

Bias in the Fine Arts (N) Range of the Library of Congress Classification System (LCC)

30 mins

Note: This lesson is intended to introduce students to bias in the fine arts range. It argues that by privileging fine art over craft, LCC reinforces ideas that white male European art is superior to art made by women and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) artists. The Fine Arts range is arranged by medium. While the fine arts (architecture, painting, sculpture, and drawing) are treated as primary categories (NA for architecture, NB for sculpture, and so on), the craft mediums (glass, woodwork, textiles, and ceramic) are a subdivision of a subdivision, located under “Other Arts and Art Industries” in Decorative Arts (NK).

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Understand how LCC functions to locate books on the library shelves
- Analyze how the Fine Arts Range privileges fine art over craft
- Link the privileging of fine art over craft to the West’s privileging of white, male, European art over art made by women and BIPOC artists
- Understand that libraries are not neutral and are reflective of systemic bias within society

Instructor gives brief introduction to LCC and how it functions (5 mins)

- LCC is an organizational system that puts similar books next to one another on the shelves
- How we organize information matters because it creates a narrative. Exhibitions are an excellent example of this. They organize information (in this case, artwork) and create a narrative, sometimes even a visual argument

Students watch a short video, *Is There a Difference Between Art and Craft?* By Khan Academy (6 mins)

- <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/approaches-to-art-history/approaches-art-history/questions-art-history/v/is-there-a-difference-between-art-and-craft-laura-morelli>

Instructor hands out Fine Arts Classification Outline

- https://www.loc.gov/aba/cataloging/classification/lcco/lcco_n.pdf
- Explain how LCC is a hierarchical system – N is Fine Arts, NA is Architecture, etc.

Think-Pair-Share Activity (20 mins)

- Questions: Based on what you learned in the video, what can you conclude about the Fine Arts Range? What else do you notice about how books are arranged in the Fine Arts?
 - Students look handout individually (5 mins)
 - Students discuss their observations in groups of 3-4 (5-7 mins)
 - Students engage in class-wide discussion (8-10 mins)

During discussion, the instructor walks around to tables

- Opportunity to informally assess student learning
- If students need help, can ask leading questions like “Take a closer look at how mediums are treated within LCC. How does this relate to what you’ve learned about fine art and craft in the video?”