



Image as Text: A Bridge to Critical Literary Analysis

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“The principal goal of education in the schools should be creating men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done.”

-Jean Piaget, *The Origins of Intelligence in Children*, 1953. (1)

Introduction

For my twelfth birthday, my mom gave me a very important option for a birthday gift. Growing up, most of the gifts that I received for my birthday or other holidays consisted of things that I didn't want but probably needed, like wool sweaters and new gym shoes. One time, I remember getting super excited that my mother got me a game called *Mario is Missing* for my Super Nintendo system. I always remember how cool she thought she was for getting a game with Mario in it. I proceeded to play it only to find out that it was really a game intended to build geography skills. Needless to say, I was still excited and hopeful about the idea of an option in her gift-giving. She had received a bonus at work, so she was excited to go all out with her gift to me that year.

So, she sat me down and said that I have two options: either she could purchase a computer or a set of *Encyclopedia Britannica*. After she could sense that I was less than excited about either choice, she explained to me that both were extremely expensive purchases. Until that point, I had relied on using the encyclopedia set that my grandmother purchased for my mother while she was growing up during the 1960's. I enjoyed reading the *Book of Knowledge* entries despite their age. No one came up to me and said that there was going to be a technology revolution and that it is really important that you learn how to use a computer. When I was in 6th grade in 1996, we went to computer lab once a week, to learn how to type and play a computer game called Oregon Trail. In the span of the next ten years, the world changed dramatically. I got to navigate that world with a brand new set of *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

In thinking about my students, I often wonder about the skills and abilities that will most benefit them going forward. If anything, I want my instruction to be the right tool at the right time to project my students into the future, ready to tackle novel situations that are dramatically different from the present. To go back to my

experience and think about it metaphorical terms, I don't want to tie my instruction to an encyclopedia when a computer is what is really needed. As a result, I have thought deeply about areas in which my students struggle and how my instruction can address those areas of need.

Participating in the *The Illustrated Page* seminar made me think closely about the relationship between image and text. When an image and text are brought together, my students have been trained to think that the image illustrates the text. In fact, many of the early literacy experiences that students have relate to reading a picture and writing about it, or illustrating what they have written. The novel direction that the *The Illustrated Page* addressed is to deeply consider the relationship between image and text pairs. It has caused me to stop and look more closely when text and images are paired together to think of the intention of the pairing. It has made me wonder, does the picture always have to be subservient to the text? Another question participating in the seminar has led me to wonder when I see an image and text pairing is: in what ways could an illustration complicate or even subvert the written text?

In thinking about the seminar content in relationship to the students that I teach, students need to be primed to interpret illustrations in a more critical way. The training that they have received in early literacy experiences, that the illustration and the text are equal partners that show the same thing, needs to be reexamined with students. They need to come to question that construct and begin to wonder about the role of an illustration when embedded within a text. In order to do this, my students will need explicit instruction in looking at images and art and considering the role that images play in creating meaning. This abstract thinking is not practiced with students.

Jean Piaget is considered to be the Father of Cognitive Development. The quote at the start of this unit espouses not only the goal of this unit, but one of the goals of my professional practice. Kids need to be taught in novel ways. The most exciting part about this is that my sixth graders are ready for this type of thinking. In considering child development, it is logical that my students struggle with considering abstract relationships and concepts. Thinking of Piaget's Cognitive Stages of Development, my students are just entering the stage considered to be the Formal Operational Stage. According to Piaget, by this stage individuals are able to use symbols related to abstract concepts, to create hypotheses based on novel information, and to consider possibilities of actions or ideas. (2) Given that my students are just entering this developmental stage, it is critical that they are given the opportunity to build interpretative skills now that they are able to think in more complex and ambiguous ways.

Content Objectives

My hope for students that I teach is that they are prepared for a future that may look dramatically different than today. In order to be successful in the future, students need practice interpreting and sifting through information. As a Language Arts teacher, what excites me about teaching a unit that focuses exclusively on image as text is that so much of the language that is used to describe art is the same language that is used to describe literary text. Considering the mood, imagery, diction choices, selection of subject matter and theme are just some of the areas in which a conversation about a piece of art can begin to sound more like a conversation about literature. By developing student capacity to interpret art, student ability to interpret literature should also improve.

Each piece in this unit considers a text and image relationship in a different way, reflecting the content of our YNI seminar. The *Detroit Industry* mural can be read much the same way as we explored the Bayeux Tapestry. Similar in scale, it tells a narrative of the auto industry at the time of the Great Depression in Detroit. It showed robust factories that were filled with workers, when in reality many factory workers lost their jobs while Rivera painted his mural panels in Detroit. In similar fashion, *George Washington Crossing the Delaware* creates a heroic and inaccurate narrative about George Washington's actions during a battle during the American Revolution to which Frank O'Hara irreverently responds, "Now that our hero has come back to us/ in his white pants and we know his nose/ trembling like a flag under fire/we see the calm cold river is supporting/ our forces, the beautiful history." (3) These lines are probably a much more accurate version of the truth than the popular myth created by the original painting. In *Guernica*, so much of the discussion of the painting relies on similar academic language that is used to describe literature that if an administrator walked into the class they might think we are discussing literature. Exploring symbolism, imagery, and mood will be key elements of the discussion revolving around *Guernica*. Finally, in *The Problem We All Face*, Rockwell's use of a descriptive title and provocative diction image and text in powerful ways. As much as I tried to focus on the image, it became glaringly apparent that there is no divorcing the image from text and narrative.

