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Creatively Communicating through Visual and Verbal Art- Poetry and Murals

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"There is no picture and no poem unless you yourself enter it and fill it out." - Jacob Bronowski

Introduction

Visual literacy is defined as the ability to interpret, negotiate, and make meaning from information that is commonly presented in a form of an image. It is based on the idea that pictures can be "read" and that meaning can be established through a process of reading. In a visual arts class, we often have students practice this concept by having them examine elements such as color, line, shape, form, depth, and detail to see what relations exist both among these components and between what is in the picture and their previous visual experiences. As the students analyze artwork, they can begin to comprehend what the artist is attempting to communicate through their overall composition. The same can be accomplished in text such as poetry. As a reader, we think about the purpose of the text and how certain techniques help to communicate a message to an audience. Artists and poets alike initiate their work with an intent to communicate an idea, theme, or subject. An artist does so by meticulously selecting specific colors, a medium, technique, perspective, & composition. Similarly, a poet chooses specific words, a main idea, tone, point of view, and form. Therefore, it can be confirmed that there are compelling similarities between visual and verbal art. Both poetry and art speak to our imaginations through the power of images. In other words, these art forms inspire one another.

That being said, we can utilize both art forms simultaneously in an educational environment in order to support students in developing both skills, especially when they commonly struggle in subjects such as language arts. This way, the students will strengthen their ability to analyze and interpret the messages conveyed in both visual and text format as well as the ability to create art and demonstrate writing proficiency with a clear message. In addition, through each artistic process, they will develop self-confidence and be opened to new experiences while learning to use what they already know to figure out what they don't. They are then prepared to explore other complex subject matters alone as well as with their peers.

Rationale

As an International Baccalaureate (IB) candidate school, Seward Academy is committed to developing inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. More specifically, we primarily focus on providing our upper grade students (6th , 7th , 8th) with a rigorous academic program (Middle Years Program) in literacy, mathematics, science, design, physical education, world language, and fine arts while in a safe and nurturing environment. In addition, we encourage students to become active, compassionate, and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right. This unit will support our IB commitment because I will essentially be guiding students in inspirational conversations while they come to the realization that their perspectives are valued because there is no wrong or right way of thinking; there is only a furthering of growth and development. I do believe that it is vital that the students learn from one another, respect each other, listen, and understand that there are multiple ways to see any given situation. I also hope to preserve students' curiosity, make them lifelong learners, and have them become contributing citizens to a diverse and changing world.

I have taken into serious consideration our neighborhood and school's demographic. Out of the 688 students currently attending Seward, 98% are Hispanic and 92% come from low-income families. Unfortunately, the neighborhood itself is not considered the safest in the area due to its high crime rate. In a CPS survey where students were asked if they felt safe in and around the school building as well as traveling to and from school, the school ranked "weak." Still, our school is rated as a "Level 1" (1+ being the highest rank a school can achieve) because we do provide several programs and resources to support our students by other means. Furthermore, I've recognized that 43% of the students in the school are limited in the English Language (predominantly Spanish speakers). This certainly plays a crucial role in creating this unit because reading and writing is where most of our students need the greatest support. We certainly do have students who are reading and writing at or above grade level. On the other hand, some students are reading and writing below grade level and have a limited vocabulary. Therefore, during the 10 weeks of the unit, I will be teaching a group of 8th grade students at a variety of levels, and will need to establish a creative approach in order to have successful poetry/art analysis and effective communication in their own work.

Content Objectives

My objective for this unit is to transform the way in which students think and learn through visual and verbal art. It is also my goal for students to appreciate how various art forms inspire one another. Ideally, I would like the students to immerse themselves in art and poetry so much that they begin to appreciate the value of these artistic forms in their own lives. It is imperative that they have the opportunity to have meaningful experiences with both the poetic language and aesthetic images in order to build their confidence as poets and artists.

From my personal experience as an educator, I have realized that any form of art can be difficult for students to interpret. This is because we often interact in literal terms since we want to make sure that we are understood, and when communication is incoming, we seek it in the same manner and try to extract its literal

meaning. Art doesn't always work that way. Artists and poets often show us a higher truth (their truth) that is expressed in a nonliteral, nonlinear way. Therefore, some students get discouraged and shy away from poetry. What I would like students to realize is that they have the ability to investigate both visual and verbal art through personal experiences and prior knowledge. The connection is certainly there and I will simply be a guide to help them discover it.

This unit will ask students to use their cognitive skills to connect visual arts to poetry and vice versa. The students will explore how biographical and social factors shape an artist's or poet's work. Through this unit, I would like to foster a more conscious approach to analyzing work by breaking thoughts into smaller, more digestible pieces. My pedagogy is based on investigation and break-downs, which enhances the analyzing and production of visual artwork. We will be taking a similar approach to enhance the process of reading and writing poetry. In discussing a poem, will we analyze its context, identify its purpose, focus and topic, and targeted audience. Subsequently, we will do the same with public art. That way, students can write poems confidently about murals in their community while using personal experiences as the initial spark. Ultimately, this will help lead students toward creating a public art piece that will be a form of communicating their collective ideas, motivated by the poems they have written.

In summary, by the end of this unit, 8th grade student will have engaged in meaningful conversations involving poetry and famous works of art that inspired the poets, they will have successfully written poetry about art inspired by their community (specifically murals), and lastly, they will have created a community mural that is strongly influenced by the poetry they have written about their neighborhood. In other words, they will have taken on the roles of both a poet and artist.

Why Poetry?

Poetry is a beautiful form of literature that can bring students together to discuss important ideas/themes while ultimately providing them with a strong literacy foundation. In addition, teaching students how to read and appreciate poetry sets them up well as literate individuals who understand the beauty and meaning of written language. Moreover, I find that the art of poetry is an effective and under-utilized tool for developing competent literacy, including reading comprehension skills for all levels. Therefore, this unit can be modified to be utilized at any grade level. In fact, if introduced to students in earlier stages such as Kindergarten, it would strengthen their literacy skills much more in the long term. Studies have shown that the concepts embedded in poetry, like rhyme, alliteration, personification, and imagery, are foundational to decoding, comprehension, and fluency- the backbones of good reading comprehension and visual literacy.

