



Energizing Creative Processes Through Art Appreciation: The Influences American Culture had on Modern Art

Curriculum Unit 15.02.02
by Claudine Renee Davis

Rationale

As an artist and teacher I am familiar with people and students exclaiming disapproval for modern art. Responses such as, “why is that famous?” or “my little brother can finger paint better than that”, and even “that’s stupid” are common and unfortunately expected. Most beginning (and even experienced) art students have misunderstandings about modern art because they do not understand the complexity of the work including but not limited to: the formal qualities of the design’s structure or the influences that inspire idea and subject. Observing how people tend to dislike what they can’t understand has prompted this unit and it’s purpose to connect students with factual background information that can transfer to critical thinking about appreciating art and motivate their own creative process.

At first glance, modern art can stand as visually unclear, chaotic, or pointless; contributing to some (passionately) misinformed criticism. There is an appreciation for the level of naivety carried by students (which simultaneously mirrors the general public’s level of ignorance) due to recognizing where it stems from. In the art room, the lack of information students have when confronted with modern art typically leads to negatively impulsive reactions, stifling student motivation and creativity, obstructs the learning process from gaining proper momentum, and eliminates the possibility for future opportunities to think critically. As a high school teacher, implementing factual background for art bridges context, narrowing the wide gap of uncertainty that students have when thinking, reacting, and processing art. Also, the bridge serves to cross students over to understanding how to look at artwork objectively, instead of only subjectively, while learning the difference between both approaches and their results. The unit will develop an appreciation for art that takes students beyond noticing the art’s aesthetic value. The unit is supported with information relating to the culture in America during the 20th century.

The unit will be instructed in Exploring Visual Design, a foundational art class, consisting of a combination of four high school grade levels. The experience demographics in each class are extremely diverse and not every student is a beginning art student. Some students have been fortunate enough to have taken art classes through middle school and back in elementary as well, a few may have had private lessons of some sort, transferred from an arts magnet school, or have a strong interest in art. On the other side of the scale and weighing more are students who have had limited or no experience with art including any formal education in

earlier grades. All this can make for a very challenging dynamic for a teacher to address and sustain. There is a common thread however that all students have, regardless of experience in the subject and that is their motivation being greatly influenced by their desire (and perceived ability) to connect with the subject.

There's a myth about art class and that it's not really serious because it's perceived as not academically important. It's commonly thought of as a class where academic learning objectives or expectations don't exist. Experienced art teachers are aware that art class can be extremely intimidating for many students, contributing to motivation deteriorating. Students frequently confuse that they need to be 'talented' already to do well in class instead of realizing they are in the class to learn how to 'do' the subject. The unit is designed to be rigorous in challenging students at the high school level, taking into account the variety of former experience that contribute to class dynamics as well as the special circumstances for students on IEP plans, 504 plans, and who are English Language Learners (ELL). The unit bridges art with cultural history to explore and reveal the influences culture has on art, the intentions that motivated artists to execute their visual expressions, and the impact that art makes on its audience. Lessons and activities in the unit expose art from a technical standpoint and through the historical context of American culture.

At Engineering and Science University Magnet School, where I teach, students are required to take EVD in order to graduate. We are a STEM magnet school. Our school has a wonderfully diverse ethnic population and a stronger male population. The examples in art were selected because they support a sequence and describe a continuous story, and also because I found relevance to our schools' academic focus. This unit could also be adapted for US History or Civics classes where the project medium could be changed to making a poster or collage or writing a paper. The design is user friendly in the way that the format for connecting history, culture, and art could be easily altered for other subjects and supported with relevant content and examples that serve a high school teachers humanities based curricula.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to identify historical cultural influences reflected within specific works of art, deepening their critical thinking skills.

Students will develop and present meaningful subject to describe in a painting project responding to current cultural issues by developing content and expressing point of view.

Students will demonstrate how to artistically apply related technical skills and present design elements and principles within their painting composition.

Students will demonstrate the ability to effectively construct criticism on modern art and comprehension between objective and subjective claims in art.

Intentions of Visual Artists

Visual Art is a broad discipline and it spans across a rich variety of media forms applied to its processes and development. Visual art is a non-verbal form of communication and has been profoundly reflective of history, if only for the artist who had the motivation and the courage to create. Frequently, expressions in art reach a large audience, and whether the audience feels positive or negative towards the work, the art can work as an oracle to shape and provoke cultures, subcultures, and counter cultures and be taken and held as a symbol to simply convey perspective.

