

Heavy, Heavy Hangs Over Thy Head: Artists Response to War

Ohio Standards

Connections:

STANDARD:

VISUAL ARTS:
CONNECTIONS,
RELATIONSHIPS
AND
APPLICATIONS

Benchmark A:

Summarize and explain the impact of a historical event or movement (e.g., realism, feminism, modernism or post modernism) on the development of visual art.

Indicator 2:

Research and explain the relationships between specific artworks and major historical events. Grade 11

Indicator 1:

Compare and contrast universal themes and sociopolitical issues in a variety of artwork from different cultural contexts.

Grade 12

Indicator 2:

Analyze the cultural influences on art in America today.

Grade 12

Lesson Summary:

In this lesson, students will learn how artists have dealt with war and depicted that theme in their works. Students will discuss the questions:

How have artists responded to war?

What is the role of the artist in times of war?

They will respond to the artwork, artist's quotes about their work, and critics' statements. Students will investigate the meaning behind the work and will consider how the artists portrayed their own concerns in their artwork. Finally, students will discuss contemporary issues surrounding the Iraq war and other 'wars' that our society is involved in today.

Estimated Duration:

Six 50 minute sessions. Additional time will be needed if optional activities are chosen.

Commentary:

"If either art or society is to survive the coming half-century, it will be necessary for us to re-assess our values. The time is past due for us to decide whether we are a moral people, or merely a comfortable people, whether we place the sanctity of enterprise above the debasement of our public. It if falls to the lot of artists and poets to ask these questions then the more honorable their role. It is not the survival of art alone that is at issue, but the survival of the free individual and a civilized society."

Ben Shahn 1951—lecture from Pohl, Frances K., In the Eye of the Storm, an Art Conscience, 1930-1970. Selections from the Collection of Phillip J. and Suzanne Shiller, 1995, Chameleon Books, Inc.

Pre-Assessment:

Lead a discussion about war and how people respond to war.

DISCUSS:

Historically, what tools have been used to help populations form an opinion of war? Do we utilize different tools in contemporary America?

How have artists communicated their ideas about war?

Have you ever viewed artwork that expresses an idea about war?

How might an artist express an idea about war without using words?

Make a list on the board or have students write individually. Save lists and review them at the conclusion of the lesson.

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Benchmark B:

Formulate and solve a visual art problem using strategies and perspectives from other disciplines.

Indicator 3:

Research and provide examples that show the relationship of visual art to other subjects in the curriculum

(e.g., English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science)

Grade 9

STANDARD:

ENGLISH/
LANGUAGE ARTS;
READING
APPLICATIONS:
LITERARY TEXT

Benchmark A:

Analyze and evaluate the five elements (e.g., plot, character, setting, point of view and theme) in literary text.

Indicator 2: *Analyze the historical, social and cultural context of setting*

Grade 11

Indicator 3: *Explain how voice and*

Post-Assessment:

Write a statement about your work that explains to a viewer what concerns you were trying to show in your work. What are you expressing in your work? What symbols, elements and principles of art, and images did you use to communicate your idea? Review your original list of tools used to respond to war. Have your opinions changed? How?

Scoring Guidelines: Rubric-see page 9

Instructional Procedures:

DAY 1

The teacher will provide reproductions of the following four images for the students:

Ben Shahn, *Study for Goyescas*, 1946

Joseph LeBoit, *Tranquility*, 1936

James Guy, *Black Flag*, c. 1940

Rockwell Kent, *Heavy, Heavy Hangs over thy Head*, 1946

The images are available on the Columbus Museum of Art website: www.artandsocialissues.com.

Divide the students into critique “teams” and give them one of the four artworks to critique following a criticism model.

One suggested model:

1. DESCRIBE: What do you see? Only state facts such as a baby asleep, a mountain, etc. No interpretation is given at this point.
2. ANALYSIS: What elements/principles of art are utilized such as color, line, value, texture, shape, emphasis, movement, contrast and space?
3. INTERPRET: What is this artwork about? What do you feel (emotion) when you look at the work?
4. JUDGMENT: Do you think this work of art is persuasive? Why or why not?

The teacher will share the artists’ and critics’ statements. Ask the students to appoint one of the team members as ‘the artist’ who will explain the work to the group covering the following area:

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narrator affect the characterization, plot and credibility.

Grade 11

Indicator 4:
Evaluate the author's use of point of view in a literary text.

Grade 11

Indicator 1:
Compare and contrast motivations and reactions of literary characters confronting similar conflicts (e.g., individual vs. nature, freedom vs. responsibility, individual vs. society), using specific example of characters' thoughts, words and actions.

Describe "their" work including the subject matter and objects in the work.

