

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

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

*This version of the instructions is a detailed lesson plan for grades 9-12, Service Learning, and community groups. It was compiled by Kim Abeles, Professor Emeritus, California State University Northridge with advisement from A Window Between Worlds, and Professor Terry Lenihan, Director of ARTsmart Service Learning Program, Loyola Marymount University*

### **Lesson plan for grades 9-12, Service Learning classes and community workshops**

This project and its options are suitable for **Art classes, 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.

**Options** are described for scenerios with limited supplies or time, younger students, and classrooms lacking art facilities. The project options can take place within 20 minutes, or extend over several class sessions. The full pearl process can be completed in 2 hours, including time for discussion.

### **Objectives**

To have students:

- understand their own connection to issues around domestic violence
- use metaphor to consider what we can do with the knowledge gained by past experience and what we can do with it for future possibilities
- work collectively with others, and understand that shared experiences empower by connecting the personal, local and global
- add their pearls and words of wisdom to the online blog at [createpearls.awbw.org](http://createpearls.awbw.org)

### **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.

Entitled *Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence*, participants are led through a process to understand their connection to violence, in the past and toward a future of non-violence.

### **Overview**

The project encourages reflection, empowerment and an opportunity to make connections between nonviolence among individuals, and society as a whole. That's how all students can connect with this project. It is important from the start to let students know that their artwork and writing are part of a **collective project**.

Each participant makes their own pearl, and along the way, expresses written "pearls of wisdom" or advice to share. Rather than thinking of ourselves as lacking power, we can share advice with each other. The resulting pearls 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 [createpearls.awbw.org](http://createpearls.awbw.org).

## Project steps, Materials and Optional approaches

### Materials and supplies for spherical pearls

#### Step 1. Irritant and writing

- Small object or symbol representing your "irritant"
  - this must fit within the palm of the hand
- Mirror mylar paper
  - cut to approximately 8" x 10" per student
- Marker for writing on mylar
  - sharpie or pen that works on glossy surfaces

#### Step 2. Wrapping and wire rod

- Yarn, raffia, ribbon, etc
  - each student will use about 20 feet in length
  - students can bring in remnants from home and add the various cords to a collective selection
- Scissors
  - for cutting cord
- Thin gauge metal rod or coat hanger wire
  - approximately 6" in length per student
  - the metal loops visually connect the pearls together when they are displayed
  - the loops serve to suspend the pearls while they are drying
- Needlenose pliers (or similar)
  - for cutting and bending wire

#### Step 3. Bandaging

- Plaster bandages
  - cut lengthwise in half, and strips approximately 6" long; each student will use about 20 strips
  - plaster bandages are available through art or medical supply companies
- Buckets and water
  - share 1 bucket per 6 students
- Latex gloves (optional)
  - if a student has a skin allergy, the plaster may irritate their hands
  - hand lotion will eliminate any resulting dryness

#### Step 4. Plaster coating

- Plaster (fast-hardening plaster is best)
  - approximately 2 lbs. of plaster per 6 students
- Buckets and water
  - share 1 bucket per 6 students
- Rasps (optional) and/or sandpaper
  - 1 sheet, medium grit sandpaper per 6 students
  - rasps can be shared among students
- Fiber mask(s)
  - to protect against plaster dust for those mixing plaster into the water
- Latex gloves (optional)
  - if a student has a skin allergy, the plaster may irritate their hands
  - hand lotion will eliminate any resulting dryness

#### Step 5. Painting

- Acrylic paint (pearlescent paints are available)
- Brushes
- Containers for paint and water

#### Step 6. Blog

- Camera
  - to document pearls
  - a scanner can be used for a paper pearl option
- Internet connection
  - to upload pearls to [createpearls.awbw.org](http://createpearls.awbw.org)

### Options for limited time, space or supplies

#### OPTION 1: Writing and metaphor

- Total time, 15-20 minutes
- Use the materials, discussion questions and process for Step 1

#### OPTION 2: Writing, metaphor, wrapped pearls

- Total time, 30-40 minutes
- Use the materials, discussion questions and process for Steps 1, 2 and 6

**NOTE:** The rod & pliers are optional; consider other ways to connect each pearl for display

#### OPTION 3: Writing, metaphor and wrapped, bandaged or paper maché pearls

- Total time, 50-60 minutes
- Use the materials, discussion questions and process for Steps 1-3 and 6

**NOTE:** You can replace the plaster bandages with **paper maché**. A bandage print for paper can be downloaded at the website for this project at [awbw.org](http://awbw.org).

#### OPTION 4: Writing, metaphor and wrapped, bandaged, plastered, painted pearl

- Total time, 90-100 minutes
- Use the materials, discussion questions and process for Steps 1-6

**NOTE:** If you replace the plaster bandages with **paper maché**, then coat the pearls with acrylic medium to help smooth out the form, and then complete with paint.

#### OPTION 5: Pearls of Wisdom blog

- The metaphor of the pearl and the resulting words of wisdom to share can be created in many ways.
- All of the options and offshoots for the project can be uploaded to the blog at this address:

[createpearls.awbw.org/](http://createpearls.awbw.org/)

## Pearls project steps

### Step 1

#### A. Introduction

- The introduction can take place during the class prior to the project so that students have a chance to decide on an irritant to bring to class. Otherwise, you can provide a selection of images and small objects.
- Show students the video about the project background on the instructional dvd provided. This dvd also contains video instructions for making the spherical pearls (as written here) and for pearl discs. You can use the dvd instead of these written instructions. →
- If you have internet access, go to the awbw.org website and you can show students the blog and images from the exhibition at the Korean Cultural Center Los Angeles (March 20011). →
- DISCUSSION  
Why is this entitled *Pearls of Wisdom*? What is the metaphor of the irritant within the oyster? Is the irritant also a symbol? How are metaphors and symbols different?  
  