While developing the unit, it was helpful to break down the wide world of art into two subcultures, with one being Graphic Art and the other Fine Art. Usually, the distinction between the two is very clear. Graphic arts use imagery and text together in a highly stylistic and (seemingly) controlled and concrete fashion communicating blatant and subtle commands and information, in a layman's style of visual language with purpose to persuade. Graphic arts serve capitalistic agendas and advertising is the leading and largest industry for graphic artists and designers. Students recognize graphic art for the purpose it serves and unless the product or message within the art is something they dislike or disagree with, they usually don't react with negative criticism on the artistry of the work. To understand an artist like Andy Warhol and the Pop Art movement, it's very helpful to present historical background with examples of consumerism that reflect samples of advertising and propaganda influences to help students make sense of Warhol's artistic intentions.

Fine art is also a persuasive form of communication, although high school students seldom make this connection, generating more inspiration for this unit. The fine artist is typically independent, spending great amounts of time conceptualizing, processing and executing themes contained within their work. Fine art can hold and increase its value over time because of its unique and one of a kind quality. Master pieces can be worked on simultaneously in the studio and can take hours to years to complete. Clearly, teachers don't have this kind of unlimited time for teaching anything, however, the unit poses the information for students to learn that art work is an evolution where progress is made over the course of time and ideas on subject and arrangement are open, evolve, and change. Students are (generally) very anxious to see results so the unit counters this and ingrained in the lessons are opportunities for developing the understanding from the past while conceptualizing their own final project over a span of time. The processes over time that execute the final piece will be learned through practical experience. Students will be given examples of painting and other 2D forms of expression made by American modern artists who reflected the times they were living in. The unit is designed with lessons that develop technical skills in art and help to assimilate the influences modern culture had on artist, subject and audience reaction. Fine art derives from very personal intention and quite often, can convey very deep and insightful perspective. Paul Cezanne was quoted as saying, "Paintings can be highly calculated, they are idea based." ¹ The final project will be an assessment for students to develop an idea and express personal perspective in painting.

A synopsis written by the Museum of Modern Art provides insight for ideas, medium and processes that artists practiced. Both quotes impact and explain an appreciation on how to begin to understand the works of art that reflected the many art movements during the 20th century.

"Modern art represents an evolving set of ideas among visual artists, seeking new approaches to art making. Approaches and styles of art were defined and redefined throughout the twentieth century and the development of visual language was original and representative of the time." ²

“Modern art is the creative world’s response to the practices and perspectives of the new lives and ideas provided by technological advances of the industrial age that caused contemporary society to manifest itself in new ways compared to the past. Artists worked to represent their experience of the newness of modern life in appropriately innovative ways. Although modern art as a term applies to a vast number of artistic genres spanning more than a century, aesthetically speaking modern art is characterized by the artists intent to portray a subject as it exists in the world, according to his or her own unique perspective and is typified by a rejection of accepted or traditional styles and values.”³

The following is a list of the Modern Art Paintings that have been selected to include in this unit.

Both Members of This Club , 1909

George Bellows, artist

American, 1882 - 1925 oil on canvas 45 ¼” x 63 3/16”

Battle of Lights, Coney Island, Mardi Gras , 1913-14

Joseph Stella, artist

Italian-American, 1877-1946

Oil on canvas

77” x 84 ¾”

Gift of Collection Société Anonyme

Aspiration, 1936

Aaron Douglas, artist

African-American, 1899-1979

Oil on canvas

60” x 60”

Freedom From Want , 1943

Norman Rockwell, artist

American 1894-1978

Oil on canvas

46” x 35 ½ ”

Convergence , 1952

Jackson Pollock, artist

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American (1912-1956)

Oil on canvas

95 ¼ x 157 1/8

Gift of Seymour H. Knox Jr., 1956

Campbell Soup Cans , 1962

Andy Warhol, artist

American (1928-1987)

Oil on canvas

Synthetic polymer paint on 32 canvases, each canvas 20 x 16”

Although Norman Rockwell’s art is not abstract but representational, it was selected because of its contributions that influenced American cultures through its idealistic message, an indelible mark on the American art history time line causing reaction amongst artists, and (indirectly) helped to spark the abstract expressionist movement.

Cultural Influences in the 20th Century

“New needs need new techniques and the modern artists have found new ways and new means of making their statements...the modern painter cannot express this age, the airplane, the atom bomb, the radio, in the old forms of the Renaissance or of any other past culture.”-Jackson Pollock ⁴

To teach students to become (more) appreciative of art, students need to look at subject more deeply. Gathering supplemental references on historical culture from various media gives students information to think about art critically and reminds students to utilize the diverse selection of media they are exposed to enhancing the research process as they develop their ideas on subject and visual content for final projects.

Although there are a seemingly infinite amount of political, social, and economic reasons driving culture, influencing subjects in art, and motivating artists to express perspective, three specific influences are the focus of the unit including technology, mass media and industry and includes material to bridge modern art to artist’s intention.

