

The Coming Community



An Introduction



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Photo: © Damian Griffiths

An Introduction

'An Introduction' is a series of educational resources offering teachers thematic points of entry for exhibitions at Freelands Foundation gallery.

These notes highlight the artists in our current exhibition, exploring the themes within their work and looking at their influences.

This resource will also focus on the themes of 'community', 'environment' and 'sustainability', which are relevant to some of the ideas in the exhibition. The resource also poses questions to inform discussions within the classroom and beyond.

The themes presented here are intended to be used as a catalyst for conversations with students regarding the various communities that we live in today. It also asks what these communities might look like in the future, as a consequence of the effects of the current climate crisis.



What is the exhibition about?

The Coming Community exhibition draws upon the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben's ideas on what 'community' means. Agamben suggests that communities are constantly changing and re-forming themselves and that there is not one particular way a community should look or operate.

The exhibition includes projects drawn from several different geographies which consider strategies for humans living together in the face of change. It brings together two artists and an artist collective – Grace Ndiritu (UK/Kenya), Andrea Zittel (USA) and Karrabing Film Collective (Australia) – who have all imagined new forms of community as a response to the current global political instability and the escalating concerns about the future impact of the climate emergency.

These notes provide an opportunity to explore further the themes of community and sustainability, as well as investigating how these ideas can relate back to the school itself as an example of a growing and evolving community. The resource will also pose the question: 'What kind of school would the students and teachers like to build?'





Photo: © Damian Griffiths





Photo: © Damian Griffiths

Grace Ndiritu



The Ark, 2019, installation view, Bluecoat, Liverpool.
Photo: © Rob Battersby

Grace Ndiritu

In 2012, dual-national British and Kenyan artist Grace Ndiritu (b.1976, Birmingham, UK) made the decision to spend time in cities only when necessary, and to otherwise live in alternative communities. This decision took her to many different places: to Thai and Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, alternative communities in New Zealand and Argentina, festivals in America and a New Age community in Scotland.

These experiences and the artist's research have inspired Ndiritu's ongoing 'pay what you can' fashion and economic research project, **COVERSLUT© (2018)**, which focuses on issues of democracy, race and class politics. The exhibition display also features documentation of *The Ark: Center For Interdisciplinary Experimentation (2017)*, a model for creating an off-grid community within an urban setting, where Ndiritu brought together people from diverse walks of life and professions.

Themes To Explore

Community
Alternative
Research
Lived Experience
Fashion
Economics
Costume
Film
Protest





Photo: © Damian Griffiths



The Ark, 2019, installation view, Bluecoat, Liverpool.

Photo: © Rob Battersby



Andrea Zittel



Planar Pavilions at A-Z West, 2017. Courtesy Regan Projects, Los Angeles. Photo: © Sarah Lyon



Andrea Zittel

Andrea Zittel (b.1965, Escondido, California, USA) is an American artist whose practice focuses on the questions, 'How to live?' and 'What gives life meaning?' Zittel examines these questions through a series of investigations about our daily lives. For example, in one ongoing experiment she designs her own seasonal uniform and wears this same outfit every day for weeks on end until the beginning of the next season.

For Zittel, this is all about discovering what we can live without, and these smaller investigations now form part of a physical/live artwork, *A-Z West*, which is located in the Californian desert. *A-Z West* is a destination which houses many different buildings and structures that collectively question ideas about spaces, objects and ways of living. *A-Z West* contains Zittel's studio and allows her to host students, artists and other like-minded guests who are interested in questioning how we might live and how we interact with the spaces we embody.

Themes To Explore

Community
Daily Lives
Sleeping
Shelter
Environments
Habitat
Clothing
Investigation
Objects
Spaces
Hosting
Recycling
Sustainability
Re-use
Testing
Experimentation





*Wagon Station Encampment 2012 – current at
A–Z West. Courtesy Regan Projects, Los Angeles.
Photo: © Lance Brewer*



Native Experience and the three dynamic orders of its expression #1, 2010.

Photo: © Damian Griffiths

Karrabing Film Collective



Karrabing Film Collective, *The Mermaids, or Aiden in Wonderland*, 2018, film still. Image: © the artists

Karrabing Film Collective

The Karrabing Film Collective formed around 2010 in response to what the Collective felt was an ongoing assault from the Australian state on indigenous lands and social environments. The Collective is an arts and film group which uses its practice to help organise and analyse the local Karrabing population and its wider society. Most Karrabing are Indigenous people and live in a low-income rural community. The Collective's films and artworks represent local people's lives, forge connections with their environment, and look at the wider global representations of indigeneity.

Earlier works predominantly take the form of documentation, for instance using statistics concerning indigenous life which are supported by imagery of indigenous community activities and places such as hunting, fishing and rugged landscapes. Their later works such as the film *The Mermaids, or Aiden in Wonderland* (2018) take a more experimental approach in how their ideas and themes are explored through their artistic practice.

