



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2026 Volume IV: Resistance from Aristotle to Star Wars

Beyond Protest: Reimagining Art as Resistance

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Throughout history, art has never been merely decorative. It has been used to reinforce authority, preserve culture, challenge injustice, and inspire resistance. This curriculum unit explores art as a powerful form of resistance by examining the relationship between art, power, censorship, and visual culture. Students first investigate how images shape beliefs, influence collective memory, and reinforce systems of power, before considering why those same images are often censored, controlled, or destroyed. Building upon this foundation, students expand their understanding of resistance beyond protest alone by exploring how artists preserve cultural identities, mobilize communities through collective action, and challenge traditional boundaries of what art is, where it belongs, and who has the authority to create it. Through the work of historical and contemporary artists from diverse cultures, students analyze how visual expression communicates ideas, questions dominant narratives, and inspires social change while developing the visual literacy needed to critically interpret the images surrounding them. Students engage in looking closely, discussion, case studies, and studio experiences that encourage critical thinking alongside creative expression. The unit culminates with students creating an original artwork communicating a message of resistance they believe deserves to be seen and curating a mini exhibition that places their work in conversation with historical and contemporary examples of art as resistance.

(Developed for Visual Art, grades 5-7; recommended for Visual Art, Civics/Social Studies, and ELA, grades 4-12, and Art History, grades 6-12)

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