

WHITNEY

VIDA AMERICANA: MEXICAN MURALISTS REMAKE AMERICAN ART, 1925-1945 TEACHER GUIDE



February 17–May 17, 2020

WELCOME TO THE WHITNEY!

Dear Teachers,

We are delighted to welcome you to *Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925–1945*. This exhibition features approximately 200 works by Mexican and American artists, including a number of reproductions of important mural projects in the United States and Mexico. Together, these works explore how American artists were inspired and influenced by the work of the Mexican muralists and demonstrate the tremendous impact Mexican artists had on the development of art in the United States.

This teacher guide provides a framework for preparing you and your students for a visit to the exhibition and offers suggestions for follow-up classroom reflection and lessons. The discussions and activities introduce some of the exhibition's key themes and concepts.

We look forward to welcoming you and your students at the Museum.

Enjoy your visit!

The School and Educator Programs team

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Cover image: José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949), *Zapatistas*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 45 × 55 in. (114.3 × 139.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York; given anonymously, 1937. © 2020 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SOMAAP, Mexico City. Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, New York

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

VIDA AMERICANA: MEXICAN MURALISTS REMAKE AMERICAN ART, 1925–1945

The cultural renaissance that emerged at the end of the Mexican Revolution in 1920 dramatically changed art not just in Mexico but also in the United States. At its center were monumental public murals commissioned by the new government of President Álvaro Obregón to unify a country devastated by a decade-long civil war and educate its citizens about Mexican history and the social ideals and achievements of its populist revolution. The murals established a new relationship between art and the public by portraying subjects relevant to people's lives in an accessible style that synthesized the traditions of Mexico's many Indigenous peoples with aspects of European art. Enthralled by enthusiastic press reports, U.S. artists flocked to Mexico to see the murals and work with the muralists. When commissions declined after the inauguration of a new Mexican president in 1924, the leading muralists—José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros— came to the United States for extended periods to exhibit their art and create easel paintings, lithographs, and large-scale murals.

By juxtaposing the work of Mexican artists with that of their U.S. counterparts, *Vida Americana* reorients art history, revealing the muralists' seismic influence on the style, subject matter, and ideology of art in the United States between 1925 and 1945. The muralists provided a model for a new visual language that would reflect contemporary America at a time when U.S. artists were searching for an alternative to European modernism. Further, their conviction that art could be used to forge national identity and fight for social and political change inspired U.S. artists to address the nation's past and present, including its most urgent crises of unemployment, labor disputes, and racialized violence. Many of these problems persist today, and this exhibition also provides a historical context for considering them within our current moment, alongside issues as varied as the politics of representation, income inequality, nationalism, and immigration. Nearly a century after the initial impact of Mexican art on the United States, *Vida Americana* reminds us of the beauty and power that can emerge from the vibrant cultural exchange between these two countries.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION (CONTINUED)

Here are some examples of themes in the exhibition:

Romantic Nationalism and the Mexican Revolution

In an effort to unify Mexico after ten years of civil war, the country's new government sought to construct a shared understanding of Mexican identity and national history. Central to this was the celebration of rural Mexico's landscape, customs, and people—a sharp repudiation of the veneration of European culture that had existed among Mexico's ruling class before the revolution. Mexican artists began to portray the country's Indigenous and largely agrarian population as symbols of national pride and to depict Emilio Zapata, who led the people's heroic fight for land reform, as the defining hero of post-revolutionary Mexico. From a contemporary perspective, the idealized portraits of Mexico's Indigenous peoples created by both Mexican artists and those visiting from abroad may be seen as having reduced their subjects to stereotypes that reinforce their marginalized status within a social system that privileged European heritage. At the time, however, painters, photographers, and filmmakers embraced a romanticized vision of rural Mexico as the embodiment of a simpler, more spiritually authentic way of living in contrast to the alienation and isolation of modern urban and industrial life.

The Mexican Muralists

The work of José Clemente Orozco had a tremendous impact on American artists such as Jacob Lawrence, Jackson Pollock, and Charles White. Orozco was the first of the leading Mexican muralists to come to the United States, arriving in New York in December 1927. Orozco inspired artists across the country, who channeled his visceral brushwork and uncompromising portrayal of struggle and trauma into their own depictions of upheaval and strife, both personal and collective.

