

Chiura Obata
(1885-1975)

Teacher Packet

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Biography : Chiura Obata

Chiura Obata (1885-1975) was a renowned landscape artist, professor, and devoted environmentalist. Born 1885, in Japan, Obata studied ink painting before immigrating to California in 1903. After settling in Japantown in San Francisco, Obata established himself as an artist and took on large-scale commissioned art projects. After an influential trip to Yosemite in 1928, Obata began devoting his art to portraying landscapes and the beauty of nature. Throughout the next decade, Obata continued to earn recognition, but like many Japanese Americans during WWII, his life was violently uprooted as his family was interned, first at Tanforan and then at Topaz. During his imprisonment, Obata was able to start art schools at both camps, teaching hundreds of students and even holding an exhibition in 1942. After the end of the war, Obata returned to lecture at UC Berkeley, joined the Sierra Club's environmentalist efforts, and consistently celebrated Japanese aesthetics until his death. Over the course of a seven-decade career, Obata became a prominent educator at UC Berkeley and a central leader in the California Art scene.

This teacher packet contains the following lesson plans :

- 1) Create an Obata-Inspired Landscape Painting
- 2) Obata-Inspired Poetry
- 3) Save the National Parks Environmentalism through Art
- 4) Exploring the 1906 Earthquake through Primary Source Documents
- 5) WWII Japanese Internment and Political Art
- 6) Self-reflection Poem
- 7) Close Looking and Interpreting Obata's Art through Writing
- 8) Collage Making Reflection Piece inspired by Obata's Art

Keywords/Object of Study

Environmentalism; Woodblock Prints; Landscape Artists; Asian American Artists; Japanese American Artists; Japanese Internment Experience; Early California History 20th c ; San Francisco Art History; National Parks; Nature-inspired Art; Environmentalist Art; Political Art

Links to Virtual Art Archives

- https://americanart.si.edu/search?query=%22Chiura%20Obata%22&f%5B0%5D=content_type%3Aartwork&page=0
- <https://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/obata>

Lesson 1 : Obata-Inspired Landscape Art (K-12)



Death's Grave Pass, 1930, color woodblock print

Student Outcome : Students will study Obata's signature landscape paintings and create individual works of art in his style, using texture from nature. Students will further compare and contrast patterns, color, and texture between their work and Obata's.

Common Core Content Standards

K.VA:Re8 - 7.VA:Re8 Interpret art by analyzing art-making approaches, the characteristics of form and structure, relevant contextual information, subject matter, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.

K.VA:Re8 Interpret art by identifying subject matter and describing relevant details.

1.VA:Re7.2 Compare images that represent the same subject.

2.VA:Re8 Interpret art by identifying the mood suggested by a work of art and describing relevant subject matter and characteristics of form.

3.VA:Re8 Interpret art by analyzing use of media to create subject matter, characteristics of form, and mood.

5.VA:Cr2.3 Identify, describe, and visually document places and/or objects of personal significance.

K.MA:Cr1 Discover and share ideas for media artworks using play and/or experimentation.

1.MA:Cr3 a. Create, capture, and assemble media arts content for media arts productions, identifying basic aesthetic principles, such as pattern and repetition. Practice and identify the

effects of making changes to the content, form, or presentation, in order to refine and complete media artworks.

6.MA:Cr3 Experiment with multiple approaches to produce content and components for determined purpose and meaning in media arts productions, utilizing a range of associated aesthetic principles, such as point of view and perspective.

Appraise how elements and components can be altered for intentional effects and audience, and refine media artworks to reflect purpose and audience.

Materials

Tempera Paint or Watercolor

Paper

Paint Brushes

Black Pens

Materials from nature - rocks, acorns, leaves, wood chips to be used as texture

Obata's art prints - [Artworks Powerpoint - Landscape Art](#) or can be found in the virtual archive links above

Procedure

Introduction

- 1) Begin by introducing Obata's artwork and life story to students. Practice close looking at Obata's signature landscape paintings. Use questions to direct conversation, such as the following:
 - a) What colors do you notice? Are the colors bright or darker? What textures do you see? What lines or patterns do you notice? What are some things that you see in each painting, what is Obata painting in each of his artworks?
- 2) Make images visible either electronically, or by physically distributing printouts to table groups.
- 3) Ask students to brainstorm what they will create.
 - a) Allow students to decide what landscape they will be painting (lake, trees, flowers, fields, mountains?).
 - b) Ask students to decide what time of day and season will be represented in their paintings.
- 4) Do a demonstration to show students how to begin their artwork.
- 5) Do another demonstration on how to incorporate texture. Gently paint a leaf, piece of wood, rock, acorn, etc, and stamp on the page. Use multiple stamps to create a larger pattern.
- 6) Get creative!