This unit builds off of the work was done in an earlier seminar to provide a stronger scaffold for the unit that I developed then. Last year, I participated in the seminar titled, *Over the Rainbow*, that explored fantasy as a genre and explored derivative versions of *Wizard of Oz*, *Peter Pan*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and other texts. From this seminar, I crafted a unit that explored the use of critical readings to unlock deeper understanding of a text. In the unit I developed, I intended to introduce students to the multiple genres that are associated with dream worlds and fantasy. From this introduction, students were to be introduced to ways to think about literature critically through the use of Freytag's Pyramid, selected literary criticism on the *Wizard of Oz* and *Anthem*, as well as learn ways to write fiction that incorporates the elements of speculative fiction. By the end of the unit, it was hoped that students would be able to respond to literature more critically and write speculative fiction more authentically.

The unit was successful for some, but I wasn't pleased with the results for all of my students. It became glaringly apparent while I was implementing the unit that I was right about the need for a shift from only close reading to using critical readings that added layers of meaning. The critical readings that I found and modified were effective in getting students to think in new ways. Some students did not experience the level of success that I planned for because they struggled to interpret on their own. This unit seeks to address the extra practice that students need to grow confident and capable in their ability to analyze and interpret.

By the end of this unit, students will be able to take a piece of narrative art, describe what they see, analyze what they see, research what others have said about it, then respond to what others have noted about the piece. This practice will better situate students for responding to literary criticism in the following unit. By the end of the unit, I hope that students are more confident in their ability to interpret complex text (art or written) and apply this ability to future units of study.

Demographics

Mark Twain Elementary is a K-8 public school on the Southwest Side of Chicago. The student population can be generally categorized as middle class, although the free and reduced lunch percentage is roughly 85%. With that noted, it is evident that there are some segments of the school's student population that demonstrate needs that come along with serving a diverse student population.

Roughly 85% percent of the student population is Latino. The remaining demographics include a mixture of Polish, African American, and other groups. Mark Twain has a large bilingual program that supports student acquisition of English and provides native language instruction for new arrivals from Poland and Spanish-speaking countries. The diversity that exists within in my school directly impacts the thinking and planning that supports classroom instruction. I am aware of the diversity of needs that exist within my classroom and plan instruction that is scaffolded appropriately to address those needs. Many of the students perform at or above grade level.

Narrative Art

Narrative art tells a story, either as a single moment in time or over a series of events. Students will use several rich pieces of narrative art to build their capacity to interpret and respond to works of art that tell a story. The four pieces below address not only seminal events in world history, but they tell a story that will lead to instructionally rich discussion and thinking. In order to facilitate conversations about each piece, it is important for teachers to have some contextual information to ground the discussion. After information about each, I provide questions that could be used to discuss each work as well as a graphic organizer for students to use to explore each work.

George Washington Crossing the Delaware by Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze



George Washington Crossing the Delaware by Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze (4)

George Washington Crossing the Delaware by Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze shows George Washington and a group of soldiers in a small boat crossing the Delaware River; it is considered to be both romanticized and inaccurate. (5) It suggests that the soldiers are going to launch a surprise attack on the British troops. The popular retelling of the event is that during the American Revolution, the Continental Army struggled under the leadership of George Washington, losing control of New York City and other key points in the colonies. In hopes of catching the British army off guard, they planned a surprise attack that involved crossing the Delaware River with 5,400 troops to engage the other side at Trenton, New Jersey. Attacking on Christmas night, Washington and roughly 2,400 troops crossed the partially frozen river in three locations, reaching the New Jersey side before dawn. The rest of the troops he had at his disposal met up the following morning to descend upon the British side on December 26th. The British side was outmanned and underestimated the ability of Washington's men because of a series of successes. Almost 1,000 British troops were taken captive and news of Washington's victory "raised the spirits of the American colonists, who previously feared that the Continental Army was incapable of victory." (6) While that general retelling is accurate, Leutze romanticized a few other parts. For example, the crossing was at night under the guise of poor weather conditions. This differs from daylight that is included in the painting. Washington also didn't lead the charge; he and 40 others crossed the Delaware led by William Blackler, "a salty, savvy Massachusetts fisherman who most certainly would never have permitted Washington, rank be damned, to stand during so treacherous a crossing." (7) Leutze's interpretation of the event creates a much more powerful narrative than having Washington restrained at the back of a boat.

In the painting, Leutze depicts Washington as a decisive and powerful leader. Washington stands taller than all of the other figures in the piece; he is also almost centered in the piece next to the American flag. He holds a brass telescope, wears a heavy saber, and is flanked by another future president of the United States, James

Monroe. A bright star shines upon him as if he was chosen by God to conduct this battle. The river is filled with ice, and the boat is filled with 13 men that represent “a cross-section of the American colonies”....an African American, a New England seaman wearing a tarpaulin jacket, a Scottish immigrant, a rower with an unclear gender designation, a woman, riflemen, farmers, a merchant, and even someone who appears ill with a bandaged head. (8) All of these people represent the various trades and colonies; all have a common cause to see the Revolutionary Army win. There is forward movement and momentum in the piece as it moves from right-to-left; this victory had the same impact for the Revolutionary Army. This movement forces the viewer to read the ship, as most viewer’s eyes are habitually trained to view from left-to-right. In this reading, it becomes clear that the victory that created momentum and sustained the army and citizens of the colonies was the direct product of Washington’s virtuous leadership.

