physically (in hallways) and digitally (on school platforms), promoting youth voice and civic engagement.

By the end of the session, students will:

- Create and present an original, socially conscious poster based on research and visual storytelling.
- Apply inclusive design principles and cultural symbolism in their composition.
- Reflect on gender and identity representation in activist art.
- Justify design choices using visual analysis and peer feedback.



Objectives: What will I learn?

- **Research and analyze examples of activist art across cultures and eras** by examining posters from different historical movements and artistic traditions, so you can draw inspiration and



understand how visual messages shape public awareness.

- **Critically evaluate how art influences social attitudes and movements** through class discussions and case study comparisons, to better understand the power of art as a tool for civic change.
- **Apply design principles (color, composition, typography, symbolism) intentionally** by planning and creating your own posters, to communicate messages clearly and persuasively through visual storytelling.
- **Practice teamwork, inclusive decision-making, and rotating leadership** by taking on and rotating collaborative roles within your group, to ensure that all voices contribute meaningfully and equitably to the creative process.
- **Integrate cultural and traditional motifs or symbols into visual storytelling** by researching the origins and meanings of selected symbols, so that posters respect and reflect diverse cultural perspectives.
- **Include gender equity by highlighting women and gender-diverse role models in art** by studying biographies and poster examples by marginalized creators, to contribute to visibility and representation in STEAM and activism.
- **Use optional digital tools to transform physical posters into online campaigns** by exploring platforms like Canva or Padlet, to extend your message's reach and engage broader audiences digitally.
- **Reflect on communication choices and refine design through iterative feedback** by exchanging work with peers and applying structured feedback forms, to improve your design's clarity, inclusiveness, and impact.



Materials: What do I need?

1. Provided by the teacher/institution

- Poster paper or cardboard
- Markers, colored pencils, glue, scissors, tape
- Magazines/newspapers for college
- Rulers, stencils
- Computers/tablets with Canva, Google Slides, or Padlet access
- Printed example posters (including from women artists)
- Bios of women activist-artists (e.g., Barbara Kruger, Faith Ringgold, Emory Douglas)
- Reflection worksheet

2. Provided by students

- Personal pencil case
- Any relevant magazine clippings or images

3. Downloadable resources (guides, templates, reference examples).

- [Bios of women activist-artists](#)



- [Printed example posters](#)
- [Reflection worksheet](#)
- [Teacher Resource for Step 1](#)
- [Data collection template](#)



Previous preparation

- **Introduce the Project and its Social Purpose**

Present the purpose of the activity as a form of creative civic engagement, where students use visual art to address issues such as gender equity, kindness, environmental justice, and cultural heritage. Then, display 3–4 examples of historic or contemporary activist posters, intentionally selected to show diversity of eras, styles, and cultural perspectives (e.g., civil rights, environmental protests, feminist art).

Afterwards, share short bios or tributes of women and gender-diverse activist-artists whose work reflects social resistance, cultural storytelling, and inclusive advocacy. These could include artists like Barbara Kruger, Luba Lukova, or Favianna Rodriguez. Finally, emphasize how art can challenge stereotypes, elevate marginalized voices, and promote inclusion.

- **Prepare Technical and Artistic Materials**

Firstly, test optional digital platforms such as Canva, Padlet, or Google Slides in advance. Ensure students can access and use these tools if chosen. Then, prepare and organize physical workstations with all necessary materials:

- Markers, colored pencils, scissors, glue, paper, recycled magazines/newspapers for collage
- Devices or tablets for those using digital tools

Finally, provide printed examples of impactful poster elements, such as color symbolism charts, inclusive language samples, and slogan formats.

- **Build Inclusive Teams and Assign Rotating Roles**

Divide students into small, inclusive teams of 3–4, ensuring diversity in gender, background, and communication style and explain that rotating roles will be used to ensure equitable participation and exposure to all creative tasks.

Assign these roles at the start and rotate halfway through the activity:

- **Designer** – sketches, composition, layout
- **Researcher** – finds cultural symbols, slogans, and visual references
- **Writer** – drafts slogans and supportive text
- **Presenter** – prepares and delivers the final explanation



RESEARCH



Have a look at these resources

Why This Matters – Context and Relevance

Posters are more than just decoration—they are powerful tools for social change. From civil rights marches and feminist protests to climate justice and anti-war campaigns, artists have long used posters to communicate urgent messages and rally communities. This activity invites students to join that tradition by creating their own visually impactful, socially conscious posters.

Throughout history, art has amplified marginalized voices and challenged dominant narratives. Posters have called for equality, justice, peace, and representation—across cultures, continents, and generations. When students explore examples from women, Indigenous, and gender-diverse activist-artists, they begin to understand that creativity can also be a form of resistance, healing, and empowerment.

Research shows that art-based civic learning helps students connect more deeply with social issues. It enhances empathy, communication, and teamwork—all key to meaningful participation in society. Collaborative poster-making encourages young people to explore complex topics, express personal views, and practice visual storytelling that is inclusive and culturally respectful.

