

Art as Social Commentary

Developed By	Elizabeth Wendt
Suggested Length	Lesson #1: 80 minutes Lesson #2: Two+ 80 minute classes Lesson #3: Three+ 80 minute classes Lesson #4: 80 minutes
Suggested Grade Level(s)	10, 11, 12
Subject Areas	Social Studies, Visual Arts, Language Arts

Overview

Students will view artworks that make a statement about the social condition. They will respond to these artworks through discussion, writing, presentations, and art making.

Links to Curriculum Outcomes

Students will (be expected to)

- analyse and compare events of the past to the present in order to make informed, creative decisions about issues (Social Studies)
- use visual arts as a means of conveying concerns about social and ethical issues (Visual Arts)
- use technology to effectively serve their communication purposes (Language Arts)
- articulate, advocate and justify positions on an issue or text in a convincing manner, showing an understanding of a range of opposing viewpoints (Language Arts)

Links to Telling Stories: Themes / Key Words

- Photos as documentary and art
- Perspectives on war
- Art as social comment

Art Works

- *The Grave of Boyd Carpenter 1916, Somme Front*, Jack Turner, CAG 80.2.7
- *Charlottetown Pillory*, Robert Harris, CAG H-123

Context

These lessons might be incorporated into: a Social Studies unit dealing with issues of war or justice; Visual Arts lessons on graphic design, photography,

and/or collage; or into a Language Arts activity that encourages students to explore challenging issues.



Lesson #1: Beyond the Grave or Shots That Rang Around the World

Objective Students will, through discussion, explore their thoughts and feelings about war and how photography plays a role in forming our understanding of important social issues.

Materials

- paper
- pencil
- Power Point software

Activities

1. Have students view Jack Turner's photo, *The Grave of Boyd Carpenter*.
2. In a whole class discussion, have students respond to the work by asking the following questions:
 - When and where do you think the photograph was taken?
 - What is the message that the artist is trying to convey?
 - What techniques has the artist used to convey this message?
 - What emotions or thoughts does the image evoke in the viewer?
3. Introduce students to powerful images from the 20th and 21st centuries that have documented the events and impact of war and aggression throughout the world. Possible examples of events and images are:
 - Hitler rally (Nazi propaganda ministry)
 - Holocaust
 - Tiannamen Square
 - Vietnam (Kim Phuk, My Lai, Kent State, etc)
 - 9 / 11
 - Iraq war

In a whole class discussion, analyse the photographs using the questions above.

4. Conclude with the following question:
 - How has photography contributed to our understanding and feelings about war?

Possible Extension

In groups of 2 or 3, have students create and present PowerPoint Presentations that rely primarily on the above images to make a statement about the impact of war and aggression on humanity. Encourage students to use little or no text in their presentations.

Computer Option

- Key words: **Vietnam war, war photography, Holocaust, Leni Riefenstahl, Margaret Bourke-White, World War I and II, Tiannamen Square**, etc.

Ideas for Assessment

Students could complete a self- or peer evaluation rubric of the PowerPoint presentations. Possible categories might include:

- preparation and planning
- visual impact
- clarity of message
- originality and creativity



Lesson #2: Cutting Edges

Objective Students will create a strong visual statement in the form of a photomontage that expresses their feelings and opinions about a social issue.

Materials

- variety of collage materials such as newspapers, photocopies, old photographs
- white glue
- variety of drawing and painting materials

Activities

1. Introduce Jack Turner's photograph. In a whole class discussion, have students analyse and interpret the artwork. (Refer to questions in Lesson #1.) Additional questions might include the following:
 - How has Turner used colour to create visual impact?
 - What feelings or emotions does the photograph provoke in the viewer?
 - How do you think Turner felt about war?

2. Introduce students to visual artists who have made artworks about war or other social issues such as Picasso (*Guernica*), Goya (*The Third of May, 1808*) German expressionists such as Beckman and Kathe Kollwitz, and photographers Margaret Bourke-White and Robert Capa.

In a whole class discussion, have students analyse the techniques these artists have used to successfully convey a message.

3. Review collage / photomontage techniques and the principles of design.
4. Have students gather photographic images from a variety of sources – newspapers, magazines, photocopies, photographs – and create a composition that expresses their feelings or thoughts about a social issue such as racism, AIDS in Africa, or exploitation of child workers.