- The artist should explain what elements and principles of design were important to get the message across.
- They should then explain what the work is about.
- What visual or stylistic effect has the artist used to portray his/her message?

At the completion of the presentations display (SEE ATTACHED PowerPoint "Heavy, Heavy Hangs Over Thy Head") all four works together and have the class respond to the similarities and differences among the works.

How are these artists responding similarly to war?

How are they different?

DAY 2

READ: Ben Shahn's statement from 1951 (see p. 8)

DISCUSS:

1. Does this statement ring true today?
What is your response to this question?
What do you think the role of the artist is in creating artworks that ask these questions?
Is it the job of the artist to influence society?
Do artists make art that deals with today's social issues?
2. Can you think of other artists that responded or are responding to war or other societal problems? In addition to the visual arts, consider music, dance, drama and literature.
3. What other 'wars' can you think of besides actual wars such as those in Iraq or Afghanistan? For example, there is a war on poverty, war on crime, etc.

WRITE:

1. List 10 objects, images, places, things or symbols that deal with the various issues. For example, the war in Iraq might include a map of the U.S., map of Iraq, soldiers, desert, media, television news, newspaper, Afghanistan, armor, civilians, etc.

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2. List 10 concepts, feelings or symbols about this issue i.e. peace, danger, anger, death, innocence, sadness, etc. How might you portray these in your work? Compose some sketches that incorporate the elements and principles of art and your chosen media.

DAYS 3-5

STUDIO ASSIGNMENT

Create an artwork that depicts an issue about which you are concerned. Student work should pull together imagery, text, color and design to convey their idea and express a mood. Brainstorm ideas using the attached Response sheet.

DAY 5-6

Students will write a statement about their work that explains the viewpoint expressed in their work. Comment on the symbolism, elements and principles of design, word and images used.

Differentiated Instructional Support

Students may opt to work with clay to form a sculpture instead of paper and paint to create work that expresses an idea about war.

Extension

Look at the art of other artists that expresses concerns about war. Suggested pieces include

- Eugene Delacroix, Scenes from the Massacre at Chios, 1822-24. Oil on Canvas.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugène_Delacroix
- Francisco Goya, Third of May, 1808, 1814-15, Oil on canvas, 8'9" x 13'4".
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goya>
- Pablo Picasso, Guernica, 1937, Oil on Canvas, 11'6" x 25'8"
Read excerpts from Guernica with the students that describe the bombing on that day (pp 32-44). Compare the description to the painting.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guernica_%28painting%29

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- Kathe Kollowitz, Killed in Action, 1921.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Käthe_Kollwitz
- David Alfaro Siqueiros, Echo of a Scream, 1937, Enamel on Wood, 48” x 36”.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siqueiros>
http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/history/jtuck/jtsiqueiros.html
- Maya Ying Lin. Vietnam Veterans Memorial. 1982. Black granite, 500 ft long. How are they similar? How are they different? *View the Maya Lin DVD to understand how she created this piece.*
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maya_Lin
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_Veterans_Memorial

2. Read about the Iraq/Afghanistan wars in the newspaper, magazines or online to become more familiar with issues and concerns of the current war. Bring the clippings in to class for discussion. Keep a journal with copies of the clippings and student reflections regarding the articles.

3. Look at historical and contemporary political cartoons about themes of war. Are the issues clear? Do the issues expressed remain current? How might they be improved or made current?

Homework Options and Home Connections

Students should collect newspapers, magazines and the internet for images and symbols that fit their issue.

Interdisciplinary Connections

Drama: Write and dramatize a short play that explains an artwork or idea about war. Consider using characters from a work of art as the dramatis persona in the play.

Music: Write and perform a short song that would accompany your image or expresses an idea about war.

Math/Social Studies: How many incidents or wars has the United States been involved in since the beginning of the 20th century? List the issues in each. Create a graph that compares some of the overriding issues of each such as religious freedom, economic, natural resources.

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Social Studies: Students will read about the American Artists Congress and will form an artist organization that supports a particular social cause. This could be a division of your school National Art Honor Society. Students read and compare various artists' manifestos. They will write their own group manifesto and compare those, as well.

<http://www.gis.net/~scatt/heller/artists-congress.html>

Materials and Resources:

For teachers

IMAGES:

Guy, James. *Black Flag*, c. 1940

Kent, Rockwell. *Heavy, Heavy hangs Over Thy Head*, 1946

LeBoit Joseph. *Tranquility*, 1936

Shahn, Ben. *Study of Goyescas*, 1946

DESCRIPTION OF IMAGES

POWERPOINT (Attached)

BOOKS (available at the Columbus Museum of Art):

Keegan, John and Knightley, Phillip, *The Eye of War: Words and Photographs from the Front Line*, Smithsonian Books in association with Weidenfeld & Nicolson, Washington D.C. & London, 2003

Pohl, Frances K., *Ben Shahn New Deal Artist in a Cold War Climate, 1947-54.*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1989.

