Lesson Plan

Challenging Intersectional Inequality through Digital Media Images

Lesson Plan Author
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Featured Texts/Authors

Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw (she/her/hers)
Image source [here](#)

Dr. Moya Bailey (she/her/hers)
Image source [here](#)

Izetta Autumn Mobley (she/her/hers)
Image source [here](#)


Overview

The overarching objective of this unit is for students to put theoretical and empirical frameworks for understanding intersectional inequality in conversation with contemporary, visual art created by contemporary social justice activists, often characterized by their digital engagement and attention to intersectionality (Zimmerman 2017).

In this unit, students will gain a deeper understanding of two key concepts developed by the featured authors, Crenshaw’s (1991) concept of representational intersectionality and Bailey and Mobley’s (2019) Black feminist disability framework.

Crenshaw’s representational intersectionality highlights how pop culture portrayals can overlook, misrepresent, and marginalize women of color and other individuals. These representations can further oppress such people along intersectional lines, by obscuring their authentic lived experiences. As explained by the Women of Color Policy Network, representational intersectionality refers to the depiction of individuals and groups in dominant culture and society through media, texts, language, and images. It pays close attention to how both the dominant and marginalized groups are represented in society. It refers to the way race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnic images in society come together to create unique and specific narratives that shape and inform policies, laws, and institutions.

The Black feminist disability framework introduced by Bailey and Mobley addresses overlooked considerations of the intersectional nature of oppression, specifically the need to consider disability in Black Studies and race in Disability Studies.

Students’ knowledge about these two key frameworks will then become the basis for them to discover and engage critically with visual literacy, or the “ability to construct meaning from visual images” (Girogisis, Johnson, Bonomo, Colbert et al. 1999: 146). We live in an increasingly visual culture shaped by digital technology in particular, and this makes the need for visual literacy and the ability to “read” images in a meaningful way a vital skill (Bamford 2003; Oring 2000). Visual images enhance student learning by offering concrete representations of abstract processes. Thus, they constitute key facilitators of problem-solving, critical thinking, and higher-order cognitive skills (Bamford 2003).

To strengthen their visual literacy skills, students will engage with social media images from social justice projects that contest representational inequality, such as Girlgaze, a platform that aims to close the gender gap by creating visibility and tangible jobs for emerging Generation Z female and non-binary photographers and directors. Incorporating their understanding of representational intersectionality and the Black feminist disability framework, students will analyze, curate, and/or create visual art exhibits that challenge mainstream/popular representations of individuals oppressed along intersectional axes.
Learning Goals

Students will be able to:

Part I: Explain the Core Contributions of the Texts

2. Explain the core contributions to Crenshaw and intersectional theory put forward by Bailey and Mobley (2019).

Part II: Apply Concepts from the Texts to Digital Media to Build Visual Literacy

1. Sharpen visual literacy skills for analyzing more consciously the many images they encounter daily in the digital age.
2. Appraise how multimedia/visual forms of popular media resist and/or reproduce representational axes of inequality, using examples from social media platforms such as Instagram’s #GirlGaze.
3. Apply Bailey and Mobley’s (2019) Black feminist disability framework to identify images that showcase or challenge the types of intersectional blind spots highlighted by B&M.

Part III: Create / Curate Mini-Art Exhibits to Challenge Representational Dimensions of Intersectional Inequality

1. **Mini-museum Project A:** Practice curatorial art exhibition skills – categorize visual media; assemble images that support a clear curatorial thesis, as a mini-exhibit; and write powerful captions and curatorial statements that help communicate the images’ meanings.
2. **Mini-museum Project B:** Collaborate to 1) design a mini-portfolio comprised of original images (photography or other artwork) for #GirlGaze or another platform that thoughtfully and creatively illustrate/challenge specific, representational forms of intersectional inequality and 2) write powerful captions and artists’ statements that help communicate the images’ meanings.
**Type of Lesson**
Ideally a week-long (or more) unit, adaptable to intro-level or advanced classes in Women’s & Gender Studies; Digital Media; Inequality/Social Stratification; Social Movements/Social Change; Race & Ethnicity; and Intersectional Theory & Practice.

