Voice, Choice, and Mending

A tool for making legacy visible

Begin by looking closely at an artifact (a portrait, map, flag, memorial, monument, video, etc.) that is representative of a larger historical system.

Consider the Context: What do we know about the artifact and the historical system it represents? Where was the artifact made? When was it made? Who made it? What else was going on in this place and time?

What stories are connected to this artifact? What counter-stories do we know about?

Maker Choices: What choices do you think the artist made when creating this artifact and why?

Voices Present: Whose voices do you think are present in this artifact? What perspectives are represented?

Voices Absent: Whose voices do you think are missing or silenced? Why?

Mender Voice(s):
Trace the Break from your perspective:
How do you think this artifact is complex?
What contradictions or dilemmas do you notice?
Do you think this is a "true" way to represent the legacy of this historical system?
In what way(s) might this artifact be broken? For whom is it broken?

What perspectives or values do you bring to the artifact? How do you connect?

Mender Choice(s):
What might you keep/show from the original artifact? What might you change or add?
What could be hidden or revealed by your Mend?
What strategies can you use to juxtapose and connect different stories?

Make to Mend: Redesign the artifact in order to mend it. In your redesign, you will juxtapose two or more stories. A mended artifact:
- references the original artifact,
- reveals the Break with evidence of a counter-story or multiple counter-stories, and
- makes visible the relationship between the stories

Voice, Choice, and Mender

A tool for looking closely at the work of another Mender, or a content-creator that makes legacy visible in their works

Looking at a mended artifact, begin by doing the steps of Voice, Choice, and Mending:

Consider the Context: What do we know about the artifact and the historical system it represents? Where was the artifact made? When was it made? Who made it? What else was going on in this place and time?

What stories are connected to this artifact? What counter-stories do we know about?

Maker Choices: What choices do you think the artist made when creating this artifact and why?

Voices Present: Whose voices do you think are present in this artifact? What perspectives are represented?

Voices Absent: Whose voices do you think are missing or silenced? Why?

Then, consider the choices the mender made and the perspectives they bring to their work:

Mender Choices:
What did the artist keep/show from the original artifact?
What did the artist change or add? What is hidden or revealed now?
What strategies did the artist use to juxtapose and unify two or more stories?

Mender Voices:
What perspectives might the artist bring to the legacy of this historical system?
What might the artist value?

My Voice:
What's your voice? What perspectives do you bring to this content?
To what extent does this piece complicate the original artifact for you?
To what extent does this artwork juxtapose two stories for you?
To what extent does this artwork connect two stories for you?

What is Critical Historical Mending?
Critical historical mending is a tool for interrogating legacy and making that interrogation visible, based upon the portraiture of artist Titus Kaphar, and building off of the Voice and Choice protocol from Agency *by* Design. It is an approach that supports learners to look closely at an artifact that represents a historical system; explore the complexities, counter-stories, and dilemmas of the artifact and legacy; and find opportunity to make their interrogation of that legacy visible by redesigning/hacking the artifact. Critical historical mending supports students to explore the relationships between historical systems (figures, events, places, or institutions), legacy, power, and the designed world around them, specifically exploring the complexity of historical truth.

Define terms
Break: The inherent dilemma or contradiction that renders the Make a dysfunctional? representation of the larger historical system and its legacy
Mend: A reimagining/hack/redesign of the Make that references related historical counter-stories to reveal the Break and show connections/relationships.
Counter-stories*: A method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society).
*Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research. Qualitative Inquiry, 8(1), 23–44.

Begin with reflection
Before engaging in the mending process with learners, begin with reflection prompts that encourage thoughtful questioning of historical representation, memorial, and legacy. Some possible prompts include: *What are the responsibilities of public monuments that claim to represent history? To what extent are public artworks historic records, and what are they records of? How are they related to legacy, memory, truth, beauty, community membership, witness, politics, justice?*

Choose an artifact
For Voice, Choice, and Mending: Critical historical mending is most effective when the artifact selected is an object or artwork (portraits, maps, flags, memorials/monuments, videos) that is representative of a larger historical system.

For Voice, Choice, and Mender: Looking closely and exploring the complexity of a mended artifact (an object, artwork, map, flag, monument, video etc.) is most effective when two different artifacts are involved: 1) An artifact that is representative of a larger historical system; and 2) A mended artifact that contains a direct visual reference to the first artifact and involves references to related historical counter-stories. Some examples of menders based in the United States include artists Titus Kaphar, Dustin Klein, and Sonya Clark.

Consider design choices
Ask students to reflect on their mended object, maybe using the prompt: *What design choices did you make that show evidence of your Mend? You might use the Messages, Choices, Impacts Thinking Routine.*