

Cultural Appropriation Policy

What is cultural appropriation?

“Taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else’s culture without permission. This can include unauthorized use of another culture’s dance, dress, music, language, folklore, cuisine, traditional medicine, religious symbols, etc. It’s most likely to be harmful when the source community is a minority group that has been oppressed or exploited in other ways or when the object of appropriation is particularly sensitive, e.g. sacred objects.”

Susan Scafidi

Author of *Who Owns Culture? Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law*

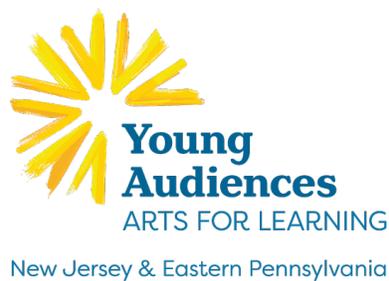
YA defines cultural appropriation in accordance with the above definition. In addition, whether an artist has “permission” can be difficult to establish, so YA also investigates whether a given element of a program has implicit/explicit roots in racism, stereotype, or misinformation, or has been historically white-washed and separated from its roots in BIPOC communities. We find that cultural appropriation and related issues of inaccurate and/or harmful cultural representation can be present in, but not limited to, the following elements:

- Communication of inaccurate or white-washed historical facts.
- Use of “general” accents, costuming, and language which necessarily draw upon stereotypes in representing people, traditions and dress outside of the artist’s direct cultural experience, particularly when a historically marginalized group is portrayed by an artist with a less marginalized identity.
- Inclusion of program elements with roots in racist ideology, even when those roots are no longer part of mainstream knowledge.
- Separating an artform founded in BIPOC communities and cultures from its historic roots through omission or revision of context and/or failure to communicate the artist’s background of understanding.

Note: Conversations about cultural appropriation are uncomfortable and not an exact science but are necessary to bring programs into alignment with YA’s diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (Arts United) strategic plan and to reduce harm for students. YA values collaborations in which artists are willing to disarm defensive responses in order to engage in mutual learning and growth when these issues arise.

OUR STANCE:

Young Audiences (YA) believes that arts education experiences are most effective when delivered from a place of cultural authenticity and transparency. To this end, YA is dedicated to maintaining teaching artists with deep connections to their artforms, programs that provide accurate historical and cultural context, and internal processes that continually review and communicate the accuracy and authenticity of language, images, and programming. YA acknowledges that cultural appropriation is most likely present where there is historic oppression of a marginalized culture. We will review all services with the understanding that artforms created by people of color are uniquely susceptible to being stripped of



their original context and meaning. It is also important to also bring attention to the economic impact of cultural appropriation. Adopting, monetizing and/or capitalizing another's group's (usually one that has been historically oppressed) culture, creativity, pain or hurt.

Interactions with artists:

YA staff guiding questions to ask an artist:

- How are you sharing the history and cultural context of the artform you are presenting?
- Is your cultural background aligned with the cultural origin of the artform and/or historical context you are presenting?
- What is your personal relationship, training background, and understanding of the artform?
- How are you telling the story of that relationship in the program?

Best practices:

All teaching artists should share their connection with their artform. For culturally specific programs where the indigenous culture of the artform differs from the artists' own background, this is especially important. Does the artist have a deep relationship to the culture in question, and the authority to speak as an expert in it?

- If an artist is an expert in an artform but does not share that connection, or the artform's original cultural context in the program, YA staff will guide the artist in how to do so.
- If an artist is NOT an expert in an artform that differs from the artist's cultural background, YA staff will point the artist towards a different programmatic choice or consider no longer presenting the program.
- In the event of more egregious racial or cultural presentations of stereotypes and offensive imagery (eg. blackface) YA reserves the right to immediately cancel any upcoming bookings of the program and remove the program from active presentation until the issues are addressed.



Marketing

As much as is possible in each given marketing medium, YA will present clear language and images that reflect both the artform being presented and the story, expertise, and identity of the individuals presenting it.

- Marketing images will be up to date and feature depictions of the program that mirror what the school will see. (eg. a program on Latinx musical traditions will not have a photo of three Latinx performers when the actual make-up of a group performing in a school might be two White and one Latinx performer.)
- Language in program and artist descriptions will make clear the relationship of the artist to the artform. If an artist has studied deeply in a culturally specific artform that is not their own, YA will communicate that history. YA will avoid tacitly implying in its language that a performer is of the same cultural background as the origin of their artform when this is not the case.
- Language will be examined to avoid exoticizing phrasing when describing programs highlighting non-white cultures such as “exotic” and “colorful”.

Recruitment

YA will prioritize connecting with expert teaching artists who share the same cultural background as the artform they are presenting. If this is not possible, YA will diligently investigate the artist’s expertise in the artform and their ability to share authentic cultural context during the course of a program. If YA is not satisfied in either the artists’ expertise or ability to communicate context, they will not pursue adding the artist to the roster.

Professional Learning

YA will:

- Provide professional learning opportunities to artists, whether en masse or in focused one on one sessions, to continue to educate about how to avoid cultural appropriation and seek authenticity in programming.
- YA staff will continue, with the help of the Arts United Working Group, to redefine and hone its understanding of how cultural appropriation can appear in YA’s programs. Best practices are periodically examined and redefined.

Resource: https://aorta.coop/portfolio_page/cultural-appropriation/