

# ***Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence***

## **Using art to understand and prevent domestic violence**

*This version of the instructions is a syllabus for college level art foundation classes. Use the lesson plan version for a highly detailed description of process and discussion.*

*Compiled by Kim Abeles, Professor Emeritus, California State University Northridge with advisement from A Window Between Worlds.*

### **Project syllabus for 3-D Foundations, team-taught workshops and Service Learning**

This project and its options are suitable for **3-D Foundations, team-taught workshops** with other departments such as **Literature, Women's Studies, Sociology**, as well as **Peace and Justice** programs, and **Service Learning** opportunities within communities. Because each step of this process-driven concept is rich with imagery and narrative, it makes it applicable for a team-taught project with **Beginning Sculpture** and **Photography** or **Video** classes, as an another example.

### **Background**

Using the metaphor of pearls forming inside oysters in response to an irritant, Kim Abeles in collaboration with A Window Between Worlds ([awbw.org](http://awbw.org)) has developed a workshop using art to understand and prevent domestic violence.

A person does not need to have a direct history with domestic violence to participate in this project. Everyone has had experiences with their own irritants. Irritants come into all of our lives, and the wisdom we gain and share is relevant to all aspects of living.

### **Output - process and product**

*Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence* focuses on the process as a powerful metaphor. Each participant makes their own pearl, and along the way, write "pearls of wisdom" or advice to share. The resulting objects and writing can be combined as an art installation, artist bookwork or as a digital presentation, on- or off-line. Pearls, text and images can be uploaded to the Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence blog at [awbw.org](http://awbw.org).

Instructors may consider team-taught workshops with other departments such as Literature, Women's Study, Sociology, as well as Peace and Justice programs. Within 2-4 classes, each instructor brings an expertise through this hands-on experience and contextual discussion. The project encourages reflection, empowerment and an opportunity to make connections between nonviolence among individuals, and society as a whole.

The attached instructions for making pearls is easily suited to 3D Foundations classes, where basic tools and use of plaster can be combined with content-based art. Photography and video played an important role in the development of the *Pearls* project because each step along this process-driven concept is rich with imagery and narrative. This makes it applicable for a team-taught project with sculpture and photography or video classes, as well.

### **Instructions and supplemental materials**

This curriculum packet includes:

- background information about domestic violence and A Window Between Worlds ([awbw.org](http://awbw.org)), the only national nonprofit using art to end domestic violence
- instructional dvd including videos of the project background, the process for making the spherical pearls and pearl discs (the pearl discs can be pre-cast for students and used for drawings, paintings, and graphic design classes)
- written instructions for making spherical pearls
- catalogue from the exhibition, *Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence*, that features essays about art and activism by Kim Abeles, Suvan Geer, Suzanne Lacy, Sandra Mueller, Cathy Salser and Barbara T. Smith
- additional, suggested reading; pdf versions of the above information is available at [awbw.org](http://awbw.org)

### **Materials, tools and project steps for pearls**

#### **Materials and Tools**

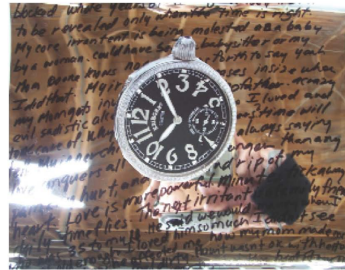
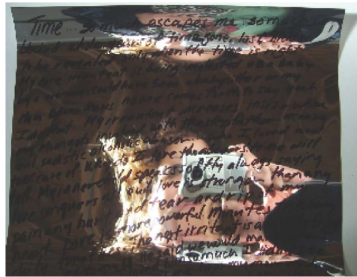
Small object or symbol representing your "irritant"  
Mirror Mylar (mirror paper that is approximately 8" x 10")  
Marker for writing on mylar  
Thin gauge metal rod or coat hanger wire (approximately 6" in length per student)  
Yarn, raffia, ribbon, etc (students can bring in remnants for a collective selection)  
Plaster bandages  
Plaster  
Sandpaper  
Acrylic paint (pearlescent paints are available)  
Needlenose pliers (or similar)  
Scissors  
Buckets  
Rasps  
Fiber masks (to protect against plaster dust) and latex gloves as needed

## Project steps

Select or bring a symbol of the irritant. Refer to it as you write or draw on the mylar paper. *Questions to ask:* Why did you pick this to represent your "irritant"? Where are you in your process of change or if this is about someone else, where are they now? Thoughts can be expressed through drawing or single words or phrases.



Photograph the mirrored paper if this works with the curriculum goals of the class. Photography and these results can be used throughout the process. Photography amplifies the point of view.