The painting was an immediate hit with the public. More than 50,000 people visited the New York exhibit and even more viewed it when it moved on to Washington, DC, where it was placed in the rotunda of the nation’s capital. (9) It was viewed as a form of patriotic art throughout the duration of the 19th century. During the Civil War, both the North and the South highly regarded the painting. For individuals from the North, they used the image because it contained a black person to show that was one of the reasons why they were fighting, while individuals from the South connected with the theme of independence and liberty (10). It has continued to prove popular among the masses because it suggests the idea that Americans have strong ideals regarding liberty and freedom and are willing to work together in stark circumstances to fight for those beliefs. This aligns with Leutze’s goal in the painting. Leutze came to America as an immigrant and returned enamored with democracy and democratic principles; he believed the American Revolution could serve as the model revolution for Germany, which faced a potential revolution in 1848. As he was working on the composition, he initially envisioned brighter and more triumphant colors. When the revolution failed, the coloration changed and the goal of the painting was to demonstrate “determination and struggle to overcome oppression—the heroic quest.” (11) Leutze’s work resonated with most Americans, but some took great issue with both the content and the vision that Leutze had for his work.

Many people have not shared Leutze's vision for this seminal moment in American history. Larry Rivers’ *Washington Crossing the Delaware* is an artistic critical response to Leutze’s source piece. In the piece, Larry Rivers uses his style of painting, charcoal drawing and rag wiping, to create a scene that loosely mirrors the event depicted in Leutze version. Rivers wanted to create the “most controversial painting ever.” (12) Rivers’ had some observations to make about Leutze’s version:

The last painting that dealt with George [Leutze’s *Delaware*] and the rebels is hanging at the Met and was painted by a coarse German nineteenth-century academician who really loved Napoleon more than anyone and thought crossing a river on a late December afternoon was just another excuse for a general to assume a heroic, slightly tragic pose....What could have inspired him I'll never know. What I saw in the crossing was quite different. I saw the moment as nerve-wracking and uncomfortable. I couldn't picture anyone getting into a chilly river around Christmas time with anything resembling hand on-chest heroics. (13)

As a result of Rivers’ unfavorable view, he makes some interesting choices in white-washing and blurring some of the key figures involved in the actual crossing. Rivers has gone in a completely different direction with his portrayal of Washington, placing him in a “troubled area” and is considered by one critic to “mock bravura gestures” made by Washington in the original. (14) Rivers’ piece undercuts Leutze’s narrative of Washington’s brave leadership and questions an iconic moment in American history. (See Appendix for a link

to the Rivers' version of the moment)

Rivers' *Washington Crossing the Delaware* induced others to rethink Leutze's work. Frank O'Hara decided he would respond to Rivers' and Leutze's work in the form of a poem. This creates a similar image text pair to what we studied in seminar. O'Hara's poem, "On Seeing Larry Rivers' Washington Crossing the Delaware," O'Hara recognizes the nature of Rivers' efforts to explore the layers of meaning that are created in the Leutze version by adding even more layers of meaning. The title suggests the framing that both Leutze and Rivers engage in around a moment that may possibly be fictional or overdramatized by noting that he was seeing another form of the work in a museum. (15) (See Appendix for a link to O'Hara's poem) O'Hara's lines go further to frame what the moment might have actually been like when he writes: "Now that our hero has come back to us/ in his white pants and we know his nose/ trembling like a flag under fire/we see the calm cold river is supporting/ our forces, the beautiful history. (16) These lines are borderline irreverent to the popular image that Leutze's work has engrained in the minds of many. Interesting enough, O'Hara's depiction in his poem may more accurately portray what actually happened than Leutze's paintin

Another contemporary manifestation of *George Washington Crossing the Delaware* is Robert Colescott's painting titled *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware* (See the link in the Appendix to view the painting). In the painting, Colescott takes an "easily recognizable masterpiece" and uses it to consider other issues. In depicting George Washington Carver, the painter mimics George Washington in the original Leutze piece: he is the tallest and most commanding figure, standing in the same stance, facing forward towards a goal, and dressed in a similar fashion. This projects him as a hero in the boat, an important individual surrounded by stereotypes. (17) Some critics argue that Colescott was trying to show the lack of real black faces in art and American history through exaggeration and the exploration of the roles of blacks in light of slavery. (18) This adds a new dimension to Leutze's work. Just as Leutze relied on stereotypes to create unity by representing many of the stereotypical lifestyles that existed in the colonies, Colescott takes that idea and makes it subversive by questioning the roles that blacks had after slavery. George Washington and George Washington Carver share similar names and placement in each painting. Colescott elevates Carver to a similar mythical proportion as Washington, but it is hard to determine why. Colescott's piece is controversial. Right in the middle of the piece, there appears to be a female figure performing a sex act on another male. The piece is not appropriate for middle school students, but it may warrant further exploration in a setting with older students. *The Problem We All Live With* by Norman Rockwell



The Problem We All Live With by Norman Rockwell (19)

Norman Rockwell created the painting *The Problem We All Live With* to function as a centerfold in the January 1964 edition of *Look Magazine*. In the piece, Rockwell depicts Ruby Bridges as marshals walk her into a public school in New Orleans as a result of a desegregation order. (20) The action that is depicted in the piece occurred almost four years before the piece was made. Ruby Bridges entered the all-white William Frantz Elementary School on November 14, 1960. On that first day of school, besides being jeered at outside of the school, white parents entered the school to remove their children from the school. Few children remained in the school. Only one teacher was willing to teach young Ruby. Daily crowds continued to assemble to taunt Ruby and instill fear into her, going so far as to threaten her, saying that they would poison her, or building a small coffin and putting a black doll inside of it. (21) It is interesting to note that a four-year gap exists between this event and Rockwell's depiction of the event. It leads one to wonder if he felt compelled when it occurred, if he thought that it was timely given other events related to the civil rights movement, or if enough time had elapsed that it became a safe topic to address related to civil rights and still project a sort of edginess in subject matter.

