

Protesting through Art

A Critical Approach

Description: Students will be critiquing, analyzing, and comparing different works of art from different eras. A discussion on how these works can or can't be considered a form of protest will take place, guided by factual information from the teacher.

Project Rational: Students will develop and use common approaches to critiquing work, as well as evaluating their own judgments and values on such art work and it's relation to society. Student will discuss historical events as well as current events, respecting and acknowledging other students perspectives on similar subjects.

Objectives:

- Students will familiarize themselves with the artists Leon Golub and Fernando Botero, and familiarize themselves specifically with Picasso's *Guernica*.
- Students will develop skills for critiquing an artwork, focusing specifically on understanding the artists intentions, understanding the aesthetic value, and/or understanding any personal significance an artwork may relate to.
- Students will develop comparative skills between two or more works of art and be able to discuss similarities and differences between such works of art.
- Students will discuss provocative subjects, remaining able to disagree respectfully.
- Students will evaluate their own positions on things, and be able to support their opinion on a subject related to a work of art while respecting the opinions of others.

NYS Standards:

Standard II: Students will be knowledgeable about the materials used in discussed paintings. Students will consider physical characteristics of the artworks when discussing and evaluating artworks. Students will be knowledgeable about and be free to make use of resources available for further education of both artists and specific artworks discussed.

Standard III: Students will respond critically to a variety of artists, concerning artworks of a similar genre or philosophy. The artworks will be addressing a specific event in history. Students will discuss possible relationships between these events and the viewer that these paintings could be communicating.

Standard IV: Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that possibly shaped the creation of these specific paintings, and the possible cultural and public reaction when these paintings were first presented. Students will discuss similarities and differences between these paintings and how an older painting may compare to events in society today.

Materials:

Visuals (Picasso's *Guernica*, selections of Leon Golub's *Interrogation/Mercenary* series, and selections of Fernando Botero's *Abu Ghraib* series, Francisco Goya's *Third of May, 1808*, and/or Eugene Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, etc.)

Sketchbooks/notebooks
Writing utensil
Critical analysis worksheet
Artwork reproduction worksheet

Motivation:

Has any student participated in a protest of any sort?
Do any students have friends or family that has fought or is fighting in a war?
Do you think artwork can play a role in protesting?
Do you think art should play a role in such situations?
Are we familiar with the photos of the abuses that have taken place at the Abu Ghraib prison recently? How do we feel about those photographs?

Procedure:

- Present to the students a selection of artwork that can be used to start a conversation about artwork as a form of protest. Carefully critique each artwork, giving factual information about a specific artwork to guide classroom discussion as necessary (i.e. Title, artist, physical characteristics of artwork, history of artwork and/or the imagery presented in that artwork). What do the students see in the artwork? What do they think might be happening? Who are some of the characters presenting in the artwork, and how could they be important?
- Guide classroom discussion/critique onto how an artwork may be a form of protest. What or whom did the artist choose to present in the painting? Why do you think the artist chose this specific event, person, or perspective on an event? What exactly do you think the artist could be protesting? War in general? Interrogations or the containment of prisoners? The dehumanization during war time? A specific country or a countries foreign policy? The media? Could the artist be interested in presenting a figure as a martyr?
- Begin to compare artworks of similar themes to each other. What do they have in common? What makes them different? Can an artwork made in response to one specific historical event be relevant to another historical event? How so? Which painting might be more effective or successful as a form of protest? Why?
- Probe students for personal reactions to specific works. Do any students know of anyway who fought in any war? Does that affect how they view a specific work of art or artwork of this theme in general? Does any student know of or participated themselves in a protest against war? How might this affect how they view work of this nature?
- Have students break up into groups of 3-4. Give handout with images of selected artworks for small group critiques. The teacher can be selective as to which works they choose based on grade level and ability level of students. Picasso's *Guernica*, Goya's *Third of May, 1808*, and Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* may be more suitable for younger students. Older, more advanced students may be able to handle more mature subject matter, like that presented in Golub's *Mercenary and Interrogation* series as well as Botero's most recent Abu Ghraib series.

- In small groups, students will discuss further the paintings presented to them. They will use the classroom discussion/critique as a model for the small group discussions, as well as the Critical Inquiry worksheet to help ignite discussion. The teacher should make it known that the students are encouraged to disagree and discuss those disagreements with each other. Students will also discuss which artwork they believe is most successful and/or least successful and why.
- The students can write answers either directly on the worksheet or in their notebooks/sketchbooks. Towards the end of class, the students will present to the classroom the results of their small group discussion. What are the ultimate feelings about the presented artworks? How do these feelings differ within the small groups? Which piece is considered most or least successful? Why or why not?
- The students are to take what was written during classroom and small group discussion and write a 2-3 page comparative critique about the given artworks for homework. The paper should concisely describe the artworks compared, what elements of those artworks that definitively makes them a protest work of art, and whether the student thinks the artist was successful or not, supporting their statement. The length of paper can be shortened to 1-2 pages for younger students or students of lesser ability. For early education students, the teacher can skip the homework assignment altogether.

Assessment: Teachers should use classroom participation, small group participation, and students' abilities to express ideas and concepts as well as accept and respect peer's opinions and feelings, and written paper for student assessment.

Group Art Criticism

What elements of Picasso's *Guernica* might lead the viewer to interpret it as a work against war? Are there any images to make it obvious this is a painting about war?

Consider the physical qualities of *Guernica*. The painting is in black and white. The dimensions are 17' x 27'. How do you think these elements affect the interpretation of the work?

In Leon Golub's *Interrogation*, what do you think the artist is trying to communicate to the viewer, considering the 4 standing men in relation to the seated prisoner? Pay special attention to the expressions on the faces, where their hands are located.

How would your interpretation of Fernando Botero's *Abu Ghraib* painting differ if it wasn't titled *Abu Ghraib*?

Think back to some of the other Abu Ghraib paintings, do you think the artist is making a statement about the Global War on Terror? On the treatment of prisoners detained by the US? On the media's desensitizing of war related images on the public?

Choose any two of the paintings and compare how they are similar and how they are different. Is one more successful than the other as a protest against war? How?