A Learning Cycle Lesson Plan: Learning from the Paintings and Drawings of Artists

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Abstract

Student-created pictures are commonly used to assess students’ remembrances of experiences they are unable to verbalize. Artists, too, frequently select events as the subject of their works and in so doing, use their talents to express remembrances and opinions. While works of art supplement knowledge of society, some knowledge of past societies is available only through works of art. This learning cycle illustrates how artists use their skills and available resources to record history and encourage students to appreciate, examine, and create works of art for the stories they tell. With its use of paintings that illustrate a life experience of various groups of people often omitted in history texts, the learning cycle illustrates one way to add a multicultural dimension to the study of history.

Grade Levels: Intermediate and Middle Grades. Primary teachers might use portions of the lesson with success.

NCSS Standards: Time, Continuity, and Change; Culture; People, Places and Environments; Individuals, Groups, and Institutions; Culture

Teacher Background Information: Between 1940 and 1941, large numbers of poor Negroes moved from the South where there were few jobs and segregation to the cities of the north where industrial production related to World War II was increasing. In his paintings, Jacob Lawrence recorded events of the migration from the perspective of the Negro migrants he observed and knew. This event is usually missing from the general textbooks where events of the WWII dominate.

Generalizations: (A) Artists, like writers, create works illustrating events they consider important. (B) Painters interpret events through the use of color, lines, textures, and shapes. For higher grades only: (C) Information about some peoples is only available from painting and drawings. (D) When combined with written works, paintings and drawings can add to the depth of students understanding an event.

Skills practiced in the lesson include the following: making observations, inferences, hypotheses and conclusions as well as communicating through discussion, writing, and drawing.
Exploratory Introduction

Materials: A copy of an action painting such as *The Stampede* by Frederick S. Remington. Packets for each group containing a variety of three or four paintings or drawings illustrating different events with each packet containing two pictures in common. Obtain paintings through Internet searches at the National Gallery of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and by entering the names of such artists as Grandma Moses, Bernice Sims, Homer Winslow, Frederick Remington, or Norman Rockwell in your favorite search engine. Select events that are personal, family, or local. For use with older students include one or two paintings of major historical events.

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<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Procedures</th>
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<td>Students examine pictures and decide what events are taking place in the pictures.</td>
<td>(1) Show students a copy of the painting <em>The Stampede</em> by Frederick S. Remington. Ask, “What do you think is being shown in this picture?” “Have you ever witnessed any event similar to this?” Listen to and accept all student comments. Ask, “What words would you use to describe the event?” Raise your hand if you would like to be the man on the horse. “What do you think he might be thinking or feeling?” “How does the painter convey these feelings about the rider to us?” (2) Help students to recognize that the lines of the body parts of the horse, rider, and cow show movement forward. Help them to see that the light and darker colors add to the excitement of the picture and the blurring of background details helps the viewer to focus on the action in the front of the picture. Ask, “Can you see the expression on the face of the rider?” “What do they think his face would look like?” Ask students to try to duplicate their idea of the expression with their own faces. Say, “Raise your hand if you think the painter was a good artist.” Call on several to tell why or why not. Inform students that Remington was a famous artist whose works show us about the American West.</td>
<td>Use a check list to record students sharing materials and opinions to research conclusions and selecting a favorite picture.</td>
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he observed.
(3) Place students into small groups; explain that each group will receive a packet with new painting or drawings with some unique to their group. “Your group is to examine the pictures and decide what is happening in the picture.” Explain how the artist calls attention to parts of the picture using the tools of color, line, texture, and shapes. List some words that describe each of the event(s) illustrated in the pictures. Each person should decide which of the pictures he/she likes the best and tell your group members why it is your favorite.
(4) Groups share their descriptive words about the common pictures and show the class their unique painting(s) describing each. Using a show of hands, students indicate the painting that is their personal favorite. Review ways the artists help make events come alive for an observer.

### Lesson Development

Materials: Downloaded paintings by Jacob Lawrence from his 1940-1941 Migration of the Negro Series; enter “Jacob Lawrence” in the search box as well as from the site called The Phillips Collection. Prepare sets of 5-8 pictures for small groups to use. Each set should contain three common pictures. For an additional website with many Lawrence paintings, click on The Young Artist.