In 1932, David Alfaro Siqueiros came to Los Angeles, where his encounters with industrial technology and Hollywood studios were formative in his artistic development, leading him to adopt the tools of industry—spray guns, blowtorches, airbrushes, and photo projections—and to establish a collectivist approach to art making. Artists who assisted Siqueiros, including Philip Guston, Reuben Kadish, and Fletcher Martin, were deeply influenced by his aesthetic, particularly his union of the rhythms of Baroque art with the monumental forms of Olmec and Aztec sculpture. Siqueiros returned to the United States in 1934 and 1936, when he established the Experimental Workshop in New York. The Workshop was a laboratory for modern aesthetic techniques, keeping with his conviction that revolutionary art needed to be made with revolutionary materials and methods. The Workshop had a powerful effect on many artists, particularly Jackson Pollock, whose participation introduced him to the possibilities of controlled accidents long before his adoption of his famous “drip technique.”

Diego Rivera visited the United States in 1930 as the most acclaimed artist to have worked on the Mexican government's public mural program. For American artists who were seeking to assure the nation of its self-worth as it grappled with the devastating fallout caused by the Great Depression, Rivera's art was an inspiring model. They adopted Rivera's subject matter and his decorative, descriptive style, crowded imagery, multiple vanishing points, and montage aesthetic in the thousands of murals they created in public buildings across the country.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION (CONTINUED)

Epic Histories

Guided by the Mexican muralists' creation of unifying national myths rooted in the struggles and triumphs of ordinary citizens, artists in the United States remodeled elements of national history and everyday life into epics of strength and endurance in an effort to help the country revitalize itself. African American painters such as Aaron Douglas, Charles White, and Hale Woodruff found inspiration in the muralists' celebration of the Mexican people's fight for emancipation from the tyranny of autocratic rule. In constructing redemptive narratives of social justice out of their own history of oppression, resistance, and liberation, these artists transformed that history into a new collective identity, one that foregrounded the contributions of African Americans to national life.

Art as Political Activism

The economic and social turmoil that was unleashed by the U.S. stock market crash in 1929 caused many Americans to question a capitalist system that no longer seemed compatible with the country's democratic ideals. Artists in larger numbers than ever before resolved to use their art to effect change. In seeking to mobilize collective energies against racial and class oppression and to fight for the rights of the worker, they turned for inspiration to the Mexican muralists, whose art was steeped in such leftist social and political content. Taking their cue from these role models, artists in the United States embraced the belief that art had a social role. By depicting episodes of violence against workers and people of color, they hoped to provoke public outrage that would ultimately lead to a more just society. Among the most frequent subjects were police brutality against unionized labor, injustice against political radicals, and racial terror in the form of lynching.

More information about the exhibition:

<https://whitney.org/exhibitions/vida-americana>

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES

Before visiting the Whitney, we recommend that you and your students explore and discuss some of the ideas and themes in the exhibition. We have included some selected images from the exhibition, along with relevant information that you may want to use before or after your Museum visit. You can print out the images or project them in your classroom.

Pre-visit Objectives:

- Introduce students to the artists and works in the exhibition.
- Examine themes and topics students may encounter on their Museum visit.

1. What Is A Mural?

A mural is an artwork that is part of an architectural space—indoors or outdoors. Murals can be painted or applied directly on a wall, ceiling, or other architectural feature. They are often created for public spaces or buildings such as schools, hospitals, libraries, churches, or community centers.

- Explore your students' ideas about murals and write them on a "brainstorm wall." What ideas come to mind when students think of the word mural? Ask them where they might have seen a mural in their neighborhood or school. If you have a mural at or near your school, have your students view and discuss it. Examine the subject or theme that the mural addresses, its shape, its composition, and its palette. Is the mural on a wall or a building? Consider how the mural incorporates the architecture where it is located. Notice whether the mural is comprised of a few colors or many. Does it include words? People? Shapes? Patterns? Discuss the scale of the mural and the imagery in it—what appears larger or smaller, and why the creators might have made that decision. Is the subject of the mural historical or current? Does the subject or theme relate to the surrounding community? In what ways? Think about who might see this mural and what it might mean to its audience.
- Ask your students why an artist might choose to create a mural in a public space.
- Many twentieth-century US artists were inspired by the murals of the Mexican artists. How do the murals they've seen inspire your students?

2. Artist as Observer: Poetic Portraits

The exhibition includes portraits by Mexican artists Frida Kahlo and María Izquierdo. Kahlo's self-portrait depicts the artist wearing a traditional Mexican blouse with four of her pet parrots, while Izquierdo's portrait is of three nieces.

- Ask your students to view and discuss Izquierdo's and Kahlo's portraits on pages 9 and 10 respectively. Explore the colors, textures, patterns, and details in each painting. Notice what the subjects are wearing and how they are posing. What symbols can students find in each of these paintings? What might these symbols communicate about the people in the portraits?