Remember, even if a person does not have a background in domestic violence, prevention and understanding are important for our local and global communities.



#### B. The irritant and the narrative

- Select or bring a symbol of the irritant. This project is most effective when the students bring in their own irritant, but the instructor can supply images and small objects that can fit in the palm of the hand.
- DISCUSSION  
Have students write a list of words and phrases about the reason they selected their irritant. Ask for a few students to volunteer to share about their choice of irritant.
- Students will then write their narrative (or draw) on the mirror, mylar paper.



#### OPTION 1

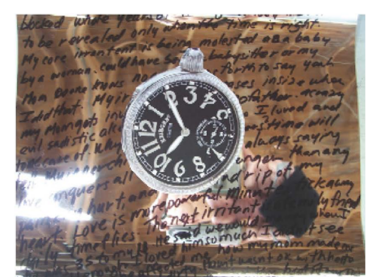
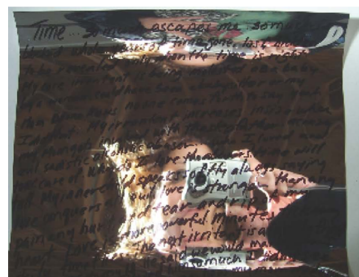
If you only have 15-20 minutes, use the basics of these instructions.

If you don't have mylar, you'll miss the physical mirror reflection, but the discussion about this metaphor is where the strength of this project is held.

NOTE: Photograph the mirrored paper if this works with the goals of the class. This should be optional for students.

Photography can be used throughout the process, and it amplifies the point of view.

All of these images can be uploaded to the Pearls of Wisdom blog: [createpearls.awbw.org](http://createpearls.awbw.org)



## Step 2

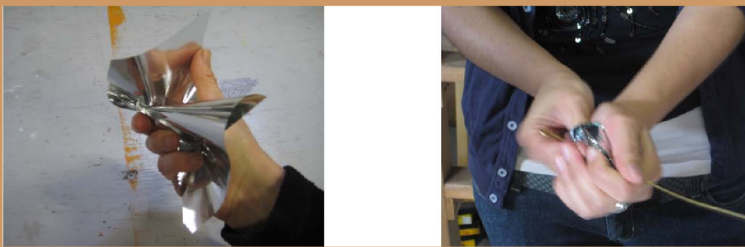
### A. Bending the rod - optional

- Bend the metal rod with 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.
- If you opt not to use the rod, you can dry the pearls on a surface or use another method for the loops, like cord or telephone wire.



### B. Securing

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



### C. Wrapping with yarns or cords

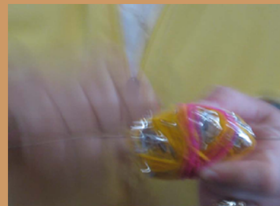
- Select any color of yarns or ribbons or cords and wrap the paper.

#### • DISCUSSION

Describe the action of “securing” the irritant and narrative. What are other ways to describe this? How do the words “crumple” or “collapse”, for example change the meaning?

Identify colors that have cultural and social meanings. Ask students to share colors that have personal implications for them. What color is most empowering for you?

What is the difference if raffia is chosen instead of yarn, for example?



### OPTION 2

If you only have 30-40 minutes, the discussion and process of Steps 1 and 2, can be very rewarding.

The wrapped pearls are very beautiful at this stage, so consider uploading photographs of them to the blog: [createpearls.awbw.org](http://createpearls.awbw.org)



### Step 3

#### Bandaging

- Use warm water. Dampen the plaster bandages and wrap the ball. Each student will use about twenty 6" x 1-1/2" strips.
- Be careful not to keep adding water to the bandages. 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.
- **DISCUSSION**  
This discussion is more effective following the process.

How does this part of the process relate to the irritant inside?

What do you think about it and how did it feel since the water was warm and soothing? What is the difference between thinking about an idea and feeling it?



#### OPTION 3

This option will take 50-60 minutes and uses Step 1-3.

If you are working with younger students or with limited facilities, you can replace the plaster bandages with **paper maché**.

If you want to pursue the metaphor of the bandages, go to the [awbw.org](http://awbw.org) website, and download the bandage pattern that you can print and use for xeroxing.

Thin paper and diluted white glue will be the best materials for the paper maché.

Both the bandages and the paper maché can be painted.

Upload photographs of the pearls at [createpearls.awbw.org](http://createpearls.awbw.org)

#### **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.

## Step 4

### A. Plaster coating

- Add the water first. Add about 1½ - 2 cups of water to a plastic bucket. This will be enough for about 6 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. As it hardens, don't work against the hardening plaster or it will begin to crumble. It can be smoothed out during the next step. Add a healthy layer of plaster (¼" – ½").
- Suspend the pearls by the rod loops for drying (or lay flat).
- 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. If the project is conducted over several class sessions, keep this in mind and opt to paint during the next class.



### B. Sanding

- Use a rasp and/or sandpaper to refine the surface.

### C. Painting

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



### D. Reflection and sharing the Pearls of Wisdom

#### • DISCUSSION

Reflect upon the process. Students can reflect individually, starting with written notes, then sharing them with the class or in groups. This can include the importance of metaphor, color, and working collectively.

Which step in the process of making the pearl was most meaningful to you?

Discuss ways to display the pearls. The example shown displays them on shelves with ribbons connecting.

What advice would you give to someone who is encountering an irritant? What advice would you share with the world? These are the words of wisdom for each pearl.



## OPTION 5 *Pearls of Wisdom: End the Violence* blog

The resulting pearls and words can be uploaded to the blog as a collective voice to inspire dialogue and action.

**Add your voice at [createpearls.awbw.org](http://createpearls.awbw.org)**