

**STEPHEN  
CARPENTER:**

I have two activities that I've prepared. So interpretation, this idea of constructing meanings or developing meanings about works of art, or we can think of interpretation as someone is speaking one language and then we take that language and we are able to-- not only do we speak and understand this language, then we can take those ideas and those words and turn them into a different language that someone else speaks. We can have interpretation function in that way as well. So it's about taking ideas from one context into another or one mode of representation in communication into another.

But in terms of art and art practice, art criticism and interpretation work together. So this image I think is useful for our purposes here. Imagine that this image was the poster for a movie, full length, feature length movie. And imagine you were responsible for writing the copy-- for writing the text for the voiceover of the movie trailer, but all you had was this image to go by.

You probably heard movie trailers, those little commercials for movies. And usually my experience, they start off with one of two phrases or a version of one of two phrases. One of the phrases is usually something like this, "Imagine a place--" And you can imagine-- you've heard this phrase before from movie trailers. "Imagine a place" and the music is start doing [HUMMING]. You see the scenery.

Another phrase that is often used is "In a world where--" You've-- I see nothing going on, so that means, oh, I've-- you could probably name several films that have movie trailers that start that way.

So take one of those phrases-- "imagine a place," or "in a world--" and-- I don't know if you have something to write with or if you want to keep it in your head. And if you come up a sentence or two, that would be great. But the sentence or two that starts with one of those two prompts would function as the beginning voiceover copy for the movie from which this still comes. We got it?

All right. Here's the movie trailer.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

- What would you do in a world without justice? In 2017, humankind's most precious resource is used as a weapon of control. Will you punch up against power?

[END PLAYBACK]

**STEPHEN**

I'm going to that movie. [LAUGHS] Wow, all right.

**CARPENTER:**

So part of what I'm hearing-- like I heard swimming upstream, adversity, these water hoses, I heard-- there was an issue of control, resistance. This border wall suggests there's something about being in and out and not being able to attain something. And then the X Games-- what'd you call it? Cheerleading? Extreme-- ultimate cheerleading. Extreme cheerleading.

So there's an activity, but then there's something else that pushes it or ramps it up. Add some context here. This is a still image from a performance by performance artist Dread Scott. The title of the work is called, *On the Impossibility of Freedom in a Country Founded on Slavery and Genocide*.

And he's referencing a range of events, but specifically a particular event in the '60s where there was a protest against racial injustice. Where the authorities used water hoses, high-powered water hoses to push back African Americans. This was not a single event, these kinds of things happen all the time in the '60s. So this is part of Dread Scott's performance, this is a still from his performance.

I find it remarkable listening to even the comedy trailer, that you were picking up on elements of what his performance-- what he intended his performance to be about, but also what other people have interpreted his performance to be about. Charles Garoian is a performance artist an art educator who also taught high school in the Bay Area in San Francisco. And he taught his students in late '60s and the '70s-- into the '80s actually I believe-- about performance art and happenings, and the ways in which our bodies can perform symbolically to construct works of art that relate to social issues and cultural issues.

So his work is documented in several of his books, one of which is called *Performing Pedagogy* where he interprets several works of art and performance art and then provides a set of activities that teachers and their students can perform to learn some of the basic structures or some elements of performance art using one's body as an artistic medium, but also a way in which to comment on social issues.

But it's the idea of using our bodies as symbolic vehicles that become powerful. And also the

ways that our bodies can move and the ways in which our bodies interact with other objects or other ideas, the way in which we might maybe think of taking our body, doing something to it, doing something else to it.

So there's an activity that I often do with my students-- undergrad, graduate students, students who are learning to be teachers that I borrowed from Charles Garoian. Here's a still image of one student doing this. And what I'd like you to do is to identify a statement. Could be an excerpt, it could be song lyrics, it could be a poem, but it needs to be a set of words that-- ideally it's a text or a sentence or several phrases-- that you could or someone else could say within a 30-second time period.