By taking part in this activity, students will see themselves as not just learners, but changemakers. They'll explore how visual design can challenge stereotypes, highlight underrepresented voices, and promote fairness across communities.

Real-World Examples

- Feminist artists like Barbara Kruger have used bold text and collage to challenge sexism and consumerism.
- Environmental movements like Fridays for Future and Earth Day campaigns rely on vibrant, youth-created posters to mobilize action.
- Posters from the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S., Zapatista resistance art in Mexico, and anti-apartheid graphics in South Africa have played key roles in organizing and educating.
- Modern digital campaigns like #MeToo and Black Lives Matter also use powerful visuals to spread awareness across social platforms.

Guiding Questions to spark reflection

- Why do some images or messages stick with us more than others?



- Can you think of a poster, mural, or graphic that changed how you felt about a social issue?
- What kinds of social issues are *not* commonly represented in art—and why?
- Who has traditionally had access to public messaging? Who has been left out?
- How can we design posters that speak across different cultures, ages, or languages?
- What makes a poster inclusive, respectful, and effective—not just beautiful?
- How can visual storytelling help make activism more accessible?
- How can *you* use your artistic voice to stand up for something you care about?



CREATE



Some things you need before beginning

Before you start sketching or assembling your activist poster, it's helpful to understand the powerful role posters have played in history and can still play today. These facts and ideas will help you see your project not just as an art task, but as a way to use your voice for real-world change.

Did You Know?

- Posters have been used as activism tools for over 100 years—from suffrage and anti-war movements to public health campaigns and labor rights.
- Barbara Kruger, a feminist artist, uses bold slogans like “Your body is a battleground” to confront gender inequality. Her work inspired a new generation of activist-artists.
- The Zapatista movement in Mexico, Indigenous climate campaigns, and LGBTQ+ rights marches have all used community-made posters to demand justice.
- A simple visual like a raised fist, a broken chain, or a planet wrapped in flames—can communicate a message faster than a full speech.
- Visual design shapes how we understand the world. Governments, companies, and movements all use visuals to influence opinions.
- Learning to recognize bias, stereotypes, or exclusion in images is just as important as knowing how to create fair and inclusive ones.
- Posters can be used not only to protest but to celebrate identity, build solidarity, and educate others.
- By making your own poster, you’re participating in a long tradition of using art as a tool for empowerment, especially for groups that have often been left out of mainstream media.



- Your poster can reflect something you care about deeply a cause, an identity, or a local issue that deserves attention.
- You'll be making design choices that show your values, your understanding of others, and how you want to impact the world.



Now, follow these steps

Step 1: Introduction and Visual Analysis:

Begin by analyzing historic and impactful posters from various cultural and activist movements:

- Display 3–4 posters featuring different eras, causes, and artists from poster example documents.
- Ask guiding questions:
 - “What messages do these posters communicate?”
 - “Who made them and why?”
 - “What colors, symbols, or styles stand out and why?”
- Lead a short discussion on cultural symbolism, visual power, and the role of marginalized artists, especially women and Indigenous creators. Apart from that, introduce the tradition of art as civic engagement and encourage students to brainstorm local or global issues they care about. Use the “Teacher Resource for Step 1” document.

Step 2. Research and Brainstorm:

In groups:

- Choose a social issue (e.g., climate justice, gender equity, cultural heritage).
- Research the issue’s visual language:
 - What symbols, icons, or motifs are commonly used for this cause?
 - What slogans or phrases are powerful or repeated across movements?
 - Are there particular colors or fonts associated with this theme?
 - How do artists make the message feel urgent, emotional, or hopeful?
 - Do representations of the issue change across cultures or eras?
- Explore the bios of activist artists and select at least one artist who has created work related to their chosen issue and analyze their work more deeply. Some guiding questions for research:
 - What cause(s) does this artist care about or support?
 - What are the key symbols or themes in their work?
 - What medium or style do they use (e.g., collage, bold text, pattern, portraiture)?



- How does their cultural background or identity influence their art?
- How do their work challenge stereotypes or promote inclusion?
- What emotions or ideas do you feel when you see their work?
- Complete the “data collection template” document with the gathered information.

Optional Digital Extension: search online for historic vindictive posters from different cultures using tablets and save inspirational images to Padlet or Slides.

Step 3. Sketch and Plan:

Teams will collaboratively design a concept for their activist poster:

- Draft a sketch including layout, message, and visual hierarchy.
- Choose a slogan that’s clear, inclusive, and relevant.
- Select colors and symbols based on research and cultural sensitivity.
- Discuss:
 - “Who might see this poster?”
 - “Is the message welcoming and accessible to everyone?”
 - “Does it include or exclude any groups unintentionally?”

Teams are encouraged to incorporate:

- Traditional motifs or local artistic styles.
- Tribute elements to a woman or gender-diverse artist.
- Space for public interaction or digital sharing.

