

In the News

A High School Unit In Expressive Composition and Social Engagement

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AIM: How does Art reflect, as well as shape, our world? What is the relationship between the artist and the “real world”? How do we communicate mood through an image? How do we represent our opinions and feeling with abstract design elements?

Students will explore the themes of contemporary art and self-expression through the process of responding visually to a contemporary news article and making mixed media artworks that incorporate actual newspaper.

OVERVIEW:

This lesson asks students to encounter a contemporary issue through the newspaper, and respond to what they read through a visual language. Students experience the actual art-making process of contemporary artists, as they express their opinions about the contemporary world around them. This lesson aims to engage student in a critical reflection of the world around them and to empower them to use art as activism.

GRADE LEVEL: 11

TIME ALLOWANCE: 2 Weeks

OBJECTIVES:

Students will understand the concept of “contemporary” and “socially engaged art”
Students will understand the relationship between the artist and the “real world”
Students will practice representing emotion through expressive use of the elements of art.
Students will learn the value of creative expression in the contemporary world.
Students will learn mixed media techniques.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS:

Slideshow, Art Analysis Routines, News Articles, Newspaper & Art Supplies

REQUIRED BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE:

1. The Elements of Art & Formal Analysis
2. Students can analyze an Expressive Compositions, especially the use of specific formal elements to express mood. (I.E. Analyzing the difference in mood between Picasso’s Blue period & Circus series.)

PROCEDURE:

A. Slide Show & Conversation: Guernica, Picasso, 1937 (20-30 min)

1. Students complete questions 1-3 of the 5 stages of Art Criticism worksheet. (Handout Attached) The first three stages are: *Literal Description, Formal Analysis, Interpretation*.
2. Students read article: UN conceals Picasso's "Guernica" for Powell's presentation by David Walsh, Feb.8, 2003.
3. Students complete questions 4-5 of the 5 stages of Art Criticism worksheet. These stages are: *Contextual Analysis* and *Judgment*.
4. Collect Art Criticism handouts as a written assessment.
4. Class conversation:
 - What is this work of art about?
 - What is this work of art saying about that event?
 - What about this image (visual information) tells you the artist's opinion?
 - Why did the UN cover this image during Powell's speech?
 - What does that say about the power of an image?

B. Introduce Art Project & Criteria for Success: (20 min)

1. Tell students that for our next project, we are creating a work of contemporary art. Ask students, "What do I mean by contemporary?" and define. Tell students we are going to make an artwork inspired by today's world, and will find our inspiration in the news. This art piece is going to be an expressive composition – meaning it should express our opinions about the news article.
2. Show examples of other artworks inspired by newspapers, including previous student artwork or any artworks using Newspaper & Mixed Media.
3. Explain criteria:
 - You will choose from three possible news articles.
 - Artwork should be mixed media: incorporate the actual newspaper article (collage or whole), and at least two other dry media. Choose from pastel, charcoal, colored pencil, graphite, or collage.
 - Artwork should express your *opinion* about the article through the use of *abstract expression*. (Artwork uses the elements of art expressively, to convey a mood)
 - Artwork should be turned in with a written response to the article.
 - During critique, you will give a verbal explanation of how your work expresses your emotions or opinions.

C. Read & Respond to Current Events article (30 min)

1. Students can choose an article off of approved news sites (NPR, CNN, Etc.) Have printed options available for ELL or IEP students who need additional scaffolding (PBS Student News)
2. Read article. (If students are struggling readers, consider adding an 'anticipation guide' or annotation strategy for this step. Example attached)
3. Complete a verbal or written reflection about the article. Ask students to describe the central idea, and to reflect on their own opinions and emotions in response to the article. (If students are struggling readers, consider adding some reading comprehension questions before this step. Example Attached)

D. Plan Artworks (30 min)

- Choose one of two *moods* that you would like to convey in your pieces.
- Create a rough-draft sketch in your sketchbook planning your image.
- Students must consider all criteria for success & present the rough draft to the teacher before moving into production of a final draft.
- Students must be able to describe how they will use each element of art expressively to convey their mood. (Optional Visual Planner Attached)

E. Create Image.

Students will need roughly 2-3 hours of studio work time to complete their artworks.

- While the students work, rotate and check for thoughtfulness and understanding. Encourage students to be thoughtful about EACH element they choose. Consider asking the following questions:
 - “What reaction did you have to the article? Why did you choose this color? What do these lines represent? What made you choose this color to represent that emotion? What formal elements are you using to convey your mood?”
- If you notice that their image is not conveying a clear mood, let them know!
 - “What did you intend to convey with this piece? How did you intend to convey it? When I see the image, I instead got the impression that you felt _____. How could you convey your emotion more clearly?”