Emphasize the importance of planning the layout.

5. Review colour theory. Explain to students that the photomontage will be primarily black and white but that they will use colour to create contrast and highlight the message.

Computer Option

- Key words such as **photomontage, collage, colour**

Ideas for Assessment

Develop a rubric that addresses:

- preparation and planning
- use of colour to add visual impact
- clarity of message
- creativity and originality



Lesson #3: Posting Persuasions

Objective Students will design and construct a poster or magazine advertisement that makes a social statement about war, poverty, racism, hunger, or another social issue.

Materials

- illustration board

- a variety of drawing and painting materials
- sketchbooks for planning and sketching

Activities

1. Have students view Turner's photograph, *The Grave of Boyd Carpenter*.
2. Discuss how artists such as Turner create artworks that instill a strong emotional response in the viewer to a given issue through composition, colour, and strategically placed imagery.
3. Graphic artists also employ these design devices to send a message to the viewer.
 - If possible, display posters around the classroom that effectively communicate a message to the viewer. Alternatively, share poster images found on the Internet with the class in the form of a PowerPoint presentation.
4. In a whole group discussion, ask students the following questions:
 - What artistic devices has the artist used in these images to attract the attention of the viewer?
 - How has the artist used the elements of art and design effectively? (Consider colour, shape, line, space, contrast, movement, emphasis, balance, size, and placement.)
5. Have students research, share, and analyse images that show creative solutions to design problems. Newspaper and magazine ads, posters, and billboards are good sources.
6. Encourage students to observe interesting posters and ads they encounter throughout their day and to make a mental note of devices artists have used.
7. Review the design process. Remind students, that a successful design is simple, easy to read, and eye-catching. They should stick to a colour scheme and avoid a "rainbow" of colours.

Students might choose to use traditional methods to create their posters, such as drawing, painting, and / or collage techniques. Alternatively, they might use software such as PowerPoint, Illustrator or Corel Draw.

8. Remind students to avoid using images found on the web unless the resolution is adequate as they tend to pixilate when scaled to poster size.

Possible Extensions

Students might create a cartoon for the school newspaper dealing with a social issue in which they are particularly interested.

Computer Option

- Key words: **Poster design, anti-war art**

Ideas for Assessment

As a class group, have students critique the posters using criteria they have generated themselves.

Students might write a journal response about the power of the poster to influence people. (Refer to Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent*.)



Lesson #4: And Justice for All

Objective Students will discuss and compare judicial issues from the past to the present.

Related Art Work(s)

- *Charlottetown Pillory*, Robert Harris, CAG H-123

Materials

- paper
- pencil
- PowerPoint software (optional)

Activities

1. For centuries, artists have sketched events as they occurred in the moment. Until the advent of photography, this was the only way to document everyday or important events. Often, a quick sketch was a far more accurate representation of events than a formal painting.
2. Have students view the drawing above and respond to the following questions in a whole class discussion:
 - Describe what is happening in this drawing.
 - What is a "pillory"?
 - What crime might this man have committed?
 - How have ideas about justice changed?
 - In your opinion, has society made any progress? Elaborate.

3. In small groups, ask students to propose alternative solutions for dealing with crime. For example, how might they approach issues such as bullying and violence at school, vandalism and theft? Each group can then report back to the class.

Computer Option

- Key words: **pillory, justice system, Native American**

Ideas for Assessment

- anecdotal notes for group work

Suggested Resources

- Design magazines such as Adbusters (an excellent Canadian publication dealing with media issues), Communication Arts, and Graphis
- Poster websites such as:
 - www.brushstroke.tv/peace.html (peace posters)
 - <http://war.miniaturegigantic.com/gallery1.html#> (anti-war posters)
 - www.poster.com.pl/poster-artist.htm

Possible Extensions

Students might research the ways different cultures deal with criminal issues. Have students research and compare our current judicial system to that of 19th century Canada and present their findings in the form of a PowerPoint presentation.

Invite people in the community to speak to students about their different roles in the judicial system (crown attorneys, law officers, judges, social workers, mental health workers, court reporters).

Visit a courtroom to observe how a court of law is conducted.

