

Teacher Lab

Lesson Plan

Title of Lesson: Art and Propaganda

Topic or Theme of Unit that Lesson is Part of: The American Revolution and/or Westward Expansion

Subject Areas: Social Studies/Language Arts

Schedule: 5 class periods

Lesson Summary:

Through this unit, students will analyze a legendary event from American history. Students will compare the narrative telling with that shown in a famous work of art about the event. Students will also examine how this Revolutionary War image was used in the mid-19th century to promote national unity and Manifest Destiny. Ideally, this artwork will be studied during a unit on the American Revolution, and revisited when covering 19th -century Westward Expansion.

American Artwork(s) on Which Lesson is Based:

(Primary)



Emanuel Leutze (1816–1868)
Washington Crossing the Delaware (1851)
Oil on canvas, 149 x 255 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of John S. Kennedy, 1897 (97.34)

(Secondary)



Emanuel Leutze (1816–1868)
Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way (mural study)
Oil on canvas, 33 1/4 x 43 3/8 in.
Smithsonian American Art Museum
SAAM.1931.6.1

Big or Main Ideas Students Will Understand:

- *Washington Crossing the Delaware* depicts a momentous event that has had great symbolic importance in American history.
- Artists resurrect historical events to comment about current issues. We retell the past to help us understand the present. In his image, Leutze deliberately manipulated historical fact in order to emphasize the larger values that Americans have read into the history of the nation's founding, such as heroism, sacrifice, and unity.
- Inaccuracies in great works of art may be done intentionally to communicate a message.
- In mid-19th century America, western expansion was seen as vital to solving social, economic, and political problems.
- Applying an historical context to a work of art results in a fuller understanding of the artist's intentions and the meanings of a work of art.

National Standards (National Center for History in the Schools):

- Historical Comprehension Standard 2A: Differentiate between historical facts and interpretations.
- Historical Analysis and Interpretation Standard 3B: Consider multiple perspectives

Illinois Learning Standards:

Social Science

14 F. 3a: Analyze historical influences on the development of political ideas and practices as enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Illinois Constitution.

14 F. 3b: Describe how United States political ideas and traditions were instituted in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

16 A. 3b: Make inferences about historical events and eras using historical maps and other historical sources.

16 A. 3c: Identify the differences between historical fact and interpretation.

16 B. 3a: Describe how historians use models for organizing historical interpretation (e.g., biographies, political events, issues and conflicts).

Language Arts

I.C. 1.C. 3a: Use information to form, explain and support questions and predictions.

I.C.1. C. 2a: Use information to form and refine questions and predictions

Chicago Reading Initiative Correlation:

X word knowledge ___comprehension X writing X fluency

Student Objectives: Students will...

- Compare and contrast an historic event depicted in art with facts as presented in narrative accounts
- Interpret the artist's intentions in his depiction of the crossing of the Delaware in this painting
- Evaluate the causes and effects of 19th-century westward expansion in the U.S.
- Appreciate the significance of a celebrated American masterpiece

Vocabulary Students Will Learn:

anachronism, cliché, Dusseldorf, *E Pluribus Unum*, Hessians, historical context, history painting, inaccuracy, "Manifest Destiny", mercenaries, metaphor, monarch(y), scale, spoof/parody, symbolism.

Assessments:

Students produce and explain their own artwork that communicates an idea.

Students write to explain what they have learned.

Information about the Artwork that is Important to Students' Understanding:

Relevant Information about the Time Period

- In the mid-19th century, the American Revolution was a touchstone of political ideals for both Americans and Germans.
- In the mid-19th century, longstanding Euro-American convictions of their Christian duty and God-given right to expand their territory and influence were codified in the doctrine of "Manifest Destiny," the belief that by conquering the west, European-Americans would bring to culmination the progress of civilization.
- The California Gold Rush (1848) hastened the drive to reach the Pacific Coast.
- Victory over Mexico in the 1846–1848 war seemed to further confirm American right of conquest.
- Growing sectionalism, which would lead to the outbreak of civil war a decade after Leutze completed the painting, was a source of great concern by the late 1840s. When the Civil War began, the painting was used to raise money for the union cause.
- Southern secessionists in the 1850s recalled the radical ideology of 1776 to justify their plan to liberate themselves from what they saw as Yankee repression.
- The losers of the Battle of Trenton, Hessian mercenaries, symbolized the contemporary German city-state monarchs' abuses of military power, while Washington's motley crew was intended to remind Germans that the 13 separate colonies had successfully united to form a single nation.
- Dusseldorf was a destination for artists studying figure art.

Source: *Washington's Crossing* by David Hackett Fischer, New York Times 2004

Relevant Information about the Artist

- Emanuel Leutze (1816–1868)
- Of German heritage, but grew up in the U.S. He received artistic training and started his career as an artist in Dusseldorf, Germany, before settling in U.S.
- He believed in the liberal democratic principles and progress toward democracy from the Middle Ages to the present. He was a supporter of contemporary liberal movements in Europe, and wanted his fellow Europeans to be inspired by the success of the American Revolution as the concerted effort of disparate states.
- Leutze was a strong abolitionist; the inclusion of an African-American in the boat is noteworthy.