F. Class Presentations & Critique.

1. Students will need 5-10 minutes to plan artist statements. Consider using the following sentence starters for ELL or IEP students:

- “In my artwork, I used _____ in order to represent _____ that I felt while reading about _____”
- For example: “In my artwork, I used sharp lines, dark colors, and hazy textures in order to represent the anger and confusion that I felt while reading about the civil war in Syria.”

2. Students each present their work to the class, and receive questions and comments about the work. If this is your first time conducting a class critique, consider setting some norms for the conversation and going over behavior and procedures first.

EVALUATION:

Final artwork & class critique: Student displays understanding of concepts and attempted to express their opinions through their artwork. Student is able to identify elements of design & explain why he chose to use certain visual styles.

STANDARDS OF ART:

CA 1.0, 2.0, etc.

IMAGE EXAMPLES:

<http://arttattler.com/archivelastnewspaper.html>



Judit Berstein, *Are You Running With Me Jesus*, 1967



Student Work, 2014

Optional Visual Planners

Artwork Citation: _____ Name: _____ Class #: _____

STAGES OF ART CRITICISM

2. Formal Analysis
Use the Elements of Art and the Principles of Design to analyze the mood and the visual style of the work.

4. Contextual Analysis
Apply your knowledge of the artist's historical & cultural context to your analysis of their artwork. Why did the artist make the work and what type of audience was it made for?

1. Literal Description
*Simply say what you see! Be Specific!
(Who? What? Where? When?)*

3. Interpretation
*Go beyond what you see and find the hidden meaning to determine what the work represents or means.
Provide visual evidence.*

5. Judgment
*State whether you like the work or not and explain why.
State whether it means something to you or if you learned something from the work.*

COLOR
The colors that come to mind for my mood are...

LINE
The lines that might convey my mood look like this...

(Mood)

VALUE
The level of brightness or darkness that best matches my mood is...

SPACE
The arrangement of objects that best conveys my mood...

UN conceals Picasso's "Guernica" for Powell's presentation

By David Walsh
8 February 2003

In an act with extraordinary historical resonance, United Nations officials covered up a tapestry reproduction of Pablo Picasso's anti-war mural "Guernica" during US Secretary of State Colin Powell's February 5 presentation of the American case for war against Iraq.

Picasso's painting commemorates a small Basque village bombed by German forces in April 1937 during the Spanish Civil War. The painter, in desolate black, white and grey, depicts a nightmarish scene of men, women, children and animals under bombardment. The twisted, writhing forms include images of a screaming mother holding a dead child, a corpse with wide-open eyes and a gored horse. Art historian Herbert Read described the work as "a cry of outrage and horror amplified by a great genius."

The reproduction has hung outside the Security Council chamber at UN headquarters in New York since its donation by the estate of Nelson A. Rockefeller in 1985. As the council gathered to hear Powell on Wednesday, workers placed a blue curtain and flags of the council's member countries in front of the tapestry.

UN officials claimed that the cover-up was simply a matter of creating a more effective backdrop for the television cameras. "When we do have large crowds we put the flags up and the UN logo in front of the tapestry," asserted Stephane Dujarric. *New York Newsday*, however, reported that "Diplomats at the United Nations, speaking on condition they not be named, have been quoted in recent days telling journalists that they believe the United States leaned on UN officials to cover the tapestry, rather than have it in the background while Powell or other US diplomats argued for war on Iraq."

The right-wing *Washington Times* was obliged to

note: "Television cameras routinely pan the tapestry as diplomats enter and leave the council chambers, and its muted browns and taupes lend a poignant backdrop to the talking heads. So it was a surprise for many of the envoys to arrive at U.N. headquarters last Monday for a Security Council briefing by chief weapons inspectors, only to find the searing work covered with a baby-blue banner and the U.N. logo."

Further damaging Dujarric's claim, the *Toronto Star*'s art critic Peter Goddard wrote that "the coverup may have been prompted by UN realization that images of the mural's vivid anti-war message were televised world-wide when it appeared as a backdrop to the Jan. 27 interim report by chief weapons inspector Hans Blix."

A group of protesters held up copies of Picasso's painting outside the UN on Wednesday while Powell was making his warmongering appeal.

Aside from its general evocation of anti-war sentiment, Picasso's painting threatened to speak to historical parallels that the Bush administration and UN officials were clearly determined that the media or the public should not make.

For an entire generation the bombing of Guernica and Picasso's interpretation of the event signified the barbarity of fascism and the widespread determination to resist its violence and brutality.

The bombing of Guernica, by the German Luftwaffe in support of Francisco Franco's Nationalist army, was one of the first opportunities for European fascism to reveal its murderous face.

German bombers launched an unprovoked attack on the Basque village of 5,000 at 4:30 in the afternoon, the busiest hour of a market day. According to one account, "The streets were jammed with townspeople and peasants from the countryside. Never before in modern

Hidden Treasures

What's so controversial about Picasso's *Guernica*?