The process of reading poems, like coming to understand works of art, exercises the mind when they are read thoughtfully and multiple times. A poem is meant to be read more than once so that its audience can begin to uncover its deliberate word choices and its structure. I think poetry will help students appreciate complex meaning by needing to slow down in order to consider word choices. Moreover, poetry has elements in it that transcend times and culture. It can transport students to a distant geographic location or historic era, or to a specific emotion. Ideally, I would like students to understand that a poem is a bridge between humans because their minds as well as hearts can connect in ways that can strengthen both the writer and audience. Once students find that connection and feel comfortable with the concept of poetry as another form of art, they can move forward and explore poems about artwork as well as create their own poems and communal

art piece- the mural.

The Power of Ekphrastic Poems

Truthfully, before attending this seminar, I had no idea that there was a specific term for poems written about works of art. I knew that poetry has always been inspired by artists, and artists most certainly have been influenced by poets throughout history; however, it was not until recently that I discovered the term ekphrastic poetry and its power to introduce poetry to those students that might have been intimidated otherwise. My first discovery was how this would certainly appeal to the students' unique intelligences and diverse learning styles. I also recognized this as an opportunity to engage the students in a higher form of thinking through investigation, synthesis, and evaluation. More importantly, I realized that introducing ekphrastic poems to students will help them become more observant in their reading and writing and in their study of visual images. They will begin to envision what they are reading in a way that will help them incorporate visual details in their own writing.

For my 8th grade students, I have chosen to start this unit by sharing an ekphrastic poem titled "Not My Best Side" by U.A. Fanthorpe. The poem is based on a 1470 painting by Paolo Uccello titled *Saint George and the Dragon*. The reason I chose this poem is because it is fragmented into three segments (verse paragraphs) which provides insightful viewpoints from all three subjects painted in the artwork: a princess, a dragon, and St. George. This would be ideal for exploring the various perspectives represented in the poem. It can also increase student engagement because it is a lighthearted poem about a picture that can be easily construed.
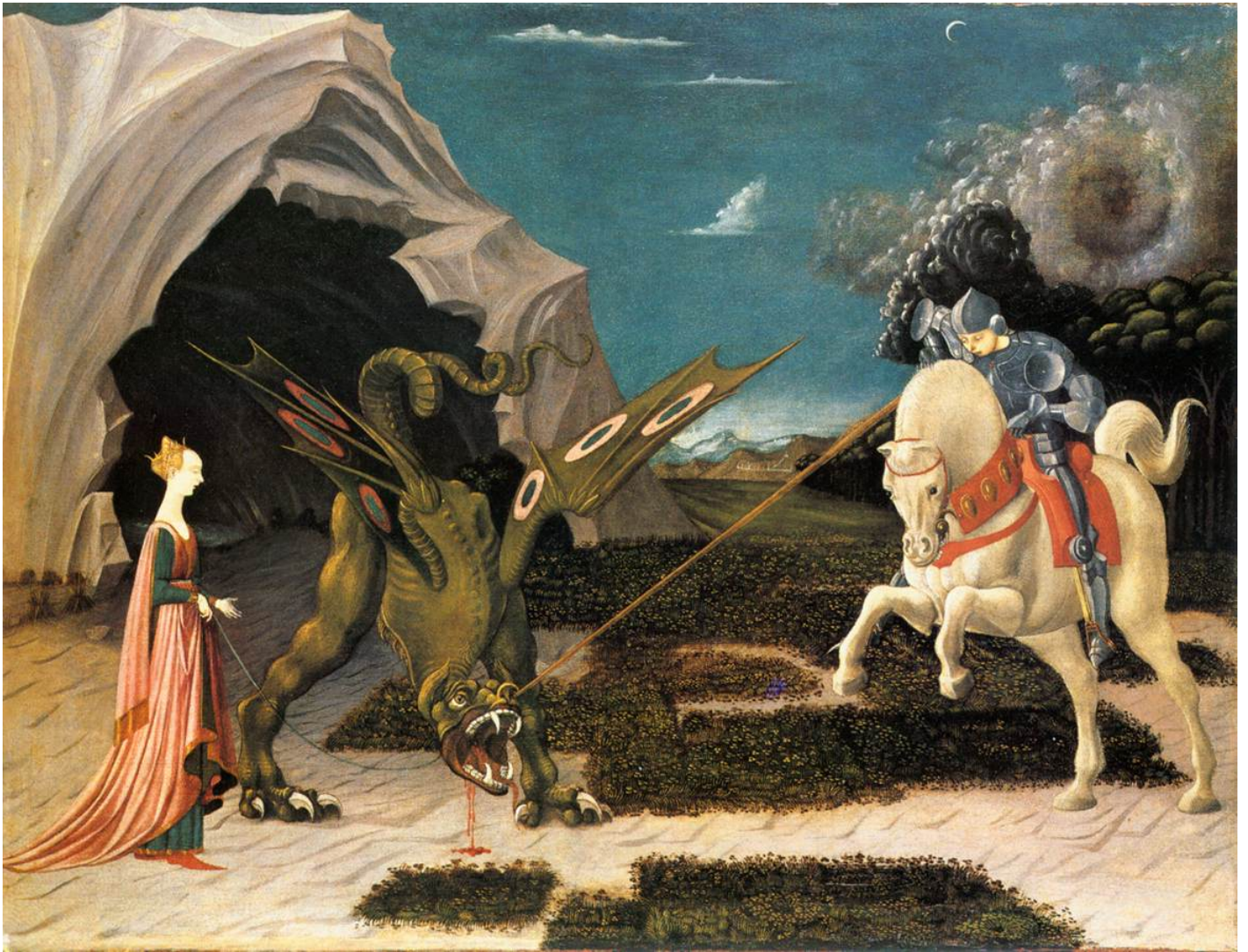
Uccello, Paolo (1456) *St. George and the Dragon* Oil on canvas, 57 x 73 cm, National Gallery, London

From a visual arts (and historical) standpoint, this story comes from a well known collection of saint's lives written in the 13th century titled "The Golden Legend". The painting shows St. George defeating a plague-transmitting dragon that has been frightening a town. It also shows the rescued princess bringing the dragon to heel with what appears to be her belt. At a further look, we can see that a storm is gathering in the sky. This storm seems to line up with the heroic St. George's lance. This formal pattern in the composition brings us to realize that a divine intervention has helped him to victory. The painter also seems to use the lance to emphasis the angle from which St. George attacks the dragon. This establishes a clear geometrical space which may suggest that Uccello was a formalist as much as a realist. This can be confirmed through his consistent use of linear perspective and his creation of decorative patterns in most of his paintings.