Art Project

- 1) Distribute practice materials to students - scratch paper to begin and natural objects for texture.
- 2) Provide time to sketch landscapes and practice texture before beginning the final project.

- 3) Distribute final materials (paper, paint, black pens) once class is ready.
- 4) Use a pencil or Sharpie pen to create outlines, before using paint.
- 5) Add texture throughout student art pieces.

Discussion

- 1) Ask students to describe what their favorite Obata artwork is. Were they inspired to use any of his techniques in their painting?
- 2) Why do they think Obata painted so frequently?

Extensions

- Consider adding shading to your discussion and demonstration of art techniques.
- Consider exploring [An Introduction to Chinese Brush Painting](#), and discussing East Asia Ink techniques in relation to your project and to Obata's sumi ink work.

Lesson 2 : Obata-Inspired Poetry (2nd-7th Grade)



Along Mono Lake, 1927, sumi and watercolor on paper

Student Outcome : Students will practice close looking and writing skills through crafting poems inspired by Obata's natural landscapes.

Common Core Standards

RL.1.4 Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.

SL.2.5 Add drawings or other visual displays to stories or recounts of experiences when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

SL.3.5 Create engaging audio recordings of stories or poems that demonstrate fluid reading at an understandable pace; add visual displays when appropriate to emphasize or enhance certain facts or details.

RI.3.7 Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur).

RL.3.10 By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry, at the high end of the grades 2–3 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

W.6-7.3.d Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.

RL.7.10: By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 6–8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

Materials

Collection of Obata's artworks (Can be found in [Artworks Powerpoint - Landscape Art](#) PowerPoint or in the virtual archives linked above)

(Optional) Obata's Yosemite : Art and Letters of Obata from His Trip to the High Sierra in 1927

Paper

Pencils

Colored Pencils, Paint (to decorate)

Procedure

- 1) Introduce Chiura Obata. Consider how nature-inspired artwork has influenced society through a classroom discussion.
 - a) Lead a discussion on how and why it is important to celebrate nature.
 - i) Ask questions like - How is nature important?
 - ii) How can we preserve nature?
 - iii) Why is it important for people to celebrate nature?
- 2) Show students the following poem by Obata along with an artwork ; invite a classroom reader to read aloud the text

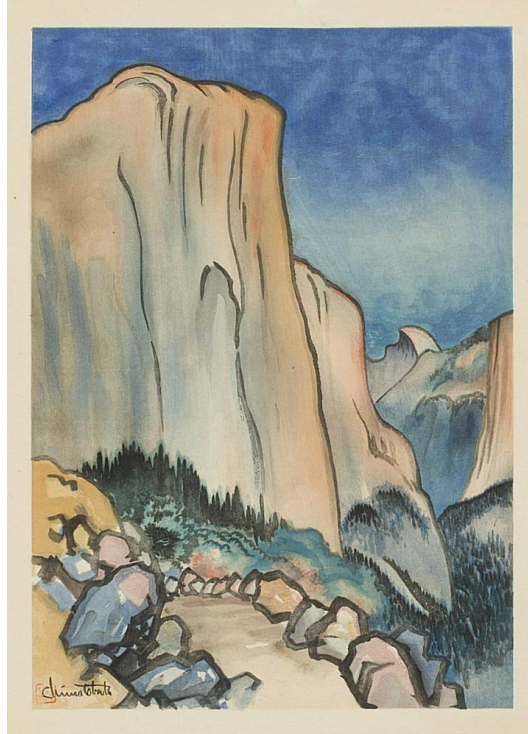
*My aim is to create a bowl full of joy
Clear as the sky,
Pure as falling cherry petals,
Without worry, without doubt;
Then comes full energy, endless power
And the road to art.*