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

- b. Share some of the info about the paintings with your students. Compare the portraits. What similarities and differences do students see?
 - c. Divide the class into two groups—one group for each painting. Have each student in the group write three adjectives, three nouns, and three verbs on Post-Its—one word per Post-It and display them on one or two walls in your classroom. For younger students, choose one painting, ask ten or more students to think of words (adjectives, nouns, verbs) and say them out loud. As they say the words, write them on Post-Its—one word per Post-It—and display the Post-Its on a wall. Discuss the words that students chose for each portrait. What did they come up with?
 - d. Ask each group to arrange their words into a “poem mural” about the portrait they worked on. With younger students, create the poem together as a class.
- 3. Artist as Storyteller: Rhythm and Motion**
- a. Ask your students to view and discuss José Clemente Orozco’s *Zapatistas* on page 12 and Jacob Lawrence’s Panel 3 from *The Migration Series*, *From every Southern town migrants left by the hundreds to travel north*. on page 11. What rhythms and patterns do students notice?
Ask younger students to use their finger in the air to trace the pattern of hats in Orozco’s painting and birds in Lawrence’s painting. Share information about each painting with your students. What can they see that helps to tell the story in each of these works?
 - b. A tableau vivant is a group of models or figures who pose to represent a scene from a story or from history. Ask students to create a tableau of each painting. Ask some students to be the actors while others can be the directors. Have the directors help the actors recreate the pose and the rhythm of each painting. Take a photograph of each tableau. Have students discuss how it felt to recreate the scene. What did they think the characters in the paintings might have felt, based on their poses?
- 4. Artist as Critic: Mural Ideas**
- a. Ask your students to look closely and discuss Diego Rivera’s *Man, Controller of the Universe* on page 13 and Thelma Johnson Streat’s *The Negro in Professional Life—Mural Study Featuring Women in the Workplace* on page 15. Provide information about these works to your students. Ask students to identify the following subjects in these murals: industry, agriculture, scientific progress, labor, wealth, suffering, struggle, protest. Have students look for these subjects when they visit the Museum.
 - b. Ask students to discuss mural themes or subjects that they think would be effective in their school or community. What message would they want to communicate? Divide students into small groups. Have each group identify an issue that they consider important to their community and create a list of items they would like to include in their mural, such as people, nature, objects, symbols, and actions. Have each group use their list for a post-visit mural project.

AARON DOUGLAS

INTO BONDAGE, 1936

ASPIRATION, 1936



Aaron Douglas (1899–1979), *Into Bondage*, 1936. Oil on canvas, 60 3/8 × 60 1/2 in. (153.4 × 153.7 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Corcoran Collection, museum purchase and partial gift from Thurlow Evans Tibbs, Jr., The Evans-Tibbs Collection. © 2020 Heirs of Aaron Douglas / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Aaron Douglas (1899–1979), *Aspiration*, 1936. Oil on canvas, 60 × 60 in. (152.4 × 152.4 cm). Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; museum purchase, the estate of Thurlow E. Tibbs Jr., the Museum Society Auxiliary, American Art Trust Fund, Unrestricted Art Trust Fund, partial gift of Dr. Ernest A. Bates, Sharon Bell, Jo-Ann Beverly, Barbara Carleton, Dr. and Mrs. Arthur H. Coleman, Dr. and Mrs. Coyness Ennix, Jr., Nicole Y. Ennix, Mr. and Mrs. Gary Francois, Dennis L. Franklin, Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell C. Gillette, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Goodyear, Zuretti L. Goosby, Marion E. Greene, Mrs. Vivian S. W. Hambrick, Laurie Gibbs Harris, Arlene Hollis, Louis A. and Letha Jeanpierre, Daniel and Jackie Johnson, Jr., Stephen L. Johnson, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Lathan, Lewis & Ribbs Mortuary Garden Chapel, Mr. and Mrs. Gary Love, Glenn R. Nance, Mr. and Mrs. Harry S. Parker III, Mr. and Mrs. Carr T. Preston, Fannie Preston, Pamela R. Ransom, Dr. and Mrs. Benjamin F. Reed, San Francisco Black Chamber of Commerce, San Francisco Chapter of Links, Inc., San Francisco Chapter of the N.A.A.C.P., Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, Dr. Ella Mae Simmons, Mr. Calvin R. Swinson, Joseph B. Williams, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred S. Wilsey, and the people of the Bay Area. © 2020 Heirs of Aaron Douglas / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Aaron Douglas was inspired by the Mexican muralists to present history in epic form. *Into Bondage* and *Aspiration* are the two surviving mural panels of four that Douglas created in 1936 for the Hall of Negro Life at the Texas Centennial Exposition in Dallas, the first World’s Fair in the United States to celebrate the achievements and accomplishments of African Americans. The series depicts the history of people of African descent from the moment of enslavement to an idealized vision of the future. One of the figures at the center of *Into Bondage* looks up at a star in the sky, as if, on the way to the slave ship, this figure is already recognizing that the North Star would be an important symbol of freedom. The three main figures in *Aspiration* seem to represent the promise of education, of scientific advancement, of professionalization for African Americans who had been denied so many opportunities through the legacies of enslavement and Jim Crow.