I am confident that my students would be able to easily read and interpret this painting alone if I simply showed it to them because of their prior knowledge of linear perspective, space, colors, patterns, value, etc.

From a verbal arts standpoint, there great deal to uncover. It appears that the three characters in the poem mutiny against their painter-Uccello. It also seems as though this poem makes the scenario relatable to people of today who will find these roles recognizable in their own social world. It suggests facetiously that society has not changed between the time the painting was created and the time the poem was

written—although undoubtedly Uccello took a rather different view of his characters than we do. This is partly because the enjambment throughout the poem makes it conversational in a way that's familiar to our ears.

In the first verse paragraph, the reader is introduced to the dragon in the painting. The voice of the dragon appears to be intelligently analytic, judging from the clever and knowing deployment of language that the poet has chosen for him. He is both bitter and witty in mocking the knight, the princess, and the painter by observing the absurdity of their behavior. Condescendingly, he jokes about the artist's obsession with triangles, and the ridiculous fact that he is missing two feet:

> The artist didn't give me a chance to
>
> Pose properly, and as you can see,
>
> Poor chap, he had this obsession with
>
> Triangles, so he left off two of my
>
> Feet.

Buying into the common stereotypes, the dragon also mocks St. George for not being "manly" enough, claiming that he is 'ostentatiously beardless' while he also mentions that the princess is so 'unattractive as to be inedible'. But the reader can see that his rhetorical question sarcastically poses these stereotypes to make the them recognize the constraining roles that social convention has placed them in:

> Why should my victim be so
>
> Unattractive as to be inedible,
>
> And why should she have me literally
>
> On a string?

The dragon continues by depicting himself as a celebrity, a renowned figure symbolizing evil in a way. Amusingly, the entire time, the stanza never loses its comic tone even though the dragon then talks about his death. The tone remains light-hearted, and we realize that in looking back on the painting the dragon has lived on in some way.

In the second verse paragraph, the reader gains the perspective of the princess or a possible modern day woman. The poet does not depict this princess as refined or ladylike; she is humorous in her lack of propriety. Some readers might not favor the princess because she appears to be vulgar, shallow, and insensitive towards the knight. However, it seems intentional to make the reader feel uncomfortable as they realize that they would otherwise be placing her in a specific gender role. We all know her because she speaks the voice of social media. It is clear that this princess is preoccupied with things of the body as she focuses on physical attributes in describing the dragon's features. For a moment, she does insightfully adopt a feminist perspective. A reader can become uncertain whether they should laugh at her for being this way, or if they should laugh because she has not lived up to their expectations:

I didn't fancy him much. I mean,

What was he like underneath that hardware?

He might have acne, blackheads or even

Bad breath for all I could tell, but the dragon—

Well, you could see all his equipment

In the third and final verse paragraph, the reader discovers St, George's (the knight's) point of view in the pictured scenario. He is a representative of the patriarchy. He cares very little for anyone other than himself. In the mechanized world of his mind, his horse becomes a machine rather than a conscious being, confirming that he is a man without empathy. His unreflective sense of make superiority arises from the idea that he alone can save the princess and return her to her original status as a woman on a pedestal without power:

My spear is custom-built,

And my prototype armour

Still on the secret list. You can't

Do better than me at the moment.

I'm qualified and equipped to the

Eyebrow. So why be difficult?

As the knight continues, he seems to make an accusation that women are ruining society because of the way they are. This is a common argument feminists face in today:

Don't you realize that, by being choosy,

You are endangering job prospects

In the spear- and horse- building industries?

Because of viewpoint, it appears that the poet made the knight out to be the only one happy playing his role. This is because he has the most power; society seems to favor men; the princess and the dragon are both reduced to abject roles. Still, it can be argued that it is merely his role that makes him powerful because if he were to lose his position as a knight, he would be nothing.

Overall, this is quite an entertaining poem that students can find relatable. In addition, it is a perfect introduction to ekphrastic poetry because it is so descriptive that students can almost certainly picture the painting in their minds before even seeing the artwork. Furthermore, through our discussion, I also hope that the students conclude that this is only the poet's interpretation of the painting; we can make interpretations of

our own.

Bruegel, Pieter (1558) *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* Oil on canvas, 73.5 x 112 cm, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.

As we move forward, I will use another ekphrastic poem titled "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" by the 20th-century American poet William Carlos Williams. It was written in response to *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* which was created by Pieter Bruegel. The reason I have selected this for the students is because of the descriptive visuals created in the poem.

From a historical standpoint, the painting was inspired by a Greek myth that relates a story about a father and son. Daedalus the father built artificial wings to allow his son, Icarus, to fly away from the location in which they had been imprisoned. In his excitement at being able to fly, Icarus flew closer and closer to the sun even though his father had warned him not to. As a result, the wax from his wings melted causing Icarus to fall to his death.

Visually, Pieter Bruegel captures the day that Icarus attempted to fly and plummeted into the ocean. In the painting, a viewer can clearly see that it is spring time. Judging from the overall composition, it appears as though this is the main theme. There are images of farming, herds of animals, and merchant vessels in the sea. As a closer glance, a viewer can see a tiny set of legs and a splash where Icarus hits the ocean. He clearly is not the main focus of the painting because none of the other human figures notice him. Bruegel seems more interested in depicting peasants accurately. For example, the shepherd tending to his animals draws a viewer's eyes away from Icarus. A viewer can even imagine that this placement of Icarus was a last-minute

addition to the painting. Moreover, the use of light and color found in the background seems to also illuminate the painting. It gives the scene a sense of warmth and life, not a tragic atmosphere for death.

