

VIDEO

Write With. . . Life Stories: Art as Activism with Martin Sheen

by 826 National and Life Stories

GRADES 9-12

TYPE

NARRATIVE POETRY

Activism and art are personal—they are fueled by your perspective of the world. In this lesson, you will write a poem or a narrative that shares your deep connection to an important topic or issue.

WHAT YOUR STUDENTS WILL LEARN

About Life Stories

Life Stories is a 501(c)(3) non-profit media organization that creates and distributes documentaries, interviews, and educational resources about people whose lives inspire meaningful change. These stories address issues of civics, history, politics, the arts and culture by shining the spotlight on relatable human stories of purpose and meaning in times of change. We provide open access to all our content for communities and classrooms through our curated website and YouTube channel.

About *The Thread*

The Thread is a new documentary interview series exploring what it means to live a purpose-driven life through conversations with multi-faceted people who have helped shape our society. Each 30-minute episode takes viewers on a personal journey into the life of extraordinary people who candidly share their triumphs and failures. The Thread is available on the Life Stories website and YouTube channel, and as a podcast across all major platforms. Teaching The

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Thread brings the series into the classroom with episode lessons designed to strengthen social emotional learning and media literacy skills and expand the scope of subject matter in Social Studies and English Language Arts. Future seasons of *The Thread* will include similar curricular support.

WHAT YOU WILL DO

Introduction:

In this video, Martin Sheen delves into his activism, arrests, and community service. Sheen reflects on his long acting career, including the impact of his role in *The West Wing*, a fictional television drama about the people who work in the White House. This role inspired young people to pursue careers in public service. Please visit "Martin Sheen: Lights, Camera, Activism" to see the full lesson by Life Stories.

Content Note:

- Before watching the video, we suggest you provide students with an overview of the Civil Rights Movement and the Selma Marches, to ensure they understand the historical context of the clip they watch in STEP 1. This resource from the National Archive provides background on the Selma Marches.
- To create an environment where all students feel welcome to participate, we encourage students to start where they feel comfortable. For example, they may draw or journal about the suggested prompt or about a related topic.

STEP 1

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Begin by watching this clip of Martin Sheen's *The Thread* video: <u>10:57–15:05</u>. In this clip, Sheen reflects on how the Selma to Montgomery march inspired him to use his art (acting) to respond to and support the Civil Rights Movement. Activists often use art to express their points of view on political issues—examples of activist art can be found as early as the eighteenth century.

• Activist art: Fine art or performance art form used to speak out against social and political issues.

In your writing journal, freewrite about art and activism. Consider these questions:

- What does *activism* mean to you? What does it look like, sound like, feel like?
- What qualities do the arts—such as theater, music, creative writing, and painting—have that make them a vehicle for self-expression?
- Why do you think someone would choose to respond to current events with art?

STEP 2

Art in all forms is often used as a tool in activism because both art and activism are personal—they are driven by an individual's personal connection to an issue and how that connection shapes their perspective of the world. Art serves as a vehicle for sharing that perspective.

On page 1 of the Art as Activism with Martin Sheen — Handout, brainstorm a list of 1–3 current issues or topics that you care about deeply, and include the personal connection you have to them. When you're done, put a star next to the issue you'd like to explore further.

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STEP 3

Next, read the three mentor texts on pages 2–4 of the handout. These are poems and prose of protest and empowerment written by students:

- "Alemeny" by Izzy T., 826 Valencia
- * "What Is Freedom?" by Regina, Grade 10, 826LA
- "I See" by Itzel Medina Luna, Grade 8, San Francisco, CA

As you read, underline words and phrases that resonate with you. After you've read the three examples, choose the piece that impacted you the most and answer the Reflection Questions on page 5 of the handout.

STEP 4

Thinking about the topic you starred on your chart, begin brainstorming details for your poem or narrative. Answer the questions on page 6 of the handout to get started.

STEP 5

Educator Note: This lesson offers an optional extension, in which students use another artistic medium in addition to writing. Students may choose to start with their second medium and then return to writing the poem or narrative.

It's time to write your poem or narrative! Feel free to jump right in or look for inspiration in the following prompts:

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Prompt 1: Show the reader your firsthand experience

• Do you have a story that showcases your connection to your issue? Use the first-person point of view to show the reader that story.

Prompt 2: Use repetition

• As you read in the mentor text "I See," repeating a simple line or phrase can help underscore your perspective. Write a simple line that relates to your issue and then try starting or ending your stanzas or paragraphs with that line.

Prompt 3: Metaphors and similes

• Create a list of metaphors and similes using the sensory details you brainstormed on page 6.

Incorporate these phrases into your poem or narrative.

Optional Extension: Do you have additional artistic talents besides writing? Take your piece a step further: Draw illustrations, turn your poem into a rap, choreograph a contemporary dance, paint a mural, make a short film, etc. The additional layer creates another point of connection between the piece and your reader.

MATERIALS

- "Martin Sheen: Lights, Camera, Activism" *The Thread* video
- Art as Activism with Martin Sheen Handout
 - 1 copy per student
- Writing journal and writing utensil

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