

Activity: Explore Mexican Murals and Muralists

PASS Objectives Addressed

Grade 4- The Arts

Standard 1: Language of Visual Art - The student will identify visual art terms (e.g., architecture, contour, medium, mixed media, perspective, symbol).

1. Know how works of art are made with respect to the materials, media, techniques, and sources of ideas.
2. Describe and use the principles of design: rhythm, balance, contrast, movement, variety, center of interest (emphasis), and repetition in works of art.
3. Describe and use the elements of art: line, color, form, shape, texture, value (light and dark), and space in works of art.
4. Discuss observations of visual and expressive features seen in the environment (such as colors, textures, shapes).

Standard 2: Visual Art History and Culture - The student will recognize the development of visual art from an historical and cultural perspective.

1. Describe and place a variety of specific significant art objects by artist, style and historical and cultural context.
2. Identify themes and purposes of works of art and artifacts in history and culture.
3. Demonstrate a basic knowledge of several fields of art such as painting, sculpture, drawing, computer graphics, printmaking, architecture, and fiber arts.
4. Identify how visual art is used in today's world including the popular media of advertising, television, and film.

High School- The Arts

Standard 1: Language of Visual Art - The student will identify visual art terms (e.g., content, engraving, foreshortening, mosaic, perspective)

3. Describe exhibitions of original works of art seen in the school or community.
4. Differentiate between art criticism and art reviews, recognizing that criticism is positive as well as negative in its evaluation of a work of art.

Standard 2: Visual Art History and Culture - The student will recognize the development of visual art from an historical and cultural perspective.

5. PROFICIENT: Identify major regional, national, and international collections of art.

Standard 4: Visual Art Appreciation - The student will appreciate visual art as a vehicle of human expression.

2. Demonstrate respect for their work and the work of others.

Part 1: Vocabulary

Fresco- a mural painting technique of painting on a moist, plaster surface with pigments dissolved in water

Mural- any piece of artwork painted directly on a wall, ceiling or other large permanent surface

Muralist- an artist who paints murals

Muralism- an artistic movement identified chiefly with the Mexican painters José Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Siqueiros and exemplified by their grand-scale, narrative murals on humanitarian, social, and political themes

Patron- a customer or client who pays for the effort or product of an artist

Public Art- works of art in any media that has been planned and executed with the specific intention of being sited or staged in the physical public domain, usually outside and accessible to all

Part 2: Muralists

Carlos Tello is a native of Mexico. He studied graphic communication in Mexico City and became a noted painter, potter, and muralist. In 1992, Tello relocated to Oklahoma City. He has painted several murals in Oklahoma City, including the Capitol's newest addition, Beyond the Centennial.

José Orozco was a Mexican muralist who painted in the style of realism. Orozco was known for being a politically committed artist. He promoted the political causes of peasants and workers. He is known for his bold murals which depicted human suffering. Between 1922 and 1948, Orozco painted murals in Mexico City, Orizaba, Claremont, California, New York City, Hanover, New Hampshire, Guadalajara, Jalisco, and Jiquilpan, Michoacán.

Diego Rivera was a prominent Mexican painter and muralist who often used the fresco technique. His murals often depicted the historical perspective of the Mexican people. Between 1922 and 1953, Rivera painted murals among others in Mexico City, Chapping, Cuernavaca, San Francisco, Detroit, and New York City.

David Siqueiros was a Mexican muralist who also utilized the fresco technique. He believed art should be public, educational, and ideological. He painted mostly murals and other portraits of the Mexican Revolution.

Part 3: Explore

The following activities may be used as oral class discussion or individual written work.

- Using the internet, do some research on the above muralists. Explore their artwork and list the titles of three murals by each of the artists including Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros.
- The Mexican muralists used their art to educate the public. They addressed the problems of poor people who did not have the power to make their voices heard. If you were designing a mural today, what problem or issue would you choose to illustrate? Why? What are some other non-violent ways you can communicate to bring social issues to the public's attention?
- Because of their controversial subject matter, many of the murals by the above artists have angered people. One of the murals Siqueiros painted in Los Angeles, American Tropical (1932), made people so upset that it was painted over so it could no longer be seen.
- Imagine that someone wanted to whitewash Beyond the Centennial by Carlos Tello because they found it offensive or didn't like it. What argument could you make to support removing it? What argument could you make to convince them it deserves to be seen? Use historical facts to support your opinion.
- Muralists and other public artists are often commissioned, or asked, to paint specific works for a person or group who pays them for their effort, called patron or patrons. Sometimes the patron may want some control over the subject matter of the art. Sometimes they may allow the artist to do anything they want. For instance, in the early 1930s Siqueiros was asked by Hollywood director Dudley Murphy to paint a mural. Murphy did not ask for control over the subject matter, in fact he invited Siqueiros to be as controversial as possible.
- Such arrangements may not always be so pleasant. For example, in 1933 Nelson Rockefeller commissioned Diego Rivera to paint a mural for the new Rockefeller Center in New York City. Rockefeller was not prepared for the political message Rivera included such as the imagery of the Russian communist Vladimir Lenin. Rockefeller was so displeased that he locked Rivera out of the building and eventually destroyed the mural.
- Do you think the person who commissioned and paid for a work of art has the right to destroy it? Why or why not? Since most murals are works of public art and viewable by all, does the public have the right to destroy the work if they don't like it?
- Murals are a form of storytelling using images rather than words. Beyond the Centennial depicts the story of Oklahoma. Using your own words, construct a story from the images of Tello's mural. You may use your imagination and include characters, plot, sequence of events, and climax.
- Today, many large cities including Philadelphia, New York, and Los Angeles employ contemporary muralists for public art. Through internet or library research, find a modern-day muralist who interests you. Write a few paragraphs about the artist and one of their murals that interests you.