The poet's view of the painting to some extent supports Bruegel's. Williams creates a vivid image of the surrounding landscape. He describes the landscape and surrounding community as "awake tingling". This evidently takes away from the seemingly tragic death of Icarus. Through the entire poem, William is painting a picture like Bruegel's that illuminates the natural world. This seems to make the tone almost joyous or merry, which is ironic considering the death that is about to take place. William's choice of words such as "unsignificantly" also makes the reader want to not pay attention to Icarus. He also writes "a splash quite unnoticed" which can be translated as a death going unnoticed as if it were minor. Moreover, if a reader observes the structure of the poem itself, they can discover that it emulates a fall—much like the fall of Icarus:

Unsignificantly

Off the coast

There was

A splash quite unnoticed

This was

Icarus drowning.

While discussing this poem in relation to the painting, I hope that the students discover symbolism just as in the first ekphrastic poem. Through our discourse, I anticipate that we will expand on the meaning behind the artist's and poet's choices and answer questions such as, what do you believe the artist and poet want you to know, feel, and understand? What in the poem and artwork causes you to think that? For instance, based on my observation that most of the vibrant colors are situated on the left side if the painting and the bystanders are looking in the opposite direction from the splash, I can assume that the artist wanted Icarus to be the last thing I noticed. This can represent the lack of awareness people may have of other's lives. In other words, the pain of one person may go unnoticed. This can provide a message to the audience that they may often live their lives while being completely oblivious to other people's suffering. However, in the process, I will be certain to consistently remind the students that there is no correct result when interpreting art. I want to essentially eliminate the notion that there is somehow a "right answer" when one is asked for an interpretation. I want ensure that every student feels confident in sharing their insight while understanding that there are responses more adequate or suitable than others based on prior knowledge. Students' responses should be influenced both by any prior knowledge they may have and by personal experience. Various viewpoints will arise and that is completely okay as long as it is followed by an explanation.

For small group activities, I have also considered utilizing the following ekphratic poems:

- Poem: Edward Hirsch, "Edward Hopper and the House by the Railroad" Artwork: Edward Hopper, *House by the Railroad* (c. 1925)

- Poem: Mary Leader, "Girl at Sewing Machine" Artwork: Edward Hopper, *Girl at Sewing Machine* (c. 1921)

- Poem: John Stone, "Three for the Mona Lisa" Artwork: Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa* (c. 1503)

- Poem: Derek Mahon, "Girls on the Bridge" Artwork: Edvard Munch, *Girls on the Jetty* (c. 1899)

Why the emphasis on Murals?

Murals have been around for as long as we can remember and serve as a valuable record of life from the prehistoric times to now. Throughout the years, murals have covered the interiors and exteriors of many public buildings such as churches, libraries, museums, palaces, temples, tombs, temples, and more. As time progressed, murals spread onto the streets and neighborhood walls, but their purpose remains the same—to paint a picture of society, created from stories, values, dreams, and change. It is also a way in which a group of people with a common goal can leave signs and messages about their existence in a time and place. Moreover, they are considered an important form of socially engaging art that plays a significant role in the relationship between art and community.

In this unit, I would like students to realize that murals mean more than just an aesthetically pleasing wall. Murals are a powerful form of communication that can instill a sense of community pride, especially for a school. Often times, the pride comes from the process of creating a mural, but it can also be tied to the mural's subject. This unit will offer the students a chance to celebrate their local history and culture while working collaboratively. By integrating murals with poetry, I hope the students will realize that they too have the ability to profoundly communicate a common message through both text and art. This will first be accomplished by taking a stroll down their Back of the Yards neighborhood as well as the Pilsen neighborhood to observe and discuss its murals. I have selected these two areas in particular because they are enriched with so much culture and feeling that the student can connect to. Most of the students see these murals on a daily basis but have not truly uncovered their meaning or their connection to their personal lives. Therefore, students will be asked to select a mural that highly interests them in order to play the role of a hired poet who creatively communicates their interpretation of the art through a poem. They will then transition their role from poet to muralist once they have shared their poems about their community. Needless to day, before we can put this into motion, an introduction to murals within the classroom environment is necessary.

Diego Rivera: "I paint what I see"

During the Mexican Muralism movement, murals received strong recognition as a powerful communication tool which was meant to promote opinions of people and to convey social as well as political messages promoting unity (Rochfort, 1987). Diego Rivera, a prominent Mexican painter and *revolutionary socialist,* helped establish this movement and made several inspiring murals that were often the subject of controversy although they always promoted solidarity, freedom, and hope. For this particular unit, I will focus on one specific mural that caused quite a stir during the 1930s.

In 1932, Diego Rivera was approached by John R. Todd, the official architect of Rockefeller Center, to undertake a mural commission for the building. Knowing Diego's communist politics very well, the Rockefeller family still did not demur from hiring him as the muralist. However, they had a definite theme in mind for the mural that wasn't incendiary. The original title was "Man if the Crossroads Looking with Hope and High Vision

to the Choosing of a New and Better future" (Rochfort, 1987). In short, this mural was to salvage some political integrity and have aesthetic and social as well as historical value. A sketch of the mural was viewed and approved by the Rockefeller family, and Diego began to paint it in March of 1933. It appeared that all was well until one of the previously unidentified figures in his murals started to look distinctively like the Russian leader Lenin. The sketch originally showed a worker wearing a cap, whose features seemed to represent no one in particular. John D. Rockefeller found this likeness extremely alarming and demanded that Diego remove Lenin's portrait. Diego refused to do so and replied "rather than mutilate the conception I should prefer the physical destruction of the composition in its entirety, but preserving, at least, its integrity." (Rochfort, 1987) In response, Rockefeller immediately terminated the work on the mural and had it destroyed. Still, Diego was paid the full commission for his work and he vowed to utilize the money to paint the mural again.

