When art, music, and poetry are integrated into the art room, children can confront difficult themes in works of art and process the information in highly personal ways (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). An arts classroom gives children the time and place to confront images of war and violence and decode the multiple levels of meaning (Arnold, 1997) found within them.

The third, fourth, and fifth-grade students in my university preservice "after-school-art" class looked at several narrative works by Francisco Goya, Käthe Kollwitz, Frank Gaylord, II, and Pablo Picasso, and discussed the stories and imagery in each. The larger theme of "narratives in art" framed the semester-long art class, but the more specific theme of "aggression, violence, and war" was chosen for this lesson. Each student interpreted the many themes found in the artworks within the context of their personal lives. They put themselves in the place of the figures in the story. How would the man in front of the firing squad feel in Goya's large-scale painting The Shootings of May Third 1808? How might the soldiers that comprise the firing squad feel? Can you put yourself in the shoes of the victims in this scene? The children made mixed media collages in which they depicted themselves in a similar story, and wrote about their artworks. The bold power I found in the students' collage work led me to believe that the images of war served as catalysts for the students' expressions of empathy. The experience was a time of discovery and a time to confront the multiple realities of their lives.

A desire to protect children from the harsh realities of life may cause teachers to avoid showing children art that has difficult imagery. Yet, a strong and powerful understanding of the human condition can be gleaned from the presentation of the array of subjects found in artworks—with an array of emotional expression (Broudy, 1972). The feeling of people being crowded in Kollwitz's The Prisoners is very different from the explosive energy in Goya's The Shootings of May Third 1808. And the mood of isolation among the larger-than-life soldiers in Gaylord's Korean War Memorial is also very different from the depiction of the chaotic aftermath of war seen in Picasso's Guernica. These artists had personal encounters with war and were able to share their hatred of war and its effect on human lives with a very graphic style.

Exploring Questions-Without-Answers through the Arts

Among the recurring questions in the children's dialogue were: What emotions does the scene evoke? What do you feel when you view this work? Can you empathize with the figures in the work? Have you had a time of fear or terror in your own life that mirrored these emotions? When did you have a feeling of isolation that could be compared to the
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isolation seen in Kollwitz's *The Prisoners*. Can we tell who is more powerful and who has lost power in each image? Are there important figures that fall outside of our viewing frame? What does freedom mean when you are a prisoner? The teacher and students raised critical questions (Giroux, 1988) in rapid-fire succession. Every voice was heard, yet no set answers were given, only speculation and debate. The students gave one solution and then another as they became involved with the deeper meanings of each work.

The artists' names and the titles of the works became secondary to the more important information of why the works were made and what they were about. What relationship did Kollwitz have to war? Did the fact that her son was killed in war in 1914 and her grandson in 1942 fuel her energy to create art? What feelings was she able to portray in the crowded space of *The Prisoners*? What political messages was Goya delivering in his large-scale painting, *The Shootings of May Third 1808*? Are Goya's monochrome etchings, *The Disasters of War*, more or less meaningful than his panoramic view using color? Why? In order to allow for the diversity of viewpoints found in the classroom, the students answered these questions for themselves.

The fact that *Guernica* was made as a reaction to an unexpected act of war was important information. We discovered that the work was a protest—an angry response to a seemingly senseless crime. "This huge composition, inspired by the Spanish Civil War, expresses in complicated iconography and personal symbolic language...the artist's abhorrence of the violence and beastliness of war" (Murray & Murray, 1987). The creation of the work was also a way for Picasso to channel his feeling and emotions about the war.

The students' discussion and explanations became a way for them to make sense of these large and complex paintings. Careful analysis of the detail and complexity in the paintings provoked ideas and many questions (Broudy, 1987). What conditions of life would the soldiers depicted in the *Korean War Memorial* share? Are they all young soldiers? What human conditions frame the lives of the fallen victims in Picasso's *Guernica*? Can we now see women, men, and children as victims in Picasso's depiction? Picasso and Goya were both documenting what for them were needless and brutal events. The theme of violence took on greater meanings after the class exploration.

The Shootings of May Third 1808 by Francisco de Goya. Oil on canvas, 268 x 347 cm. 1814. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.
The arts can create the time, the support, and the permission to reflect on difficult events of the world.

This collaborative viewing process, where each answer was respected and considered, gave the children time to peel away the multiple themes related to war and reveal greater realities about war: the tragedy, sorrow, loss, and despair. For example, the students' collages revealed that a personal awareness of the aftermath of war was a reality for each child. The discussion seemed to de-bunk the glorified picture of triumph and heroism so often found in the popular media (Daspit & Weaver, 1999).