To adapt the unit to introductory levels, instructors should spend more time constructing a mutual understanding of intersectional theory, before attempting to apply it. Be on the lookout for common misconceptions for introductory-level students, based on their prior knowledge. For example, introductory-level students may confuse markers of difference with forms of oppression. Visual representations of intersectional theory can help students better understand these types of concepts, as with this graphic by Women of Color Policy Network:

![Intersectional Theory Graphic](image)

Students may also find it difficult to conceptualize how macro-levels of discrimination differ from micro-levels. Here is another useful graphic by Women of Color Policy Network:

![Macro and Micro Discrimination Graphic](image)
Classroom Setting & Student Population
This lesson plan is intended for undergraduate students and can be used in a variety of
gender & sexuality, race & ethnicity, digital media, stratification/inequality, and social
movement courses. It can be adapted for both smaller/seminar-sized classes and larger
classroom settings.

Digital Media
Students/instructor can choose their own digital media and specific hashtags of interest, but here are some ideas.

Key Social Media Sites Featuring Visual Art that Challenges Mainstream Representations and Highlights Intersectional Axes of Oppression

1. GIRLGAZE
   Instagram and Website
   Example 1, Example 2, Example 3, Example 4, Example 5, Example 6, Example 7, Example 8, Example 9 (video clip), Example 10, Example 11, Example 12

2. The Disability Collection
   Challenges stock photo portrayals of disability (and lack thereof)

Suggestions for other relevant Instagram hashtags
Note: Students may be more familiar with relevant hashtags than the instructor, so I encourage instructors to incorporate student input.

#NotYourInspirationPorn
   Example 1 (video), Example 2, Example 3

#Blackanddisabled, #disabledpoc, #spoonielife, #queeranddisabled
   Example 1, Example 2, Example 3, Example 4, Example 5, Example 6, Example 7, Example 8

#povertyporn
   Example 1, Example 2, Example 3, Example 4 (video clip), Example 5

#blm, #saytheirname, #sayhername, #blacktranslivesmatter
   Example 1, Example 2, Example 3, Example 4, Example 5, Example 6, Example 7
Additional Resources for Student Projects

Instructors can provide these resources to students to aid them in developing visual arguments about Crenshaw’s (1991) concept of representational intersectionality and Bailey and Mobley’s (2019) Black feminist disability framework.

Girlgaze


Digital Citizenship and Critical Literacy in Digital Activism


Curation


Popular Cultural References

Spoone
Recommended Teaching Approach

Introduction: Begin by communicating the unit’s learning goals transparently to students

Explain the overarching goal of the unit and provide students with a road map of how they will build skills to connect Crenshaw’s (1991) representational inequality; Bailey and Mobley’s (2019) Black feminist disability framework; and digital media images.

Part I: Explain the Core Contributions of the Texts

Learning Objective 1: Students will be able to distinguish between the three interrelated axes of intersectional inequality articulated by Crenshaw (1991): structural, political, and representational.

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<tr>
<th>Classroom Activities/Assessment Techniques</th>
<th>Instructor Script/Prompts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Think, Pair, Share</strong></td>
<td><strong>Think, Pair, Share prompt:</strong> “What are the three types of intersectionality Crenshaw (1991) discusses, and how does she distinguish between them?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Begin class with an activity that engages all students and assesses their understanding of Crenshaw (1991), e.g. a “Think, Pair, Share” activity.</td>
<td><strong>Sample follow-up prompts:</strong> “What examples does Crenshaw provide of [alternate inserting structural, political, or representational] inequality?”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Concept Clarification Activity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Key passages from text to highlight:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>After assessing students’ understanding through the Think, Pair, Share, instructor can choose from a variety of activities</td>
<td><strong>STRUCTURAL INTERSECTIONALITY:</strong> “[T]he ways in which the location of women of color at the intersection of race and gender makes our actual experience of domestic violence, rape, and...”</td>
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to help clarify/deepen students’ understandings of structural, political, and representational inequality (e.g. facilitated large class discussion or concept mapping in small groups).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Student discussion of relationship between representational inequality and contemporary digital media</th>
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<td>This can be done in large or small group discussion, or as a brainstormed listing activity.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Connect representational inequality to digital media:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prep students for focusing on Crenshaw’s third axis of intersectional inequality, representational, by asking open-ended questions such as the following:</td>
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“How might Crenshaw analyze the perpetuation of or resistance to representational forms of intersectional inequality on Instagram?”
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**remedial reform qualitatively different than that of white women” (1245).**