MARÍA IZQUIERDO

MY NIECES, 1940



María Izquierdo (1902–1955), *My Nieces*, 1940. Oil on composition board, 55 1/16 × 39 5/16 in. (139.8 × 99.8 cm). Museo Nacional de Arte, INBAL, Mexico City; constitutive collection, 1982 © 2020 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SOMAAP, Mexico City. Reproduction authorized by El Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, 2020

María Izquierdo studied traditional painting at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes in Mexico City, but she soon became interested in a more radical modern art that she saw in works by Diego Rivera and Rufino Tamayo. Izquierdo often painted images that held personal meaning and were rooted in Mexican traditions. In this portrait, the three female figures occupy a compressed space against a shallow background of lush vegetation. Izquierdo was an outspoken proponent of women's equal treatment in working life, though at the same time she believed women should have strong obligations to their families. This duality is expressed through the traditionally-clothed yet confident stance of the figures in this painting.

FRIDA KAHLO

ME AND MY PARROTS, 1941



Frida Kahlo (1907–1954), *Me and My Parrots*, 1941. Oil on canvas, 32 5/16 × 24 3/4 in. (82 × 62.8 cm). Private collection. © 2020 Banco de México-Rivera-Kahlo/ARS

As with others who supported the Mexican Revolution, Frida Kahlo celebrated her country's Indigenous culture as the bedrock of national identity. In the many self-portraits she executed during her career, she identified herself with this aspect of Mexico by depicting herself wearing traditional folk attire like the white blouse here, similar to those worn by Zapotec near the Oaxacan city of Tehuantepec. She also often surrounded herself with the flora and fauna of southern Mexico, such as the parrots perched atop her torso. Parrots, which she kept as pets, also symbolized sorcery, which she would have identified with—she called herself "la gran ocultadora," the great concealer.

JACOB LAWRENCE

PANEL 3 FROM THE MIGRATION SERIES, 1940–41



Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000), Panel 3 from *The Migration Series*, *From every Southern town migrants left by the hundreds to travel north.*, 1940–41. Casein tempera on hardboard, 12 × 18 in. (30.5 × 45.7 cm). The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC; acquired 1942. © 2020 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

In 1939, Jacob Lawrence began research at the Schomburg Collection in Harlem for a major artwork on the history of the migration of African Americans moving from the South to the North. His efforts culminated in the *Migration Series*, a group of sixty paintings—ten of which are on view in the exhibition—that depict the Great Migration and the oppression and racialized violence experienced by African Americans in the North as well as the South. This painting, the third in the series, shows a group of people traveling with their hats, bags, and boxes. Lawrence was introduced to the work of the Mexican muralists through his mentor Charles Alston. Lawrence credited José Clemente Orozco in particular with inspiring his ambition and his use of bold colors, narrative, and architectonic forms.

JOSÉ CLEMENTE OROZCO

ZAPATISTAS, 1931



José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949), *Zapatistas*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 45 × 55 in. (114.3 × 139.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York; given anonymously, 1937. © 2020 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SOMAAP, Mexico City. Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, New York

José Clemente Orozco depicted the sort of scene he might have witnessed during the Mexican Revolution, a bloody conflict that lasted from 1910 to 1920. One of the main goals of the revolution was to achieve land reform, ending the oppression of an immense rural population by a few wealthy landowners. In this painting, a group of *campesinos*—male and female farmers from southern Mexico—march across the canvas in a rhythmic composition. Orozco used a somber palette of limited colors to create the mood of this scene. The men’s sombreros identify them as *Zapatistas*, followers of Emiliano Zapata (1879–1919). Zapata was an agrarian leader and revolutionary hero who was assassinated near the end of the revolution.