The Influences that Technology had on George Bellows, Joseph Stella, and Jackson Pollock

As the Industrial Revolution from the previous century continued to grow and dominate, technological advances were being innovated at a rapid rate helping to sustain industry. Our students of the 21st century are so constantly connected to technology that including this influence in the unit is profoundly relevant. Comparing the impact that previous technologies had on people in history to the impact our technologies have on us today makes the content of information more meaningful keeping students engaged in the learning process. Selected examples of technological advances will be presented to students through artist statements, photographs and videos.

Photography, invented in the previous century, was an art form or medium that totally changed the ability to inform, communicate and persuade. Photographs could reveal actual subject by capturing a snap shot of pure realism. It was utilized for private art, for journalism and education purposes and for advertising. Although the photograph clearly represented its subject, it lacked the expressive quality that artists and painters could capture and convey using traditional medium. Painters like **George Bellows** , at the turn of the century, noticed that black and white film was restrictive and emotionally flat. Cameras weren't capable of conveying the artist's emotional perspective, about the subject being photographed. Painters could imply mood, tone and feeling through brushstroke technique and color variations, which was further interpreted by the viewer. Motion picture cameras came along at the onset of the 20th century and also held similar restrictions as still cameras and they too only revealed actual qualities of person, place or thing where artists could imply their subject more imaginatively. The inventions of airplanes had an affect on modern art as flying high above ground gave an aerial view to subject, changing an artists physical perspective in relation to the canvas like artist **Jackson Pollock** was able to develop with Action Painting. Leisure and entertainment were enhanced by innovations in neon lights and structural materials like steel and thermite. Coney Island became an enormous draw for people including artist **Joseph Stella** . Suggested materials to supplement the American cultural component on technological advances include photographs showing aerial views of landscapes including Nagasaki before and after the atom bomb. These can be used to analyze elements within a visual composition like line, shape and space. Nagasaki incorporates another example of the tensions that people were feeling about war, post war and cold war threats precipitating the Abstract Expressionist movement. Photographs by Jacob Riis connect with the actual experience for thousands of immigrant children who lived near the turn of the century in the world that Bellows lived in and the way his style of painting figures captures an aggressively genuine perspective that defined new American Realism.

Two videos were found searching YouTube to surround the students in the intense psychological sensations that a place like Coney Island provided. I plan on projecting the videos accompanied by opposing styles of music that represent the duality of feelings that carnival type atmospheres instilled. Lastly, I found a pertinent quote from Jackson Pollock that speaks of his rationale for his art and his motivation for the style he founded to express his subject. The quote also ties in perfectly with the "need" for new, directly speaking on embracing modern advances in technology.

The Influences that Mass Media had on George Bellows, Norman Rockwell, Jackson Pollock, and Andy Warhol

Media reflects as much as it creates cultures. Mass media had already grabbed the reins on disseminating information broadly and rapidly changing the scope for communicating. The birth of the Penny Papers in 1830, peddled by poor and aggressive newsboys, often referred to as 'little rascals' or street rats, desperately worked competitively getting people to "read all about it." ⁵ Through its tabloid style of writing, the sensational substance of content made profits off of reading highly lucrative. During the 20th century, mass media expanded further and continued to grow at epic proportions and suddenly it was possible for the lives of anyone from ordinary people to common criminals to be broadcasted locally, regionally, nationally and eventually globally, creating a phenomena for being famous (or infamous). The Ash Can School of Art, founded by Robert Henri around 1898 was a group of irreverent artists, who formerly worked as newspaper illustrators, including **George Bellows** . The American Realism movement in painting expressively depicted scenes about

the grit, poverty, struggle and outlook of the poor and working classes. As successful newspaper illustrators, their former experience required a sharp sensitivity, keen observation skills and highly accurate rendering technique to inform their target audience of newspaper readers. American realism exposed a side of the human experience that contradicted the genteel subject of the Impressionists, whom the art hegemony was trying to protect as they denounced, scoffed at and dismissed the disturbing and vulgar content being described in the works of art produced by Ash Can artists. This rejection of course, only inspired the painters to continue. This also is an opportunity to discuss the acceptance of a style like Impressionism vs. a denial and rejection for the style of Realism with examples of visual work that students embrace or reject and why, exposing reasons that would be considered subjectively or objectively based.

Magazines, targeting the middle class were entertaining people with news and information specifically intended to engage the reader with experiences that they could relate to. The artist Norman Rockwell was employed by the "Saturday Evening Post" and was paid to think of and make art covers that perpetuated the contrived notions of what America was supposedly like. By depicting people in situations that were idyllic, in bucolic settings, the Post was affecting millions of readers through its powers of visual persuasion. The American public wanted and did believe in everything the Post covers stood for. At the end of WWII, Abstract Expressionists began to rebel against traditional art and the mainstream. Artists like Jackson Pollock countered in opposition to the Americana style of idealist notions that the Post and artists like Rockwell delivered. Jackson Pollock and other Abstract Expressionists were disgusted with the politics and hypocrisy of their parent's generation. The art is said to be anxiety driven and a release of frustration and distress over the Cold War, fearing Soviet takeover and the atomic bomb. Art critics were not impressed. Finally, Andy Warhol used high art as a way to reflect on the idea of commercial design being so pervasive that art is everywhere because media is everywhere. The scope for mass media is huge but finding examples from cultural history helps students to put the art in context, supporting the bridge to think critically from an objective perspective, about the artist's motivation and using their canvas to represent their experience. The suggested supplemental material included in the lesson can easily be replaced with other gripping and appropriate ones that engage any classroom of learners.