- 3) Ask students to consider what these words mean. Ask students how the placement of words on the page changes how we view the poem.
- 4) Inform students of the following assignment : Students will compose rough drafts of poems inspired by landscape art. Poems should be 6-12 lines long, using both a metaphor and simile. Define metaphor and simile for your students, if you have not covered this material previously.
 - a) *Metaphor* — A figure of speech that is used to make a comparison between two things that aren't alike but do have something in common
<https://examples.yourdictionary.com/metaphor-examples-for-kids.html>
 - b) *Simile* — a figure of speech that directly compares two different things. The simile is usually in a phrase that begins with the words "as" or "like." This is different from a metaphor, which is also a comparison but a methapor says something is something else.
<https://examples.yourdictionary.com/simile-examples-for-kids.html>
- 5) Distribute art prints or show the [Artworks Powerpoint - Landscape Art](#) for students to view; allowing for brainstorming time for students to consider the subject of their poems.
- 6) Allow time to write poems on art paper, trace poems with sharpie, and decorate to display.

Extensions

- Extend or modify the assignment for the following themes : saving nature, visiting a national park, or simply an experience that students have had outside.
- Consider incorporating the effect of Climate Change's effect on Nature in your discussion and poem prompt.

Lesson 3 Environmentalism “Can Art Save the World?” (4th-8th grade)



Capitan: Yosemite National Park, 1930年 Chiura Obata (Japanese, 1885 - 1975) Date: 1930, Woodblock print, Ink and colors on paper, *Gift of Dr. Stephen A. Sherwin and Merrill Randol Sherwin* Object Number: 2010.13

“Obata spent the summer of 1927 visiting Yosemite with the artists Worth Ryder (1884–1960) and Robert Boardman Howard (1896–1983). This view of El Capitan was based on one of the watercolor sketches Obata made during their stay. Obata rendered the dramatic scenery of Yosemite through simplified, almost abstract forms. He used watercolor tones to define the elements of the scene and to give the sky its lush color, but ink— as in traditional Japanese painting—to describe the landscape’s textures: long, smooth strokes for the granite wall, wide and angular strokes for knobby foreground boulders, and dots, scalloped patterns and longer strokes to represent the valley’s evergreen trees.”

Source : Asian Art Museum

<http://searchcollection.asianart.org/view/objects/asitem/id/37693>

Student Outcomes : Students will consider the ways art can be used as activism in the context of Environmentalism and National Park Preservation

Grade Levels : This lesson is designed for upper elementary, middle school and high school students with appropriate modifications.

Duration : Two class periods, with an optional take home assignment.

Common Core Standards

ESS3.C: Human activities in agriculture, industry, and everyday life have had major effects on the land, vegetation, streams, ocean, air, and even outer space. But individuals and communities are doing things to help protect Earth's resources and environments.

Visual Arts

Visual Arts 3.0: Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of the

4.VA:Re7.2: Interpret art by analyzing use of media to create subject matter, characteristics of form, and mood.

Visual Arts 5.0: Connecting and Applying What is Learned in the Visual Arts to Other Art Forms and Subject Area and to Careers

5.VA:Cn11: Identify how art is used to inform or change beliefs, values, or behaviors of an individual or society.

6.VA:Re7.2 :Analyze ways that visual components and cultural associations suggested by images influence ideas, emotions, and actions.

Media Arts

6.MA:Cn11: Discover and share ideas for media artworks using play and/or experimentation. Research and show how media artworks and ideas relate to personal life, and social, community, and cultural situations, such as personal identity, history, and entertainment. Analyze and interact appropriately with media arts tools and environments, considering copyright, ethics, media literacy and social media.

English Language Arts

6-12.SL.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade appropriate topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL.8.5: Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

Materials

PBS Film Clip : <http://www.pbs.org/nationalparks/watch-video/#651>
[Student Writing Worksheet](#)

Web access

Whiteboard

Access to NY Times Article - Can Art Save the World?

Large Blank Paper for Final Project

Art supplies

Background and Quotes

Obata was a devoted environmentalist throughout his life. His signature landscapes become prominent works celebrating the natural world. Obata's art invites viewers to look upon nature with gratitude and thoughtfulness to understand its value.