Van Hensbergen, Gils, *Guernica The Biography of a Twentieth Century Icon*, Bloomsbury Publishing, New York, 2004

VIDEO (available at the Columbus Museum of Art):

American Photography: A Century of Images, PBS Home Video 3 tapes, each approximately 53 minutes. The teacher will need to preview the tapes to find the related clips.

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For students

ARTISTS & WAR handout

Good paper for wet media

Watercolor or acrylic paint

Pencils

Sketch paper for ideas

Key Vocabulary

Role- Person's position, function and/or responsibility

Symbolism-imagery that represents a particular concept or idea
Encarta World English Dictionary

Technology Connections

Use of computers to do related research on individual artists and issues. Related sites:

<http://www.gis.net/~scatt/heller/artists-congress.html>

Research Connections

1 Research issues of current wars. Research issues of wars and incidents involving the United States in the 20th and 21st centuries.

2. Research artwork related to war.

Attachments

Description of Images

Rubric

Artists and War Brainstorming Handout

PowerPoint—Heavy, Heavy Hangs Over Thy Head: Artists Response to War

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ARTISTS AND WAR BRAINSTORM QUESTIONS

“If either art or society is to survive the coming half-century, it will be necessary for us to re-assess our values. The time is past due for us to decide whether we are a moral people, or merely a comfortable people, whether we place our own convenience above the life-struggle of backward nations, whether we place the sanctity of enterprise above the debasement of our public. If it falls to the lot of artists and poets to ask these questions then the more honorable their role. It is not the survival of art alone that is at issue, but the survival of the free individual and a civilized society.” *Ben Shahn*,
1951 lecture from The Catalogue Schiller Exhibition

1. Discuss: Read Ben Shahn’s statement from 1951. Does this statement ring true today? What is your response to this question? What do you think about the role of the artist in creating artworks that “ask these questions” and create works that deal with our society’s issues.
2. Can you think of other artists that responded or are responding to war or other societal problems? Think of other art forms, as well.
3. What other ‘wars’ can you think of besides actual wars such as Iraq? For example, war on poverty, war on crime, etc.
4. What are some of the areas of concern that you have about society today?
5. List 10 objects, images, places, things or symbols that deal with this issue. For example, the war in Iraq could include: the United States, Iraq, soldiers, air, desert, media, television news, newspapers, Afghanistan, maps, armor and families affected by the war.
6. Write down 10 concepts, feelings or symbols about this issue. Peace, danger, anger, death, innocence, sadness, etc. How might you portray these through your selection of materials, and the elements/principles of design?

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ARTISTS RESPONSE TO WAR RUBRIC

STUDENT NAME _____
PERIOD _____ DATE _____

ASSESS YOUR WORK AND SCORE IT BASED ON THE FOLLOWING
CRITERIA:

POOR 1 MODERATE 2 GOOD 3 STRONG 4 EXCELLENT 5

USE OF MATERIALS IS THOUGHTFUL, APPROPRIATE
AND HELPS CONVEY THE STATEMENT _____

TECHNIQUE DISPLAYS EXEMPLARY CRAFTSMANSHIP _____

INVENTIVE AND/OR IMAGINATIVE _____

CLEAR VISUAL STATEMENT _____

STATEMENT IS COMPLETE _____

COMMENTS:

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ARTISTS RESPONSE TO WAR IMAGE & ARTIST INFORMATION

Four images have been selected for this lesson. LeBoit's *Tranquility* from 1936 questions the artist's role in times of great strife. Rockwell Kent's *Heavy, Heavy Hangs Over Thy Head* was created in 1946 as a commentary on the tension of the Cold War. James Guy's *Black Flag* c.1940 raises questions about the role of art in political agendas and Ben Shahn's *Study for Goyescas*, created in 1956 blames the hypocrisy of 'leaders' for violent times.

Joseph LeBoit, *Tranquility*, 1936, Etching and Aquatint, 14" x 11 in.
Museum Purchase, Derby Fund, from the Phillip J. and Suzanne Schiller Collection of American Social Commentary Art 1930-70

“There is a little etching in the Weisman's (Art Museum) exhibit *In the Eye of the Storm: An Art of Conscience 1930-1970* in which a 'modern' artist is depicted at his easel in a gas mask, calmly working on a cubist guitar while a battle rages just outside his window. Printed in 1936 while fascism was building steam all over Europe, Joseph LeBoit's **Tranquility** provides a bitter (and somewhat reactionary) critique of the supposedly vanguard art of the time—and points out a central quandary of the 20th century art.”