By modeling a diverse selection of material, students can think about media critically at the advantage of having access to a wide variety of material. Students will be assigned the task to compile a diverse selection of research to explore their subject more widely for the final project. Suggested material to supplement the cultural connection of Mass Media's influence include looking at videos of working newsboys from the past and at original pages of The Sun to see the way in which the quantity of information and the quality of content was crammed into a small space creating a bombardment of information that was appealing or interesting to its readers. Then, taking a clip from the recent film "Anchor Man 2" where the main character of the movie, being a TV newscaster for a tabloid news station, comments on the awesomeness of filling the perimeter of the television screen with boundless and seemingly urgent information that sensationalizes the traditional broadcast of the newscaster so much that the newscaster himself is being blocked by all the graphics of information spilling over from the perimeters. The satirical style of Anchor Man 2 is a silly but significant example that a class of teenagers can relate to sparking vibrant discussion. Having a discussion on the similarities between the two forms of news content will be organized in groups for collaborative participation. Using the formatting of newspapers and news broadcasts on television will be tied into the technique exercises that explore breaking up the picture plane into sections of content and creating balance and emphasis. The point for using the cultural perspective of information from newspapers to television can be tied with any of the modern artists in the unit. For example, Bellows who was a newspaper illustrator was not just part of the groundswell of mass communication with persuasive content that newspaper editors insisted on, but he was also influenced by the news itself, and its unavoidable insistence as it penetrated society's

outlook and opinion and shaped the notion of being newsworthy which generated attention and fueled perspective, and formed opinion that artists spoke of in their medium.

The Saturday Evening Post helped to shape the perception that Americans wanted to believe and it held the attention of a wide spread audience across the nation for over a third of a century. With Norman Rockwell being one of its most famous Illustrators, Lessons in the unit use Rockwell's famous "Freedom from Want" painted in 1943, being an effort to honor the American spirit for gratitude and family, and discusses the story happening in his painting and how it would impact the viewers at the time it was published. The influence for Rockwell's painting, part of the *Four Freedoms* collection was an assignment from his Editor and Boss, insisting that he create a statement that reminded Americans of their fortune to be citizens in such a terrific country based on freedom and liberties, during WWII, when anxiety was high. The idea for Americans to remember why we were fighting the enemy was to preserve the perception of the American reality and to raise money to fund the war. All the paintings in the series were symbolizing hope for all Americans, even though all of Rockwell's figures were homogenous and seemingly economically comfortable, even in a country whose population was a combination of citizens from all around the world, living in various to extreme economic conditions, Rockwell's depiction of nationalism was very one dimensional. He was being employed to paint subject and his Americana style pleased his Editor. It's interesting to have students observe and list what they actually see and then work together in groups with guided questions to make inferences on what Rockwell is implying and complement with historical material of War Bond Posters and Video Clips of American life during the WWII era. The Segway to Pollock and the counter of Abstract Expressionism against Americana will be presented with aerial views of historical documentation including photographs of Nagasaki both before and after the bomb, the famous photograph of the American sailor embracing and kissing a woman in the middle of times square and a historic Public Service Announcement warning Americans "He May Be A Communist", a pervasive concern that was drilled into the minds of the nation as the cold war took hold, creating tremendous fear and anxiety through a perceived civic duty to retain patriotism. Material about Jackson Pollock and the history of the Abstract Expressionist movement can be found on the About Education website as well as the Jackson Pollock website. Here, teachers can read and present a synopsis about both, supplementing background information to help students make connections between the art and its place in contemporary culture, opening up and creating an appreciation for what Pollock was doing with his art and how to relate his style to the context of American history.

The Influences that Industry had on Joseph Stella, Aaron Douglas, Jackson Pollock, and Andy Warhol

Taking a look at American labor statistics during the 20th century reveals how the workforce grew by over 115 million people between 1900-1999. Although the work place environment improved drastically during the 20th century, service industries increased the most (almost 40%) but goods production (manufacturing) dropped by over 10% and farms started the century at 38% and dropped to less than 3% by 1999. ⁶

Industry is the ground in America's cultural landscape and the impact it had on visual artists can be seen in the artists choice of subject, the mechanized contours of figures and structures along with the materials and processes that were applied.