“For American audiences, [Obata’s] was a very fresh way of looking at their landscape,” says Kimi Kodani Hill, Obata’s granddaughter and the family historian. “It helped Americans perceive their own parks with a fresh vision, and I think that remains today.

There was no environmental movement back when he was teaching, but his message clearly speaks to what we are dealing with today in trying to preserve the environment. His philosophies, just like John Muir’s philosophies, echo to modern man as a way to learn from nature and have a feeling of gratitude toward nature—and therefore want to preserve it.”

“Obata was less interested in overwhelming the viewer than in fostering a one-on-one communion with nature,” says Timothy Anglin Burgard, curator in charge of American art at the de Young Museum in San Francisco. “In Obata’s paintings nature is beautiful, but it’s also precious. It’s not so overwhelming that it’s untouchable, or so timeless that it doesn’t require our care and preservation.”

Source : <https://www.npca.org/articles/1041-wood-blocks-water-colors>

Vocabulary

Environmentalist (noun)

A person who is concerned with or advocates the protection of the environment.

Environmental Art (noun)

“For centuries, the landscape’s appearance in art was meant to construe either awe for our natural world, or as a background subject for the documentation of human narratives. In the 20th century, alongside rising global concerns surrounding the state of the environment’s health, and our impact as humans upon it, many artists started creating works in collaboration with the physical world to draw attention to ecological issues as well our relationship and contribution to them. As a more defined concept, Environmental art has gained more traction since the 1990s when artists began to think about their surroundings not just in terms of lived or built space, but as a cohesive system in which humans have a central part to play.”

Source : <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/environmental-art/>

Procedure

- 1) Invite students to consider the definition of Environmental Art and environmentalism
 - a) Use classroom participation to craft definitions of the two terms
 - b) Compare your class’s definition to the above
- 2) Introduce Chiura Obata as an environmental artist connected to the National Parks through his works of Yosemite.
- 3) Have your class watch this PBS documentary of Chiura Obata’s biography.
<http://www.pbs.org/nationalparks/watch-video/#651>
- 4) Give classroom directions for the following written assignment.
Students will complete the short writing prompts found here : [Student Writing Worksheet](#)
 - a) How did you develop a relationship with nature?

- b) Where and how do individuals get their view of nature?
- c) Is it necessary to appreciate nature in order to preserve it?
- 5) Once students are finished, share ideas in groups of 2 or more, and ask students to share what they discussed. Record comments on white board.
- 6) Pair students into groups again to discuss the following questions either by writing answers on the student worksheet, or by responding verbally within groups.
 - a) Ask students to consider what environmental issues are occurring.
 - b) Ask students to consider what tools environmentalists have to preserve nature.
- 7) Take comments from each group and continue jotting down answers on whiteboard
- 8) Optional Take-Home Assignment : Have students research an environmentalist and/or find one art piece about the environment to share.

Conclusion

- 1) Allow group and class sharing of homework assignment if applicable
- 2) Prepare for Final project
 - a) Option 1 - Invite students to create their own individual environmental activist art piece.
 - b) Option 2 - Have groups complete a poster board promoting environmentalism.
 - i) What are the key issues faced by environmentalists?
 - ii) What tools can environmentalists use? (Protests, art, videos, movies)
 - iii) Include notable environmentalists
 - iv) Draw their own environmental art

Extension

- Students have the option to research individual environmentalists and complete writing assignments.
- Teachers can introduce the national parks and american history using this resource by PBS <http://www.pbs.org/nationalparks/history/ep5/2/>
- Teachers can consider adding a discussion about environmental racism, or have the class primarily focus on environmentalists of color.

Further research

Shumaker, Susan, "Untold Stories from America's National Parks - Chiura Obata, PBS", *National Parks, America's Best Idea*.
[PBS, National Parks, America's Best Idea.](http://www.pbs.org/nationalparks/history/ep5/2/)

Lesson 4: 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Primary Source Documents (4th grade and above)



Chiura Obata, View of Burnt Out Japantown from California Street, 1906

https://www.pbs.org/nationalparks/media_detail/544/



San Francisco City Hall after the 1906 Earthquake. (from Steinbrugge Collection of the UC Berkeley Earthquake Engineering Research Center)

Student Outcome - Students will explore primary documents to understand the severity of the 1906 SF Earthquake, and resulting damage.

