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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative

2005 Volume II: Art and Identity in Mexico, from Olmec Times to the Present

The Influence of Mexican Muralists on Wpa Art

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"The Influence of Mexican Muralists on WPA Art" is an interdisciplinary unit that uses art to help students to understand the economic, social, and political changes that occurred during the Great Depression. It is designed to be taught in Social Studies classes and may be adapted to American History, World History, Cultural Geography, American Government, Psychology, as well as 2-D Art. In American History, it is part of the story of the New Deal. In World History and Cultural Geography, it provides the highlights of 20th century Mexican culture. Lessons on symbolism, influence, and tone include a variety of strategies for both advanced and challenged learners.

An overview of the work and influence of Mexican muralists, Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros, and Jose Orozco, is discussed in the context of economic, social, and political events including the Mexican Revolution, Communist Revolution, the Great Depression, and the post war industrialization of the United States. Internet sites are provided for mural examples of their work in the United States..

The outstanding mural work of the Mexican artists in the 1920's and their connection to many prominent Americans opened the door to government financed art projects during the Great Depression. Initially, the United States government created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) as a New Deal building project and later added an art section to beautify the many public buildings constructed.

Many of the murals still exist today in public buildings (Treasury and Interior Department Buildings in Washington, D.C.) and especially Post Offices all over the nation. There were over 50 murals created for the Chicago schools. I have provided a web address for locating the Post Office projects in your state. In Appendix 7, I have included 5 examples of Florida murals that I personally photographed. I am planning a field trip to the local murals, some of which have been restored.

(Developed for American History, grade 11; recommended for American History and World History, High School grades)

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