Introduction: What is the Social Justice Driven Arts Framework?
The following document outlines the Social Justice Driven Arts Framework (SJDA Framework) developed by the Arts in Action Arts Faculty as part of the Arts for LA Activate Fellowship in Arts Advocacy Leadership. The SJDA Framework presents a social justice arts pedagogy that harnesses the creative, cultural and healing powers of arts education in service of the creation of a more just and equitable world. The SJDA Framework is meant to accompany the AIA Purposeful Action Curricular Objectives as a tool in executing the annual AIA Social Justice Project Based Learning Units. The SJDA Framework is organized as a series of Four Lenses that can be applied to any social justice project at any stage of development:

Lens 1: Arts and Cultural Identity Affirmation
Lens 2: Art Appreciation as a Tool for Cultivating Cultural Empathy, Respect, Understanding and Connection
Lens 3: Arts Practice as a Tool for Personal Expression and Healing from Systems of Oppression
Lens 4: Arts Practice as Protest, a Public Community Offering for Justice

These Four Lenses are inspired by the Teaching Tolerance Anti-Bias Social Justice Standards: “1) Unpacking Identity 2) Unpacking Diversity 3) Understanding Justice and 4) Unpacking Action (Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards).” Teaching Tolerance is an educational organization providing resources to teachers, students, and administrators to be “active participants in a diverse democracy (Teaching Tolerance, About).” AIA Social Justice Projects are encouraged to connect to the arts in some way. This framework offers arts engagement as a means of designing a “purposeful action,” which is central to the AIA Social Justice Project Curriculum:

At AIA, purposeful action is defined by the following:

**Purposeful action.**
- Instructional content, while grounded in Common Core standards, is presented in ways that often hold interest and/or personal meaning for learners, often growing out of learners’ interest and concerns.
- Instructional content is consistent with the school-wide goal of preparing students to take strategic action for a more just, humane and sustainable world.
- **Connections** between the classroom work, the surrounding communities, and the world beyond the community are clear.
- Students “learn by doing,” using hands-on activities, powerful projects and experiential learning and practicing the methods of each discipline as an adult expert would.
As we move through the SJDA Framework Lenses, the goal is to demonstrate to teachers that incorporating a social justice driven arts project into your unit is a direct and meaningful way to lead students through a purposeful action. Engaging with the curricular prompts in any or all of the SJDA Lenses will ask students to learn by doing, practice authentic learning, dig into their personal interests, and most of all take action. The arts are inherently action driven. Creative expression challenges us to carefully shape our perspective into being. It is through a social justice driven arts framework that students discover their creativity is their secret weapon in the battle for justice.

Getting Started: Vocabulary and Community Building for Social Justice Driven Arts Practice

Throughout the Framework, we have used a series of words to describe arts practice. In some cases we have used art, art form, and artist and in other circumstances we have chosen cultural arts practice or cultural arts practitioner. Though the terms are sometimes interchangeable, we wanted to offer a variety of terms in order to undermine the high art versus low art, craft versus gallery, and ritual versus arts institution binaries. Cultural arts practice encompasses the Quinceanera or the Dia de los Muertos Altars, whereas the connotations around the term "art" can feel exclusive.

Before beginning your social justice arts learning with students, it is truly critical to create a educational environment where students feel safe to take risks. Without establishing norms for respect, growth, support, and confidentiality students will struggle with arts practice of any kind. Social justice conversations and art making should bring up interpersonal and political topics for students and teachers. Learning to engage in these topics with students is a difficult and rewarding part of taking on this work.

LENS 1: Arts as Cultural Identity Affirmation

At the heart of social justice education is culturally sustaining pedagogy in which the students’ identities, experiences, and issues relevant to them are centered. Students of color receive
messaging that whiteness and Euro-American culture is superior, which in turn spawns internalized racism. When the arts reflect our experience, we feel that we are special, that we belong, and that we have the support we need to thrive. This centering of Urban/Latinx/Youth identity through arts education can manifest in many ways. A mural, a mariachi song, or a quinceanera dance are examples of possible social justice arts “texts” that center our students’ identities. Learning how cultural practitioners who have similar backgrounds to our students use cultural arts practice to bring attention to urban/Latinx issues, can cultivate student's sense of self pride, belonging, and community. When choosing a social justice driven arts text teacher can ask: What are my social emotional and experiential learning objectives for my social justice project? If community building is important, choose an artform that is communal like mural making. If self reflection is a focus, perhaps poetry would be a good fit. The following curricular examples can be used as a full 4 unit progression, or as singular units.