Common Core Standards :

HSS-3.3 : Students draw from historical and community resources to organize the sequence of local historical events and describe how each period of settlement left its mark on the land.

ELA/Literacy

W.4.7: Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

W.4.8: Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; take notes, paraphrase, and categorize information, and provide a list of sources.

W.4.9.a,b: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

RI.5.8: Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).

RI.5.9: Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

Library

LIB.6.4.3 : Appreciate and respond to creative expressions of information: a. Demonstrate a variety of methods to engage the audience when presenting information (e.g., voice modulation, gestures, questions). b. Appreciate a range of creative forms of expression (e.g., poetry, drama, film, literature, visual arts). c. Evaluate one's own research process and that of others in a respectful, cooperative, and productive way.

Associated Standards:

ESS1.C: The History of Planet Earth - Local, regional, and global patterns of rock formations reveal changes over time due to earth forces, such as earthquakes. The presence and location of certain fossil types indicate the order in which rock layers were formed.

The following lesson plan was written by By Doug DuBrin, an English and history teacher as well as an editor and writer for PBS. It has been modified to include Chiura Obata's artwork and biography in honor of APA Heritage Month. Original Lesson plan can be accessed here <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/lessons-plans/using-primary-documents-the-1906-san-francisco-earthquake/>

Materials

Web Access

Primary Source Documents from <http://www.sfmuseum.org/1906/ew.html> -

Alternative Primary Source Documents

<https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/sf-earthquake-and-fire/earthquake-fire.html>

Background articles

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/ansel/peopleevents/e_earthquake.html

<http://quake.wr.usgs.gov/info/1906/>

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/savageearth/earthquakes/>

Background

Shortly after Chiura Obata immigrated to California, the 1906 Earthquake occurred. This natural disaster upended life in the Bay Area. Obata created artworks of the mayhem and destruction the earthquake caused.

“The 100th anniversary of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire is April 18[, 2006]. The quake and the resulting fires were one of the most devastating natural disasters in United States history. Recent estimates place the death toll from the quake at close to 3,000, far more than the original tally of around 300. The physical devastation to the city itself was immeasurable, in great part due to the lack of structural reinforcements that we take for granted today. Yet, like most events of sweeping adversity (such as Hurricane Katrina or the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001), the people of San Francisco galvanized support for each other and from the outside and found ways to rebuild one of the country’s most beloved cities.”

Source :

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/lessons-plans/using-primary-documents-the-1906-san-francisco-earthquake/>

Procedure

- 1) Introduce the 1906 earthquake by sharing the above background information and showing Obata’s rendering of Japantown, along with the image of SF City Building
 - a) Option to use the following resource to study the science of Earthquakes prior to this lesson <https://www.calacademy.org/educators/teacher-guide-earthquakes>
- 2) Provide definitions for students of primary and secondary source documents. Explain that students will be examining primary source documents today.
 - a) *“Primary Source* - provide raw information and first-hand evidence. Examples include interview transcripts, statistical data, and works of art. A primary source gives you direct access to the subject of your research.
 - b) *Secondary Source* - provide second-hand information and commentary from other researchers. Examples include journal articles, reviews, and academic books. A secondary source describes, interprets, or synthesizes primary sources.

Primary sources are more credible as evidence, but good research uses both primary and secondary sources.”

Source - <https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/primary-and-secondary-sources/>

- 3) In order to gain a thorough understanding of the scope and impact of the disaster, have the students prior to the lesson carefully read the background articles provided above.
- 4) Copy and randomly distribute to each member of the class a different firsthand account (there are 32 provided in the sfmuseum.org link above).
- 5) Divide the class into groups of 3-4 students each.
- 6) Have each student read an account out loud to the other group members, while attempting to capture the mood and tone of the piece as it was written. For example, if the narrative is describing the horrible destruction of the quake and resulting fire, insist that the tone of the reading reflects it (i.e., the student should not be laughing while reading, but rather projecting a somber mood).