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<td>Students recall artists’ tools for paintings and drawings.</td>
<td>(1) Review students’ ideas about how artists inform them of events and the tools the artists use to add details and feelings to their paintings.</td>
<td>Students list color, lines, texture, and shape as important tools of the artist.</td>
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<td>(2) Tell students that they will examine a series of paintings of an event that a famous African American artist, Jacob Lawrence painted in the early 1940s called</td>
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Given a sample of pictures from the series *Migration of the Negro* 1940-1941 by Jacob Lawrence, students describe the pictures and hypothesize about the story being told through the series of pictures.

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<tr>
<th>Migration of the Negro. Set the paintings in the context of this period of time (consult teacher background). Instruct students to think for a moment about what they might see in the paintings. Have a few students share some ideas and their reasoning. Say, “Let us see how Lawrence viewed the story of the migration.”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(3) Return students to the groups and distribute envelopes containing a sample of the pictures. Ask students to examine the pictures in ways similar to what they did with the painting yesterday and use details from the painting to agree on a story that is illustrated by their pictures. Groups should write this story in several sentences for reading to the class and pick a group member to read their story. Tell the students to be certain to include the feelings and beliefs or the people in the pictures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(4) Ask the selected students to read their group’s story. List the common characteristics of the stories and the differences in columns on a chart. Ask groups to explain their differences and to show those paintings that led them to their conclusions, pointing out what they consider important evidence that led to their conclusions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(5) Display the common pictures. Did all groups find the same message in these pictures? Ask members of the group to come forward and hold up the paintings that were unique to their group. Students can also be asked to show with their facial expressions and posture how Lawrence illustrated the people in the unique pictures. As each group presents their pictures, ask, “What new messages or ideas</td>
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Students compare their stories for common and different conclusions.
do you get from these pictures?”
Say, “Raise your hand if you think
Lawrence described the event of the
1940-41 Migration of African-Amer-
icans well.” Ask for reasons
and accept student opinions.
Ask, “How would you describe the
colors and texture of Lawrence’s
paintings compared to what you saw
in the Remington picture?” “Do you
think Jacob Lawrence should be
classified as a good artist?” “Why?”
Ask, “What questions would you
like to ask Jacob Lawrence about his
series of paintings on the Negro
migration of 1940-1941?” “Do you
have any other questions about him
as an artist or his other paintings?”
List students’ questions on a chart.
Ask, “How do you think we might
find the answers to these questions?”
If equipment and time is available,
older students can research for the
answers. Alternatively, the teacher
might use the book *STORY
PAINTER: THE LIFE OF JACOB
LAWRENCE* by John Duggleby to
show additional paintings and read
some details of his life and career as
well as get additional pictures from
the Internet sites. Visit this site The
Phillips Collection and click on the
young artist to see more pictures by
Lawrence
Ask, “From the additional pictures
we have seen and the words we have
found about Lawrence, what would
we like others to know about Jacob
Lawrence the artist?” List students’
ideas.
(6) Have students individually write
a short statement that informs others
about how they might identify a
painting as being done by Jacob
Lawrence. They should describe
how he uses the artist’s tools and the

Students express their view on the status of Jacob Lawrence as an artist defending their viewpoints.

Students seek out additional information about Jacob Lawrence to better understand his career.

Students recognize that artists use their tools differently and have different styles of painting.

Students state conclusions and seek evidence to support differences or revise original conclusions.

Paragraphs are formal assessment use rubric at end of plan.

Students express their views and seek to understand the reasoning of those with other ideas.
Students reflect and write what they believe others should know about Jacob Lawrence and his paintings.

most likely subject or event for the painting. Include something about Lawrence’s life that might help others understand his paintings.

Closure: Ask students to relate what they have learned about Jacob Lawrence as an artist and invite students to volunteer to read their statements.

Expansion

Materials: Paper of various types, colors, roughness, or quality; crayons, tempera paints, various sized brushes, markers, and colored pencils. For older students, materials and screens to add texture may be used. Computer and projector or copies of pictures from sites listed on the plan.

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<td>Students conclude that different materials and personal preferences contribute to the variety in appearances of paintings.</td>
<td>(1) Display several pictures by the various artists for the students. (2) Review the facts about artists having the same tools of color, texture, line and shape to use in their drawing and painting. Ask, “What do you think accounts for the fact that not all of the pictures by a single artist look exactly alike and that different artists’ paintings may look very different from those of other artists?” (3) Show a new painting and ask the class to agree on the event shown by the artist. See the following sites for art ideas: Astronomy Pictures, Primitive Man Paintings, Primitive Animal Art, and Primitive Sports. Ask: “What event is shown?” “Whom do you think did this painting?” “What evidence do you see that leads you to this conclusion?” “Do you think this is an important painting?” “Why?” See Ancient Egypt paintings, and ask, “What do you think is being done in this picture?” “Do you think this picture was drawn at the same time or before or after the other</td>
<td>Students identify better surfaces and different qualities of paints used. Some artists prefer to show objects as very realistic with sharp lines others fuzzy lines and shapes.</td>
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Given a selection of prehistoric drawings, students identify herding and hunting as activities of the people.

