Rural Arts Initiative Lesson Plans | 9-12

Objectives:

- Encourage students to critically analyze the role of art in societal change and cultural expression.
- Develop research, discussion, and creative thinking skills about social issues and their representation in art.
- Facilitate group work and collaborative decision-making in curating and presenting visual art.
- Foster an understanding of how different perspectives influence our interpretation of art and its connection to history and culture.

Overarching Learning Goals:

- I can analyze the role of art in societal commentary and change.
- I can research and evaluate artworks that address social issues and their cultural significance.
- I can collaborate with others to curate an art exhibition and explain the meaning behind the selected works.
- I can deepen my understanding of a work of art by researching its context and presenting creative visual responses.

Before the Exhibition

Activity 1A: Discussion on Art and Society

I Can:

- Analyze how art reflects and influences social and political change.
- Discuss how art can raise awareness of social issues and inspire action.

Instructions:

1. Discuss how art has been used to comment on social issues throughout history (e.g., Picasso's *Guernica*, protest art, photojournalism, or anything else you can think of).
2. Use these discussion prompts to help guide the conversation. You can do this as one big group or several smaller groups.
    - How can art help us understand social or political issues?
    - Can art change people's views or inspire action? How?

    - Share an artwork you know that addresses a social issue. What message does it communicate?
3. Next, have students discuss how art in North Dakota has addressed local issues (e.g., Native American rights and rural challenges). [You may want to combine this with Activity 9-12: 2A. In addition to the North Dakota Museum of Art, The Plain's Art Museum has some excellent resources for this topic.]
4. Finally, have students discuss how art can help raise awareness of issues in our community or beyond.

Activity 2A: Research on Social Issues

I Can:

- Research and analyze works of art that represent a social issue.
- Reflect on how art in various forms helps convey messages about societal topics.

Instructions:

1. Have students choose a current social issue (e.g., Indigenous rights, environmental concerns, or economic challenges in North Dakota).
2. Find photographs or works of art (historical or contemporary) that address the issue. You can use online archives or local museum collections (Some of our favorites are the Met, the North Dakota Museum of Art, the Getty, the Walker, and the Plains Art Museum).
3. Next, have students analyze their images by writing a short paragraph. What is the message or emotion in the artwork? How does the artwork help us understand the issue?
4. Finally, have students share their findings with the class. Discuss how photography and other works of art help us to understand social issues and how they can influence public opinion.

During the Exhibition:

Activity 1B: Gallery Walk & Talk

I Can…

- Analyze how artwork influences my understanding of cultural experiences.
- Explain how artwork connects to social, cultural, and political histories.

Instructions:

1. Divide students into small groups.
2. Assign each group to find an artwork that reflects or challenges social or economic issues. Once they've selected their artwork, use the following prompts for discussion:
    - What social or economic problems does this artwork reflect or challenge?
    - What historical, cultural, or political context can this artwork infer? How do these contexts influence its message?
    - What emotions or societal critiques does this piece evoke, and how might the artist have intended to provoke these reactions?
    - How do composition, color, texture, and symbolism contribute to the artwork's commentary on social or economic themes?
3. Have groups walk through the exhibition, closely analyzing the artworks and discussing their interpretations.
4. Facilitate a class discussion in which groups share their insights, supporting their claims with evidence from the artwork. Encourage connections to broader societal, political, and economic issues, and explore how the artwork speaks to these themes.

Follow-Up: Challenge students to examine how the artist's use of formal elements—composition, color, texture, symbolism—works together to communicate a critique or reflection on social and economic issues. Encourage them to think critically about the artist's intent and the potential impact of the artwork on the viewer's understanding of these themes.

After the Exhibition:

Activity 1C: Curate a Mini-Exhibition

I Can Statements:

- I can collaborate to curate a collection of artworks based on a specific theme or concept.
- I can critically evaluate images and organize them to convey a coherent message.

Instructions:

1. Divide students into groups and challenge them to curate a mini-exhibition using photographs from the exhibition or their own research.
2. Assign each group a theme, such as cultural heritage, environmental issues, or personal identity. Feel free to use the appropriate resource guide to help you choose.
3. Have groups present their curated exhibits to the class or in small groups, explaining the rationale for their selections and arrangement.

Activity 2C: Cultural Connections through Art
I Can Statements:

- I can use different resources to deepen my understanding of an artwork and the culture it represents.
- I can translate research into a creative visual response.

Instructions:

1. Ask students to select an artwork from the exhibition that resonates with them.
2. Have them develop research questions related to the artwork (e.g., "What cultural, historical, or social context does this artwork reflect?").
3. Students research their topic and create a visual composition (Such as a work of art, a PowerPoint, or a poster) that includes:
    - Central imagery or words that encapsulate their topic.
    - Symbols and motifs representing cultural or historical connections.
    - Text (quotes, historical references, or reflections) for context.
4. Students present their final visual works to the class, sharing what they learned about the artwork's cultural or historical significance of the artwork and how their research influenced their perspective.

Activity 3C: Artist Research Project
I Can…

- I can research an artist's background, inspirations, and stylistic approach and connect their work to the exhibition's themes.
- I can present my findings in a clear and creative format that effectively communicates the artist's significance and impact.

Instructions:

1. Assign each student to research an artist whose work connects to the exhibition's themes (e.g., socio-political commentary, cultural identity, or historical impact).
2. Encourage students to focus on the artist's background, their journey as an artist, and the key themes present in their work. Use the appropriate resource guide to help identify credible sources and guide their research.
3. Students should examine how the artist's work addresses or reflects specific social, cultural, or historical issues, and how the artist's style or techniques contribute to the message.
4. After completing their research, students will present their findings in a format of they choose. (e.g., slideshow, essay, or video).
    - The presentation should include:
        - Key background information about the artist (e.g., biography, career highlights).
        - An analysis of the artist's inspiration and stylistic approach.
        - A discussion of how the artist's work connects to the exhibition's themes and societal or cultural issues.
        - Visual examples of the artist's work (when possible) to support their analysis.
5. Students can present their work to the class if they so choose.

Activity 4C: Perspective Writing Exercise

I Can…

- I can explore different viewpoints of a work of art by imagining the scene from another perspective.
- I can write creatively to express my emotions and experiences from a different viewpoint.

Instructions:

1. Have Students pick an image from the exhibition or another work of art that interests them.
2. Encourage students to imagine the scene from another point of view, such as a person in the photo, an observer in the background, or an object or animal in the image. Think about how the perspective changes the story or emotions.
3. Then, have students write a short story or essay from the chosen perspective. Focus on the character's emotions and thoughts or what the scene means to them.
4. Have students pair up. Did you have the same idea as someone else? What did you do differently? Discuss how seeing the scene from a different perspective changes their understanding of the image.

Standards Addressed:

North Dakota Visual Arts Standards (2019):

- **VA:Pr5.12**: Analyze, evaluate, and present logical arguments about the significance of artworks and exhibitions.
- **VA:Re7.12.4**: Analyze how interpretations of art change as knowledge and context shift.

North Dakota English Language Arts Standards (2023):

- **9-12.W.6**: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question or solve a problem.

North Dakota Social Studies Standards (2019):

- **ND.6_12.4**: Analyze historical and current events and their impact on North Dakota's development.