- 7) Once each student has completed reading the narratives aloud, have the groups critically examine the texts by answering the following:
- 8) What commonalities did you find in the content of the narratives? In other words, what are the shared memories of the experience?
 - a) Why might certain memories stand out more than others? What might cause a person to vividly remember the color of a lamp shattered by the quake when he/she would not ordinarily recall such a detail?
 - b) How might you identify the mood of the narratives? Are they all necessarily dark?
 - c) Could there be a sense of relief due to the simple fact of having survived? When recounting separate parts of the disaster, does the mood change within the individual narrative itself? If so, why might that be?
- 9) Reconvene as a class to discuss the overall role and value of first hand historical accounts. To guide the discussion, you may wish to ask the following:
 - a) In what ways do personal narratives enrich our study of history? What do they provide that objective, analytical accounts of historical events do not?
 - b) In what ways are personal narratives limiting in their view of history? What do they lack as far as enriching our understanding of historical events?
 - c) How trustworthy are the firsthand accounts of historical events? What individual biases or external influences could get in the way of "truthful" reporting?
 - d) How does the age, gender or social status of the eyewitness influence the way in which he/she views the disaster?
 - e) Does the media today rely on firsthand accounts of events to report the news? Are reporters themselves discouraged from expressing their own opinions? In what ways does the news coverage of major events differ between television reporting and print media?

Extension Activity I: Analyzing other primary documents

For a follow-up activity, the procedures above can be applied to the study of firsthand accounts of other seminal events (besides the 1906 San Francisco earthquake) in American history.

Included below are useful links to various other primary-document resources:

<http://www.archives.gov/research/arc/>

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/browse/manypasts/>

<http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu/>

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/>

Works Cited

Durbin, Doug, Using Primary Documents: The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, PBS News Hour Extra, 13, March 2006

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/lessons-plans/using-primary-documents-the-1906-san-francisco-earthquake/>

Lesson 5 Japanese Internment Experience and Political Art (6th-12th Grade)



Chiura Obata (American, b. Japan, 1885–1975), A Sad Plight, October 8, 1942, ink over graphite on paper, 11 x 15 3/4 in., Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Museum purchase, gift of the Graphic Arts Council, 2001.28.3



Chiura Obata (American, b. Japan, 1885–1975), Dust Storm, Topaz, March 13, 1943, watercolor on paper, 14 1/4 x 19 1/4 in., private collection
<https://www.theutahreview.com/umfas-chiura-obata-american-modern-exhibition-artistic-meta-narrative-immigrants-faith-american-experiment/>

Student Outcome : Students will explore Chiura Obata's artwork as an introduction to political art during the WWII era. They will further consider the experiences of Japanese Americans during internment, before creating their own political art.

Grade levels : 6-12

Duration : 1 -2 weeks

Common Core Content Standards:

SL.8.5: Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

Visual Arts

6.VA:Pr6: Objects, artifacts, and artworks collected, preserved, or presented either by artists, museums, or other venues communicate meaning and a record of social, cultural, and political experiences resulting in the cultivating of appreciation and understanding.

Media Arts

6.MA:Cr3 - Experiment with multiple approaches to produce content and components for determined purpose and meaning in media arts productions, utilizing a range of associated aesthetic principles, such as point of view and perspective.

Appraise how elements and components can be altered for intentional effects and audience, and refine media artworks to reflect purpose and audience.

6.MA:Cn10 - Access, evaluate, and use internal and external resources, such as knowledge, interests, and research, to create media artworks.

Explain and show how media artworks form new meanings, situations, and cultural experiences, such as historical events.

6.MA:Cn11- Discover and share ideas for media artworks using play and/or experimentation.

Research and show how media artworks and ideas relate to personal life, and social, community, and cultural situations, such as personal identity, history, and entertainment.

b. Analyze and interact appropriately with media arts tools and environments, considering copyright, ethics, media literacy and social media.

History and Social Science

HSS-10.8 Students analyze the causes and consequences of World War II.

HSS-11.7 Students analyze America's participation in World War II.