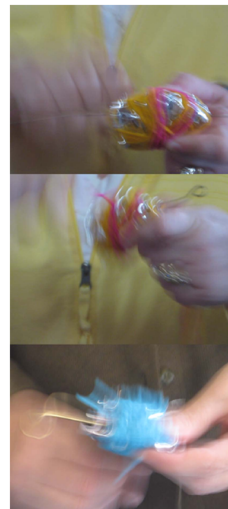
Bend the metal rod with needle-nose pliers so that it has 2 loops on the ends. The rod loops will be used when the pearls dry. (As an installation, the looped ends can connect each pearl to one another.)



Crumble the irritant, the mylar paper and the rod together with the ends of the rod extended.



Select any color of yarns or ribbons or cords. Discuss how colors have cultural and social meanings as well as personal implications. This is another opportunity to photograph the process.



### IMPORTANT message about PLASTER and plaster bandage use

- DO NOT rinse plaster down the sink--ever! It will harden down the line.
- HANDS - When you need to rinse hands, have a communal water bucket to rinse off excess plaster, then finish washing hands in the sink. When the sediment of plaster sinks in the hand-wash bucket, pour off the water, let the plaster harden and then throw away the small chips.
- CLEAN-UP - After the plaster is dry in the bucket, it can be easily removed; break apart and put it in the trash. Cover tables with reused paper or plastic to help with cleanup. Plaster can be easily brushed off clothing after it dries. Always recycle appropriately.
- HEALTH AND COMFORT - Use latex or rubber gloves if preferred, and paper masks to be safe (you do not want to breathe in plaster dust). Hand lotion does the trick if hands feel dry after using the plaster.

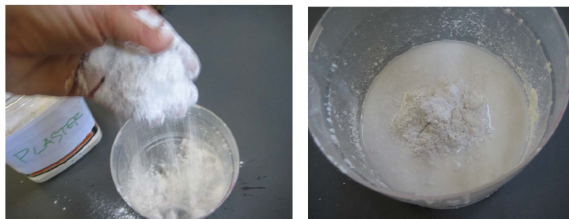
Optionally, trim the bandages to be half the width. Dampen the plaster bandages and wrap the ball. The participant can use as much as they wish, but be careful not to keep adding water to the bandage. Too much water makes it soggy, weak and slow to dry. If the bandages have become too soggy, add a dry piece or two of the bandages and it will soak up the moisture.



Next, add the plaster coating. When mixing plaster, remember that a little water goes a long way. Add about 1½ - 2 cups of water to a plastic bucket (not much). This will be enough plaster for 4-5 students.



Sift the plaster EVENLY into the water. It will sink. When there is enough plaster added, an "island" of dry plaster will stay floating on top.



Mix the plaster and apply it to the pearl. The plaster will dry in about 10 minutes, so there is not much time to work. Be attentive. As it hardens, don't work against the hardening (and crumbling!) plaster. It can be smoothed out during the next step. Add a healthy layer of plaster (¼" - ½" - 1"). Next, suspend the pearls by the metal rods for drying. When it is damp but ready to handle, you can rasp or sand the surface to smooth it, or leave it textured.





Acrylic paint is applied to the pearl. Paints can be layered, glazing with translucent, transparent and pearlescent paints.



Suspend the pearls by the rod loops for drying.

Note: these instructions push the timeframe for the project to about 2 hours. Normally, plaster takes several days to cure, so there may be touch-ups needed in the painting when the project is pushed to a shorter timeframe. If the project is conducted over several class sessions, keep this in mind and opt to paint the pearls later in the class sessions.



This project is complete when the *pearls of wisdom* containing a symbol of their experience with violence, become words of wisdom that are shared. It's part of the process. Questions to ask: What advice would you give your younger self regarding violence? What would you say to someone who is encountering similar difficulties? What advice would you share with the world?

There are several ways to accomplish this interaction. If an instructor is team-teaching with other disciplines, there will be other suggestions for ways to proceed.

The students can reflect individually, and proceed with phrases, writing, poetry or graphic posters, for example. If the project is team-taught with an art class and a poetry or writing class, the text can be developed further.

Another strategy is to have the students talk in pairs about the advice they would impart to another, taking turns to speak to each other for 5-7 minutes. Then, students share (with the full class), their partner's idea. They don't need to repeat every word; sometimes a word or phrase can be the most effective, but it gives an opportunity for people to really listen to each other.

The pearls and writing become the resulting core to create a bookwork, installation, or digital result by the collective voices. **Add your voice to online Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence blog at [awbw.org](http://awbw.org).** The resulting pearls and documents can be uploaded to this blog as a collective voice to inspire dialogue and action.