Rivera, Diego (1933) Man at the Crossroads Fresco, 160 x 43 cm, Rockefeller Plaza, NYC

From a visual arts standpoint, a viewer can see that Diego's composition represented many images of contemporary social and scientific culture, while also reflecting influences of communism. A working class man is painted in the center of the mural who is depicted as the controller of machinery. Right in front of him emerges a giant fist holding an orb which appears to hold atoms and cells that represent the acts of the chemical and biological generation. From this central figure, a viewer can also see four propeller-like shapes stretching to the corners of the composition. These depict arcs of light created by enormous lenses anchoring the left and right edges of its space. Inside of these extended ellipses are painted cosmological and biological forces such as the sun and additional cell-forms. These can be assumed to be discoveries made by the telescope and microscope. In addition, a viewer can see scenes of modern social life. There are women playing cards while smoking on one side while on the other side Lenin can be seen holding the hands of a group of multi-racial workers. There are also images of soldiers and war machinery above the women as well as a Russian May Day flag alongside Lenin. For Diego Rivera, this represented the conflict within the social vision: the dishonest wealthy men are watched by the unemployed while war is occurring and a socialist utopia is escorted in by Lenin. From this message, a viewer can possibly come to understand why Rockefeller found the mural controversial. Moreover, an angry Jupiter statue is depicted raising his hand holding a thunderbolt that had been severed by a lightening strike. On the opposite side of the mural sits a headless Cesar statue. For Rivera, these figures represent the replacement of misconceptions in achieving the scientific mastery of nature as well as the overthrow of authoritarian rule by liberated workers during that time.

It is quite evident that Diego Rivera had a considerable number of ideas to express in his mural and he truly wanted to make a powerful statement that would have been shared for years to come if it had not been destroyed. There are several focal points in this mural, and I do not expect 8th grade students to understand the message in its entirety. I will briefly explain the historical context behind the mural, but our main discussion will revolve around Diego's mural composition. For example, we will examine his color use, the objects and their positions, its size, light/shade, and so on in order to make our own interpretations and conclusions.

E. B. White, an American writer, was inspired by the fracas between Nelson Rockefeller and Diego Rivera, and wrote a light verse poem titled "I Paint What I See: A Ballad of Artistic Integrity." It is not an ekphrastic poem per se, but it would applicable to use because of its relevance to the mural. I interpret this as a lyrical poem since it appears to make a statement. The statement may not be true but White wrote it with the intention to make the reader believe that this scenario truly occurred. This poem seems to flow as if it were a conversation between Rockefeller and Diego in rhythmic form. Rockefeller is essentially asking Diego questions regarding his approach to painting the mural, similar to an interview. In response, Diego simply states *"I paint what I see." A reader can certainly find truth in this because most artists paint to express their thoughts and ideas. As the poem progresses, a tone of annoyance or frustration seems to arise in Rockefeller as his questions become more specific concerning the figures Diego is deciding to add to the mural. On the other hand, Diego's tone seems to remain the same, self-assured and bold:*

> I paint what I paint, I paint what I see,
>
> I paint what I think, said Rivera
>
> And the thing that is dearest in life to me
>
> In a bourgeois hall is Integrity

As a reader, one almost wants to side with Diego because he is holding on to his artistic integrity although it may not be what Rockfeller wants to hear. The poem concludes with Rockefeller complaining:

> "And though your art I dislike to hamper,
>
> "I owe a little to God and Gramper,
>
> "And after all,
>
> "It's my wall . . ."
>
> "We'll see if it is," said Rivera

Based on Diego's final response, it can be implied that this does not end well. With my students, I would like to initiate a discussion about the poem and how it pertains to the mural itself. What does this say about Diego as an artist? How does this help us understand murals? How can this help us establish ideas for our own mural?

The Mural Making Process

Undoubtedly creating a mural takes time, research, and skill. When designing a mural, students need to understand the important elements that it entails. Mural painting is not like easel painting**;** the composition will be very large and reflect the community it is placed in. Therefore, we will carefully take the following steps:

1. Generate a common theme discovered in their classmate's poems
2. Brainstorm Content and Imagery (identify same test utilized throughout)
3. Create a shape proportional to the wall
4. Create Sketches of Imagery
5. Arrange the Composition
6. Consider the Foreground, Background, and Middle ground
7. Draft the Composition
8. Finalize the Composition
9. Calculate the color needs
10. Mix and **l**abel all colors that will be used
11. Transfer the sketch onto the wall
12. Streamline the order of operations

Teaching Strategy

Dictionary Guides: Because I am teaching a diverse groups of students at various levels of reading comprehension, on a few occasions we will need to stop and review a few words that they might not understand. Therefore, I will select one or two assistants who are willing to look up words on behalf of the class. It is a responsibility for the collective, a post as significant as the transcriber in collaborative writing. This will help the students realize that the dictionary is an enormous ring of keys to new awareness and knowledge, and we should not feel reluctant to look up a word we are unsure of. Examples will be shared and once we have confirmed that we are comfortable with the definition, we can proceed with the lesson.

The Process of Analysis (Poetry): In order to dive deep into a poem about a work of art, I will utilize the five levels of analysis in our class discussions:

Examine- Reading the poem silently, reading it out loud to yourself as well as others, or listening to someone reading it in order to notice specific details and become immersed in it multiple times.

Experience-Think about the poem. Try to relate to what it says, whether it be with something you know, have experienced, or heard of. Continue to notice the details in the poem such as the diction, word choice, structure, literary devices, theme, and content.

Interpret- Make connections between prior knowledge, life experience, and what the poem is saying. Try to uncover what the poem conveys in your own words.

Reflect- Take into consideration the elements of the poem and the connections you have recognized. Ask what it is about the poem that you can imagine or relate to from your point of view.

Respond- React to what you have discovered in the poem and create an opinion about it. Share your opinion with someone else.

Visual Thinking (Artwork & Mural): The visual thinking strategy is a teacher-facilitated method where I introduce visual images and encourage discussions within the classroom about what we are seeing. Art can have so many meanings based on life experiences and when a teacher welcomes discussions about personal thoughts on art, it establishes grounds for engagement by contributing observations and ideas based on the student's personal experiences. Furthermore, to enhance the thinking process, I will utilize the 4W'S as they are attempting to read the artwork:

What do you see? (What do you observe?)

What does it remind you of? (Another image? A personal experience?)

What's the artist's purpose? (To analyze? Persuade? Express? Document? Entertain?)

So what? (Why does this matter? What is the significance?)