**POLITICAL INTERSECTIONALITY:**

“How both feminist and antiracist politics have, paradoxically, often helped to marginalize the issue of violence against women of color” (1245).

“The concept of political intersectionality highlights the fact that women of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas” (1251-52).

**REPRESENTATIONAL INTERSECTIONALITY:**

“[T]he cultural construction of women of color […] how controversies over the representation of women of color in popular culture can also elide the particular location of women of color, and thus become yet another source of intersectional disempowerment” (1245).

“With respect to the rape of Black women, race and gender converge in ways that are only vaguely understood. […] Black women victims […] fall into the void between the concerns about women’s issues and concerns about racism” (1282).

“[W]hen one discourse fails to acknowledge the significance of the other, the power relations that each attempts to challenge are strengthened” (1282).
Instructor can highlight for students this related passage from Crenshaw:
“Such an analysis would include both the ways in which these images are produced through a confluence of prevalent narratives of race and gender, as well as a recognition of how contemporary critiques of racist and sexist representation marginalize women of color” (1283).

Sample follow-up question: “What kinds of prevalent narratives of [race and gender, race and class, disability and sexual orientation – instructor can highlight a variety of intersectional narratives that perpetuate representational oppression] do you see reproduced in [popular media, social media, television, advertising, etc.]?”

Note: Check for misconceptions/preconceptions continually. For intro-level, showing visual aids to clarify misconceptions can be useful (see some recommendations on page 4).
Learning Objective 2: Students will be able to explain the core contributions to Crenshaw and intersectional theory put forward by Bailey and Mobley (2019).

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<tr>
<td><strong>Jigsaw Puzzle</strong> to Co-Construct Understanding of B&amp;M Central Arguments</td>
<td><strong>Intro discussion before breaking into jigsaw groups:</strong> The jigsaw activity and Bailey &amp; Mobley’s (B&amp;M) core argument can be introduced by posing a question to the entire class such as, “Why do Bailey and Mobley point out that only a year separates the publication of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1991) article “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” and the signing of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) (1990)?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructions and tips for running a jigsaw puzzle classroom <a href="#">here</a> and <a href="#">here</a></td>
<td><strong>Central argument text to highlight:</strong> “Both Crenshaw’s articulation of intersectionality and the signing of ADA serve as pivotal interventions that illuminate the oppressive structures that impact women of color and disabled people, respectively. Crenshaw noted the interplay between race and gender in violence against Black women; we take up intersectionality to argue that a single-issue approach to disability fosters the same pitfalls. Our intervention requires intersectionality to explicitly attend to disability. It is our contention that racism, sexism, and ableism share a eugenic impulse that needs to be uncovered and felled” (21).</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Jigsaw Activity Prompts</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jigsaw Group 1:</strong> What are specific examples B&amp;M give of how Black Studies have overlooked disability?</td>
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<td><strong>Jigsaw Group 2:</strong> What are specific examples B&amp;M give of Disability Studies have overlooked race as an analytic category?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jigsaw Group 3:</strong> In what ways, according to Bailey &amp;</td>
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| Assessment Activity A: Invented Dialogue - “The Phone Call Home” | Mobley, do ableism and notions of disability constitute a major component of anti-Black racism?  

