

I Will Be An Upstander: Creating Symbols, (Re)Creating Culture

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Grade levels: 4th – 7th grade

Expected length: 2 – 3 class periods

We see symbols everywhere: street signs, restroom doors, our schools—everywhere! They help us navigate our lives. They help tell stories and communicate. In this lesson, repeating a symbol, until it becomes a regular part of our consciousness relies on the strength of a visual image to teach others our values and beliefs. Students will communicate personal stories of upstanding through symbols. It is a powerful way to reinforce to the world: “Yes, I *am* an upstander, and I will repeat it over and over again until you hear me.” In this way, not only are we re-writing symbols—we are also (re)creating culture; a better, more compassionate world for us all.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Studio Inquiry: Students will create a print that symbolizes upstander behavior with an emphasis on repetition.

National Visual Arts Standard: CREATING

Anchor Standard: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work

Enduring Understanding: People create and interact with objects, places, and design that define, shape, enhance, and empower their lives.

Art History Inquiry: Students will identify symbols of upstander behaviors in activist artist Linda Stein’s *Holocaust Heroes: Fierce Females* series.

National Visual Arts Standard: CONNECTING

Anchor Standard: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Enduring Understanding: Through art-making, people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge, and experiences.

Aesthetics Inquiry: Students will identify art’s capacity to serve as a vehicle to deepen empathy and compassion, in particular Linda Stein’s *Holocaust Heroes: Fierce Females* as well as children’s literature about upstander individuals.

National Visual Arts Standard: RESPONDING

Anchor Standard: Perceive and analyze artistic work

Enduring Understanding: Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed through engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, the natural world, and constructed environments.

VOCABULARY:

Upstander: A person who speaks or acts in support of an individual or cause, particularly someone who intervenes on behalf of a person being attacked or bullied. Someone who takes a stand for something they believe in.

Symbol: A sign, shape, or object that represents or stands for something else.

Repetition: In art, to repeat something multiple times for emphasis.

ARTWORK:

Holocaust Heroes: Fierce Females. Begun in 2013, Linda Stein dedicated and focused a series of works on women heroes during the Holocaust, researched each woman extensively for their role by reflecting on the questions: *What makes a hero?* and *What defines bravery?* What resulted was a series of large wall collages she calls “tapestries” that she assembled. Each includes a pictorial representation of the women and their roles as heroes during the Holocaust, juxtaposed by direct quotes, and images (from past and popular contemporary culture). Rich contrasting textures, patterns, and colors result from the use of fabrics, found items, images, and various textures.



Eleven Heroes 1110

2022

archival pigment on canvas, acrylic paint, fabric, leather, metal, mixed media, wood poles
67.5" x 68" x 3"

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DISCUSS:

What is a symbol? How do they function in our daily life? We are now going to turn our attention to the symbols in activist artist Linda Stein's work, who wanted to show the many upstander women of the Holocaust. Women are often overlooked as heroes during that difficult time in our world history. Today, we are going to honor their **upstander** accomplishments and look closely at how Linda Stein shines a light on just how incredible they were.

Prepare an **Idea Generator** about the heroes from the *Holocaust Heroes: Fierce Females* series, which can be viewed at www.lindastein.com, as well as purchased as an ebook or hard copy:

Include:

Hero's Name

A one-sentence summary of their upstanding action during the Holocaust (or after, if pertinent)

*The color reproduction of the corresponding tapestry (the ebook or hard copy of *Holocaust Heroes: Fierce Females* is available for purchase at <https://shophawt.com/>).*

Question to include on each Hero Idea Generator:

Look closely at the tapestry. Name 5 things that are not a photograph of the hero. Next to each one: what do you think that object/picture **symbolizes**? For example: a zipper might symbolize "holding together" other people during times of great distress.

Think-Pair-Share: Group students into teams to complete the Idea Generators. Teams should then take turns sharing their findings of the symbols.

Next: Arrange for students to read children's books about upstanders to children in younger grades. It is important for children in the intermediate grades to feel as if they can be upstanders. Reading to younger learners is one way to do that. Reading about upstanders will magnify the experience even more. After each scheduled reading, follow up with a discussion: how were the characters in the book **upstanders**? What were they upstanding for?

Book list

The People's Painter: How Ben Shahn Fought for Justice with Art: by Cynthia Levinson, illustrated by Evan Turk

A story of growing into an upstander from a young age, coming from Lithuania to America, we learn of the many ways Jewish artist Ben Shahn used his art to fight injustices.

The Artist, written and illustrated by Nikkolas Smith

A story of a boy on his journey to becoming an activist artist—an activist—as he responds to his urge to combine his love of his community and the inequities he observes with his love of painting.

Jovita Wore Pants: The Story of a Mexican Freedom Fighter: by Aida Salazar, illustrated by Molly Mendoza

In the story of Jovita Valdovinos, a revolutionary in the second wave of the Cristero Revolution, we learn what Jovita did to be a brave upstander for what she believed, fighting side by side with men, to fulfill her mission of justice for her family and people.