The Problem We All Live With does not shy away from controversial choices. The choices that Rockwell make in composition invite the viewer to think deeply about the loaded nature of this particular moment in history. Faintly inscribed in the wall that Ruby is walking past is the word NIGGER. The connotation of the word would weigh heavily on the viewer in any context, but it is especially poignant because it is directed at such a young girl. Dressed in a white dress, Ruby innocently marches on between commanding adult subjects. Color choices play a role in creating a powerful dynamic in the piece. The red of the tomato on the ground and smeared down the wall and the yellow of the armbands demonstrate the power that outside adult influences had on Ruby. Ruby narrowly avoiding being soiled by the dangers presented by jeering onlookers. Red and yellow

historically represent colors associated with power and revolution. Red was the color of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 and of the Chinese Revolution of 1949, and later of the Cultural Revolution: red was the color of Communist Parties. The goal of many whites who wanted to bar Ruby from entering the school was to make her feel intimidated or powerless because she represented a break in common segregated society that had been created in the South. Bridges' actions were revolutionary, so Rockwell's color choices are appropriate. Rockwell also makes a careful decision to depict Ruby facing forward with her head held high. She is also dressed in white, which creates the image of purity especially since she was wearing plaid the day of the actual event. This suggests that the onlookers have failed in their efforts to intimidate Ruby, a symbol of purity and innocence. It is also interesting to note Rockwell's choice to " ." (22) Given that this was created at the height of the civil rights movement, this decision goes beyond a tepid critique of the treatment that Ruby and other students received while trying to integrate all-white facilities and supports the revolutionary nature of Bridges' actions.

This work had come not too long after Rockwell ended his contract with the *Saturday Evening Post* in order to express more political themes; *Look* allowed him a platform to create work that expressed some of his more progressive thoughts. (23) Despite Rockwell's attempts to be progressive, some critics argue that when viewed with a contemporary lens that this piece falls short in some respects. In the text *Normal Rockwell: The Underside of Innocence*, Richard Halpern makes the following argument:

How does the treatment of Ruby Bridges by the millions of (mostly white) readers of *Look* differ from that of the New Orleans mob on November 14, 1960? The latter group views her with anger and contempt, the former with pity or admiration. But she is in any case a spectacle for the white gaze-- a specimen... By memorializing her, Rockwell has also frozen her in that traumatic moment of shame and fear. He has made her into the object of a liberal voyeurism. (24)

This argument is interesting and could lead to classroom conversations that will induce students to grapple with thematic matters associated with the work. It is hoped that students come to question whether or not the composition portrays Ruby in a manner that is triumphant or in a manner that robs her experience of power and dignity.

Considering Halpern's argument about the depiction of Bridges in *The Problem We All Live With*, it would be an unfair characterization of Rockwell to not address the evolution of his career and his efforts to create work that is socially conscious and progressive for his time. In considering Rockwell the artist, it is important to note that his work was censored while he worked for the *Saturday Evening Post*; it has been suggested that this may have prevented him from tackling issues that aligned more closely with his beliefs. (25) Response to *The Problem We All Live With* was mixed from readers of *Look*; some readers were not used to seeing direct social commentary from an artist they thought they knew. This new direction in Rockwell's career made it critical for the Norman Rockwell Museum to make this piece their first acquisition. (26) Early in Rockwell's career, he tackled issues of race by ignoring them. In an exhibit of Rockwell's work in Los Angeles in 1989, a critic noted how *Woman Fallen from Horse* (1930s) and *Boy in a Dining Car* (1946) show well-to-do whites being attended by blacks. (27) This secondary function that blacks played in the pieces reveals a sense of powerlessness and subservience that could be argued reflected society at the time, but it is interesting to note how *The Problem We All Live With* (1964) and even later *New Kids in the Neighborhood* (1967) place young black children at the center of the action rather than as observers of the action. (28) Ruby is clearly the subject of the painting, and the marshals are so insignificant that they do not have to be completely present in the scene. This change in approach and depiction of blacks cannot be underestimated and demonstrates a significant shift in Rockwell's

approach to race.

In considering Rockwell's motives in the composition, it is also important to consider an argument made by Rockwell's granddaughter. She argues that her grandfather breaks the safe and wholesome stereotype that many have of his work by using some of the most offensive racial language and imagery of the time by having NIGGER and KKK scrawled prominently in the middle of the text. She continues to argue that Rockwell created a composition that suggests Ruby represents the hope and promise for black children and points out a small detail that is easy to miss in the composition. He paints "a tiny heart with 'MP + NR'-- to counterbalance the hate depicted in the scene." (29) The MP stands for Molly Punderson Rockwell, Rockwell's spouse. This is an interesting juxtaposition to consider; why would a white illustrator include an image of erotic love in a scene that is so hostile? Rockwell's granddaughter may have a slight bias in addressing the works of her grandfather, but I do think it is worthwhile to consider her interpretation of her grandfather's work as a way to further engage students and build their interpretative skills.

