

# Mentor's Introduction

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# mentor's introduction

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Teaching art from a multicultural point of view is a challenging and difficult task open to many interpretations and classroom practices. In the introduction to her book, **Mixed Blessings: New Art in Multicultural America**, Lucy Lippard<sup>1</sup> wrote: "The cross-cultural process is a recalcitrant, elusive subject" (p.3). For over a decade, Nancy Schien Parks has been researching issues related to art about and from many diverse cultures. Her background in museum education and classroom practice allow her to have insights and revelations into issues that involve introducing concepts about art to those both within and outside specific cultural contexts.

In her paper about cross-cultural interpretation and valuing of Northwest coast art by natives and non-natives, she raises some very provocative questions about what it means to teach art from what has been popularly termed a **multicultural point of view**. This case study portrays the good intentions of an art teacher at the elementary level who wishes to introduce the art of other cultures into her classroom practice. The information and insights into the Northwest coast native culture that she conveys to her students takes the form of a nicely wrapped package with nothing inside. She was not able to go beyond the boundaries of her own background and challenge herself and her students to think about the deep meanings of the symbolism and myths connected with art from another culture than their own and her own experiences.

What if the Haida sculptor, portrayed in Parks study, were to teach the 6th grade art class under consideration? How would conservative, rural, almost entirely white, community members respond to the teaching of religious aspects of a non-Christian culture to their children? From a community-based point of view, how 'dangerous' are new ideas that are foreign to the population of children in this research? Nancy Schien Parks provokes us to ponder our own questions about cross-culture teaching of art that indicate her future success as an art educator who will question how and why it is important to teach about art from a diversity of cultures and perspectives.

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<sup>1</sup> Lippard, L. (1990). **Mixed blessings: New art in multicultural America**. New York: Pantheon Books.