



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2020 Volume II: Teaching about Race and Racism Across the Disciplines

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## **Mexican-American Labor in California through Art Literacy**

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Mexican-American Labor in California through Art Literacy is a month-long middle school curriculum centering student discussion about domestic and farm workers as depicted in the canon and counternarratives.

Students write art critiques of ten artworks by British artist David Hockney, understanding that his work upholds white supremacy without acknowledging ongoing subordination of Mexican-Americans. Students write artist statements analyzing seven paintings by Ramiro Gomez that re-appropriate and reframe Hockney's work, eliciting feelings of pride and solidarity with the indispensable legacy of labor. Using art-to-self connections to discuss how students see themselves in Hockney and Gomez's work, students create an intentional domestic scene.

Students analyze twenty-five commercial fruit crate labels and theorize how misconceptions used by advertisers, including the Solar Theory of Value, diminish the strategic role Mexican-American workers play in labor organizing. Juana Alicia and Judy Baca's murals celebrating worker identity introduce a reclaimed history and reframed genealogy. Students track project progress while creating a diptych comparing narratives.

Finally, students collaboratively curate art exhibits by writing proposals. Teachers foster affective and intellectual receptivity to learning by decolonizing dominant definitions of art and student-teacher power-dynamics. Students engage and imagine with Gomez, Alicia, and Baca, rehumanizing their own fundamental beliefs of Mexican-American workers.

(Developed for Art, grade 7; recommended for Art and ELA, grades 3-9)

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