By David Cohen



The tapestry in question

Earlier this week, U.N. officials hung a blue curtain over a tapestry reproduction of Picasso's *Guernica* at the entrance of the Security Council. The spot is where diplomats and others make statements to the press, and ostensibly officials thought it would be inappropriate for Colin Powell to speak about war in Iraq with the 20th century's most iconic protest against the inhumanity of war as his backdrop. Why is *Guernica* such a powerfully controversial image after all these years, and how did it come to hang in tapestry form at the United Nations?

Advertisement

Guernica is a mural, 11 feet 6 inches high and 25 feet 8 inches wide, which commemorates the aerial bombardment—and obliteration—of the ancient Basque town of 5,000 inhabitants by German and Italian squadrons on April 26, 1937. It has justifiably been held to be one of the masterpieces of modern art. A modern history painting, *Guernica* self-consciously draws on archetypal forms the artist was exploring at the time: bulls, horses, melancholy women—particularly Spanish themes that were nonetheless classical and universal. Picasso used a distinctive pictorial language to convey meaning in a broadly accessible way without compromising the hermetic originality of the artist's style; the chopped-up, fragmentary treatment of form makes the image more startling and conveys violence. Most notable, though, is the painting's audaciously stark absence of color—*Guernica* is painted solely in black and white and gray tones. Black-and-white images carry symbolic as well as graphic punch, of course, and, to a contemporary audience used to black-and-white newspapers and film, the added connotation of objectivity.

Guernica is no stranger to political dispute. Picasso painted it for the Spanish Pavilion of the 1937 Paris World's Fair as the fulfillment of a commission that predated the bombing atrocity. After the World's Fair, *Guernica* toured European capitals, a rallying-cry-in-paint to the anti-fascist cause. In 1939, the mural and supporting studies arrived in New York for a fund-raising tour in aid of Spanish war relief. It left America for numerous exhibitions during the Cold War years (by which time Picasso had joined the French Communist Party) but during that time the Museum of Modern Art had become its semipermanent home. Meanwhile, the Franco regime, far from viewing the work as an embarrassment, was calling for its "return" to Spain—ignoring the fact that the painting had never actually resided there. In the first Spanish monograph on Picasso, published in Madrid in 1951, the author described *Guernica* as "the picture of all bombed cities"—a neat formulation that underscores the cost of universalism in art. Lack of specificity makes the image more potent and more tame.

While at MoMA, the mural became the focus of intense political activism. Commenting on the natural home for the painting, Picasso had said in 1956, "It will do the most good in America." In 1967, however, 400 artists responding to the Vietnam War signed a petition urging Picasso to take it out of the country: "Please let the spirit of your painting be reasserted and its message once again felt, by withdrawing your painting from the United States for the duration of the war." The liberal art historian Meyer Schapiro viewed this as nonsensical political posturing. In a letter to the Art Workers Coalition in 1970 he asked if MoMA was making a protest against the crucifixion by hanging paintings of that subject, and by implication, wondered why Franco was so keen to have *Guernica* in the Prado, if hanging it implied criticism of all warfare.

Not long after, in 1974, Tony Shafrazi, a young Iranian artist (and later a trendy SoHo dealer) sprayed the words "Kill Lies All" onto the picture, as a protest against U.S. action at My Lai. (The canvas was well-varnished so his paint cleaned off with ease.) A self-proclaimed Guerrilla Art Action Group came to the defense of Shafrazi, arguing that he was completing, not vandalizing, Picasso's creation. Spain

Example of Scaffolding For ELL Students:

Trayvon Martin Article Guide

Name:

Class:

1. Anticipation Guide

- What is your definition of justice?
- Should a person be able to defend him or herself if he or she is in danger of being hurt or killed? Should he or she be able to use a weapon to keep him or herself safe?
- Do you feel that people of different races are treated equally in today's society? Give an example.

2. Read & Annotate Article

3. Comprehension Check

- What is the Stand Your Ground Law.
- What was the charge against Zimmerman?
- In the third paragraph, we learn that Zimmerman is "acquitted" of all charges. What does this mean?

4. Discussion Questions

- In Florida, "To prove second degree murder, a prosecutor must show that the defendant acted according to a 'depraved mind' without regard for human life. (Depraved = Morally corrupt or wicked). Do you believe that Zimmerman was guilty of second-degree murder? Why or why not?
- The not guilty verdict and acquittal of all charges against George Zimmerman has angered many people who feel that justice was not served because Trayvon Martin was an African American teenager. Do you believe that race played a role in the jury's judgment?
- In California, the California Criminal Jury Instructions (CALCRIM) does allow a jury to acquit someone based on a stand-your-ground defense. Do you believe Stand Your Ground Laws are good laws, in general? Do these laws make you feel more or less safe?

5. Describe your reaction to this article. What type of *mood* did the article put you in?

6. Complete the "Mood Planner" (on reverse of this page)