**Jigsaw Group 4:** What examples do B&M provide for how to put a Black feminist disability framework into practice?  
(If needed, direct students to search for examples in the text related to the following statement: “We can begin to actualize theoretical interventions that challenge mainstream news narratives that erase race and gender and forestall the ableism used to explain away white violence” (31).  
(Instructor can create additional questions as needed to match the number of students in the classroom).  

In this directed paraphrasing activity, instructor invites students to pair up to do a role play skit in which they paraphrase a central concept for a specific audience (a friend or family member from home), translating specialized information into language the audience can understand. Students synthesize their knowledge of how to apply B&M’s Black feminist disability framework to visual media in a carefully structured conversation, choosing and weaving in relevant quotations from the reading/s. After practicing, a few pairs volunteer to share their role play skit with the class. In a post-mortem discussion of the skit, the instructor guides students in highlighting key concepts included/omitted in the skit. |
| Assessment Activity B: Angelo & Cross’s (1993) Analytic Memo | Alternately, the instructor can assess student learning by asking students to write a one-page analysis of a specific issue, to help inform a decision-maker. Instructors can pick a specific issue/problem (such as recent BLM protests in response to George Floyd’s 2020 murder and other examples of systematic police violence against black communities), and create prompts for students to engage with B&M in order to construct a one-page memo of recommendations for a decision-maker related to the topic/issue. |
Part II: Apply Concepts from the Texts to Digital Media to Build Visual Literacy

Learning Objective 1: Students will be able to strengthen visual literacy skills for analyzing the floods of images that spill into their consciousness in the digital age.

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<td><strong>Introduction to Visual Literacy:</strong> Anonymous Word Association</td>
<td>Instructors can assess students’ prior knowledge of the concept of visual literacy through activities such as an anonymous online word cloud. Alternately, without technology, students can co-constructing a concept map on the blackboard – “visual literacy” is written in large font in the center, and students take turns coming up and adding words around it that they might associate with visual literacy or hypothesize that it might mean.</td>
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**Teaching Visual Texts in the Classroom**

Clarify students’ understanding of the concept of visual literacy as “the ability to construct meaning from images...a form of critical thinking that enhances your intellectual capacity” (Brian Kennedy, Director of the Toledo Museum of Art, cited in this useful guide to teaching visual texts in the classroom).
Guided Visual Analysis:  
**Focused Listing & Discussion**

Example questions for listing (can be adapted by instructor):

1. What can you see? Note Visual Literacy Clues (VLCs) such as subject matter, colors, angles, symbols, vectors, lighting, gaze, gestures, shapes.

2. How does it make you feel?

3. What is the image trying to tell us? What about any accompanying text?

To model the types of questions used to build visual literacy, choose one or a few sample social media images to analyze with the class. Provide students a handout or visual slide with the focused listing questions, and give them several minutes to look at the image and respond to each of the questions.

The goal is mainly to allow students to become comfortable using the vocabulary of visual analysis and to highlight how increased visual literacy can enrich their understanding of the media they consume, as well as their enjoyment of visual art.

**Visual Literacy Resources for Instructors**

Useful follow-up prompts about specific VLCs can be found [here](#), to help instructors guide a group discussion of the students’ lists.

Other useful visual literacy guides include the General Questions section of [this guide](#) by the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art; [this student art guide](#) by Amiria Gale; [this list of 82 questions](#) to ask about a work of art, by Cindy Ingram; the well-organized table of the Visual Elements of Design in [this guide to Writing a Visual Analysis](#), from Chandler-Gilbert Community College; [and this list of Common Core Questions for Discussing Artworks](#) by the Terra Foundation.
Learning Objective 2: Students will be able to appraise how multimedia/visual forms of popular media resist or reproduce representational axes of inequality, on social media platforms (e.g. Instagram’s #GirlGaze).