Choose an **Artistic Cultural Practice**, like Graffiti, Bachata, or Corrido Lyric Writing relevant to your social justice project that is native to our student’s cultural community. Create informational lessons that ask: What is the history of this practice, where did it come from, who practices it, how does one learn to do it, and why do people practice it? Lessons should simultaneously ask students how they see themselves, their families, and their communities in the history and practice of these arts.

Identify a **Community Cultural Practitioner** of the chosen art form that exemplifies using their craft to center Urban/Latinx/Youth identity like Las Cafeteras, Josefina Lopez, Wayne Perry and the East Los Streetscapers and Frank Romero. Create informational lessons asking: What is this person’s background and how did they become an artist? How do they use their craft to highlight Chicanx identity? How does their art contribute to the struggle for equality and justice? If the artist is available it is always extremely meaningful for them to visit the classroom and offer a guest lesson. If they are unavailable, it is also great to identify another artist, family member, or community member who can visit the class and share a related lesson.

Create a **Hands on Experience** with the cultural practice. Once students have a basic knowledge of how an art form relates to their history, their family, and their experience, it’s time to give it a try! Going to a performance, screening, an art studio, a museum, a concert to experience the art form is one excellent way to get a first hand experience. Having a lesson(s) in how to do baile folklorico zapateado, or how to play a mariachi instrument, or how to create a street mural are also deeply impactful hands on learning examples. Though it is important to continue to tie how these arts, artists, or art works fight injustice, the simple practice of meaningfully engagement in cultural practice as a form of identity affirmation is social justice arts education at work.

Provide a mode of **Reflection**. Create a lesson in which students can reflect on questions like: How does this art form, artist, or artwork reflect my identity? How does it feel to see myself in this art? What does it mean to be proud of my culture? Why am I proud to be me?
Examples:

Local Social Justice Oriented Theater run by famous Latina writer Josefina Lopez Casa 0101 on 1st St.

Las Cafeteras, a chicanx band from East LA.
Baile Folklorico Resurrección group located in Boyle Heights

Mural in Boyle Heights by local artists East Los Streetscapers working out of Self Help Graphics
LENS 2: Art Appreciation as a Tool for Cultivating Cultural Empathy, Respect, Understanding and Connection

Learning about the cultural arts practices of our local and global neighbors can foster students’ capacity for empathy, respect, and understanding of folks who have different identities or experiences than our students. Learning to meaningfully understand the life experience of someone different from ourselves, motivates us to fight for each others’ wellbeing. As a tactic of keeping us apart so that we do not organize diverse coalitions, xenophobic rhetoric tells us that those different from us are dangerous. Teaching students about the cultural arts practices created by others, can strengthen students ability to draw critical connections between people who are different and their own experiences. The following curricular examples can be used as a full 4 unit progression, or as singular units.

Choose an **Artistic Cultural Practice from a different community from our students** like the Santa Clara Pueblo Buffalo Dance, Brazilian Capoeira, Iraqi Poetry, or African-American Quilt Making that exemplify ideas relevant to your social justice project. If your project is about Islamophobia, consider incorporating arts from the Middle East. If your project confronts immigration, think about including activist art projects from the border. Create informational lessons that cultivate deep understanding. Providing primary sources, and sources created by the cultural group, is key to developing social justice driven curriculum. Interven into lessons aiming for deep understanding, should be exercises that cultivate empathy. Questions like: What is admirable about this art practice? What challenges do these artists face in making their work? How do I see myself in the artist's desires, experiences, and creations?

Identify a **Community Cultural Practitioner** of the chosen art form that students can become deeply acquainted. It can be useful to think of debunking outdated methods of "multiculturalism" that only scratch the surface of many cultural practices by taking the time to more profoundly
connect on a personal level to one artist. Artists like Kara Walker, Kendrick Lamar, Cannupa Hanska Luger, No One Art House, Kahinde Wiley, or the Clown Dancers of South Central, are all great examples of (mostly local) artists from different demographics than our students that engage in social justice driven arts practices. Create informational lessons asking: What is this person’s background and how did they become an artist? How do they use their craft to highlight their identity? How does their art contribute to the struggle for equality and justice? If the artist is available it is always extremely meaningful for them to visit the classroom and offer a guest lesson. If they are unavailable, it is also great to identify another artist or community member who can visit the class and share a related lesson.

