

Picturing Hope in Difficult Times

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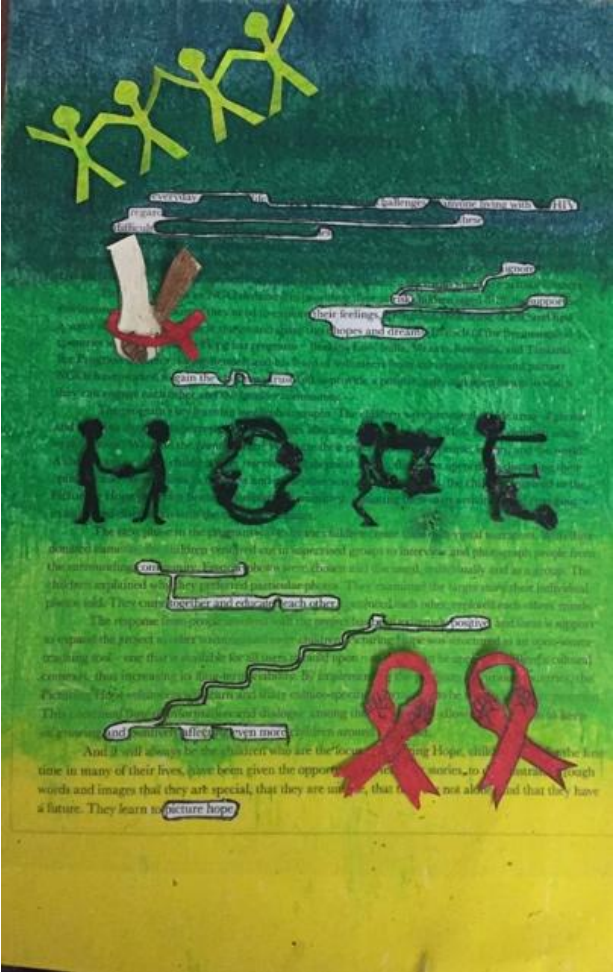
In our darkest moments, it is the glimmer of hope that allows us to continue forth against the currents that beat us back. “Everyday life challenges anyone living with HIV.” (Prasad, 2016) 35 years into the HIV/AIDS epidemic, it is especially important that discrimination is overshadowed by support of people living with HIV. A Humument-style piece by Duke student Gauri Prasad, entitled *Picture Hope*, highlights the idea of hope in the light of dark times by interspersing a hope-themed poem with various representations of hope.

Prasad chooses to use a piece of text from a brochure compiled for *Picturing Hope*, a project supported by the Abbot Fund that allows children around the world to use photography to cope with their feelings (Picturing Hope, 2005). This piece of text is fitting to represent the broader theme of hope due to similarity in ideologies within the original text. Like Tom Phillips, the artist picks out eye catching phrases that relate to one another and bring them together to form a poem (Weisblum, 2015).

Slightly different from Tom Phillips’ original Humument piece, the artist chooses to have her poem flow in an easy-to-read, linear fashion by linking individual lines of the poem with thin lines of white space. Upon initial glance, a viewer would notice the color gradient of the piece. Shades of green are well known in many cultures to symbolize positive feelings such as hope, growth and peace (Graphic Springs). The color gradient follows the emotional progression of themes in the poem. Specifically, the poem starts off with a rather negative outlook by saying

“Everyday life challenges anyone living with HIV” and this is met by darker shades of green (Prasad, 2016). As the poem continues, it emotionally ascends into a lighter and encouraging outlook by saying “Come together and educate each other”, and “Picture hope”, which is met by lighter shades of green and yellow (Prasad, 2016).

Apart from the background and the words themselves, the individual artistic components also play a role in producing a hopeful feeling in a viewer. The artist does this by choosing two motifs of hope, namely the idea of strength and togetherness and using those to draw different “pictures of hope”. She also ensures to not draw too far



away from the purpose of the original text by adding a rather direct focus on youth and HIV/AIDS to her piece.

The strength motif is mainly characterized by the red AIDS awareness ribbons at the bottom. The HIV/AIDS epidemic in the past has been associated with acts of rebellion. Within the ribbons themselves, Prasad draws an image of two arms crossed and clenched, a universal image of fighting, indicative of the epidemic's history of combatting stigma through protest and rebellion. The togetherness motif is characterized by the other three images of hands being held together on the art piece. Support is critical to helping a person through rough times, thus Prasad chooses to create pictures of support to bring out the larger message of hope.

In addition to the themes that represent hope, Prasad chooses to maintain a childlike theme as the original text is about children and the way they picture hope (Picturing Hope, 2005). Each image is simplistic, and the intention is that the piece can be thought of as an example of what the project's original aim was, that is, to see the ways in which children affected by HIV/AIDS picture hope (Picturing Hope, 2005). The cutout at the top reminds adult viewers of childhood birthday parties and can catch the attention of younger viewers due to its simplicity and bright colors. Additionally, the light green color seems to symbolize being able to see light despite darkness, which is the typical meaning of hope to many.

Positive feelings of hopefulness are captured in Prasad's Humument piece. The combination of the words in the poem along with the visuals of the artwork create a temporary optimistic mood despite existing feelings of the viewer. In the current day and age where there are so many problems including HIV/AIDS, it is becoming increasingly important to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Confidence and enthusiasm is essential to produce productive change toward the world's larger problems; without feelings of hope, it is difficult to find motivation to make the world a better place.

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