Themes To Explore

Film-making
Response
Language
Grass Roots
Rural
Politics
Government
Community
Social
Documentation
Intervention
Power





Karrabing Film Collective, *The Mermaids, or Aiden in Wonderland*, 2018, film still. Image: © the artists



Karrabing Film Collective, *The Mermaids, or Aiden in Wonderland*, 2018, film still. Image: © the artists

Activities

Here are some suggestions for how to use and interpret the themes within your group, both through practical exploratory activities alongside more conversational and discussion-led activities:

1 — Adapting your current environment

Thinking about the themes of sustainably and community, how could you adapt the classroom environment to be more functional if you take into consideration how the class works as a community of people?

Ask the students to reinvent the classroom, by breaking down the various functions it serves and then looking at these afresh.

- How could the students make the space totally different so that they interact with the classroom in an entirely new way?
- You could also adapt this activity to focus on other spaces, whether within the school itself, or perhaps taking a more general look at towns, cities and other environments.



Activities

2 — Reimagining your current environment

Ask students to bring into school some recyclable materials such as cardboard, newspaper, clothing, etc.

Using these materials, construct a large 3D cityscape in the classroom that students can walk through and imagine what a future environment could look like.

- What sort of cities will exist?
- How will people interact and travel around the city?
- Where will they get their food?
- Where will they study?
- What will healthcare look like?

Alternatively, you can choose a different sort of environment to imagine using this format.

3 — Exploring your current environment

Divide into five groups and ask each group to explore the environment using one of the five senses and to propose different ways of documenting their findings.

For example, what can you smell or hear or feel on your journey around the building?

For example, to explore new perspectives the group could tape phones/cameras to their knees or hold them up as high as possible and film their journeys as they experience new ways of looking around the building.



Activities

4 — Food waste

Ask the students to bring in any spare or leftover ingredients from home and invite them to join together and make something new from the contributions they've brought along.

Depending on what you produce, and if you have any relevant connections in the area, this could be donated to a local community group.

Other ideas include making something to share at the after school club; making dishes to share between the group as a whole – you could invite members of the students' families, guardians and friends to join you – or even document the finished dishes in photographs and make simple recipe cards or a cook book!

5 — Question time

Invite different people from a variety of professions into the classroom to participate in a discussion with the class. These people could be parents/guardians or family friends of the students.

You could discuss what a sustainable school community would look like, or explore any environmental worries the group have and hear from the different voices and experiences gathered together in the room.



Activities

6 — Five-item challenge

Give the group a list of materials that they would normally use in the art room and ask them, as homework, to bring in five materials/objects that could replace the chosen items.

- For example, instead of paint, are there other places they might find natural pigments, such as from flowers and food?
- Are there any alternatives to using paper?
- Could old fabrics be stretched and used as canvas?
- Could paint brushes be made from other materials?

7 — Manifesto

Split students into smaller groups and ask each group to form a political party based around a core theme (e.g. 'sustainability', 'equality', 'law and order').

They will need to work together to develop a series of policies relating to their theme, and build these into a manifesto that they can present to the rest of the class.

From this, you could encourage the class to pool the best ideas into a single manifesto to represent the group as a whole.



Activities

8 — Uniform/clothing

Could your uniform or clothing in general be more sustainable, renewable or adaptable? What would the perfect school uniform look like and what functions would it have? Could it be more environmentally friendly?

Start a discussion with the group using these questions; find different ways to record some of the suggestions as you go along.

- Using recycled fabrics, the group could design potential options for a new, sustainable school uniform. Divide into smaller groups and make a selection of sustainable, recycled uniforms.
- The students could then present these in a fashion show and invite other students, their families, guardians and friends to see what they have made.



Activities

9 — Agree or disagree

Identify one side of the classroom as agree and one side as disagree. Get your group to stand in the middle of the classroom leaving enough space for students to move along a spectrum from agree to disagree.

Read out a few of the statements from the list below (or create your own) and, following each statement, ask the group to position themselves on the agree/disagree spectrum according to their own views.

Facilitate a discussion after the group has positioned itself, asking them why they have chosen to stand in a particular place.

List of statements:

- If I ran an art gallery, I would accept funding from companies that negatively impact on our environment.
- Having a school uniform is a good idea.
- Flying in aeroplanes should be banned.
- The voting age of 18 years old should be lowered.
- If I had money to invest, I would not care about what sort of companies it was invested in.
- You should only eat food produced in the area that you live in.
- I agreed with climate change movement Extinction Rebellion's methods of protesting.



Activities

10 — Garden in school

Could the school be more sustainable and create its own food? Could you design and plant a garden? Could the school canteen use this food? Start a discussion with the group using these questions; find different ways to record some of the suggestions as you go along.

What ideas do the group have for making these suggestions possible? Talk through and plan with the students a series of steps to realise one of the ideas, getting them to think about the themes of sustainability and environment. Can you make it happen?





Photo: © Damian Griffiths

Alternative Resources

This section includes a reading list and other resources suggested by the Freelands Foundation team.