Miloo's Mind: The Story of Maryam Faruqi, Trailblazer for Women's Education, by Reem Faruqi, illustrated by Hoda Hadadi

Maryam “Miloo” Faruqi persisted in assuring she was educated and thousands of other Pakistani children, as well. In the face of adversity, she said over and over again, “enough is enough,” and upstander to found many schools that are still in existence today.

Last Stop On Market Street: by Matt De La Peña, illustrated by Christian Robinson

A young boy and his Nana volunteer one day at a soup kitchen. There are eye-opening surprises along the way for young C.J.

Ablaze with Color: A Story of Painter Alma Thomas, by Jeanne Walker Harvey, illustrated by Loveis Wise.

The first Black woman to have an artwork in the White House, Alma Thomas did much to support and encourage the artmaking of children as an art teacher. Learn how she came to be such an incredible artist and teacher who fought for justice.

We Are Water Protectors, by Carole Lindstrom, illustrated by Michaela Goade

A story of earth stewardship, strength, unity, and justice for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe as they recount how their people have defended the Earth for millennia, and now as they stand in unity upstanding to the harm of “the black snake” (the Dakota Access Pipeline [DAPL]) in polluting their waters.

A Flag for Juneteenth, by Kim Taylor

On the day before the announcement is made that all enslaved people in the U.S.A. are free, almost-10-year old Huldah celebrates and helps make a quilt with her community on a Texas plantation.

MATERIALS:

Hard and soft pencils

Masking tape

Malleable printing blocks or printing foam printing plates, pre-cut into small sizes (e.g., 2" x 2" squares or 2" x 3" rectangles)

Water-soluble block printing ink

Linoleum cutters, with blades in variety of sizes

Printing bench hooks

Brayers

Wooden spoons or barens

Paper: large enough to repeat stamp multiple times + room for border

CREATE:

Now we are going to take our upstander actions even further. We are going to create symbols about an upstander in our lives. Is it you? Is it someone else? What is it about them, or you, that makes them an upstander? Do they speak loud and proudly about what they believe in, convincing others to believe in their cause, too? Are they an educator, empowering others with knowledge? Do you know an upstander against bullies? How could you make the upstander behavior a **symbol**? Let's draw it! Remember all the symbols out in the world? Do they have a lot of tiny, intricate detail? No! Keep the details to a minimum—bold outlines, minimal details. That way, everyone will see it, and know what it is as soon as they see it. Reduce the idea into the simplest form. How can you reduce the details, concentrating on just the essential information necessary to communicate the symbol of an idea or concept?

Printmaking: We are going to print the symbols over and over, so that people who see our image really get the message about our upstander behavior. To make something "stick," you need to say/do/teach it repeatedly, right? It is how we learn! Seeing something repeated over and over again can have a very powerful effect visually. It is a powerful way to reinforce to the world: "Yes, I *am* an upstander, and I will repeat it over and over again until you hear me."



Studio model example: Caleb Hughes: Upstander story

Once you have your image drawn (in a border of 2" x 2", but on paper that is large enough to wrap around and tape to the block) on paper, flip it over. Using a soft drawing pencil, shade over the back of the image entirely.

Adhere the shaded side on top of the printing block with masking tape, by tightly wrapping and taping it securely.

Once secured, use a hard pencil to transfer the image onto the stamp block. Lift up a corner before removing completely to assess the transfer and continue if needed.

Once the transfer is complete, refinements can be made directly onto the block. However, tell students not to spend too much time on this—they will only be cutting details away!

Using a bench hook to secure your block (for older children who are confident in controlling the small block while cutting away from their fingers and hand, they can forego the bench hook), using the linoleum tools, cut away negative space (the parts you do not want to print, where ink will NOT go). Choose blades appropriate for the size you are cutting: small v-gouges for tiny details, for example.

Modification: For students with limitations in mobility where using linoleum cutters may be dangerous, substitute printing foam. Instead of using the cutting tools, ball-point pens can incise the image directly into the foam.

TIP: trim away the edges of the stamp block so they recede far enough away that ink is less likely to hit unintended areas. A good rule of thumb for depth for how much to cut away: the sharpened tip of a pencil.

Once you have decided how many times you are going to repeat the stamp by row and column, add light guidelines in pencils to help guide the placement of the stamp each time.

Charge the brayer with an even layer of ink, achieving a velvety “hiss” sound when you roll out the ink.

Modification: simple stamp pads can also be used to simplify the process.

Start at the top, placing the stamp left to right if right-handed; start at the left corner if left-handed and work your way down, since ink can smear easily before it dries.

Once filled, and completely dry, guidelines can carefully be erased.

In the 2" to 3" border, write the upstander story that accompanies the symbol, turning the paper with each side. Phrases and sentences can be repeated.

REFLECT:

Have each student create a final print of their stamp on small paper. Allow them to dry. Create multiples on the copier, enough for each student. Construct an **upstander book** of each student's stamp for each student. Email an explanation of the project in a class newsletter so families are sure to ask to see the upstander books and discuss with them with their children.

Additional resource:

<https://www.togetheragainstbullying.org/tab/activities/you-choose>