It is also worthy to consider the contemporary applications and responses to *The Problem We All Live With*. During President Obama's first term, the painting was installed right outside of the West Wing in the White House. Ruby Bridges was invited to speak briefly with President Obama; he remarked, "I think it's fair to say that if it hadn't been for you guys [individuals like Bridges], I might not be here, and we might not be looking at this together." (30) Many people criticized President Obama for not doing enough to send a stronger message on race, especially in light of him being the first African American president. For some, the choice to hang *The Problem We All Live With* was considered to be a safe choice to make a political statement on race; it was created by an iconic white artist, the event depicted was far removed from present times, and its installation was not followed by decisive actions by the administration to address institutions such as schools that may be on a path towards resegregating. (31) In this respect, critics of both Rockwell and Obama share similar criticism of both men; some argue they could have both been more innovative and provocative when it comes to addressing issues related to race.

Murals

It is important to briefly define murals, the genre of both *Guernica* and *Detroit Industrial*. Mural comes from the Latin word *murus*, meaning wall. They became a major art form in the 1930's that were and in the case of Diego Rivera and Picasso, explore the impact of industry and war on individuals. While everyday people and workers may have been exploited by factories or prejudices, murals allowed for these individuals to be depicted in ways that were human and complex. Murals throughout the United States were painted in areas with large numbers of individuals that faced similar difficult circumstances. (32) In the United States in the 1960's, murals were developed to "celebrate ethnic pride" and challenge issues related to inequality, an example of this being the Mexican Muralist Movement. Another example of celebrating ethnic pride is reflected in the piece, *Wall of Respect*. (33) Exploring each of these murals will allow for rich discussion among students.

Guernica by Pablo Picasso



Guernica by Pablo Picasso (34)

Guernica depicts the attack on a small village named Guernica on market day in northern Spain on April 26, 1937, during the Spanish Civil War. During the attack, aerial bombing from Hitler's Condor Legion and Italian Fiat Fighters dropped 100,000 pounds of explosive incendiary bombs that destroyed the town, killing 1,654 and wounding 889 individuals in the village. (35) While *Guernica* represents the bombing, it is appealing to many individuals for different reasons. Some admire the extensive use of symbols and the artist's style. Others like to look to it to consider how Picasso addresses the politics and society of the period. Many are drawn to it to think about it as a commentary on war; all of these elements have contributed to create a legacy for *Guernica* that has even driven tourism to the village today. (36) By understanding these key interests in the mural, teachers may be better able to determine their approach to facilitate discussion around the painting.

Guernica uses light, form, and symbols in interesting ways. The scene condenses many of the types of events that occurred during the bombing of the town. The stark use of black and white throughout the painting contributes to the creation of a chaotic environment within the piece. A light bulb hangs within the room, but it is hard to determine whether it is day or night, inside or outside, given the subject matter that is depicted. Contributing to the chaos is a mixture of starkly painted materials that are broken from the bombing; this carnage suggests that man, animal or object could not find safety in any setting. *Guernica* uses symbols in creative ways to capture the devastation of the bombing. At no point can the viewer of the mural see planes dropping bombs. The comingling of various human and animal figures shows the sudden nature of the attack. While it is evident that there are both human and animal forms, some of the other forms are suggestive of symbols that may signify other meanings. For example, critics have argued over the nature of the light or eye that is near the top of the mural; it suggests many messages. Equally ambiguous and suggestive is the bull figure. (37) For Picasso, the potential connotative meanings could be referring to Spain itself and the historical bull-fighting tradition with the provoking of the bull's rage, or even his own artistic temperament.

Picasso chose to employ Cubism as a style in his creation of *Guernica*. By the time that the mural was created, Cubism as a genre had been explored by several artists for a few decades. Picasso was well-known at the time for being very innovative with the technique, and *Guernica* is a thoughtful creation that uses Cubism in a way

that effectively shows the disorder of modern warfare. Some critics contend that the “fractured nature of Picasso’s cubist composition techniques” do a better job of depicting the events of the bombing than a composition that might have attempted to recreate a scene of destruction. (38) Picasso’s contortion of both dimensions and figures achieved through the use of a cubist style contributes to the confusion and chaos of the piece. By manipulating the lines and planes within the piece, Picasso captures the fear and disorientation that individuals must have felt as the bombing event unfolded. No direction leads to safety in the piece, as all of the figures within the piece are going in different directions with pained expressions.

Guernica interests many who like to think of issues related to politics and society. Picasso was commissioned at the start of 1937 to paint a mural for the Spanish Republic’s Pavilion at the Paris Exposition. Spain was engaged in civil war at the time; while not overtly political, Picasso’s fame as an artist and willingness to create a mural for the Republic demonstrated his political support. In taking the commission to create the mural, he had the opportunity to express his concern about the destruction that he saw happening, even before the bombing. (39) This initial thinking took on more urgency after the bombing of Guernica. Picasso began new sketches for his mural four days after the bombing. His new sketches were contained almost completely different characters, “a bull, a horse, and a light-bearing woman, plus some lines indicating other figures would fill certain spaces;” these changes suggested a “complete change of direction in content and meaning.” (40) These new characters all found their way into the final piece that Picasso worked on at a feverish pace to finish in time for the exposition. In thinking of the change of artistic direction taken by Picasso, it is also important to note that one of the first sketches for the mural contained “an upraised arm holding a hammer and a sickle.” (41) This communist symbol is no longer part of the final mural, suggesting that Picasso intended on making a political statement with the work all along, but that political statement changed given the attack on the town.