So borrowing from Charles Garoian's approach, one of the activities is to take an image and-- a body, and the body engages in a repetitive motion, a repetitive activity. And the ideas that that body in motion in relationship to or in juxtaposition with or in critique or conversation with that image will inherently start to construct or suggest different interpretations, just like what you did when you saw the image and you added some text to that. But there's a third element, and that's the text that you've come up with.

So what is going to happen-- so here's another student doing something similar. So what's going to happen is, I'm going to hit this button, and then I'm going to go over here and I'm going to start performing. I'm going to do a repetitive motion for 30 seconds. When I get over there, you're going to speak your text.

**AUDIENCE:** Oh, my text?

**STEPHEN** Yes.

**CARPENTER:**

**AUDIENCE:** Oh, I thought I was reading your text.

**STEPHEN** No, no. Oh, you would rather not share your text?

**CARPENTER:**

**AUDIENCE:** I mean, I don't mind, it's just not 30 seconds long. I can say it over and over again.

**STEPHEN** That would be fine. All right, we'll do that. Then I have two other images so we'll be able to get

**CARPENTER:** to two other people. But you'll see how this works. You ready? Go.

**AUDIENCE:** OK. Sometimes you gotta post bad pictures of yourself online so that people are impressed when they see you in person. Sometimes you gotta post bad pictures of yourself online so that people are impressed when they see you in person. Sometimes you gotta post bad pictures of yourself online so now people are impressed when they see you in person. Sometimes you gotta post bad pictures of yourself online so that people are impressed when they see you in person.

**LARRY** Time.

**SUSSKIND:**

**STEPHEN** All right, thank you, Larry.

**CARPENTER:**

**AUDIENCE:** [LAUGHS]

**STEPHEN** See, I had to trust him because, you know, three minutes could have been 30 seconds. You  
**CARPENTER:** see what happened? We have a repetitive motion, which might suggest certain ideas and concepts, meanings. We had this text. Be where-- say it again?

**AUDIENCE:** Oh, sometimes you have to post bad pictures of yourself online so that people are impressed when they see you in person.

**STEPHEN** So not only do we have text, we gotta put in relationship to this movement. But this image,  
**CARPENTER:** what does this image have to do with this movement? I mean, it's interesting, you can put two ideas together or put these two things together or these two things together, but all three of them? Anybody want to attempt to weave these three together? Go ahead.

**AUDIENCE:** Since the theme of repetition, I didn't catch it at first, but the fact that you kept repeating it and then your hop kind of synced in with that, and then looking at this image, just the fact that there's all these windows and all the pieces of the image deconstructed-- sort of fell into this cycle of posting pictures online and seeing people multiple times and it did sort of in time come together for me.

**STEPHEN** OK, nice. So why would I do something like that? Well, at the end of the semester, the  
**CARPENTER:** students in one of my graduate classes I teach at Penn State and also at Vermont College of Fine Arts, after going through that process of the randomness of making those connections, they then have to go through the process of intentionally combining image, text, and body movement for a public performance that lasts at least five minutes.

So these are-- the top row are stills from one video, the bottom row are stills from another one, and the one at the top, the student was interested in the idea that someone told her at one point something like, there have never been any wars-- international wars on US soil. And she thought, this doesn't make any sense, and a history teacher told her that. So the idea was that this performance speaks back to that, and this was performed in Philadelphia.

And so you can see in these three different images, she's using her body in different ways. She's holding a photo of-- a satellite photo of a plane bombing. She created almost a little memorial and burial for this and has watered it generously and then puts her own body down in this bench. That it's essentially a whispering bench where she she's sitting at one end and can whisper into the corner, and the person sitting at the other end can hear what she's saying.

And the one at the bottom is a student who performed outside of Karachi-- that's at Carnegie Hall, in front of Carnegie Hall. And symbolically speaking to a death in her family, but also her own musical aspirations and the way in which they relate to her own life, but also she was equating it to gun violence. And so she was cleaning the clarinet and puts it in this case in various ways that make you suggest-- they suggest, is this a musical instrument or is it an implement for an instrument of killing? So these are some outgrowths from that quick assignment that we did.

So in summary, you could engage learners like we've done today in any of these ways, or you could do boring stuff. It's really up to you.