People in the work force and the type of work being done was changing. Child labor laws went into effect,

women professionals such as doctors and lawyers jumped significantly during the century yet by 1999, our African American population made up only 12% of the labor force, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. ⁷

At the onset of the century, African Americans were continuing their push away from the White Supremist South. Eager to escape the inflicting, perpetual cycles of debt, along with an insect blight that had destroyed crops, the pull to the north during the 1920's, where possibilities for freedom to prosper were thought to be greater, maintained the Great Northern Migration. As African Americans arrived to the northern states, they were greeted with resistance and although it wasn't as blatant like the south, inequality and racism was still obstructing. Like most settlements and colonizing of new territory, it's natural for a group of people who share a heritage to gravitate together and live in a supported and familiar community as a new life begins to take root. The area of Harlem in New York City became home for thousands of relocating people who came together in a neighborhood rife with experiences and craft, energy and passion and where employment opportunities presented themselves, giving birth to the Harlem Renaissance. Many women and men musicians and performers found employment in the entertainment and service industry. Aaron Douglas a scholar, educator, social reformer and artist relocated to Harlem from Kansas and continued developing works of art that commented on the experiences of his race in his incredibly distinct style. His compositions represented the struggles and oppression of the past while remarking on hope for a brighter future. The faith and optimism portrayed in his subject matter was a reflection of the spirit that African American artists, entertainers and community believed for a better future. The artistry sustained by writers, performers, painters and sculptors sustained a remarkable momentum that influenced itself, asserted its own genre, grabbed the attention of audiences outside of Harlem, and created history. Verses, lyrics, rhythms and imagery spoke of cultural traditions and heritage. Through FDR's New Deal, Aaron Douglas was selected and paid a small stipend to create art during the Depression employed under the Works Progress Administration, painting his profound mural, *Aspiration*, expressing African and American heart and soul as subject.

Joseph Stella commented on the entertainment industry and his *Battle of Lights, Coney Island, Mardi Gras* was directly inspired by feats of industrial strength and magnitude that surrounded him. He expressed his point of view by using the engineered structures of modern day with the human experience as subject. He described the thrill and chaos through expressing the psychological sensationalism of it all, comparing it to something equally exciting like Mardi Gras.

Industry influenced Andy Warhol to comment on the mechanization of a subject in his *Campbell Soup Cans*. Conceptualizing the idea of ordinary merchandise or iconic celebrities reflected these industries. Warhol and Douglas both inserted a graphic style into their work. Where Warhol's repetitive placement was in tandem with his simple contours, Douglas layered imagery in a rhythmically structured way and depicted the human figure in strong silhouette. The unit suggests resources that help students learn the role that industry played for Harlem Renaissance artist Aaron Douglas and its influence in motivating the ideas represented in Stella and Warhol's works. Supplemental material on American culture included in Lesson 2 will start with historic video emphasizing mechanization and repetition of assembly lines in factories. In addition, displaying the stylized figures from the Art Deco movement that was prevalent during the Great Depression will be taken from a variety of resources to further reveal how artists perceived the human figure being strong and powerful like a machine, practically inhuman or robotic. The bold, simple and geometric shapes that made up the human form at that time were reflecting industry and made statement on the human condition, that people were strong and Americans would get through this dark economic period in history. A painting by Earle Richardson showing Negroes in Agriculture from 1934, a photograph of male workers carved as giant reliefs on the façade of the Federal Building in New Orleans and an excerpt Martha Graham's famous choreography of

“Steps in the Street” will be used to display how the human form had a similar likeness that Douglas expressed in the figures painted for *Aspiration* . Along with taking a look at the style of figures during that era, playing early American jazz music that was being crafted during the Harlem Renaissance while exploring the use and impact of complementary colors is a fun and stimulating method to motivate students to blend and apply unusual colors. The lessons include a video documentary on YouTube on the story of Harlem’s Cotton Club and the vintage photos of what the stage designs looked like can be seen in Douglas’s style for how he described his subject and the environment surrounding it. Included in the lesson is also the idea of playing an informative clip of what the big events were in the year of 1936, the year that Douglas was commissioned by the Works Progress Administration Project to paint his mural, providing more historical context for students.

Another fast growing industry was leisure and entertainment. Sports and spectators inspired subject for George Bellows painting *Both Members of This Club* . An excerpt by Historian and Author John F. Kasson, “Amusing the Million” talks about Stella’s “Battle of Lights” providing students with perspective on his specific intentions with conceiving and portraying the subject. Also, vintage video of Coney Island describes setting and energy for Stella’s perspective. Activities swept through the mainstream and created cultural phenomena inspiring subject for fine artists. The artists’ abilities to depict unusual subject with incredible vibrancy stimulated accolades among a few and criticism amongst most.