Emotional Activism by David Lefkowitz,
February 11, 1998, City Pages

Joseph LeBoit was born in New York City and received his education at the City College of New York. He also studied with Thomas Hart Benton at the Art Students League. He worked for the New York Graphic Division of the Federal arts programs as a project administrator for the silkscreen unit. LeBoit was active during World War II in artist societies supporting American involvement in the conflict by organizing war-themed

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exhibitions to boost morale at home. During the 1940s he contributed to PM magazine as staff artist.

Rockwell Kent, *Heavy, Heavy Hangs over thy Head*, Lithograph, (1946)
Museum Purchase, Derby Fund, from the Phillip J. and Suzanne Schiller Collection of
American Social Commentary Art 1930-70

This piece is a commentary on the tension of the Cold War era. A tranquil sleeping child is about to get a rude awakening. A rat gnawing through the gun sling is soon to release the weapon onto his bed. The idyllic landscape viewed through the window is threatened. Rockwell titled the work “Heavy, Heavy Hangs Over Thy Head” which is an ancient game that may have been derived from an old ritual, possibly from prehistoric times. One version of the old game is called Forfeits. The game is played as follows:

“The players each put a piece of clothing, jewelry or some personal belonging into a pile on the floor. These are the "forfeits." One person is chosen to be the judge, and another holds up the forfeits over the judge's head. The judge sits in front of the pile and cannot see what is being held overhead. As the sock or necklace or belt is held over the judge's head, the other player says:

‘Heavy, heavy hangs over thy head.

What shall the owner do to redeem the forfeit?’

Then the judge without looking up at the object, commands the owner to do some act or stunt in order to get back the property. The command might be to dance a jig, stand on their head, sing a certain son, tell a joke, etc. “

<http://www.childrenparty.com/partygames/printversion/forfeits.html>

Pieter Brueghel the Elder’s painting *Children Games* from 1560 also portrays this game amongst the 250 games.

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James Guy, *Black Flag*, c. 1940, oil on masonite. 10 x 26 in.
Museum Purchase, Derby Fund, from the Phillip J. and Suzanne Schiller Collection of
American Social Commentary Art 1930-70

“In *Black Flag* he created a nightmarish landscape presided over by a diplomat holding aloft a black flag on which is painted a death’s head and a Nazi swastika. Below him to the right another member of the German ruling elite offers a soldier a neoclassical statue of a woman, legs and arms missing, which the soldier kisses. According to Ilene Fort, Guy used this kissing motif a number of times in his work—always with negative connotations.” In the *Black Flag* “the kiss is a political ploy to hide the true intent of the diplomat, who speaks of peace and friendship but actually intends destruction. In this instance the soldier’s head literally explodes as a result of his amorous action.”

“The particular iconography of this kiss scene is also suggestive of the carefully crafted cultural policy of the National Socialists. From the very beginnings of his political reign, Hitler was aware of the power of art in all of its manifestations: architecture, painting, photography, film, music and pageantry. He said, ”Art is the only truly enduring investment of human labor.”

“The bombed church supports the diplomat of peace who waves a flag of death, while the remains of civilization—books, masterpiece paintings, lie in rubble nearby...All of tradition, culture and refinements are destroyed as the real world takes on the surreal dimension of a battlefield.” Ilene Stuart Fort, “James Guy: A Surreal Commentator”

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Prospects 12, 1987 as stated in Pohl, Frances K. *In the Eye of the Storm: An Art of Conscience*, 1930-1970. Chameleon Books, San Francisco, 1995, pp. 68-69.

Jack Guy employed surrealism for his social realist art.

Ben Shahn, *Study for Goyescas*, 1946, Brush, ink and watercolor on paper, 25 ½ x 36 in. Museum Purchase, Derby Fund, from the Phillip J. and Suzanne Schiller Collection of American Social Commentary Art 1930-70

Shahn created the work to ‘reveal the hypocrisy of politicians, military leaders and clerics who make public gestures of concern and solitude while privately ignoring the human casualties of their callous and inhumane actions. Shahn may also be saying that no matter how hard they may try to remain disengaged, such public figures will ultimately be affected by, and called to account for, their pronouncements and actions. One part of them, one set of hands, will always remain immersed in the blood and tears of the dying and dead.’ Ben Shahn—condemned artists for retreating from political activity into their studios and creating art of abstraction. He called on artists to maintain their political involvement and their commitment to an art “greatly concerned with the implications of man’s way of life.” *In the Eye of the Storm: An Art of Conscience*, 1930-1970. Chameleon Books, San Francisco, 1995, pp. 68-69.