Create a **Hands on Experience** with the cultural practice. Once students have a basic knowledge of how an art form or artist uses their work to share their particular cultural point of view, it can be great to experience the art in person. It is important during this cultural empathy and understanding module to also talk about cultural appropriation. Learning about each other’s cultures is critical to our building a more united world, however when we take that learning, and take it out of context, simplify it, monetize it, or disrespect it we can do more harm to each other than good. Going to a performance, screening, an art studio, a museum, a concert to experience the art form is one excellent way to get a first hand experience. Having a lesson(s) in how to do Maori Haka, Japanese Taiko, West African Dance Class, or the AIDS quilt can also be a deeply impactful hands on learning examples. Though it is important to continue to tie how these arts, artists, or art works fight injustice, the simple practice of meaningfully engaging in arts practice as a form of cultural empathy is social justice arts education in action.

Provide a mode of **Reflection**. Create a lesson in which students can reflect on questions like: What did this art form, artist, or artwork teach me about the culture in which it was created? What struggles face this community? What did it teach me about myself? After learning about this art and culture, how might you support this community in the future in our shared struggle for justice?

Examples:
Taiko Drummers in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles

RANDERSON ROMUALDO CORDEIRO, Kehinde Wiley
LENS 3: Arts Practice as a Tool for Personal Expression and Healing from Systems of Oppression

Arts practice as personal expression can be hugely cathartic and healing for all people. Though this type of art making is not always meant for public display, it can be some of the most valuable arts experience for participants. Healing expressive arts practices ask us to listen to ourselves, our non verbal, non linear, selves and creatively communicate that which we hear. Those students impacted by systemic oppression manifesting as trauma, stress, depression, anxiety, or low self-confidence can experience healing relief through the opportunity to listen to their inner selves and artistically tell their story. Critical to the healing power of expressive arts practice, is that students feel they are in a judgement free zone, and can be safe to try new things, share their feelings, and make work that is messy and emotional as opposed to rational and polished. An essential first step in healing arts pedagogy is community building amongst students and teachers in which all involved are empowered to be vulnerable. The following curricular examples can be used as a full 4 unit progression, or as singular units.
Offer an **Inner Listening Practice**. Inner Listening can be practiced in many ways but at its core is a scan of the self based on sensation, then emotion, then thought. Inner Listening can be practiced through guided meditation or body scans in which students lie on the floor, or sit quietly with eyes closed and slowly track sensation through their bodies. Sensations in the body arise as hot cold, tight, relaxed, hard, soft, painful, easful, or full, empty. Next, teachers can prompt students find feelings in their bodies, hearts and minds. A student might feel calm, safe, uneasy, scared, nervous, happy etc. Finally teachers might ask students to think to themselves: Why do I feel this way? Students might formulate a thought or reflection about their current state of being.

Create a space for **Expressive Practice**. Having a journal to record students inner listening practice can be useful, so that they can begin the practice of placing their inner experience in the outer world. Next, offer a single arts practice, a series of many arts practices, or spread of multiple expressive tools in one lesson. No matter if you choose to offer students visual arts, dance, poetry, musical, or theatrical practice, it is important to communicate to students their objective is not to create a great piece of art, but to engage fully and carefully in expressing their inner self. The products of your practice sessions can be shared in pairs or with the larger class, but should be kept confidential unless students decide to share their work more widely. It is great to think of Cultural Healing Arts Practice in which the forms offered for expressivity are directly linked to student’s cultural backgrounds. This intersectional social justice arts pedagogy can provide deep and wide spread healing for students.

Actively consider **Historical Oppression and Transgenerational Trauma** in your lessons. How does racial, economic, gendered, sexual oppression impact the inner lives of our students? What wounds might our students be carrying for their parents, grandparents, and communities? With these questions in mind, providing sociological resources, community narratives, and opportunities to collect family histories as research for students arts projects can assist the healing process. By understanding that our pain and joy is connected to our families and histories, we can cultivate a sense of interconnectivity and simultaneously become empowered to end the cycle of oppression.