Multimodal Arts Explorations
After viewing and discussing reproductions of the works, the children experimented with heavy collage materials—twisting and tearing paper (Figures 1-10). One student used heavy string to create a fuse for his bombs (see Figure 1). Another drew expressively with white chalk to create the smoke from a fire (see Figure 2). A boy tore and pasted brown construction paper to depict only the huge hole left in the earth after the bomb was dropped (see Figure 3). Another student showed the strewn bodies of the victims on the ground (see Figure 4). Each student moved back and forth between the expressive modalities of speech, drawing and pasting, gesture and movement, and writing with great fluency (Pahl, 2003).

Re-creating the Guernica Theme with Personal Stories
After finishing her artwork, Katie wrote, "This is a scene from when a war was going on. The horse is scared and trying to run away. The people are thrown through the air with the pressure of a bomb" (Figure 4). Anna wrote: "An eye crying, mad at war and its hatred. The dreaded bomb, lighted and falling. A person engulfed in flames. A heart (happiness) broken by the bombs. About anger and sadness. Skull—death" (see Figure 5). David simply wrote, "Crater of the night after bombs hit" (see Figure 3). The children's art and writing shows a great degree of personal identification with the chaotic aftermath of war.

Jake combined several storylines in her written work. She wrote, "My art is about a ship getting a surprise wreck in the middle of the night by their enemy. The face in the corner is a person who is remembering this because he survived. I think this is a very sad piece of art. A lot of holes got into the ship so the ship drowned" (Figure 6).

Aesthetic Confrontations
The children seemed to pull inspiration from many realms of their world—from the artwork as well as from their "everyday aesthetic" (Duncum, 1999). For example, several students pulled from television programs and films. In addition to images from the paintings they explored as a group, the students recalled other powerful images from their pasts. Jake remembered the movie Titanic, and wove the story into her image of tragedy. There was a level of authenticity in the images that revealed that most of the young artists had placed themselves at the center of the blast, just as Picasso had in Guernica. One boy re-created a scene from many days after the war. He wrote, "Mine is a picture of a person seeing a newspaper about a bombing" (see Figure 7). He seemed to be more comfortable remaining aloof from the events.

Viewing the artworks allowed nuanced meanings for the students in the class—each held a different bias, and a different attitude toward fear, anger, danger, hatred, war, violence, and death. The art
room can be a place of differences and debate as well as shared hopes for the future. Picasso's masterpiece, Guernica, has served as a point of departure for many artists and educators over the decades. The size and richness of the iconography, with its layered meanings, can be viewed in myriad ways (Wilson, Hurwitz, & Wilson, 1987). Discussing feelings about art can be both instructive and cathartic. Speculation about the reasons for bombing the sleeping town of Guernica and discussion of the potential aftermath of such an event gives children the opportunity to examine their greatest fears and question the basic nature of war (Giroux, 1988, 2000).

**Examining Beliefs**

Children are continually exposed to traumatic events through the media. Listening to the radio, watching TV, or reading the headlines in the daily newspaper can feel like a daily media assault. Tragic graphic scenes from all over the world are imported each night into the living rooms, family rooms, and kitchens of our students' homes. Images are too often presented in rapid-fire succession with very little time for processing or reflection. Children can become bewildered and depressed when asked to understand events that are developmentally beyond their years (Elkind, 2001).

In the art classroom on the other hand, children have time to confront important themes. The process of viewing, listening, discussing, and then creating, allows the child to place information in a context that makes it more understandable (Bruner, 1977). The arts can create the time, the support, and the permission to reflect on difficult events of the world. The process can help children overcome feelings of powerlessness that a media barrage of negative messages creates.

The artistic process can create a safe place for children to address long-held beliefs and prejudices. Looking at artworks that depict aspects of war is fundamentally different from absorbing the brutal images found in the popular media. The gore of the day-to-day violence seen in the news media is
Art can also serve to motivate better writing skills, as it generates imagery for the child to describe in paragraph form. Ideas become more specific and powerful when artmaking and writing are coupled.

specific and very different from the more universal human emotions depicted within an exemplary painting, print, or sculpture (Morris, 1998). Discussion of art with serious themes can encourage a new analysis and understanding and move the theme to a more abstract and universal level.