HSS 11.7.5: Discuss the constitutional issues and impact of events on the U.S. home front, including the internment of Japanese Americans (e.g., Fred Korematsu v. United States of America) and the restrictions on German and Italian resident aliens; the response of the administration to Hitler's atrocities against Jews and other groups; the roles of women in military production; and the roles and growing political demands of African Americans.

The following lesson plan has been adapted from Teaching Tolerance, and expanded to include

ready made political art examples by Asian American Artists, like Chiura Obata, in honor of APA Heritage Month The original lesson can be found here :

<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/student-tasks/do-something/consuming-and-creating-political-art>

Materials

Optional - *Topaz Moon: Chiura Obata's Art of the Internment*.

<https://www.amazon.com/Topaz-Moon-Chiura-Obatas-Internment/dp/1890771260>

Powerpoint - [Political Art and the Japanese Internment Experience](#)

General Art Supplies

[Consuming & Creating Political Art Rubric](#)

[Do Something Student Planning Guide](#)

Quotes providing Background info

Executive Order 9066

In February 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, enforcing the “exclusion of Japanese Americans from the West Coast as a ‘military necessity’” and in March, the government enforced an 8p.m. curfew and a five-mile travel limit upon Japanese Americans (Hill 13). Obata and his family had to register and be fingerprinted as enemy aliens, and the mass-removal of California Japanese Americans had begun by mid-March. The Obatas were now aware of their pending evacuation from Berkeley, and began preparing for departure.

<https://www.sullivangoss.com/artists/chiura-obata-1885-1975>

“Executive Order 9066, authoriz[ed] the Secretary of War to “prescribe military areas . . . from which any or all persons may be excluded” and to “provide for residents of any such area who are excluded therefrom, such transportation, food, shelter, and other accommodations as may be necessary . . .” On March 2, Washington, Oregon, California, and Arizona were divided into two such military areas. Within a few months, Japanese American immigrants living on the west coast and their American-born children—citizens of the United States—had been removed from their homes and relocated to internment centers, known informally as “camps.” They lost their homes, their businesses, their pets, their friends, and most of their belongings. (Burton 30–33; Shumaker).

http://www.pbs.org/nationalparks/media/pdfs/untold_stories_manzanar.pdf

“Life for Obata, an art instructor at the University of California in Berkeley, was upended by the attack on Pearl Harbor and the government’s reaction in Executive Order 9066, which sent thousands of Americans of Japanese descent into internment camps. ‘His response was to keep making art,’ said Gretchen Dietrich, UMFA’s executive director.

The Obatas were moved first to the Tanforan Assembly Center, a converted racetrack in California, and later to Topaz. At both locations, Chiura Obata organized art schools. The Topaz Art School had 16 instructors, teaching some 600 students.

He created watercolors of beautiful Utah skies above what was essentially a prison camp. And he drew in ink — or scratched into the paper with dry pens when ink ran out — dozens of sketches presenting an almost photojournalistic look at day-to-day life in the camps.

The images from his internment period ‘are very short, agitated, emotional, unsettled,’ Wang said. “If you think about his physical being at the time, sitting on the train, on the bus, while still painting, which is a remarkable thing — that reflects his experience.” The Obatas left Topaz in the spring of 1943 to live in the St. Louis area with their oldest son, Gyo, who was studying architecture at Washington University.”

Source : Means, Sean P. “Chiura Obata, who painted natural wonders and hardships of Japanese-Americans at Topaz, gets major exhibition at Utah Museum of Fine Arts,” The Salt Lake Tribune. 25, May 2018

<https://www.sltrib.com/artsliving/arts/2018/05/25/chiura-obata-who-painted-natural-wonders-and-hardships-of-japanese-americans-at-topaz-gets-major-exhibition-at-utah-museum-of-fine-arts/>

Procedure

- 1) Determine whether students will work in groups or individually.
- 2) Introduce students to political art. Show a wide variety of examples connected to themes in the central text you have been studying.
 - a) Explicitly teach the vocabulary associated with political art such as “idiom,” “satire,” “context clues,” “irony,” “caricature,” etc.
 - b) Introduce Obata’s experience by showing his Artwork found in the Teacher Powerpoint : [Political Art and the Japanese Internment Experience](#)
- 3) Consider using the art powerpoint provided in conjunction with this *NY Times* lesson plan on primary resources. Included are videos, primary sources, and photographs to humanize and investigate the Japanese American Experience.