Given the seemingly direct influence of the bombing on his work, it is only natural that many have come to view *Guernica* as a commentary on war. War correspondents who arrived to cover the bombing of Guernica were immediately shocked by a new type of warfare that they covered in great detail:

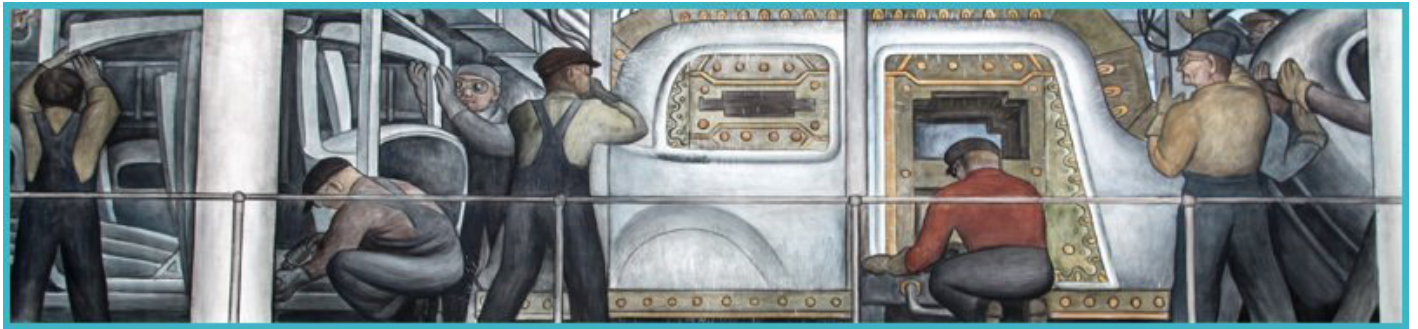
Graphic and compelling images began to emerge from the warfront of terror-stricken and fleeing women and children; upturned faces, filled with dread; skies darkened with multitudes of enemy planes; homes and cities reduced to smoldering rubble; and casualties of all ages. (42)

This type of bombardment was new to the world; the airplane was a relatively new invention by 1937 and had not been used for mass bombing. The menacing nature of air bombardment and the terrible damage that it inflicted dominated news reports of the day. One correspondent entered the town of Guernica after midnight; the village was flaming with crumbling buildings, debris strewn throughout, and survivors searching for relatives and children. People that survived the bombing reported being shot at by German fighter pilots that shot at them as they tried to escape bombed out buildings. (43) This carnage was shocking to first-hand observers and shocked Picasso; Picasso’s rapid completion of the mural for the exposition was the direct product of this shock.

The relationship between *Guernica* and potential commentary on war has sparked some of the current thinking and interest in the piece. In addressing the International Council of New York’s Museum of Modern Art in 1998, Kofi Annan referred to *Guernica* as a “.” (44) This was an interesting diction choice because the political nature of the work cannot be ignored. If the body that is responsible for ensuring world peace believes that *Guernica* is illustrative of the senselessness of war, then it is worthwhile to consider the message

of the piece in light of more contemporary world events. In making his remarks, Annan considered the piece to be a “passionate protest against senseless violence.” It was slightly ironic that five years after Annan’s address that *Guernica* could be easily seen in footage (as a copy of it hangs in the corridor outside the Security Council chamber) while the US Ambassador to the UN was addressing the world’s media to advocate for war with Iraq based on the false suspicion that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. (45) The number of people that go to see the mural on display in Madrid and visit the namesake town suggest that *Guernica* connects with people on multiple levels and has the capacity to connect with students as well.

Detroit Industrial Mural by Diego Rivera



Detroit Industrial Mural by Diego Rivera (46) Note: There are multiple parts to this mural, see the link for access to the complete mural in the Appendix.

In 1932, Diego Rivera and his wife Frida Kahlo travelled to Detroit because Rivera was commissioned to paint a mural related to industry in the central courtyard of the Detroit Institute of Arts. He received this commission from the Ford family, and it was for a high sum of money, considering it was the start of the Great Depression: \$21,000. (47) This commission was an interesting one for Diego to accept, because he considered himself to be a progressive figure, yet some of the actions of the Ford family would seem to directly oppose progressive beliefs. For example, Ford had been the first to publish the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in the United States; Hitler was fond of Ford’s anti-Semitism and recognized him in his book, *Mein Kampf*. (48) This makes one wonder about Rivera’s motives for accepting the commission. Was he interested in earning a living, despite his beliefs? Did he accept the commission hoping to subvert the system?

In the mural, 27 panels long, Rivera depicts a car factory in Detroit in the 1930’s. In some respects, it is narrative like the Bayeux Tapestry. Most of the elements can be read left-to-right and suggest a narrative about the American worker in factories. Each one of the panels focuses on a different labor process that is involved in producing a car:

In the two main panels of the north and south walls we see the major stages in the production of cars....These [panels] come together along the assembly line as we see a stream of components coming together to join the chassis being lowered onto the assembly line in the foreground.... it is people more than anything that occupy the space of the paintings.... men straining to move engine blocks, recognizable figures from the plant and the gallery at the time, and Rivera's self-portrait hidden among the mould-makers, the green of glass....Groups of workers in the foreground bump and grind body panels, they look away, down, or their faces are covered. In the center of the panel we see the final assembly line moving away from us towards the vanishing point. (49)

The process of making a car is detailed, but there is a subversive element. As the car gets developed in the mural, the workers themselves become more difficult to see. Rivera creates human figures that lose detail and become less complete as the cars they create become more complete. (50) It seems to suggest that the process of making the car in auto factories robs individuals of their humanity. This subversive message was identified early on and nearly resulted in the mural being destroyed.