*The Prisoners, The Shootings of May Third 1808, the Korean War Memorial,* and *Guernica* are quite different from each other and run through a range of expression, from betrayal and desolation to terror. They examine human qualities and conditions that many children have not experienced first-hand. The exposure can be highly instructive—expanding their frames of reference. These images call for an examination of the essential nature of war: power, aggression, chaos, and loss. They call for a discussion of beliefs about the culturally popular myths that glorify war and create the dichotomies of good-guys/bad-guys, and hero/victim (Giroux, 2000).

What kind of understandings will an art lesson on war evoke? Might these new understandings develop a stronger knowledge base from which to make major life decisions? Could the old narrow paradigm of war-hero be replaced with a broader more sober one?

**Multimodal Learning**

With time and practice, children become better at expressing themselves in myriad ways. Children's art becomes more detailed and sophisticated as they mature (Arneheim, 1974), yet many children feel most comfortable with the time-honored method of using words to give expression to ideas. Those with fewer linguistic skills may prefer the medium of the dance, the play, the song, or the visual arts to give voice to their ideas (McGuire, 1984).

Listening to the musical composition *Guernica,* by Leonardo Balada, before or during the visual art process gives students another avenue for understanding the sense of chaos and confusion that Picasso was trying to convey. Through the peaks and valleys of this symphonic piece a listener can sense the impending doom and visualize the bombing raid.

The poem “On Death, without Exaggeration” by Wislawa Szymborska (Szymborska, 1986) could be read aloud before the art-making process to arouse greater depth of understanding about war and its destruction—its aftermath of death. Each child could be given a copy of the entire poem and asked to look for images that seem important or moving to them, or an excerpt from the poem could be written on the board for discussion.

Oh, it has its triumphs, but look at its countless defeats, missed blows, and repeat attempts!

Sometimes it isn’t strong enough to swat a fly from the air! Many are the caterpillars that have outcrawled it. (Szymborska, 1986)

When several sensory and expressive modalities (visual, auditory, oral and kinesthetic) are combined in a lesson, the potential for perceptual understanding and expression is enhanced (Arnold, 1997).

(Continued on p. 33)
Music can create a mood or an aural background for the visual art process. Writing can focus the nonlinear thought expressed in a work of art and extend the meaning to a more concrete level. Art can also serve to motivate better writing skills, as it generates imagery for the child to describe in paragraph form. Ideas become more specific and powerful when artmaking and writing are coupled. Vague notions become more concrete as the narrative is extended and refined (Harste, et al., 1996). The creative process can become another avenue for the child to retell, reinterpret, and redefine the multiple themes of war, in a visual and verbal vocabulary that children can understand (Coles, 1989).

Conclusion
Great works of art are often complex, abstract, and difficult to understand. Kollwitz's The Prisoners, Goya's The Shootings of the Third of May 1808, Gaylord's Korean War Memorial, and Picasso's Guernica are highly personal statements of highly emotional events. Yet, works like these, which have serious themes, can become sources for artistic and written expression and help children confront their worst fears.

Children need the opportunity to give expression to life events that are tragic or senseless to them. They need time and permission to reflect in meaningful ways on events over which they have no control. The artistic process can provide such an avenue.

**On Death, without Exaggeration**
It can't take a joke, find a star, make a bridge. It knows nothing about weaving, mining, farming, building ships, or baking cakes. In our planning for tomorrow, it has the final word, which is always beside the point. It can't even get the things done that are part of its trade: dig a grave, make a coffin, clean up after itself.

Preoccupied with killing, it does the job awkwardly, without system or skill. As though each of us were its first kill.
Oh, it has its triumphs, but look at its countless defeats, missed blows, and repeat attempts!

Sometimes it isn't strong enough to swat a fly from the air. Many are the caterpillars that have outcrawled it.

All those bulbs, pods, tentacles, fins, tracheae, nuptial plumage, and winter fur show that it has fallen behind with its halfhearted work.

Ill will won't help and even our lending a hand with wars and coups d'état is so far not enough.
Hearts beat inside eggs.
Babies' skeletons grow.
Seeds, hard at work, sprout their first tiny pair of leaves and sometimes even tall trees fall away.

Whoever claims that it's omnipotent is himself living proof that it's not.
There's no life that couldn't be immortal if only for a moment.

Death always arrives by that very moment too late.
In vain it tugs at the knob of the invisible door.
As far as you've come can't be undone.

Translated by S. Baranczak & C. Cavanagh

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ENDNOTE

1 All comments by students were taken from their personal writings about the works they created.
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