**Examples:**

Bill T Jones: Still/Here: A dance performance created by collecting the stories of the terminally ill and bring their words and story to life on stage.
Cuerva Urban Folklórico: Missing 43: A performance about the Student Teachers disappeared by the Mexican Government

Vik Muniz: Waste Land Portraits: Portraits created by folks who live in the gigantic dumps in Brazil.
As we have seen in the three social justice arts lenses above, arts practice has the potential to foster social justice tenants without being conventionally based in protest. By engaging with a cultural arts practice based in our students heritage, students can gain self-confidence, community pride, positive role models, and a deeper understanding of the power of their identity. By learning about the cultural arts practices of others, students can grow their powers of cultural empathy, connect their life experience to those who are different from them, and more profoundly understand the struggles and joys of another culture. Through healing expressive arts practice, students can experience the benefits of a therapeutic process without having to rationally or verbally deal with their emotions. This potential for healing provides students with experiences and toolsets to address the emotional impacts of systematic oppression in their lives. All of these lenses can be applied on their own or in tandem. The final lens, Cultural Arts Practice as Protest is the lens most outwardly driven by action, protest, and resistance.

**LENS 4: Cultural Arts Practice as Protest, a Public Community Offering for Justice**

Lens 1 resists cultural whitewashing through identity affirmation, Lens 2 fights xenophobia by fostering cultural interconnectivity, and Lens 3 disrupts the capitalist, heteronormative, white supremacist patriarchy which endeavors to break our spirits by boldly prioritizing internal healing. Lens 4 asks students to consider the function of their artistic cultural practice as a form of protest. The arts have always played a key role in collective action towards justice. Banners, signage, and design have the capacity to unite an entire movement behind a single image. Songs and chants can speak out our message through the connective power of music. Theater and dance offer the performative opportunity to share commentary, emotion, and narrative with the masses. The goal of protest is to disrupt the status quo and uplift the voices of the oppressed with the intention of social change. Arts education by its very definition is the pedagogy of action. To make art, we must put our selves, our ideas, our hopes and struggles out into the world and in this way the arts are a powerful tool for social change. The following curricular examples should be used as a full 4 unit progression.

**Identify a Social Justice Issue** that students feel passionately about. Make sure the issue is expansive enough that students can approach the concept from many personal and artistic perspectives.

Create a framework for **Student Driven Research Method** that prioritizes primary sources, oral histories, interdisciplinary texts and students as ethnographers/sociologists. The discovery of a particular nugget of research the specifically speaks to a student, will fuel their creative process with ownership and passion.

Provide students with the **Creative Tools to Transpose their Research into Art**. Begin by offering some models of how artists have created work in response to social injustice. Analyze the ways in which the artists use their medium to confront the issue at hand. Next, offer students prompts like: If you had to turn that Cesar Chavez speech in to a dance, what verbs,
adjectives or nouns might you use to create choreography? After learning about the Separated Families statistics, is there an image or snapshot that comes to mind? Create a drawing based on your snapshot.

Develop an **Action Plan to Share Student’s Work with the Public**. It is important that students have the opportunity to share their research and making with their community. Though any format can be framed as an action, some examples might be a march, a performance, a school assembly, a public video, a website, a creative letter writing campaign, a presentation at a neighborhood council meeting, or a subversive gallery opening. It is critical that these actions offer students the challenge to stand up for what they believe in. As young people with a huge stake in the future, the goal is for students to experience the power of their voice as a tool for social change.

Examples:

![Climate Change Protest Poster](image1)

**Climate Change Protest Poster**

![Dinner Party by Judy Chicago](image2)

**Dinner Party by Judy Chicago**
Alec Baldwin as Donald Trump on SNL

Kendrick Lamar Performs to *Pimp A Butterfly*
**Conclusion: I am not an Art Teacher. How can I use the Social Justice Driven Arts Framework?**

Classroom teachers might feel like because they are not “art teachers,” so they cannot lead their students in arts based lessons throughout their social justice project. Our hope is that all teachers will be empowered to remember that they, just like the students, have a voice, a culture, and a place in the world that can be expressed through creativity. The curricular prompts found throughout the SJDA Framework have been designed so that facilitators can be of any educational background, and do not demand a particular artistic expertise. In the fight for justice, the creative weapons forged through social justice driven arts practice are within all of our reach.