Rivera thought that the spirit of Detroit was in its workers and factories and sought to depict that in the mural. In his autobiography, Rivera recalls the experience of planning for the mural. He went from factory to factory throughout Detroit sketching different industrial scenes. He focused on the men that worked in the factories and their interaction with all of the various machines. (51) This experience was important to Rivera. Based on viewing the mural, one is left to wonder what Rivera thought about the relationship between man and machine. An argument could be made that Rivera was trying to depict the ill-effects when man is forced to operate in a machine-like manner. Another argument could be made is that Rivera attempted to critique scenarios that seemed at odds with one another. For example, in one part of the mural, Rivera uses imagery of a scientist producing poison gas for war while juxtaposing scientists also producing vaccines. (52) Rivera seems to recognize the importance of technology for the future, but questions the impact that it could have on others.

People's reaction to the new mural was mixed. Some thought it was powerful and did capture the essence of factory work in Detroit; some did not like it and thought it cast workers in a negative light, so much so that a sign was erected near the mural that states:

Rivera's politics and his publicity seeking are detestable. But let's get the record straight on what he did here. He came from Mexico to Detroit, thought our mass production industries and our technology wonderful and very exciting, and painted them as one of the great achievements of the twentieth century. This came after the debunking twenties when our artists and writers found nothing worthwhile in America and worst of all in America was the Middle West. Rivera saw and painted the significance of Detroit as a world city. If we are proud of this city's achievements, we should be proud of these paintings and not lose our heads over what Rivera is doing in Mexico today. (53)

This defense of Rivera's art shows that some people took issue with the portrayal of workers and that the piece was controversial to some at its inception. The mural was controversial. Some people took issue with the portrayal of workers while others felt that Rivera's political beliefs were questionable.

Implementing District Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.1-Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.7-Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.10-By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 6-8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.2-Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.4-Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.7-Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.8-Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.9-Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Sequence of Classroom Activities

The unit will take place over four weeks. Each week, students will use a graphic organizer that I have developed to support the exploration of a piece of narrative art. The study of each piece will start with a gallery walk. Once the gallery walk is finished, students will do a quadrant analysis in which they do a close viewing of the piece (see the box below titled Art Graphic Organizer), finally students will do some research about each piece after they view it, filling in the graphic organizer. Then we will engage in a popcorn discussion that I will track for participation points. Each of these activities are explained in greater detail below.

Big Picture Gallery Walk

A gallery walk consists of putting or projecting the painting in the middle of the room. Students are allowed to get out of their seats and move to a position closer to the art. They are given a large sheet of paper to record all of the things that they notice or think. Each child is required to write one thought and respond to the thought of another classmate. This is helpful for sustaining conversations later on; the teacher can ask follow-up questions based on observations that students made.

Research

Students will be provided with curated links to use for research purposes. See the box below for links to sites appropriate for 6th graders to use for research. Their research will be added to the graphic organizer template below.

Links to Research Sites for Each Painting

Guernica

- <http://legomenon.com/guernica-meaning-analysis-of-painting-by-pablo-picasso.html>
- <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/early-abstraction/cubism/a/picasso-guernica>
- <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/early-abstraction/cubism/a/inventing-cubism>
- <http://study.com/academy/lesson/picassos-guernica-definition-symbolism-analysis.html>

The Problem We All Have

- <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-problem-we-all-live-with-rockwell-183005>
- <https://soapboxie.com/social-issues/The-Problem-We-All-Live-With---Norman-Rockwell-the-truth-about-his-famous-painting>
- <https://www.nrm.org/2012/08/new-perspectives-the-problem-we-all-live-with/>

Detroit Industrial

- <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/art-between-wars/latin-american-modernism1/a/rivera-detroit-industry-murals>
- <http://www.npr.org/2009/04/22/103337403/detroit-industry-the-murals-of-diego-rivera>
- <http://www.bluffton.edu/homepages/facstaff/sullivanm/michigan/detroit/riveramurals/intro.html>
- <http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/diego-rivera-s-detroit-industry>

Washington Crossing the Delaware

- <https://edsitement.neh.gov/emanuel-leutzes-symbolic-scene-washington-crossing-delaware>
- <http://www.purdue.edu/newsroom/purduetoday/didyouknow/2014/Q1/did-you-know-washington-crossing-the-delaware-painting.html>
- <https://smarthistory.org/leutze-washington-crossing-the-delaware/>
- <https://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/23/a-famous-painting-meets-its-more-factual-match/>

Popcorn Discussion

A popcorn discussion consists of using a list of questions that have been generated before a discussion to facilitate a conversation with students. In a popcorn discussion, the teacher puts out a question to the class. The first student who wants to respond raises his or her hand. Next, all other students can share their thinking in response to what has been said, agreeing or disagreeing, or asking follow-up questions of classmates. The teacher acts as a moderator and tracks the conversation for participation. This allows the teacher to watch and listen to student thoughts. It also creates a dynamic that encourages more natural conversation.

Art Graphic Organizer

Title of the Piece: _____

What do you think the title means?

Break the piece into four sections. Carefully describe what you see in each section.

Section 1 Section 2

Section 3 Section 4

Analyze the piece. What do you think it means? Talk about your observations.

Research the piece. What do others think it means?

Push back. Do you agree or disagree with what other people think?