Learning Logs: Learning logs are used to help students keep track of learning during the class discussion and any in collaboration work. Therefore, after utilizing the two strategies shared above to interpret art and poetry, I will have students jot down the similarities (example below) they have discovered from every discussion in their sketchbooks. This will help students reflect on and refer to when they are seeking clarification and inspiration during assignments. Additional notes will also be encouraged.

Similarities between Visual & Verbal art

Title

Artist's Name	Poet's Name
Artist's brushstrokes & medium	Poet's word choice, genre, & style
Artist's lines	Poet's style & form
Artist's colors	Poet's tone
Artist's value	Poet's inferences & opinions
Artist's perspective	Poet's point of view, bias
Artist's focal point	Poet's point of view
Artist's back/middle/foreground	Poet's setting
Artist's subject of painting	Poet's main idea

Collaborative Learning: Collaborative learning is a significant strategy that I will utilize for most of this unit because it helps students to establish a strong team and work together to solve a given problem or reach a common goal. There are several benefits students get when working in a group setting such as: develop social skills, learn from peers, build trust, engage in learning, and gain confidence. This will truly be essential since their final assignment asks that they work together in a communal effort to complete a mural for their school.

Think-Pair-Share: Oftentimes, some students may be too shy or insecure to share their thoughts and ideas

with the entire class. Therefore, I utilize this collaborative learning technique. A student will first examine & think about a poem alone. Afterward, they will have the opportunity to share their insight with another classmate.

Jigsaw Method: The jigsaw strategy is said to improve social interactions in learning and support diversity. It involves separating an assignment into subtasks, where students in groups will investigate and explore their assigned piece of work which in this case is an ekphrastic poem. Subsequently, the group will essentially educate other groups about their assigned poem. Confidently, the students would then discuss ideas between groups before coming back together as a whole classroom and sharing their experience.

Classroom Activities

(Note: Prior to beginning this unit, we will devote a class session to reviewing poetry terms. A word bank will be provided and students will be required to safe-keep this in their sketchbooks so that they may refer to it when necessary)

Lesson 1: "I can examine and interpret Ekphrastic Poems" (finding the similarities between the poem and artwork)

Summary- In this lesson, students will be introduced to the concept of ekphrastic poems. The primary example I will be utilizing is "Not My Best Side" by U.A. Fanthorpe, inspired by Paolo Uccello's painting titled *Saint George and the Dragon*. Students will be asked to read the poem, and illustrate their understanding prior to seeing the image based on the text. By making a close analysis of the inner story of the poem and comparing it with the actual artwork that inspired it, students can consider the complex relationship between an artwork and its audience. They will also be able to look at other poems inspired by artworks (Ex: "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" by William Carlos Williams), and use these as the basis for cross-comparison work and models for writing their own poems in the next lesson.

Objective

- Make connections between prior knowledge and new information using the process of analysis
- Note relevant information using visual literacy
- Illustrate (Draw) in response to the poem example, demonstrating an awareness of purpose, audience, voice, and style.
- Synthesize information in order to present (in groups) their examination and interpretation of an ekphrastic poem

Instructions

Part 1

1. Display and pass copies of the poem (omitting the title & poet).
2. Have the students read the poem quietly to themselves.
3. Ask for a volunteer to read the poem aloud to the class.
4. Ask for initial responses to the poem, including personal opinions and any observations about style and

content.

5. Allow this discussion to unfold naturally for a few minutes. Allow time for interesting ideas to emerge.
6. Now introduce the class to the full title of the poem and explain that it is a poem written about a painting.
7. How does this new piece of information affect their interpretation of the poem? Are there clues that point towards this being a description of a painting? Why or why not?
8. Ask students to go through the poem again and find words and phrases that refer to artistic technique and the composition of paintings.
9. Having analyzed these more technical aspects of the painting, ask the students to think about the story being told by the painting. Even though they have not actually seen it yet, can they talk about what they see in their mind's eye, through the poet's description?
10. Give the students a few minutes (5 to 10 min) to sketch out a rough version of the painting as they imagine it to be, using the text of the poem to guide them.
11. Ask for volunteers to share their sketches with the entire class. Ask why they drew that composition.
12. By this point, your students will be eager to see the actual painting. Display the image and pass hardcopies for a better analysis.
13. How does their previous mental image (or rough sketch, if they did one) of the picture compare with the real thing? Invite comments and opinions and consider asking some of these additional questions:
    ○ Is there anything of interest in the painting that did not appear in the poem?
    ○ Was there anything in the poem that you don't see in the picture, or which is not as you imagined it to be?
    ○ Has the poet done a good job of conveying the 'story' as well as the painter did?
    ○ How has the poet's use of the present tense helped to bring the scene in the picture to life?
    ○ Can a story be told as effectively in an image as it can in words? How?

Part 2

1. Break the students into groups of 4 to 5.
2. Share additional examples of ekphrastic poems and have them select one of them along with its associated artwork (be sure that poems are not repeated).
3. Students will have 10 to 15 mins to read the poem in their groups and discuss their responses to it, including personal opinions and any observations about style and content. In addition, students will analyze the technical aspects of the artwork and explain its connection to the poem.
4. Reunite as a class and have each group present their ekphrastic poems and artworks. In the presentation, students should discuss the similarities between the poem and the artwork. In addition, they should explain their interpretation and offer reflections on the process.

Lesson 2: "I can write a poem inspired by a mural in my community"

Summary- In this lesson, students will become familiar with Diego's Mural titled "Man at the Crossroads." Afterward, we discuss its brief history as well as our observation of the overall composition. In addition, we will read and review the poem titled "I Paint What I See: A Ballad of Artistic Integrity" by E. B. White. We will establish a discussion about the poem and how it pertains to the mural itself while answering questions such as, what does this say about Diego as an artist? How does this help us understand murals? How can this help us establish ideas for our own mural? This will set the foundation for our field trip in the two surrounding neighborhoods- Back of the Yards and Pilsen. During our walk, we will explore and discuss 10 of the most well-known murals in their community. Taking notes and photographs will be highly encouraged for the primary

assignment in this lesson, a poem. In preparation for this assignment, students will be asked to complete a worksheet considering a mural that highly intrigued them. A class session will be devoted to research and investigation on their chosen mural in order to help the students create their poem. In the process, I will serve as their guide and provide feedback when necessary. A peer critique will also be essential to increase the confidence of students in their writing ability. At the end of this lesson, students will be required to present their poems to the rest of the class.

