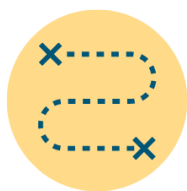


PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS TOOL



The Time Capsule Project: An Opportunity for Connection and Understanding

By Jessica Zwillinger

TOOL DESCRIPTION

A slide deck containing student-facing directions, examples, and contextual materials for a project / performance assessment.

CRITICAL CONTEXT INFORMATION

These materials were developed for sixth grade art students at a suburban middle school.

TOOL & LINKS

- [Time Capsule Project Slide Deck](#)
- [Accompanying Word Bank](#)
- [Accompanying Sentence Starters](#)

About this Tool & Guidance for Adaptation

The slide deck above contains the framing, requirements, and examples of the *Time Capsule* project used in a middle school art classroom. The deck was developed to be student-facing and to guide their work through the project, along with the support from the teacher. The two additional links above (word bank and sentence starters) are scaffolds for students in need of support.

Additional notes from the teacher: The concept of a Time Capsule could be adapted to a wide range of disciplines and grade levels. Young students could have their ideas more explicitly directed; for example, “Draw your favorite part about school,” or “Draw something you use for your favorite hobby.” Older students could use an assignment like this for perspective-taking. Perhaps this assignment is adapted to illustrate depth of understanding of a character in a novel or an influential historical figure.

There could be even more choice incorporated into this assignment by offering that students create a digital piece of artwork, perhaps a collage from images sourced from the internet or using a digital drawing tool of their choice. This assessment could be adapted for students with special learning needs by perhaps curating a selection of images beforehand and offering this as a collage, as opposed to traditional drawing.

Teacher Narrative

The goal of this performance assessment, the *Time Capsule* project, is to prove to students that they can make beautiful and meaningful artwork based on everyday objects. Instead of waiting for a stroke of creativity to dawn upon them, students can look around at their world, which includes friends, school, hobbies, family, pets, etc., to find all the inspiration they need.

This assignment simultaneously highlights our similarities and our differences, rooted in the shared experience of being a member of a school community; and more broadly, an active citizen in our modern world. At the outset of this project, I share with students that I live in the same town and rely on certain technology, just like most of them. I also take the opportunity to share other personal things, like my unique family structure, that model the sense of safety and vulnerability that I am working toward in my classroom.

This performance assessment has a wonderful balance of interpersonal and academic value because of the prioritization of student voice and frequent opportunities for additional scaffolding or enrichment. The essential questions that guide our work during this unit are: *What objects and items are important to me?* and *How can I use my artwork to capture something about my life as a sixth grader?*

The *Time Capsule* project has become a staple in my classroom, and year after year, continues to provide insight into my new sixth grade students and guidance for my teaching. Students are tasked with creating a drawing that acts as a time capsule for their life in sixth grade. This assignment is a perfect opportunity to begin building personal relationships with students by seeing what's important to them and what they're interested in, particularly through their answers to an opening brainstorming assignment. In the brainstorming assignment, I ask a variety of questions ranging from favorite foods, to the most interesting things students are learning in their other class, to how long they have known their best friend, to what their family's cultural background is. I deliver this portion of the lesson through a Google Form, an advantage of which is being able to view student responses in a Google Sheet.

Next, the *Time Capsule* project allows students to devote their time and energy to learning to draw things that they feel personally connected to, rather than a more prescriptive assignment in which all student artwork comes out looking appealing but similar. This opportunity for student agency is a hallmark of Student-Centered Learning, and it undoubtedly encourages students to take ownership and feel investment, and ideally pride, in their work.

Additionally, as a teacher just starting to get to know these sixth graders as individuals and as students, I can begin to see various levels of understanding and readiness to move toward using symbolism in a student's artwork. For example, some students choose to include only literal representations of items and objects in their time capsule, whereas others are ready to represent more abstract concepts like the importance of family or future goals. Even a student's willingness to consider whether their *Time Capsule* drawing needs to look like an actual box can give a lot of insight into a student's readiness to experiment with symbolism in his or her work.

Excerpted from *Innovation in Practice: A Student-Centered Learning Toolkit By Teachers, For Teachers*. ©The Teacher Collaborative 2022. [Theteachercollaborative.org](https://theteachercollaborative.org)



Lastly, in the reflection component of this performance assessment, which is referred to as the Artist's Statement, students are asked to explain the relevance of each item they included in their drawing. They are also asked to walk a viewer through some of their artistic choices and challenges during the process of creating their artwork. Through the Artist's Statement assignment, there is opportunity for enrichment through creative writing, but there are also scaffolds in place, like a word bank and sentence starters (both linked above), to support students who may find writing, particularly in art class, to be stressful and challenging.

The beauty and challenge of a performance assessment, like this *Time Capsule* project, is that the results cannot be perfectly predicted. Educators are empowering students to find their voice and to be active learners who make decisions and take ownership over their learning. It's humbling and exciting as a teacher to provide students with the space to show understanding through performance assessments. Whether you work with our youngest learners or our academic high-achievers preparing for higher education, or whether you work with those that love art or those that are self-conscious about their ability to express themselves visually, in using performance assessments you are validating students' lived experiences, strengths, and ideas, all of which will stay with a student far beyond the time they spend in our individual classrooms.

MEET THE AUTHOR

Jessica Zwillinger is a middle school visual arts educator who lives and works in Hopkinton, Massachusetts. Student-Centered Learning is a cornerstone of Jessica's teaching philosophy. She believes that the art room is a special place where students can show knowledge and understanding in ways that may not be offered as frequently in other disciplines. As such, Jessica prioritizes safety, inclusion, and student voice in her classroom through authentic project prompts, opportunities for choice, and meaningful in-process conversation and feedback.