Lastly, Andy Warhol’s genius concept of commenting on the retail and consumer industry is connected through photographs of store aisles filled with organized compartments of merchandise. Helping students understand that Warhol’s concepts of commenting on the mundane in an artistic form of art like his *Campbell Soup Cans* paintings did, were implying how the use of advertising and labeling were forms of art utilized for commercial purposes but could be repurposed as something to make and install as art to give the viewer a fresh perspective. Warhol’s intentions included taking a mundane subject and through repetition, a design principle, created visual interest while simultaneously remarking on our highly mechanical and industrious society.

Teaching Strategies

My classes are familiar with Do-Now activities. I use the activity frequently at the beginning of class, as students enter the classroom, I’ll have a visual projected onto the wall or handouts of a visual or written information with a few questions. The Do-Now helps students get focused relating to the subject of what is being taught in class for that block. Selecting a visual or a couple to compare and contrast can present students to the idea of looking at Modern Art and then following up with a post assessment at the end of the unit that asks students to describe their opinion objectively, after learning the cultural connections influencing the art, is an effective way to see learning gain. Presenting the same essential question in the pre and post assessments is the easiest way to discover how much information and what kind of information students have acquired, retained and are applying. Discussion is important so having students collaborate in groups contributes to a more vibrant style of inquiry, but independent work is important too and the balance of both keep the long unit engaging. Technique practices on the formal elements and principles to be explored using the painting medium are assigned to relate directly to the art examples included in the unit as students try their own ideas that will relate to expressing their subject. Time and direction to keep organized is integral, as students are being presented with so much information, they will need to keep notes on ideas to research information on their subject and the teacher can assign a daily point system to help students stay accountable

and organized. Presenting videos can be tricky as students will be working in collaborative groups, analyzing handouts of cultural material that relates to the artwork so they can answer essential questions. There wouldn't be enough time to thoroughly analyze all five modern art works and Rockwell's but students should be familiar with all six to the extent of making observations. Narrow down the overall selections and have students focus on two abstracts that they can answer two to four essential questions about. Accommodate students who need the modifications to answering one or two questions on one abstract. The size of the final work is flexible and depends on your school's supply of materials. If paints are not available, having students find imagery and text for content from magazines can be put together in a collage style and supplemented with drawing. Look at Post-Modern artists for ideas. For Post Assessment use the same work of art from the first day and have students respond. Look for answers that do or do not respond to a deeper connection that tries to develop an understanding for influence, intention and impact.

Lesson 1: Analyzing Art, 1 class block

Compare Rockwell's, *Freedom From Want* to Jackson Pollock's *Convergence* and Aaron Douglas's *Aspiration* in regards to representational vs non-representational. This lesson should focus on looking for concrete observations within the compositions and then making inferences. The connection to culture will follow in Lesson 2.

Start with the hook! With the objectives of the unit being created to teach students to have deeper understanding of modern art, asking a relevant question that provokes a common reaction amongst teenagers would work very well. "Do you ever get really angry about something and have a hard time expressing it?" or "In your sketchbooks, write down some things that make you *really* mad." Call on two or three students to share their answers with the class. Now, ask them to write down what they do to resolve it.

Meanwhile, project Rockwell's *Freedom From Want* and Pollock's *Convergence* and ask students to make a list of observations that they can actually see within each work of art on a piece of paper. Ask a couple of students to volunteer their answers with the class. Next, divide students into groups of 3-4 large to collaborate on further analysis. Counting off works well but if class dynamic is too challenging for randomness, figure out groups before lesson and direct students into them. Definitely consider grouping students who need modifications with students who don't as students learn so much from one another! Tell students that each person has a job assignment to maintain in addition to participating in the analysis. Job roles are Manager, Recorder and Presenter, if there is a fourth, Time Keeper but if just three than Manager is also Time Keeper. Having jobs helps to include everyone and keep each student active and accountable.

Start the student-directed learning by having group members share their answers they observed and create a solid list with each others input. Next, give each group handouts with two or three guided questions to begin making inferences. By collaborating together, students can share their own ideas out loud and get the perspective of the other group members. All students will be asked to contribute a sound inference. All answers to guided questions are acceptable as long as they support with evidence taken from the visual. Recorder will write down answers to present. Develop guided questions that look more deeply for concrete answers and require students to look at the art through a wide scope as well as focusing in on details. Suggested guided questions to include could be: "Where can you find one or more elements of design displayed in the composition?" This kind of question presents formal and technical inquiry. Also, questions

that get them to identify the main subject and look at the supports of the background like, “Identify the main subject and explain how that stands out” and “In what ways is the subject painted by the artist?” “What looks to be the background of the painting and how does the background connect to the main subject?” Also, create a guided question pertaining to the audience. This engages students to think about the artist, their intentions for the work and the influences they were under. Give students time to inquire and record and then have a quick presentation so there is time to move onto Aaron Douglas’s *Aspiration* . Follow the same format for observing and making inferences. Finally, end with groups presenting and make sure to tell presenters to not duplicate inquiries that have already been shared from other groups.