Source: [The Life and Works of Emanuel Leutze](#), Raymond L. Stehle

Relevant Information about the Artwork

- Painting this work in Germany, Leutze used the Rhine River as a model for the Delaware River, and recruited American tourists and students to serve as models and assistants.
- Contrary to historical fact, Leutze shows the movement of the Washington's boat from East to West—as a map is normally positioned and read (notice the North Star), thus suggesting the inevitability of Euro-American westward expansion.
- There are many other inaccuracies and anachronisms: the Betsy Ross flag wouldn't be adopted for another year after the crossing of the Delaware; cannons were last to be transported, and probably by ferry, not in these smaller (Durham) boats; the time of day is wrong: the crossing was done at night; it is doubtful that such large chunks of ice would accumulate in a flowing river; there was rain, sleet, or snow coming down at the time of the crossing; Washington likely wouldn't have stood up in the boat through such a treacherous crossing; Lt. James Monroe, future president, stands next to Washington and holds the flag, but there is no documentation that he was in this boat.
- The 13 varied men in Washington's boat signify the unity of the 13 colonies in a fight against a common enemy.
- One passenger is a New England seaman of African descent. This passenger is said to be named Prince Whipple. There is no documentation that puts him at the crossing, much less in General Washington's boat. The inclusion of this figure reflects Leutze's Abolitionist sympathies.
- There is an androgynous figure in a loose red shirt pulling an oar, possibly acknowledging the role of women (albeit hidden) in the struggle for independence.
- Other passengers are recognizable as western riflemen, farmers, a member of a Delaware regiment, a prosperous Baltimore merchant—representing different regions.
- Washington holds a brass telescope and wears a heavy saber, symbolic of a strong statesman, and—like a great leader—rises above everything but the flag. Although Washington was only 44 at this time, Leutze depicts him as in Gilbert Stuart's famous portrait of the much older ex-president.
- The painting is a monumental 12 x 20 feet, intended by Leutze to be purchased by the government and publicly displayed. The figures are life-sized.
- This artwork was painted to take on tour—a money-making venture. The artist also wanted to make it into an engraving to disseminate it more widely.
- A hit when first shown to the American public, this artwork has become a national icon as well as the subject of parody (an example of which is a painting by the same name created by Larry Rivers in 1953).

Source: *Framing America* by Frances Pohl, Thames and Hudson, 2008

Resources:

Texts, Web sites, and Primary or Secondary Sources for Student Use

- <http://www.ushistory.org/washingtoncrossing/history/whatswrong.htm>
- http://blog.oup.com/2006/02/washingtons_cro/
- *The History of US* by Joy Hakim v. Colonial America
- Detailed map of Trenton, NJ
<http://maps.google.com/maps?hl=en&tab=wl>
- Image of the painting hanging in the gallery to appreciate the scale of the painting: http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3233/2983400749_44276b6f63.jpg
- Timeline of Revolutionary War key events

Student Activities:

Day	Emphasis of this Lesson Idea/Outcome	Activities
1	Compare and contrast an historic event depicted in art with facts as presented in narrative accounts	Review text section on the Battle of Trenton. Present the painting <i>Washington Crossing the Delaware</i> as a classic image in American art. Students will think about the painting and share wonderment and questions about the event. Compare and contrast the image with facts from the text. Students engage in writing activity, listing inferences about the event depicted in the painting. Students share lists, then record new observations reported by their classmates. Finally, students work in small groups to generate questions sorted into three categories: "About the artwork," "About the Artist," and "Context of the Painting." Explain that in the next session the class will learn more background information.
2	Interpret the artist's intentions in his depiction of the crossing of the Delaware in this painting	Begin session by inviting students to share their wonderments or questions from previous session. Class will further their understanding of why this painting was created, under what circumstances, and who was the artist. Provide students working in groups with sentence strips containing information listed above. Their task is to organize the facts into three categories: "About the artwork," "About the Artist," and "Context of the Painting." NOTE: Omit the information regarding the inaccuracies for a special session later.

3	Interpret the artist's intentions in his depiction of the crossing of the Delaware in this painting	<p>Begin the session by demonstrating how some students categorized the information from previous session.</p> <p>Ask "What was surprising?" Next, ask "What would you say if I told you that this painting has many errors?" This lesson will identify the painting's inaccuracies and some of the artist's motivations in creating this artwork.</p> <p>Through group discussion, students will be able to identify some of the more obvious examples such as, "It would be near impossible to be standing up on such a journey." Elicit "Why would the artist portray this inaccurately?" (It enhances Washington's heroism and leadership.) Proceed this way organizing the student responses into a "T Chart." One side has the title "Leutze's Inaccuracy;" on the other side, "Motivation for the "Error." It will be necessary in this lesson to define "anachronism."</p>
4	Evaluate the causes and effects of 19 th century westward expansion in the U.S.	<p>Summarize the inaccuracies we identified in session #3. Motivate students with: "Was the artist just careless or was there a specific point to the inconsistencies?"</p> <p>Review a few responses from previous session. Explain that in today's session we're going to examine why the boats are moving westward. Students will use maps and the textbook to examine "Manifest Destiny." They will compare a map of the United States at the time of the Revolution with a map during Leutze's era; and identify how the country expanded westward. They will read to analyze the pros and the cons of Manifest Destiny, and will conduct a mock debate hearing different points of view, including that of a Native American, a fur trader, an industrialist, a missionary, etc.. Students will write a mock newspaper editorial expressing their views.</p>
5	Appreciate the significance of a celebrated American masterpiece.	<p>In our last session, students will examine the central metaphor in this painting: Unity as represented by the Continental Army soldiers in Washington's boat. Remind students how each passenger symbolizes a colony. Discuss how the boat symbolizes "Unity over Diversity."</p> <p>The final activity requires students to expand on the central themes in the painting. They will create their own way of depicting a selected theme via visual art. It might be a drawing or a three dimensional work. Possible topics include: "family, the environment, unity, diversity." The student/artist will include a written explanation of how the artwork symbolically illustrates this important idea.</p>

		Students discuss their artwork and appreciate the ways in which they have communicated the theme. Then they discuss the effectiveness with which Leutze communicated through his artwork.
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Assessment:

Student explanation of how their artwork symbolically illustrates an idea.

Student summary of what they learned through the lesson.