DIEGO RIVERA

MAN, CONTROLLER OF THE UNIVERSE, 1934



Diego Rivera (1886–1957), *Man, Controller of the Universe*, 1934. Fresco, 15 ft. 9 in. × 37 ft. 6 in. (4.8 × 11.4 m). Palacio de Bellas Artes, INBAL, Mexico City. © 2020 Banco de México-Rivera-Kahlo/ARS. Reproduction authorized by El Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, 2020

By 1932, Diego Rivera was one of the most widely-known and popular Mexican artists to the American public. That year, the Rockefeller Corporation commissioned him to paint a fresco on the ground floor of its newest New York development, Rockefeller Center. Rivera's assignment—to portray "man at the crossroads, uncertain but hopeful for a better future"—was carried out by the artist and six assistants. As Rivera began painting, however, he changed his composition. The left side depicts a capitalist society and on the right is communist one. Controversy over the mural's content arose after Rivera added a portrait of Russian politician, Vladimir Lenin, which Nelson Rockefeller asked Rivera to remove from the mural. When the painter refused, he was dismissed from the project and the mural was covered over in 1933. Ten months later, the Rockefeller Corporation ordered it destroyed. In retaliation, Rivera painted a modified version of the mural, (reproduced in this exhibition), entitled *Man, Controller of the Universe*, in the newly renovated Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City, where it is still visible today.

DAVID ALFARO SIQUEIROS OUR PRESENT IMAGE, 1947



David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974), *Our Present Image*, 1947. Pyroxylin on fiberglass, 87 3/8 × 68 11/16 in. (222 × 174.5 cm). Museo de Arte Moderno, INBAL, Mexico City. © 2020 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SOMAAP, Mexico City. Reproduction authorized by El Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, 2020

In this painting, David Alfaro Siqueiros replaced the face of a man with an oval stone to represent, not one specific race or nationality, but all of humanity. Siqueiros also employed multiple viewpoints that cause viewers to experience the figure from different angles. For Siqueiros, the figure's outstretched hands symbolized the heroic strength and power of the worker. The people, as he wrote in another context, march from "a distant past of misery and oppression . . . toward industrialization, emancipation, and progress."

THELMA JOHNSON STREAT

THE NEGRO IN PROFESSIONAL LIFE—MURAL STUDY FEATURING WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE, 1944



Thelma Johnson Streat (1912–1959), *The Negro in Professional Life—Mural Study Featuring Women in the Workplace*, 1944. Ink and graphite on paper, 12 1/2 × 30 in. (31.8 × 76.2 cm). Collection of Bernard Friedman

In 1940, Thelma Johnson Streat worked with Diego Rivera on a fresco in San Francisco. She was one of the only assistants that Rivera trusted to apply paint to the mural itself. He later described her work as being “one of the most interesting manifestations in this country at present.” This is one of a group of twelve works that Thelma Johnson Streat intended to make on the theme of African Americans in professional life. The laboring figures are all African American women, and there are white figures that either stand idly by or in supervisory roles. At the center of the composition, the artist placed a sign that says, “Help Wanted. White Only.” That sign stands in opposition to Executive Order 8802, issued in 1941, that explicitly prohibited discrimination in war-related industries. The figure at the bottom center of the composition holds the Executive Order in her hand, exposing the hypocrisy in the workplace and the defiance of legal norms in favor of discrimination.

CHARLES WHITE

PROGRESS OF THE AMERICAN NEGRO: FIVE GREAT AMERICAN NEGROES, 1939–40



Charles White (1918–1979), *Progress of the American Negro: Five Great American Negroes*, 1939–40. Oil on canvas, 60 × 155 in. (152.4 × 393.7 cm). Howard University Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. © The Charles White Archives

Working with the WPA's Illinois Art Project, Charles White created this mural, his first, depicting five African American figures central to the history of the United States—civil and women's rights activist Sojourner Truth, educator Booker T. Washington, abolitionist Frederick Douglass, singer Marian Anderson, and scientist George Washington Carver—for a fundraiser for Chicago's South Side Community Art Center. White had been introduced to the work of the Mexican muralists in Chicago by fellow artists Mitchell Siporin and Edward Millman, both of whom had studied with Diego Rivera. He was drawn to the Mexican artists' radical politics and their commitment to creating "an art for and about the people," as White described it. In the work of the Mexican muralists, he found a compelling model for the construction of a heroic and monumental African American history.

POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

Post-visit Objectives

- Enable students to reflect upon and discuss some of the ideas and themes from the exhibition.
- Have students further explore some of the artists' ideas through discussion, art-making, and writing activities.

1. Museum Visit Reflection

After your museum visit, ask your students to take a few minutes to write about their experience. What new ideas did the exhibition give them? Discuss the impact of seeing these works in person. For example, did the size or scale change their opinions of the work? Did students see different artworks or techniques in the exhibition that intrigued them? What other questions do they have? Ask students to share their thoughts with the class. Explore more work by the artists in this guide by using the links on pages 19-21.

2. Artist as Observer: Represent Yourself

- Ask your students to create a self-portrait that expresses something important about their identity and culture. Students could draw a self-portrait or find a partner and pose for a photograph. Have them think about what they will wear, what objects and details to include, what they can show with their pose or expression, and what they might include in the background of their self-portrait.
- View and discuss students' portraits. What did they choose to include? Do their portraits relate to any of the works that they saw in the exhibition? In what ways?

