

# ACTIVISM IN ART

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The collage includes a portrait of Jillette Smith on the left, a cityscape image in the center, and a list of keywords on the right. The keywords are: PAEA BLOG, COMMUNITY, ADVOCACY, LEARNING, RESEARCH, KNOWLEDGE, and VIBRANCY. The 'Activism in Art' logo is positioned at the top right of the collage.

**Activism in Art**

**Jillette Smith, Region 8 Representative**  
Williamsport Area School District, Art Educator

PAEA BLOG  
COMMUNITY  
ADVOCACY  
LEARNING  
RESEARCH  
KNOWLEDGE  
VIBRANCY

*Jillette Smith is a middle school art teacher at Commonwealth Charter Academy. Jillette serves as the Region 8 Representative and is a champion for advocating for her students.*

## Activism in Art

Hi there and happy Fall! I hope you have had time to enjoy your first month of school. As a middle school teacher, I find myself embracing this year and a new group of students by building connections and creating an inviting culture where students can create with brave hearts and a growth mindset. Building connections can be challenging for many art teachers because of our unique schedules and the sometimes overwhelming number of art students. We know that to build these relationships and grow strong artists we need our students to be interested and invested in what we are bringing to the table

first and then building a creative culture in your school(s) can bloom naturally. If I told you that building a culture of creative and mindful artists can be done by exposing our artists to advocacy and activism, would you be hesitant to jump on board? Let us look at how activism can be incorporated into your curriculum in a meaningful, yet approachable way for most school communities!

**Helping children understand activism is really helping them think of the world as one big classroom or playground.” Therefore, through exposure to activism, learners can begin to build feelings of empathy and help them create connections to the world around them.**

Introducing your students to activism can be done as early as elementary and can help your students make connections to art and the world they live in with intention and relevancy. [Fischer](#) writes, “The truth is that kids already understand what activism is and why it is important; they just call it by different names. Any time you have talked to them about teamwork, sharing, or cleaning up after themselves, you could just as well be explaining activism. Helping children understand activism is really helping them think of the world as one big classroom or playground.” Therefore, through exposure to activism, learners can begin to build feelings of empathy and help them create connections to the world around them.

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[Uplift Kids](#) is a great resource for families and educators. One thing that Uplift suggests is introducing children to a wide range of stories and situations, through reading fictional stories or short films. Students who are 10 years or older may be ready for bigger topics like global warming, homelessness, etc. Also, inviting children to pay attention to their natural curiosity and passion. Once you find an

age-appropriate hook to introduce your students to activism, you are ready to begin to make those connections to art and artists.

Let us look at the role of an art activist. [Boris Groys](#) shares “Art activists try to change living conditions in economically underdeveloped areas, raise ecological concerns, offer access to culture and education for the populations of poor countries and regions, attract attention to the plight of illegal immigrants, improve the conditions of people working in art institutions, and so forth.” In simpler terms, activism is about making people listen and exposing injustices. I found some great lessons and games for my students at [Tate.org](#) including the Quiz: Which Art Activist Are You? This created a lot of conversation. As each student took the quiz, they ended with a specific art activist. From there, I had students begin to name things that they would pursue if they were art activists. If you are looking for a way to have your students engage in writing within your curriculum, this is a fantastic opportunity for you to create open-ended prompts. For example, “What is one thing you would change in your community that would create a positive impact?”

Finally, it is time to get creative. As you begin to set your project expectations and procedures, try to remember that this process should be one that the student navigates on their own. Giving your learners artistic choices and allowing them to connect with a cause that means something to them. This not only helps students develop confidence in their problem-solving abilities. An activity for older students could include having students create their own logo for a nonprofit organization as described in this lesson plan found in [The Art of Education](#). For younger artists, you can have them create a poster as described in this activity at [Tate Kids](#). The possibilities are endless!

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