Exit Slip:

Before leaving class, ask students to select an art example from the three that were explored and write two new discoveries they made during class and one thing they haven’t figured out but are still curious to learn more and then collect to read over.

Lesson 2: Cultural Connections to Art; 3 class blocks

Day 1: Technology and Joseph Stella, George Bellows and Jackson Pollock

I’ve organized the cultural context in categories of Technology, Mass Media and Industry, taking one full class block to learn about each category. When presenting the Technology material, supplemental readings can be done within the smaller groups as a collaborative and video can be presented to the entire class (I have just one projector). Photographs can be presented through projection or individual copies as handouts. Manage the time for group work and breaks to watch videos as a class. The Ferris wheel videos I’ve included in this lesson relates mostly to Stella and copies of his work should be on hand for groups as either handouts or projecting the image onto the wall. Before students begin to answer Essential Questions, they should work together to find and list concrete observations and answer a guided question or two. Students will follow up with a handout of Essential Questions that guide them in thinking about how the cultural influences made an impact on Stella’s “ *Battle of Lights* ”. The same process should follow for George Bellows, *Both Members of This Club* . The “Street Arabs in Their Sleeping Quarters” photograph by Jacob Riis is intended to relate to George Bellows. The aerial views of landscapes are meant to connect with Jackson Pollock, giving perspective to Pollock’s physical relationship to his canvas, influencing the more abstract subject and harmonious style painted in *Convergence* . The Pollock quote can be analyzed, discussed and related to his own painting as well as Douglas, Stella and Bellows. As more art material is presented to students, let the groups decide on which art they are going to research more deeply with the result of having 2-4 essential questions answered on 1 to 2 works of art. That way, students have more time developing quality inquiries on one or two works of art instead of weaker inquiries made from a greater number of works in such a limited amount of time. It’s helpful to have students pick their top two choices so every group has a back up choice to avoid the possibility of one of the artists not being selected by any of the groups. The lesson is designed for all three artists presented as having been influenced by technology to be explored more deeply by at least one group.

Using the supplemental material to support the methods for teaching students how to look at art objectively, create essential questions that will effectively connect cultural influences to specific art examples that are grounded with support from both resources being connected (the painting and the cultural reference).

Essential questions should raise more questions, stimulate inquiry; spark discussion and debate. They demand justification and support and are also flexible to change as understanding deepens. ⁸ Groups should narrow down their best answers where they found the most relevant information to form their objective opinion. The recorder should write down best findings. Give another exit slip at the end of class and ask each student to write down their opinion about one work of art that is supported. Read over the slips to check for understanding.

Lesson 2, Day 2: Mass Media-Bellows, Pollock, Rockwell, Warhol

Start class by asking students to look at all four paintings by Bellows, Pollock, Rockwell, and Warhol and ask them to write down what they think all four of these paintings have in common. Call on a couple of students to share their answers. Whether or not any students come up with the connection to Mass Media, segway into the class topic and activity of Mass Media being influential to artists and their art and have students get into groups and begin by sharing the 'Newboys' video and *Anchor Man 2* to explore the dissemination and bombardment of information that can tie into all four works of art. Have students get back into their groups to look at Rockwell's *Freedom From Want* and using cultural material such as vintage War Bond Posters, Dick and Jane First Readers, and juxtaposing with a photograph of "Nagasaki, Before and After the Atomic Bomb" create a few essential questions that connect Rockwell's subject to the style he used to depict what was happening in the nation at the time. Play the "He May Be A Communist" and have handouts of vintage Atomic Bomb graphics and merchandise to present how artists were bombarded with fear and anxiety and how did Rockwell's depictions tie into this era? Supplement information with "About Education" handout that summarizes Pollock and the Abstract Expressionist movement. Have essential questions that engage students to think about the connection critically and promote discussion and feedback. Have groups narrow down the main points and Recorder should document the top two. Conclude the daily lesson in a couple of ways. Either have presenters share their groups discoveries to the class for the last 15 minutes or give more time for cultural analysis and assign each student to write an exit slip in the same format as the previous class, commenting on the topic of Mass Media being influential to the art and the artist.

