

LESSON PLAN FOR MARSDEN HARTLEY, *BERLIN ABSTRACTION*, 1914-15

TITLE: THE STORY BEHIND THE PAINTING

GRADE LEVEL: SIXTH, SEVENTH

ACADEMIC SUBJECT: LANGUAGE ARTS, VISUAL ARTS

GOAL DESCRIPTION:

After discussing Marsden Hartley's *Berlin Abstraction*, students will each research a public figure of interest to them. They will choose one on whom to focus, make a PowerPoint outlining their person's life, and, using symbolism, paint a portrait (on an 8 in. x 10 in. canvas board) that represents of that person.

BIG IDEA:

Portraits do not have to be literal representations of people.

OBJECTIVES/OUTCOMES:

After learning about Marsden Hartley's *Berlin Abstraction*, students will be instructed to choose a public figure of interest to them. Students will research the life of their figure and create a PowerPoint to present their findings to the class. Students will create a painted portrait of their chosen person using symbolism to represent aspects of their life and accomplishments found through their research.

TEACHING PROCEDURE/ TIME ALOTTED: TWO WEEKS

MONDAY

The teacher will begin by discussing the background of Marsden Hartley's *Berlin Abstraction* and what the symbolism and colors represent. The students will then be told they will choose a figure to focus on, create a PowerPoint on their life, and paint a portrait that is representative of that person using symbolism.

HOMEWORK: PICK THE PERSON WHO YOU WILL FOCUS ON.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What types of symbolism did Marsden Hartley use in *Berlin Abstraction*?

What was going on historically at the time that made many American viewers react negatively to his work?

Why do you think he chose to represent Karl von Freyburg through symbolism and not with a traditional portrait?

What facts about your figure do you think are most important to represent in your portrait?

What symbols will you use to represent various aspects of your figure?

How can colors act as symbols?

What colors do you relate with war?

What colors represent the personality of your figure?

TUESDAY

Students will spend the entire class period in the computer lab researching their figure.

WEDNESDAY

Students will spend the entire class period in the computer lab working on their PowerPoint presentations.

THURSDAY

Students will spend the entire class period in the computer lab finishing their PowerPoint presentations.

FRIDAY

Using the information on their PowerPoint as a guideline, students will chose important aspects about their figure's life/death to represent in their portrait. They will spend class brainstorming and sketching out their ideas.

HOMEWORK: HAVE A FINAL SKETCH OF THE PAINTING READY TO GO FOR MONDAY.

MONDAY-WEDNESDAY

Students will spend these three days working on their paintings.

THURSDAY

Half of the students will present their Power Points and paintings.

FRIDAY

The other half of the student will present their Power Points and paintings.

PLANS FOR DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION:

- If students struggle with creating a multi-slide PowerPoint (or computers are not available), they can make a poster of their facts instead.

- The teacher could pick five historical figures and groups of students would be assigned to each one. They could each create one slide for the PowerPoint and present as a group. They could each still do their own painting.
- If paints are unavailable, the portraits could be done on paper with crayons, colored pencils, and markers.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING:

Some artists, like Marsden Hartley, create portraits that are not literal representations of their subject, but rather a compilation of symbols that represent them. As an artist, it is important to be able to explain the symbolism in your work. If symbolism is not described, as was the case when *Berlin Abstraction* was first exhibited, viewers will project their own meaning onto the work and may not produce positive results. Artists often release works of art in a series, as Marsden Hartley did with “War Motifs”. Not all symbolism has to be literal, colors and shapes can be just as powerful.

KEY KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS:

(Declarative) Some artists, like Marsden Hartley, create portraits that are not literal representations of their subject, but rather a compilation of symbols that represent them. (Procedural) Using what they find through their research, the students will create a PowerPoint presentation on the life/death a historical figure and create a representational portrait of them.

EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT:

(Summative) The teacher will grade the students based on a teacher generated rubric* (given out at the start of the project) for creativity on their portrait, grammar, punctuation, and spelling in their PowerPoints, and overall presentation skills (enunciation*, pace*, and volume*). (Formative) As students work in class, the teacher will walk around, stopping to ask them about their ideas and offer suggestions on what symbols to focus on and how to arrange their PowerPoints.

Rubric: An authentic assessment tool for making scoring decisions; a printed set of guidelines that distinguishes performances or products of different quality.

Enunciation: To pronounce or articulate clearly all the syllables of a word.

Pace: An established rate of speaking.

Volume: The loudness of a sound

MATERIALS/ TEACHER RESOURCES:

Large scale reproduction of Marsden Hartley’s *Berlin Abstraction* (A projected digital image would work fine, so that all students can see it as they work on their stories). Access to a computer lab so that students can work on their

PowerPoints during class time.

http://www.corcoran.org/collection/highlights_main_results.asp?ID=39

TEACHER REFLECTION:

This assignment gives students the opportunity to put themselves into the role of the artist and learn what creating a portrait like this is like. It also allows students to practice researching a topic online. It allows students to practice [summarizing*](#) skills. It also gives students who are not strong prose writers a chance to present with bulleted points and can gain confidence through the presentation portion.

[Summarize:](#) *Creating a short description of a document or information object that includes its most salient features for a purpose.*

DEVELOPMENTAL RATIONALE:

Most sixth grade students are in the emerging expertise stage of artistic development. In this stage, students become very aware of the differences between themselves and their peers and look to separate themselves from adults. They are attracted to art that is can be connected to a specific situation or person rather than something more general. There is a greater chance for students to be self critical and compare their work to that of other student's so it is important for teachers to stress the uniqueness of each students' assignment.

STANDARDS:

LANGUAGE ARTS:

- **6.LT-TN.11.** Identify specific figures, objects, and places in Greek, Roman, and biblical literature that have influenced writers throughout the ages (e.g., Trojan Horse; Labyrinth; Paradise; Garden of Eden; Tree of Knowledge; Solomon's wisdom; the mark of Cain, Adam and Eve).
- **6.M.3.** Create multimedia presentations using computer technology, including graphics and animation.
- **6.LD-O.6.** Give oral presentations with focus, organization, and point of view, matching purpose, message, occasion, voice modulation, and non-verbal elements to the audience.

VISUAL ARTS:

- **6.2.7.** Use contemporary technology to create original works of art (e.g., color and texture methods on computers, fonts/point systems, animation techniques, video teleconferencing, multimedia techniques).
- **7.2.8.** Create a genre painting
- **7.2.11.** Use contemporary technologies to create original

works(e.g., film, photography, computer graphics, or video)

- **7.4.2.** Explain the intent of a personal work of art and draw possible parallels between it and the work of a recognized artist