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<td><strong>Facilitated group discussion</strong> of how one or two images resist or reproduce representational axes of inequality on social media platforms.</td>
<td>To model applying visual literacy to Crenshaw’s concept of representational intersectionality, instructors can facilitate a group discussion about one or two images, again drawing from core questions that build visual literacy and connecting them to representational intersectionality.</td>
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<td><strong>Individual or Paired Practice Image Curation</strong> – Connect images to Crenshaw reading. Students take 10-15 minutes to gather 2-3 images from social media sites that they feel say something about a specific, intersectional form of oppression.</td>
<td><strong>Instructor prompt</strong>: Select up two three images that counter or reproduce a specific form of representational intersectionality.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Image Share-Out</strong></td>
<td>Adapting to time constraints, instructor can invite students to share the images they chose, explain why they chose them, and open up the discussion to the class, drawing out more VLCs.</td>
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Learning Objective 3: Students will be able to apply Bailey and Mobley’s (2019) Black feminist disability framework to identify images that showcase or challenge the types of intersectional blind spots highlighted by B&M.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Individual or Paired Practice Image Curation</strong> – Students take 10-15 min. to select and connect 2-3 images to the B&amp;M reading.</td>
<td><strong>Instructor Prompt:</strong> Gather 2-3 images that either A) showcase the interplay and shared oppressive impulses between multiple axes of inequality or B) showcase some of the pitfalls pointed out by B&amp;M of a “single-issue approach” to a form of inequality such as ableism, racism, or sexism.</td>
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| Image Share-Out | Adapting to time constraints, instructor can invite students to share the images they chose, explain why they chose them, and open up the discussion to the class, drawing out more VLCs. |

**Instructor follow-up prompts:** Within the hashtag/site you looked at, which voices were privileged? Which were absent? Why do you think that is? (Instructor can tailor to draw attention to the types of analytical gaps discussed by Bailey and Mobley (2019).)

**Additional ideas for leading discussions in more advanced-level classrooms:** Instructors can highlight different aspects of the complicated ways in which intersectional inequality can operate.

For example:
- Instructors can invite students to consider how posts that may challenge one form of
representational inequality may simultaneously reproduce another form of oppression through representation.

- To that end, instructors can also ask students to consider which group or groups seem to feel comfortable “claiming” certain hashtags.
- Instructors can prompt students to decipher whose norms, values, and perspectives seem to be considered normal or legitimate by a particular artist or within a particular set of hashtags, or on a particular digital media platform.
- Questions of “legitimacy” could potentially be measured, to some degree, by likes/upvotes.
Part III: Create / Curate Mini-Art Exhibits to Challenge Representational Dimensions of Intersectional Inequality

Mini-museum Project A: Practice curatorial art exhibition skills – categorize visual media; assemble images that support a clear curatorial thesis, as a mini-exhibit; and write powerful captions and curatorial statements that help communicate the images’ meanings.

Mini-museum Project B: Collaborate with a partner to 1) design a mini-portfolio comprised of original images (photography or other artwork) for #GirlGaze or another platform that thoughtfully and creatively illustrate/challenge specific, representational forms of intersectional inequality, and 2) write powerful captions and artists’ statements that help communicate the images’ meanings.

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<tr>
<td><strong>An Interdisciplinary Collaboration Opportunity for Instructors</strong></td>
<td><strong>Follow-up Prompt:</strong> As you look through images, bear in mind the Audre Lorde quote cited by Bailey and Mobley: As Black feminist Audre Lorde astutely put it, “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives” (1984, 138; cited in Bailey and Mobley 2019, 20-21).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructors can collaborate with faculty and staff on campus who work with visual media and/or gallery spaces and can highlight for students the importance and value of such kinds of interdisciplinary collaborations. It can be helpful at the start of the project to invite a guest speaker, such as a Director of Academic Inquiry at a campus gallery, into the classroom to help students understand the core components of exhibition proposals and image curation, both by artists and curators.</td>
<td>Resources for learning about the concept of a curatorial thesis: Joanne Mattera’s “Curatorial Thinking” provides useful tips for emerging curators on curating an art exhibition with works that advance a curatorial thesis with depth and breadth. Similarly, this article by Alyson Stanfield explains that “[c]urators research,</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Exhibition Location Ideas</strong></td>
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<td>Ideally, if instructors are able, they will coordinate with other faculty/staff on campus to find some kind of exhibition space for showcasing their students’ final exhibition projects.</td>
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<td>Examples of possible exhibition locations include formal gallery spaces on/off-campus or a more informal space, such as the hallway of a classroom building or student union. If no such arrangements</td>
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are possible, instructors can turn their classrooms into a gallery for at least one day, or create an imaginary gallery (and insert an invented gallery name in the prompt).