Lesson 2, Day 3: Industry: Douglas, Stella, Bellows, Warhol

Follow the same format as the previous two classes. Project Douglas with another work of art and have students try and find what the two works of art share in common. Call on students for answers and explain the topic of the day and the materials they will have to find the cultural connections that will help guide them to forming an objective claim or criticism of a selected artists work that is supported with evidence between art and cultural content. Have handouts that comment on the stylized figures from the Art Deco movement during the Great Depression including the relief on the side of the F. Edward Federal Building, the painting of *Employment of the Negro in Agriculture* and show Martha Graham's "Steps in the Street" for students to compare and contrast to Douglas's work. Give students time to analyze the figures and insert time for the class to watch a small clip of Steps in the Street. To have students explore the background and symbolism that Douglas references in his painting, run the video on the year 1936, compiled by the deYoung Museum in San Francisco. To connect with Warhol, look on YouTube for interesting vintage Public Service Announcements, as there are plenty, on lifestyle and advertising from the 1940's and 50's that can be used as context to learn more about Warhol's concepts and motivation for *Campbell Soup Cans* . Also, printing photographs of shopping aisles in retail stores of merchandise can help students look at the formal principle of design, repetition, a component that Warhol used to communicate his message about commercialism. Use an excerpt from John F. Kasson's *Amusing the Million* to share insight on Stella and his influence for *Battle of Lights* (pages 87-94) and complement with a video clip from Coney Island History, "Let's Go Coney!"

Lesson 3: Technique Exercises

Now that background information has been provided for students to better understand and have a deeper appreciation for modern art, it's time to practice the art techniques that are necessary to communicate the message. The project is looking for students to creatively explore and apply specific colors that may create high impact, convey mood and is also challenging students to present a dynamic layout for all the content that will go into the composition. The element of color and the principles of emphasis and balance will be explored through technique exercises. Students will have already had previous lessons that explored primary and secondary colors and will now explore other colors like tertiaries and values manipulating color schemes for best visual impact. Teaching students how to blend colors is integral to enhancing creativity. Incorporate George Bellows painting to demonstrate the variety of colors he uses to indicate the strong mood conveyed in his painting. Have students create a painting exercises that has them looking at the different values that Bellows uses to describe subject and background and then create an assignment to have students mix primaries with the help of white and black together to create a swatch of multiple tints, tones and shades that derive from a tertiary color. Next, have students look at Douglas's use of complementary colors and have them create another swatch of mixed colors that focus on a set of complements that are placed in the center of the work space and then radiate multiple tertiary color combinations off of them that become a gradient of values that branch off the tertiaries. The purpose for spending time creating these two exercises is to familiarize students with the control they have for making their own colors, broadening their choices and enhancing creativity.

To help students get more creative with compositional arrangement, have students select one of the works of art to practice how to create emphasis and balance within a composition. Jackson Pollock was quoted as saying, "My paintings do not have a center, but depend on the same amount of interest throughout." Have students find the center of a painting and then find the emphasis of the painting and how far away from the center it is. This will help students appreciate that asymmetrical balance is not only an option but can create a more stimulating layout. Students should choose one of the paintings they've been learning about as reference and using a thumbnail sketch format, have students loosely gesture the bold shapes of mass and content they can see, paying attention to the placement of each and there relationships and proportion to the mass around it and the grounds that each mass is placed. An extension activity is to have students change the layout to show an opposite arrangement so if the balance is originally asymmetrical, create a symmetrical composition using the same amount of parts. These three technique exercises, two painting and one drawing, should be developed over three class periods.

Lesson 4: Painting Assessment

At this point, students will already be aware that they get to create a painting that uses a subject that is influenced by something greater than having only an aesthetic quality. To begin the brainstorming process, go back to the original hook question of what is something that really compels you to react and make a statement about? It would be helpful to incorporate some current events that can be found on social media that are trending. Have students use their sketchbooks to start making a list of any in particular that stand out and spark their curiosity or compel them to react. From there, assign students to start gathering information

beyond the post, article or tweet to get a greater body of evidence about the trend or issue, find the cultural connection, and look for contrasting perspectives. Students should continue making a visual collection of imagery with technical ideas for layout and color and begin drafting ideas into thumbnail sketches as they work on researching material that supports their subject. List issues from contemporary and past history and try to elaborate more specifically on any that may provoke opinions. Using smart phone technology, find factual information along with an outside opinion or two on the subject to begin formulating an idea for the painting project. Realistically, this process should take high school students 5 to 6 block periods to develop. They need time to think of ideas to get started on the process for finding supportive material that can influence their point that will be expressed in the painting and then have a good chunk of time to create the visual expression. Staying organized is really important to the process and all material, technique exercises, thumbnail sketches and notes should be kept together in a specific painting folder or portfolio.

Annotations

Currently, New Haven follows the National Core Arts Standards who instill a four-layered approach for a holistic and comprehensive experience for educating art that includes Creating, Presenting, Responding and Connecting. My unit of study incorporates all four national standards and specifically applies all eleven anchors for those standards. The unit challenges students to “organize and develop artistic ideas and work”. The painting projects objective is to convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work, demonstrating another standard. Through the work students do in becoming aware of the cultural context for the painting, students achieve the challenge of “interpreting intent and meaning in artistic work” and then apply that sensibility to their own idea and process. The unit also provides the opportunity for students to “synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art” by “relating artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding”. The unit also meets two common core standards that New Haven Public Schools follows for Social Studies and English Literacy including “Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them” and “compare the point of view of two or more artists for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

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