

Essential Question: What is most important about a community mural: what it looks like, the ideas it communicates, or the changes in the lives of those who worked together on the mural?

Murals are some of the oldest forms of art known to man. Some of the earliest works of art known to historians are cave paintings. Looking at these paintings it is apparent that from the time murals were first made they have been used to explain how people lived their lives and what was important to them.

Question: From looking at cave paintings, what can you guess about the lives of the people who painted them?

Throughout thousands of years of history, artists in many cultures from the Egyptians to the Mayans to the Greeks created murals to illustrate their history and legacy. This, of course, continued into the twentieth century.

In 1976, the Los Angeles River was turned into a canal made of cement. Artist Judy Baca (who studied in the workshop of Siqueiros (2, p313)) was hired by the Army Corps of Engineers to paint a mural along the canal. More than 400 youth helped with the creation of “The Great Wall of Los Angeles”, a mural about a mile long and 13 feet high. Baca invited youth of multiple ethnicities to join with her in the painting of the mural which retold the history of Los Angeles through the perspective of different marginalized populations.(1)

VIDEO: The Great Wall of Los Angeles
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJRL_AhQ3u4

Questions (If watching video): Why did Judy Baca think that history books of her time were unreliable? In what way are oral histories more reliable than textbooks? Will an oral history always be a reliable source of history? Why or why not?

In 1986 Artist Lily Yeh created an art park in which she enlisted the help of local residents, many of which were homeless (4)(5). This park later started The Village of Arts and Humanities in Philadelphia. The organization began to receive recognition, and made significant changes in her community. The program “renovated abandoned homes, created educational programs, art workshops, after-school programs...and joyful community celebrations.”(5) A prime example of the powerful change Lily’s artwork had on her community is James “Big Man” Maxton. Maxton was homeless and addicted to drugs at the time Lily first started her work, but eventually became the lead mosaic artist for the organization, and later became its operations director (3).

After leaving the Village, Lily Yeh began another organization called “Barefoot Artists.” In 2004 that organization organized a project in Rwanda at a burial site for the bones of those killed during the genocide. She and other artists, engineers, and other experts volunteered their time to help create a large memorial at the site, teach mural painting (which led to many murals being painted throughout the town), create a sustainable source of fresh water, and provide work training (6).

VIDEO: Rwanda Healing Project 3/4
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ub_XI2BXV5M

Questions (If watching video): What effect do you think this project had on the life of Lily Yeh? Who benefits the most from a community arts project?

Read the following quote by Lily Yeh: “My work is about the power of acting from the heart and the impact of grassroots action. It is a testimony to the capacity of art to transform people and society...Through working together, people were reconnected to their inner light of creativity. This inner light illuminates our landscape and guides us through our daily lives, especially in dark times.”(7)

Questions: In what way has art had an effect on your life? Is there somewhere or someone near where you live that could benefit from the transforming power of art and creativity?

POSSIBLE INTERCURRICULAR TIE-INS TO THE PROJECT:

- MATH/ECONOMICS - Discuss grants, corporate sponsorships, crowdfunding (i.e. indiegogo.com or kickstarter.com), and in-kind donations as methods of funding community art projects. Have students fill out a budget proposal from a grant application doing research on the cost of supplies for a community mural project.
- LANGUAGE ARTS - Have students write a community mural proposal for a specific organization they care about. Make sure they have done sufficient research so their proposed project helps the organization meet its mission and goals.
- ANY OTHER SUBJECT - Show how artists have collaborated with experts in another field of study (i.e. science, literature, math, health, etc) to communicate a message they felt was important.

OTHER MURAL PROGRAMS WORTH RESEARCHING:

URBAN ARTWORKS (SEATTLE, WA)
MURAL ARTS PROGRAM (PHILADELPHIA, PA)

LOCAL UTAH ARTISTS CREATING COMMUNITY MURALS:

ROGER WHITING
SARAH MOYER
LINDSAY LARSEN
RUBY CHACÓN
PAUL JAKUBOWSKI
KIM MARTINEZ

1. “Backstage with Judy Baca”. Juan Devis. 18 May 2009.. http://kcet.org/local/shows/web_stories/2009/05/backstage-with-judy-baca.html
2. *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920-1970*. Cancel, Luis R. with Jacinto Quirarte. H.N. Abrams in association with the Bronx Museum of the Arts. New York, NY. c1988
3. “Village of Arts Big Man.” Wallace Foundation. <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/Pages/VillageOfArtsBigMan.aspx> accessed 26 January 2011.
4. The Village of Arts and Humanities. “About The Village of Arts and Humanities.” <http://www.villagearts.org/about.htm> accessed 26 January 2011.
5. “Americans Who Tell The Truth: Lily Yeh.” http://www.americanswhotellthetruth.org/pgs/portraits/Lily_Yeh.php accessed 26 January 2011.
6. “Design That Heals: An Interview with Alan Jacobson.” Heller, Steven. AIGA. 20 February 2008. <http://journal.aiga.org/content.cfm/design-that-heals-an-interview-with-alan-jacobson> accessed 26 January 2011.
7. “Warrior Angel: The Work of Lily Yeh” submitted by Bill Moskin and Jill Jackson. p1 - preface by Lily Yeh. 21 October 2004. accessed online 26 January 2011.

Lesson Plan

Objective

Students will:

- **View and analyze examples of community murals**
- **Discuss the ideologies that drive community artists**
- **Brainstorm ideas and convert those ideas into visual symbols**
- **Design a collaborative mural**

Materials and Tools Needed

Paper, pencils, crayons

Butcher Paper (one 2x4 foot piece for every four or five students)

Activity

Discuss the essential question with students:

What is most important about a community mural: what it looks like, the ideas it communicates, or the changes in the lives of those who worked together on the mural?

Present the background about community murals, showing the students pictures of examples and using the discussion points to talk with the students about the examples. Show the students one of the two videos that accompany the discussion and ask the corresponding questions. Once the discussion is finished, return to the essential question and see if their opinions have changed.

The teacher will create a possible scenario for a public art project. For example. "What are the problems with the culture of this school, and what solutions can be offered to correct those problems?"

Divide the students into groups of four or five. Have each group draw a line down the middle of a piece of paper. On one side of the paper have the students list the problems and solutions. On the other side have them list visual symbols that can represent those problems and solutions. Model how this is done before the students begin.

Once the students have at least ten visual symbols listed, have them divide the list of symbols so every person can draw at least two. Inform them that they will be combining their sketches to create a mural design. Once the sketches are finished, the students can cut them out and paste them together to make their mural design.

Give each group a 2x4 foot piece of paper and crayons. Give them at least one class period to redo their mural design on the large paper. Inform the students that the best two designs from the class will be placed on display.

Alternate option:

Find a local nonprofit organization that would like artwork on their walls (this may be your own school!) and have the students create the artwork using acrylic paints on plywood or ceramic tiles for that organization. This may require grant funding; a good local source is the Utah Credit Union Education Foundation: <http://www.100percentforkids.org> Please contact me, Roger Whiting at rbwmail@yahoo.com for free advice about materials and processes ideal for community projects.