Students describe paintings as a way to learn about people who left no written languages we can read.

Students identify these are hunting and herding activities drawn on rocks.

Students indicate that the people could not write, so we have these drawings to tell us about their lives.
| Students view drawings of trades in Ancient Egypt and indicate the types of work done by the people. | pictures?" "Do you have any idea of who painted this picture?" Click on the Explore tab in the index on the left and view pictures of the jeweler’s workshop and the carpenter’s workshop. Click on the pictures to enlarge portions for better viewing. Click on Nebamun’s Tomb and click on the pictures to enlarge and learn about them. Ask, “What can we conclude from these pictures about Ancient Egypt?” “Do you think these paintings were done by professional artists?” ”Why?” Ask students to think of an event they witnessed and to draw a picture of that event showing how they remember it and including their beliefs and feelings about the event. Allow students to select their choices of papers and colors. Suggest that if students want, they might try to copy the style of one of the artists’ paintings they have seen in the lessons.

(4) Display students’ paintings and drawings and ask students to tell about their paintings and how the materials, lines, shapes, and colors they used help tell about their event. Painting and explanations are formal evaluations. Rubric follows lesson plan.

(5) Lesson Summary: Ask students to recall the various works of art they encountered in the lessons and to describe some of the things they learned about drawings and paintings. Have students share their ideas about the following question with a partner: “How would you respond to a person who said that everyone is an artist?” After a minute or two, ask several students to share their thoughts with the class. Ask for a show of hands from | Formal assessment use rubric at end of plan. Students create drawings that express a feeling of the event and explain pictures. |

| Given colored pencils or crayons, students illustrate their personal event using lines, shapes, and color. | pictures?" "Do you have any idea of who painted this picture?" Click on the Explore tab in the index on the left and view pictures of the jeweler’s workshop and the carpenter’s workshop. Click on the pictures to enlarge portions for better viewing. Click on Nebamun’s Tomb and click on the pictures to enlarge and learn about them. Ask, “What can we conclude from these pictures about Ancient Egypt?” “Do you think these paintings were done by professional artists?” ”Why?” Ask students to think of an event they witnessed and to draw a picture of that event showing how they remember it and including their beliefs and feelings about the event. Allow students to select their choices of papers and colors. Suggest that if students want, they might try to copy the style of one of the artists’ paintings they have seen in the lessons.

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students who agree with the various statements as they are made. If someone has a different answer, ask student(s) to share it with the class. Ask, “If you are reading a textbook or a trade book and there is a drawing or painting on the page, how will you respond to it?”

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Rubrics</th>
<th>Rubric criteria for paragraph</th>
<th>Beginning (1)</th>
<th>Mastery (2)</th>
<th>Exceptional (3)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comments on artists’ tools</td>
<td>Describes use of one tool</td>
<td>Describes use of two tools</td>
<td>Describes use of more than two tools or explains how his materials impact the style of paintings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies subject/event</td>
<td>Are of African American</td>
<td>African American people in daily life activities</td>
<td>Painted African American experiences he saw and famous African Americans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments on artists’ life</td>
<td>Identifies one fact about life</td>
<td>Identifies two or more life experiences</td>
<td>Relates his life experiences to his artwork</td>
<td></td>
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<th>Beginning (1)</th>
<th>Mastery (2)</th>
<th>Exceptional (3)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Painting’s appearance</td>
<td>Completed—neat with one tools’ use evident</td>
<td>Completed, neat, two tools’ uses clearly evident</td>
<td>Completed three tools’ uses clearly evident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Shows an event that is visually understandable</td>
<td>Shows an event with actions or emotions present</td>
<td>Shows an event with actions and emotions present on picture’s major actors and minor actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral explanation</td>
<td>Describes the event in a voice loud enough to be heard</td>
<td>Describes event in an expressive voice, loud enough to be heard</td>
<td>Describes event in an expressive voice, loud enough to be heard. Explains event’s importance or atmosphere. Tells how artists’ tools were used in picture to convey ideas.</td>
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