Step 4. Sustainability in Poster Design:

Introduce sustainable art-making practices:

- Encourage the use of recycled or reused materials (e.g., newspaper, fabric scraps, cardboard backing).
- Discuss how art can model responsible consumption and reduce waste.
- Ask:
 - “How can we design powerful visuals without buying new supplies?”
 - “What are the benefits of using reclaimed materials in activism?”

Step 5. Build the Poster:

- Use rulers/stencils to create structure; blend drawn and collage elements.
- Integrate collage, color, and traditional symbols.
- Consider digital design (Canva/Padlet) for a parallel version.
- Include a small tribute or reference to a woman or gender-diverse artist if possible.
- Think about what materials you are using to make your poster sustainable.



Step 6. Peer Feedback and Revision:

After all groups complete their first version:

- Exchange posters with another team for structured feedback using a template with guiding prompts:
 - What message does this poster communicate?
 - What's visually clear? What's confusing?
 - Is it culturally respectful and inclusive?
 - Are there any stereotypes present?
- Return posters and allow time for revision and improvement.
- Encourage students to document changes and explain why they made revisions fostering reflection and growth.



COMMUNICATE

It's time for students to present their work and reflect on the design process, their choices, and the impact of their message.

Poster Presentation

Each group presents their final poster to the class. Encourage confident, inclusive, and respectful communication.

During each presentation:

- Each team member explains their role (e.g., designer, researcher, writer) and the contribution they made.
- The group walks through the key design choices in the poster:
 - Why did you choose this slogan?
 - Which symbols, colors, or motifs did you use and what do they represent?
 - What cultural or traditional elements did you integrate?
 - How does your poster promote inclusion and visibility for underrepresented voices?
- The group connects their poster to the inspiration artists they studied:
 - Which woman or gender-diverse artist influenced your work?
 - What did you learn from their style, message, or background?
- The team shares how they would digitally disseminate their message:
 - How would you adapt or share your poster on social media or a school platform?
 - What caption or hashtag might you include?

Critical Reflection & Real-World Relevance

After presentations, lead a short reflective discussion. Students consider the real-world relevance of their work:

- Ask:

- How could your poster be used in a real protest, awareness campaign, or school initiative?
- How is your design different from or similar to activist posters you've seen in public or online?
- What would you change in your poster if it were to appear in another cultural context?
- What did you learn about communication, representation, or working in a team through this process?



It is time to share!

Share your work online with # SpeakUpSTEAM:

- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/steambrace-project/posts/?feedView=all>
- Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/steambrace_eu/
- X: https://www.instagram.com/steambrace_eu/



KEEP ON LEARNING



How can I make a similar project by myself?

- What part of the creative process did you enjoy most—research, sketching, designing, or presenting? Why?
- What did you learn about activism through visual art?
- Did you discover any cultural symbols or artists you had never heard of before?
- How did your team ensure that everyone's ideas were heard and respected?
- What surprised you the most during your research or feedback session?
- How did you use color, symbols, or layout to communicate your message?
- If someone from another culture saw your poster, what would they understand—or miss?
- Which design decision are you most proud of, and why?
- If you could redesign your poster for a different audience (e.g., young kids, elders, social media users), what would you change?
- How can art help amplify the voices of people who are often unheard?
- Where in your school or community could your poster be used, displayed, or shared to make a difference?
- What other social issues could you explore through activist art in the future?
- Could you combine poster design with other formats, like short videos, zines, or community murals?
- What topic would you choose for your next poster—and what new symbols or styles might you try?
- Would you work with a group again or try a solo project with a digital platform?



- How might you apply what you learned about inclusive visual storytelling to other areas (e.g., writing, presentations, digital media)?
- What would you add or improve in your next project now that you've done this one?



Which are other connected projects?

Design for the Global Goals

Choose one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (e.g., gender equality, clean energy, zero hunger).

- Create a new poster or campaign visual specifically for that goal.
- Research global stats or stories to support your message.
- Use bold symbols, inclusive design, and attention-grabbing slogans.
- Try it digitally with tools like Canva, Adobe Spark, or even Google Slides.

Street Art for Change

Explore how murals and graffiti have fueled social movements around the world.

- Research artists like Banksy, JR, or local community muralists.
- Sketch a mockup for a mural in your school or neighborhood.
- Include cultural motifs, empowering messages, and visual storytelling.

Lead a Peer Workshop

Become a changemaker by teaching what you've learned:

- Guide to a younger class through a simplified poster-making session
- Plan steps, prepare materials, and use inclusive facilitation techniques
- Reflect on what it means to lead with empathy and clarity



LINKS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Poster History and Art for Activism

- [Poster history archive](#)
- [Arts for change examples](#)

Create your own social justice poster

- [How to Create Your Own Social Justice Poster – SFMOMA](#)
- [Service Sparks: Advocacy Posters – Learning to Give](#)
- [One World Posters – Learning for Justice](#)
- [Empathy & Emotional Understanding](#)



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