3. Artist as Storyteller: Histories and Heroes

- Ask your students to look at Charles White's mural, *Progress of the American Negro: Five Great American Negroes* on page 16. Ask students to research or provide them with information about each of the five featured figures: Sojourner Truth, Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, Marian Anderson, and George Washington Carver. Have them think about Charles White's choices. How did he represent and tell the stories of these five great African Americans? Why do students think he put them all in the same mural?
- For older students: view and discuss Aaron Douglas's mural panels on page 8. What connections can students find between White and Douglas's work? Thematically? Historically? Visually?
- Have students choose and research a hero or heroine and create an artwork that tells a story about this person.
- View and discuss students' images. Who did they choose to represent? Why? What details did they include to tell this person's story?

POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

4. Artist as Critic: Make a Mural

- a. Ask student groups to use their mural theme and list from the pre-visit activity on page 7 to create a large painting or drawing that they can display on a wall, in their school or classroom. Think about the decisions that the artists in the exhibition made to create their works. How will students create their composition? What colors will they use? How will they incorporate rhythm or pattern? Will there be a focal point or multiple points of view? Have students begin by making a sketch on paper as a study for their mural.

Use the resources below to learn how to transfer a sketch to a larger scale work and create a mural.

Scaling up a sketch

<https://www.art-is-fun.com/grid-method>

https://www.ehow.com/how_6309146_use-projector-enlarge-art.html

How to Make a Mural

<https://www.startwithabook.org/content/pdfs/muralguide.pdf>

<https://theartofeducation.edu/2016/06/21/12-key-steps-leading-amazing-mural-projects/>

<https://www.widewalls.ch/how-to-paint-mural-think-grid/>

<https://www.pittsburghartscouncil.org/component/content/article/20-general/4295-mural-making-101>

Use acrylic or tempera paint on canvas or a roll of thick paper. If paint is not an option, markers, paint stix, or Prismacolor art stix will show up boldly on a large scale work.

Display students' murals. What subjects did they choose? How did they communicate their message? Compare students' sketches with their murals. Did the mural change in any way? If so, how?

5. Artist as Experimenter: Materials and Messages

- a. View and discuss Siqueiros's painting, *Our Present Image* on page 14. Explore the symbolic features that the artist used to represent the figure and consider why he might have chosen the stone and the outstretched hands. Siqueiros believed that radical ideas required innovative uses of materials to communicate their message. Discuss what seems surprising or experimental about this work.
- b. Ask students to experiment with materials in different ways and create an image with a message that is important to them. Students could make a collage, a drawing, a painting, or a digital work. Encourage them to explore different ways of using artmaking tools such as a pencil or a paintbrush.
- c. View and discuss students' images. How did they use their tools and materials in experimental ways?

LINKS

WPA Public Murals in New York City

Charles Alston, Harlem Hospital Murals

<http://iraas.columbia.edu/wpa/>

512 Lenox Avenue at West 136th Street

Contact Sylvia White, Chief of Staff, Deputy Executive Director, Harlem Hospital

212 939-1237

Aaron Douglas, *Aspects of Negro Life*, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at The New York Public Library

<https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/schomburg-center-douglas-murals-new-york-ny/>

515 Malcolm X Blvd at West 135th Street

Contact Novella Ford, Manager Public Programs, Schomburg Center, 212 491-2257

novellaford@nypl.org

José Clemente Orozco murals at The New School

<https://www.newschool.edu/university-art-collection/re-imagining-orozco-exhibition-essay/>

66 West 12th Street, 7th Floor

Contact Silvia Rocciolo, Director/Senior Curator, The New School Art Collection, Office of the Provost,

212.229.8947 x 3770, RocciolS@newschool.edu

Ben Shahn, *The First Amendment* mural, Woodhaven Queens US Post Office

<https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/woodhaven-station-post-office-mural-jamaica-ny/>

8642 Forest Parkway, Woodhaven, NY

Contact Amy Gibbs, Strategic Communications, Cell: 347 668-6709, Work: 718-348-3217

Philip Evergood, *The Story of Richmond Hill*, Richmond Hill Library, Queens

<https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/richmond-hill-public-library-mural-queens-ny/>

118-14 Hillside Avenue, Richmond Hill, NY 11418

718 849-7150

LINKS (CONTINUED)

New York City Murals

The New York City Mural Arts Project

<https://www.muralartsproject.cityofnewyork.us/murals/>

Groundswell map of mural projects

<https://www.groundswell.nyc/projects/map>

Locations of murals and mosaics commissioned by Hope Community Inc in East Harlem

<https://hopeci.org/murals-mosaics/>

Gallery of murals by Los Muralistas de el Puente

<https://www.losmuralistasdeelpuente.com/murals>

Overview of projects by CITYarts Programs

<https://www.cityarts.org/programs>

Aaron Douglas

The Art Story summary of Douglas' key ideas, artworks, and biography.