Suggested Questions to Facilitate Conversation for Each Painting

Guernica

1. What do you notice about the colors that Picasso uses in the composition? Picasso entertained the idea of adding color to the project. He included a red teardrop sprouting from a crying woman's eye. How would that might have changed things?
2. Picasso uses Cubism in the painting. What do you notice about that style of painting in *Guernica*?
3. List all of the different figures and things that you can identify in the painting. What about you notice about each?
4. Do you think any of the figures or things that you see act as symbols? If so, what do you think they symbolize? When asked about symbols, Picasso said, "This bull is a bull and this horse is a horse," "If you give a meaning to certain things in my paintings it may be very true, but it is not my idea to give this meaning. What ideas and conclusions you have got I obtained too, but instinctively, unconsciously. I make the painting for the painting. I paint the objects for what they are." (54)
5. Do you think that knowing that the mural was going to be displayed at the world's fair influence his artistic decisions?

Show YouTube video about Guernica-See Appendix for link

6. Do you think the work of Picasso is effective to illustrate the event of Guernica? Do you think this works or would a more realistic way would have been better?
7. Is *Guernica* famous because it is a great painting, or is it widely considered a great painting simply because it is so famous? (55)

Detroit Industrial

1. What did you notice about the workers? Are they all the same throughout the composition?

Watch the YouTube video about the Assembly Line. See Appendix
2. Based on the short video, imagine you were one of the workers. How would you feel doing the same job over-and-over each day?
3. What are some symbols that you notice? What do you think they mean?
4. How is the mural organized? Does it tell a story? If so, what is the story? Is there more than one story?
5. What do you think about the sign that they hung near the mural? Do you think that sign would still be hung today? (It remains)
6. How do you think Rivera would feel knowing that many of the jobs that were once held by people are now done by machines?
7. What do you think the message of the mural is?

The Problem We All Live With

1. What colors does Rockwell use? What do you think about them?
2. The heads of the white guards are not in the picture. Why do you think Rockwell made that choice?
3. Rockwell included a heart with the letters 'MP + NR' (Rockwell and his wife's initials) in the painting. His granddaughter said it was to counterbalance the hate depicted in the scene." Do you think this was an appropriate choice to make?
4. Rockwell makes a strong diction choice in the painting. What is the connotation of it? Describe your thoughts.
5. Based on the video clip, what can you say about Ruby and her experiences? (See Appendix for links). How does it match up with what you see in the painting?
6. This painting was displayed in the White House by President Obama. What do you think about the decision to display it outside of the president's office for several months?
7. Do you think that Ruby is powerful or powerless in the painting?
8. What do you think the message or theme of the piece is? Is that message still relevant or important today?

George Washington Crossing the Delaware

1. What do you notice about George Washington? Why is this important?
Show YouTube video about George Washington on the night of the crossing-See Appendix for link
2. What did you learn from the video? How does it add to your understanding of the painting?
3. The painting changes some things from what actually happened the night of the crossing. For example, the crossing was at night under the guise of poor weather conditions. This differs from daylight that is included in the painting. Washington also didn't lead the charge, he and 40 others crossed the Delaware led by William Blackler, "a salty, savvy Massachusetts fisherman who most certainly would never have permitted Washington, rank be damned, to stand during so treacherous a crossing." Why do you think the artist makes these changes? (56)
4. In the painting, who is in the boat with Washington? Count and describe them. Why do you think they are included?
5. Are there any symbols included in the painting? If so, what do you think they represent?
6. A poet, Frank O'Hara, wrote the following lines of poetry about the painting:

"Now that our hero has come back to us/ in his white pants and we know his nose/ trembling like a flag under fire/we see the calm cold river is supporting/ our forces, the beautiful history." (57)

What do you think about these lines? Which is probably more accurate-the lines of poetry or the painting? Which do you think that Americans prefer to associate with Washington's leadership? Why

Assessment

Students will contribute to a classroom mural. I will explain the brief history of the *Wall of Respect* that existed in Chicago in the late 1960's and 70's before assigning the assessment. See the Appendix for a link to more expansive explanation of the history of the *Wall of Respect*.

Students will contribute to a classroom mural one individual that they believe belongs on a modern version of a *Wall of Respect*. Students are to create a piece of art (drawn or poetry) that highlights the person and a

written explanation why that person belongs on the *Wall of Respect*. Students may also work in pairs if they want. The explanation needs to have the following: an introduction of the person with biographical information, one paragraph explaining what that person did that was noteworthy (describe it in an engaging way), and finally one paragraph arguing why we should respect that person (explain what makes that person worthy of praise).

Wall of Respect



Wall of Respect, Chicago (58)

Appendix/Teacher Web Resources

Should these links no longer be active, I have included a brief introduction to each link that can act as a search term to find more information.

- http://larryriversfoundation.org/seminal_works_washington.html

Link to the art piece by Larry Rivers' *Washington Crossing the Delaware*

- <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/seeing-larry-rivers-washington-crossing-delaware-museum-modern-art>

Link to the poem: "On Seeing Larry Rivers' Washington Crossing the Delaware at the Museum of Modern Art" by Frank O'Hara

- <https://classconnection.s3.amazonaws.com/609/flashcards/4424609/png/untitled-142D4B5AD3A5300C1E5.png>

Link to the painting *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware* by Robert Colescott

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0A841Vtacs>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ecBORXfap9A>

Links to Ruby Bridges movie trailer and short nonfiction video

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNRrCcbdNbc>

Link to video about *Guernica*.

- <http://www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/wallofrespect/main.htm>

Link to a deeper explanation of the *Wall of Respect*

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WT3kEF4apr0>

Link to video about Washington Crossing the Delaware

- <https://www.bluffton.edu/homepages/facstaff/sullivanm/michigan/detroit/riveramurals/intro.html>

Link for more information and complete views of the *Detroit Industrial* mural

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=thQfzzMnU3U>

Link for video about the Ford Assembly Line.

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