Books

- *No One Is Too Small to Make a Difference*, Greta Thunberg (2019)
- *We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Our Voices*, edited by Wade Hudson and Cheryl Willis Hudson (2018)
- *The Lorax*, Dr Seuss (1971)
- *The Beekeeper's Lament*, Hannah Nordhaus (2011)
- *Feral*, George Monbiot (2013)
- *More Plants Less Waste*, Max La Manna (2019)

Games

- Earth Games - <https://earthgames.org/games/climatequest/>

School-wide initiatives

- RHS School Gardening - you can apply for a free welcome pack by visiting: <https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/home>



Alternative Resources

Television/Film

- *Planet Earth*, BBC
- *Hidden Kingdoms*, BBC
- *Living On One Dollar*, Zach Ingrasci and Sean Leonard (dirs.), Netflix, 2013
- *More Than Honey*, Markus Imhoof (dir.), 2013
- *A Beautiful Planet*, Toni Myers (dir.), IMAX, 2016
- *Torre David: The World's Tallest Squat*, Daniel Schwartz and Marcus Kneer (dirs.), Urban-Think Tank, 2013

Other artists to explore:

- Assemble
- Joseph Beuys
- Christo and Jeanne-Claude
- Agnes Denes
- Olafur Eliasson
- Dan Harvey and Heather Ackroyd
- Mikhail Karikis
- KIMA (architecture and design)
- ON/OFF (design collective)
- Gabriel Orozco
- Katie Paterson
- Aviva Rahmani
- Random International
- John Sabraw
- Do Ho Suh
- Rachel Sussman
- Jess Thompson (Migrateful)
- Catherine Yass



Dictionary / Glossary

This glossary was produced by Bluecoat contemporary art centre in Liverpool to support *Rise Up!* The exhibition, which was created by children and young people, was held in summer 2019, and took inspiration from the solo exhibition of Grace Ndiritu: *The Ark*. This glossary has been revised and added to by the Freelands Foundation team.

Biodiversity: The variety of different plants and animals living in a particular area or habitat.

Carbon Footprint: The amount of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, emitted by an individual, organisation, event or product, such as the amount of carbon dioxide expended by a person's activities and modes of transport during a given period of time.

Climate Justice: A term that is generally used to show that global warming is a political and ethical issue, as well as an environmental one.

Community: People living, working and spending time together in one particular area; a community is also a group of people who come together because of their common interests, social group or nationality.

Environment: The air, water and land in or on which people, animals and plants live.

Fast Fashion: Inexpensive clothing produced quickly by mass-market retailers in response to the latest fashion trends.



Dictionary / Glossary

Global Warming: The term used to describe the ongoing rise of average temperatures around the world. Also known as climate change or climate breakdown.

Green Politics: The policies or protest movements that are based around controlling or modifying human impact on the environment to create a more sustainable society.

Human Rights: The basic rights that all humans should have access to, such as food, shelter and freedom from being harmed by others. These standards were developed after the Second World War and were adopted by many countries under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

Ideology: A term to describe a set of beliefs, ideas and values that form the basis for a way of thinking about society or a political or economic system.

Plant-based Future: The proposal that adopting a vegan or largely vegetarian diet could help reduce our collective carbon footprint; some people suggest that this idea might even wipe out global food inequality.

Policy: A specific set of ideas carried out by a government, organisation or individual to change or improve society, such as an education policy.

Pressure Group: A group of people who work together to try to influence public policy, politicians and wider society, for example, by creating a protest movement.



Dictionary / Glossary

Protest Movement: A series of actions, such as organised marches or campaigning letter-writing, to try to persuade a government to change the law or revise policy decisions or to persuade organisations to change their way of operating.

Renewable Energy: A type of fuel that is unlikely run out, such as wind or solar energy.

Society: A group of people, usually defined as those with shared values and aims.

Sustainable: The use of resources in such a way that they will not run out.



About Freelands Foundation

The Freelands Foundation is a charity that supports artists and cultural institutions. Our aims are to broaden audiences for the visual arts and to enable all young people to engage with the creation and enjoyment of art.

Art and culture can provide social and economic benefits to our society. Our goal is to tackle the issues that are limiting our society's access to these benefits. This could be anything from the inequality of access to art education in schools, to the lack of sufficient support for female and emerging artists.

We aim to provoke meaningful, positive change within the visual arts sector via strategic, high-impact programmes, partnerships and activities.

These include a varied portfolio of awards that enable existing visual arts organisations to promote new or under-represented talent and to develop pioneering creative projects with artists. We also run a diverse range of events and programmes – partnering with organisations such as Tate Modern and the Institute of Education at University College London, amongst many others.

Across all of our activities we strive to empower not just individual organisations and artists but the broader arts ecosystem – from those supporting children in education, to supporting those working to promote artists and their practice. Our mission is to enable this ecosystem to continue to deliver a positive societal and economic impact to the UK.

These notes were produced by Beth Lloyd, Programme Coordinator at Freelands Foundation and designed by UTILE.

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