<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/douglas-aaron/>

The Professional Association for Design biography.

<https://www.aiga.org/design-journeys-aaron-douglas>

Documenting the American South: Aaron Douglas' illustrations alongside James Weldon Johnson's God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse.

<https://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/johnson/johnson.html>

Frida Kahlo

Artist foundation and biographical information.

<https://www.frida-kahlo-foundation.org/biography.html>

TedEd Video on the life and art of Frida Kahlo.

<https://ed.ted.com/lessons/frida-kahlo-the-woman-behind-the-legend-iseult-gillespie>

WikiArt Visual Art Encyclopedia artist page.

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/frida-kahlo>

María Izquierdo

Surrealist Women Artists artist biography.

https://faculty.hope.edu/andre/artistPages/izquierdo_bio.html

The New York Times Art Review of the artist's Americas Society retrospective *The True Poetry: The Art of Maria Izquierdo*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1997/05/30/arts/painter-on-a-pendulum-swinging-from-innocent-to-elegiac-and-back.html>

Coleccion Blaisten biography and images of works by the artist.

<http://museoblaisten.com/Artista/240/Maria-Izquierdo>

LINKS (CONTINUED)

Jacob Lawrence

The Phillips Collection's "Migration Series" website.

<https://lawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org/artist/about-jacob-lawrence>

National Public Radio Sound Bite: Painting The 'Epic Drama' Of The Great Migration: The Work Of Jacob Lawrence.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/04/10/398806751/painting-the-epic-drama-of-the-great-migration-the-work-of-jacob-lawrence>

DC Moore Gallery images of works by the artist.

<http://www.dcmooregallery.com/artists/jacob-lawrence?view=slider>

José Clemente Orozco

The Art Story summary of major artworks and analyses.

<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/orozco-jose-clemente/artworks/>

Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, information about the artist for teachers.

https://www.mmoca.org/learn/for-teachers/teaching-pages/jose-clemente-orozco#the_artist

PBS American Masters Series slideshow of works by the artist.

https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/orozco_j_gallery_en.html

Diego Rivera

Diego Rivera website "His Life and Art".

<https://www.diegorivera.org/>

Museum of Modern Art biography and images of works by the artist.

<https://www.moma.org/artists/4942>

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art video with Ernst Halberstadt, assistant to the artist, on painting his frescoes.

<https://www.sfmoma.org/watch/painting-diego-riveras-frescoes/>

David Alfaro Siqueiros

The Art Story summary of major artworks and analyses.

<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/siqueiros-david-alfaro/artworks/>

National Gallery of Art 9-10th grade activity and discussion on the artist's self-portrait.

<https://www.nga.gov/education/teachers/lessons-activities/self-portraits/siqueiros.html>

Art Museum of the Americas biography and images of works by the artist.

<https://www.oas.org/artsoftheamericas/david-alfaro-siqueiros>

Thelma Johnson Streat

The Thelma Johnson Streat Project artist biography.

<https://streat.webs.com/>

PBS "History Detectives" on the artist's mural studies commissioned by the WPA.

<http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/investigation/wpa-mural-studies/>

LINKS (CONTINUED)

Seattle Times article in the National Museum of African American History & Culture.

<https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/back-in-the-limelight-thelma-johnson-streat-featured-in-new-smithsonian-museum/>

Charles White

National Gallery of Art artist biography.

<https://www.nga.gov/collection/artist-info.3394.html#biography>

Los Angeles County Museum of Art “Life Model” video on Charles White and his students.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEYulf-22jA>

Sightlines Magazine article “Charles White: An Artist Ahead of his Time Finally has his Moment.”

<https://sightlinesmag.org/charles-white-an-artist-ahead-of-his-time-finally-has-his-moment>

Whitney Museum

The Whitney’s programs for teachers, teens, children, and families.

<https://whitney.org/education>

The Whitney’s online resources for K-12 teachers.

<https://whitney.org/education/ForTeachers>

AT THE MUSEUM

Guided Visits

Guided visits are one hour and ten-minute thematic tours that build upon classroom learning. We introduce students to three to five works of art through careful looking, discussions, and activities that incorporate the artist's voice and process. Museum educators lead inquiry based conversations as well as sketching or writing activities in the galleries. To schedule a visit, please go to <http://whitney.org/Visit/GroupTours>.