Objective

- Understand and appreciate murals as powerful communicative art forms
- Understand and appreciate poetry as a literary art form
- Develop a deeper appreciation of cultural diversity by introducing them to murals from a Latino standpoint
- Develop their own creativity and enhance their writing skills
- Recognize iconic themes in the murals found within their neighborhood

Student Assignments

Neighborhood Walk: A Poetry-Writing Assignment

Now that we have toured the Back of the Yards and Pilsen Neighborhoods, please choose ONE mural that you would like to write about and spend the next 30–40 minutes focusing on that mural.

1. Record the following information about the mural you have chosen:

Title (if applicable) _____

Date _____

Artist _____

Medium _____

2. Write a sentence or two about why you chose this particular mural, how it makes you feel, and/or what it makes you think about.

3. Next, write a detailed description of the mural. Be specific enough so that someone else could clearly imagine the public art in his or her mind after reading your description. Be sure to include words that indicate size, shape, color, light/shade, objects, figures, positions, and so on.

4. Finally, write a poem in response to your chosen mural. If you need inspiration, look back at your answers above. Also, remember there are many different ways to go about this. Here are some of the approaches that were used in the poems from our class activity:

- Write about the scene or subject being depicted in the mural.
- Relate the mural to something else it makes you think of.
- Write about the experience of looking at the mural.
- Describe how the mural is organized or presented.
- Speculate about how or why the artist created this work.

- Imagine a story behind what you see presented in the mural.
- Imagine what was happening while the artist was creating this work.
- Speak to the artist or the subject(s) of the mural, using your own voice.
- Write in the voice of the artist.
- Write in the voice of a person or object depicted in the mural.

Praise, Question, Suggest: A Peer Critique Assignment

Now that you have completed the first draft of your poem, partner up with a peer from your table and offer critique as well as feedback for revision of work. Read your poems to each other and provide the following:

Praise: What about the poem is memorable? If after a first reading you immediately had to tell another person what caught your attention, what would you say? Be very specific about what you liked by using an example.

Question: Next, ask your classmate about anything that confused you or seemed inconsistent while you were hearing the poem.

Suggestion: As a listener, you may see potential that is invisible to your classmate, so you naturally want to share your insight. Make positive suggestions that may enhance their writing.

*Consider the critique provided prior to your presentation.

Lesson 3: "We can create a mural motivated our poetry" (painting in the context of communication with originality and imagery)

Summary- In this lesson, students will work together in a communal effort to complete a mural. Motivated by what they have learned thus far in the unit and inspired by their poetry, we will create a work of art that can be shared with the entire community. During the process, students will be required to complete a weekly journal entry in their sketchbooks based on their experiences. It will serve as a reflection piece as well as feedback to make any improvements as we continue to work on the mural together. After the mural has been successfully completed, students will launch an event where they can ceremoniously reveal their mural as well as share their poems. It would be rewarding to see that their efforts are recognized and welcomed by their school and community.

Objective

- Recognize that their experiences and perceptions have value
- Work collaboratively on a group mural, strategizing about theme, medium, and individual student contribution to the finished work.
- Explore the elements of art (texture, color, line and form) as they choose compositional layout for their mural.
- Gain experience with sequential imagery to convey a common message.
- Develop visual images and symbols using a collaborative process.
- Present their finished mural along with the poetry that influenced its composition to the school and community, discussing decisions regarding the design and implementation.

Directions to complete a mural

1. Generate a common theme- After having listened to their classmate's poem inspired by their

community, begin to notate commonalities that will essentially shape their theme. Students will brainstorm and record possible theme ideas for the group's piece by making a list of words commonly heard in the poetry session.

2. Brainstorm Content and Imagery- You and the students will utilize the common text to generate imagery we would like to include. You should try to get each classmate to contribute something even though the group may not incorporate everything into the final mural.

3. Create a shape proportional to the wall- The classroom will generate a shape on our board that is proportional to the mural wall. This will serve as the space for arranging and ultimately designing our composition together as a team.

4. Create Sketches of Imagery- Using paper and pencil, you and the students will select images from their brain storm list. Students will draw visual representations of the images on paper (one image per paper). These will be utilized as visual references to manipulate as they negotiate the mural composition. They should be taped around the composition.

5. Arrange the Composition- As a team, you will choose one image at a time and discuss its placement in the composition. Would it be better on the right, left, high, low? Continue experimenting with various placements. Once a basic arrangement is agreed upon, you will begin to advance the design.

6. Consider the Foreground, Background, and Middle ground- It is very important to analyze how to establish the depth in the composition. Illustrating the concept of foreground, middle ground, and background can be helpful to make the design more aesthetically pleasing. Therefore, you and the students should definitely study this concept in order to create an illusion of depth.

7. Draft the Composition- Lead a conversation while students are drawing a new version of the composition directly on the board. Use your hands to help your classroom determine the scale of the images in order to put it into perspective. Make sure to utilize overlapping when necessary.

8. Finalize the Composition- Once you and the students have completed a rough draft, have the students draw out and color the newly decided-upon composition. Once the students complete this task, critique and discuss the final color scheme and imagery design.

9. Calculate the color needs- Making colors ahead of time is very significant in the mural making process. It saves time and helps avoid mistakes by looking at the colored design and calculating how much paint is needed. Therefore, convert the classroom sketch from inches into square feet. For instance, if the background requires 10sq ft of paint to cover, double the amount since you need two coats for full coverage. Keep in mind that some colors are more translucent than others and additional coats may be required.

10. Mix and Label all colors that will be used- Mixing colors in advance, labeling them in an organized manner and storing them with lids appropriately will certainly accelerate the momentum of your mural.

11. Transfer the sketch onto the wall- Creating a grid system would be ideal into order to transfer the sketch onto the actual wall. It is also helpful to make copies of the sketch (with the grid) to tape along the mural wall so that students have lots of visual access to the design and the grid they are trying to transfer.