Here’s an example of the type of assignment prompt/guidelines I hand out to students:

Emerging curators and artists will present mini-exhibitions in support of a curatorial thesis/artist statement.

The college art gallery [or insert other exhibition space name, fictional or real] is accepting proposals for mini-exhibits of works of art on social media that challenge intersectional forms of representational inequality. Special attention should be paid to interrogating the interplay and shared oppressive impulses between multiple axes of systemic inequality, e.g. ableism and racism.

Whether students decide to curate works of visual art created by others on social media platforms or to become artists themselves, students should work in pairs to create a mini-exhibition proposal that includes the following elements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1) Catchy Exhibition Title</th>
<th>review, study, and select the best examples to support [their] curatorial thesis. They add.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The exhibition title helps introduce the audience to the work and start a conversation. Even if you do not want to be terribly overt about the meaning behind your (original or curated) works, a title can help to bring everything together - like a nice bow on a well-wrapped gift!</td>
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<tr>
<th>2) Actionable Hashtag</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In keeping with our goal of encouraging viewers to question power structures and societal injustices in order to take action for change, the museum asks curators/artists to propose an actionable hashtag for the exhibition that complements your catchy review, study, and select the best examples to support [their] curatorial thesis. They add.</td>
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</table>
exhibition title (some curators/artists weave the hashtag into the full title; others have separate titles and hashtags). How might gallery visitors use your hashtag to continue conversations about digital citizenship, critical literacy, and social movement efforts?

3) Exhibition Description/Abstract (max 500 words)
Like the abstract to an article or essay, the exhibition description/abstract succinctly summarizes the important points that would be included in a longer exhibition proposal, including the following:

- A curatorial thesis/artist’s statement about the relationship of the works to Crenshaw (1991) and Bailey and Mobley (2019) and why this exhibition is important (not just to you, but to the gallery and/or the broader community),
- What medium the works you have curated are in,
- The number of pieces, and the size of the work.
- Be sure to argue for why this exhibition should be at the museum now.

4) Target Audience (max 100 words)
What groups will be interested in this exhibition and why?

5) Visual Material to Include + Image List (10-15 JPG digital images in jpeg format at 72-300 dpi (standard web resolution), with dimensions no smaller than 1920 pixels on the longest side, submitted in a single PowerPoint file). Contact the instructor if you need assistance figuring out how to resize images.

Please submit images and their information in a single PowerPoint presentation (one image per slide) with names, dates, titles, mediums, and size of each work. Please number all images to correspond to an image list at the end of the PowerPoint that includes
the artists’ last name.

- For video and multi-media work, provide URL links. The videos should be up to five minutes long (Youtube, Instagram, and Vimeo links accepted for video works).
- Please view your support material before submitting to ensure its readability on Mac. Label clearly.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Mini-Exhibition Presentation and Evaluation</th>
<th>Assessment:</th>
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<td>Instructors can select a variety of assessment methods for this project, ranging from low-stakes to higher-stakes.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To actively engage and assess students’ visual literacy skills, the instructor can invite students to take turns leading discussions around each student’s mini-exhibits. The instructor can help students recall useful prompts for visual literacy by keeping them visible to all on a slide, handout, or on a blackboard.</td>
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</table>
Suggested Assessment Techniques

To assess the effectiveness of your teaching and determine the extent to which students have achieved the learning objectives of the unit, consider incorporating low-stakes assessment activities such as “minute papers” at the end of each class session you dedicate to this unit.

Instructors can also center a closing discussion around the concept of “digital citizenship” (see article resources on page 6).