Guided Visit Themes

School Programs uses a thematic-based approach to teaching in the galleries. We created these themes in order to foster thoughtful connections between K-12 classroom learning and the art on view. When you schedule a guided visit, you will be able to choose one of the following themes.

Artist as Observer (K-12)

How do artists represent the world around them? How do they choose to show people and places? This theme can address topics including New York City, community, landscape, and portraiture. This is a great thematic tour for first-time visitors as it incorporates visual literacy skills and introduces students to multiple ways of looking at and talking about art.

Artist as Storyteller (K-12)

How do artists tell a story? What is their point of view? This theme addresses ELA concepts such as narrative, tone, character, and setting and is recommended for literacy and writing classes.

Artist as Experimenter (K-12)

How do artists push boundaries and explore new concepts? This theme examines how artists experiment with materials, processes, and ideas. Younger students may look at how artists use formal elements such as line, shape, color, texture, and composition, or how they transform everyday objects. Older students may consider more conceptual questions, such as "What makes this art?" and "Why is this in a museum?"

Artist as Critic (6-12)

How do artists respond to the social, political, and cultural climate of their time? What does their work tell us about American life and culture? How can art serve as a catalyst for change? Students examine how artists respond to the topics that shape history, politics, and contemporary culture. This thematic tour can address subjects such as current events, war, gender, race, politics, and activism.

AT THE MUSEUM (CONTINUED)

Working with Museum Educators

If you are scheduled for a Guided Visit, your museum educator will contact you in advance. Let them know what preparatory work you have done, how this connects to the rest of your curricula, and what you would like your visit to focus on. The more you tell them, the better they can prepare for your visit. Please also let them know if your students have any specific needs. High school groups can spend extra time in the galleries after their guided tours only on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays when the Museum is open to the public.

All educators and students on Guided Visits receive a pass to return to the Museum for free.

Discuss Museum rules with students before your visit. We have found that works of art are more accessible if students are provided with some structure or direction, and we recommend giving students a task to complete while in the galleries. You may want to create a worksheet, free-writing or poetry activity, or a sketching assignment. To schedule a visit, please go to <http://whitney.org/Visit/GroupTours>.

whitney.org/ForTeachers

Check out our web resources especially for K-12 teachers! Here you can explore the Whitney's collection, try out an activity with your students, prepare for a Museum visit, and learn some tips for working with modern and contemporary art. For Teachers also includes discussion, research, art making and writing activities, downloadable teacher guides, and links to related websites.

ABOUT THE WHITNEY'S BUILDING

The Whitney's building opened on May 1, 2015 and was designed by architect Renzo Piano. His design was inspired by the industrial character of the neighboring buildings in the Meatpacking District. There's art all over the Whitney: in the galleries, stairwell, first-floor lobby, and on the outdoor terraces, which offer awesome 360-degree views of the city. Artist Richard Artschwager designed the building's four elevators. Titled *Six in Four*, the elevators are based on six themes that occupied Artschwager's imagination from the mid-1970s throughout his artistic career: door, window, table, basket, mirror, rug. Each elevator is an immersive installation comprised of one or two of these themes.

The Laurie M. Tisch Education Center

The Laurie M. Tisch Education Center is a hub of activity where visitors of all ages can engage with artists and enliven and enrich their museum experience. Centrally located on the Museum's third floor and adjacent to the Susan and John Hess Family Gallery and Theater, the Laurie M. Tisch Education Center brings visibility to the educational mission of the Whitney and also provides opportunities for museum educators to work in new ways, offering audiences drop-in programming, hands-on learning, as well as in-depth and interdisciplinary programming.

Feedback

Please let us know what you think of these materials. Email us at schoolprograms@whitney.org. For more information about our programs and resources, please visit whitney.org/Education.

LEARNING STANDARDS

The projects and activities in this teacher guide address national and state learning standards for the arts, English language arts, social studies, and technology.

The Partnership for Twenty-first Century Learning Skills

<http://www.p21.org/>

Common Core State Standards

<http://www.corestandards.org/>

Links to National Learning Standards

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

Comprehensive guide to National Learning Standards by content area

<http://www.education-world.com/standards/national/index.shtml>

New York State P-12 Common Core Learning Standards

<http://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-p-12-common-core-learning-standards>

New York City Department of Education's Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts

<http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/teachlearn/arts/blueprint.html>

CREDITS

This Teacher Guide was prepared by Dina Helal, Manager of Education Resources; Heather Maxson, Director of School, Youth, and Family Programs, Kristin Roeder, Whitney Educator, Monica Sekaquaptewa, Assistant to School and Educator Programs, and Lucia Dallett, Intern to School Programs.

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