12. Streamline the order of operations- Utilize two fundamental practices that will save time and effort. First, work from the back to front. In other words, have students work on the background first and work their way to the foreground. Second, when students are painting an image, advise that they begin by painting the darkest values of the image, and work to the lightest value last.

Unit Rubric Example

Beginning (1-2)	Developing (3-4)	Accomplished (5-6)	Exemplary (7-8)	Score

Contributions to group discussions	Participation was minimal.	After looking at ekphrastic poems & the paintings, observations were made about the work as a whole.	Participation included details about artwork & poems from several viewpoints.	Comments about the art form use genre specific vocabulary (subject/title; lines/shades of color/mood). Asked related questions.
Journal Entries/Word Bank	Few words transcribed from class discussions.	Word list generated from discussions recorded in journal.	New vocabulary used in context in journal entries.	Journal entries record new vocabulary discussed in class with comments or questions added. Comparative words used; mention of similarities in creative processes.
Ekphrastic Poem	Poem incomplete and minimal effort was given.	The poem does not seem to flow. The poem lines and stanza are away from the topic. Poem may not see relevant to mural.	The poem somewhat goes together but needs more cohesiveness. The poem uses 1 or 2 poetic elements that reflects the mural, but may sometimes distract the reader.	The poem goes perfectly together. There is unity between lines and stanza, which definitely connect to the murals topic. The poem also used uses unique metaphors and similes to describe a situation, object, or people related to the mural.
Contribution to final mural	Participation was minimal. or none.	The student did not to contribute examples of poetry, text, and images to express the theme. The student did not try to help to make the mural visually compelling or well executed.	The student contributed limited examples of poetry, text, and images to express the themes. The student helped to make the mural interesting and well executed.	The student contributed outstanding examples that combined elements of poetry, text, and images to express the themes. The student consistently helped to make the mural visually compelling and powerful.

Resources

Annotated Bibliography for Teachers

Art & Poetry

Bruegel, Pieter. *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*.

Williams, William Carlos. "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" (20th-century)

Fanthorpe, U.A. "Not My Best Side."

Rivera, Diego. *Man at the Crossroads. (1933)*

Uccello, Paolo. *Saint George and the Dragon*. (1470).

White, E. B. "I Paint What I See." (1933)

Books

Barnett, Alan W. (1984). *Community Murals: The **People's** Art.* Philadelphia: Art Alliance Press.

Hugo, R. (2010). *The Triggering Town: Lectures and essays on poetry and writing.* New York: W.W. Norton.

Lansana, Q. A. (2005). *They Shall Run: Harriet Tubman Poems.* Illinois: Third World Press.

Popoff, G. A., & Lansana, Q. A. (2010). *Our difficult sunlight: A guide to poetry, literacy, & social justice in classroom & community*. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative.

Rivera, Diego. (1998) *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective.* New York: Founders Society, Detroit Institute of Arts, in Association with W.W. Norton.

Websites

Christenson, M. "12 Key Steps to Leading Amazing Mural Projects." The Art of Ed. 2016. Accessed May 2018. https://www.theartofed.com/2016/06/21/12-key-steps-leading-amazing-mural-projects/

"Gallery of Pilsen Murals." WTTW Chicago Public Media - Television and Interactive. 2017. Accessed August 2018. https://interactive.wttw.com/myneighborhood/pilsen/murals

"The Poet Speaks of Art." Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Professor. Accessed August 2018. http://english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/titlepage.html

Additional Online Resources

Eichler, Karen. "Creative Communication Frames: Discovering Similarities between Writing and Art." MarcoPolo Education Foundation; National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL; International Reading Association, Newark, DE. (2003). Pg 1-9.

Moorman, Honor. "Backing into Ekphrasis: Reading and Writing Poetry about Visual Art." English Journal 96, no. 1 (2006): 46. doi:10.2307/30046662.

Smith, Ashley. "Poems Inspired by Works of Art." The Poetry Society. (2014). http://poetryclass.poetrysociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Foyle-Lesson-Plan-Poems-inspired-by-Art-Ashley-Smith-1.pdf

Students

Websites

"Gallery of Pilsen Murals." WTTW Chicago Public Media - Television and Interactive. 2017. Accessed August 2018. https://interactive.wttw.com/myneighborhood/pilsen/murals

"The Poet Speaks of Art." Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Professor. Accessed August 2018. http://english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/titlepage.html

Additional Materials

- Copies of ekphrastic poems and artworks
- Sketchbooks/Process Journals
- Pencils & Erasers
- Projector (presentations)
- Chromebooks (research & investigation)
- Tape
- Mural Primer & Paint
- Paint Brushes & Rollers
- Paint Trays & Palettes
- Newspaper & Plastic Drop Cloth
- Aprons
- Towels
- Cups/buckets of water
- Stool & Stepladder

Appendix

Following the IB Middle Years Program guidelines, the key concept we will focus on is **Communication** because it is defined as "the exchange or transfer of signals, facts, ideas and symbols. It also requires a sender, a message and an intended receiver." Communication involves the activity of conveying information or meaning and that is essentially what the students will be putting into practice in this unit. The related concepts (promoting a deeper learning of the key concept) will be: **Visual Representation, Interpretation,** and **Audience.** The global context in which the students learn is **Personal and Cultural Expression.** This is because the students will explore the ways in which we discover and express ideas, feelings, nature, culture, beliefs and values; the ways in which we reflect on, extend and enjoy our creativity; our appreciation of the aesthetic in both poetry and visual arts.

In addition to IB's guidelines, the following standards will be addressed in this unit:

National Core Arts Standards

- *VA:Cr1.2.8a:* Collaboratively shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present day life using a contemporary practice of art and design.
- *VA:Pr6.1.8a:* Analyze why and how an exhibition or collection may influence ideas, beliefs, and experiences.
- *VA:Re8.1.8a:* Interpret art by analyzing how the interaction of subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, use of media, artmaking approaches, and relevant contextual information contributes to understanding messages or ideas and mood conveyed.
- *VA:Cn10.1.8a:* Make art collaboratively to reflect on and reinforce positive aspects of group identity.

Common Core State Standards

- *ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7*: Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or

maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

- *ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7:* Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- *ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6:* Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- *ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1*: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.