“Teaching Japanese-American Internment Using Primary Resources, Rarely Seen Photos of Japanese Internment.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/07/learning/lesson-plans/teaching-japanese-american-internment-using-primary-resources.html>
- 4) Provide students with a work schedule and due dates for their own political art piece.. Use the [Consuming & Creating Political Art Rubric](#) to define expectations and project components and to clarify how you will assess student work.
- 5) Introduce students to the [Do Something Student Planning Guide](#). Students can use the guide to decide what kind of work they want to produce, their message and what medium they will use

- 6) Provide ample time for students to create and revise their artwork and for peer and instructor feedback.
- 7) Facilitate conversations between students and school leaders regarding permission and parameters for displaying art work.
- 8) Find an appropriate location to display student work. Discuss how the context and location of art can affect its impact.
 - a) Options might include bulletin boards, hallway wall space, or common areas such as the cafeteria, gym or auditorium.
- 9) Take photographs to memorialize and celebrate student's work.

Conclusion

- 10) Use journal writing or Talking Circles to facilitate student reflection on their individual art pieces. Some suggested reflection questions include:
 - a) What was your favorite piece of political art? What were its strengths? Why was it effective?
 - b) Discuss the effectiveness of using political art for social justice change.
 - c) What did you learn from this experience? What about the process stands out for you?

Extensions

- Use the teacher packet : [Incarceration-through-Comics-and-Graphic-Novels](#), to research political cartoons before having students create their own.

Lesson 6: “I Remember” (Reflection Activity)

Grade Level: Can be scaffolded for Grades 1–College

Duration: 45 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Paper and Pencil
- “[I Remember](#)” by Joe Brainard:

Introduction: We are connected to the past and the future. Our memories and the experiences that we share transmit our history to future generations. This brainstorming session helps us to open ourselves up to sharing memories.

Instructions:

1. Read out loud the poem, “I Remember” by Joe Brainard. Ask the students which details stayed with them after reading/hearing this poem. Why do they think these details affected them?
2. Warm-up: Set a timer for 5-7 minutes; allow this time for your students to focus their minds on their memories and jot down as many as they can. You can offer some of the following prompts to get them started (the vocabulary can be adjusted for your age-group):
 - What are some moments in your life when your world suddenly shifted, expanded, or broke open?
 - Can you identify any experiences in or out of school when you felt a genuine love of learning?
 - Do you have many memories of teachers or mentors who encouraged you, or who sparked something in you?
 - Do you remember any instances when you felt a breakthrough or a leap in your creative development?
3. After time is up, allow students time to share out some of the memories that came to mind. They can do this in pairs, small groups, or as a whole class.
4. After the discussion, or at the end of class, return to the “I Remember” activity in steps 1 and 2, but for a longer duration of 20 minutes with the following prompt in mind:
 - What would you want the future to know about our time?
 - What memories might instill a connection that you may have discovered during your own work on these sections?
5. As a wrap up, you can discuss with your students the common experiences students shared and those that might have been unique. From individual experiences to a shared collective, what will this tell the future about our time?

Lesson 7: The Poetry in Obata’s Paintings (Close-Looking and Writing Activity)

Grade Level: Can be scaffolded for Grades 4–College

Duration: Two 45-minute class periods

Materials:

- Slideshow of Chiura Obata's artworks (can open as GoogleSlides or download as Powerpoint):
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/111Fsl5MK7LUYfjb-ypQnk3DGh1VY2rAw/edit?usp=share_link&oid=116124934902439669347&rtpof=true&sd=true
- Index cards and pencils
- Laptops/devices with access to the slideshow
- Ability to project images/videos onto a wall or screen
- YouTube video: *Chiura Obata: American Modern*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_IbPsRVhAA
- Chiura Obata's *A Sad Plight*
<https://art.famsf.org/chiura-obata/sad-plight-october-8-1942-2001283>
- National Archives webpage: "San Francisco Earthquake, 1906"
<https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/sf>

Note: This outline assumes that the students have not yet learned about Chiura Obata or the 1906 Earthquake; if the students have already studied either of these topics, you can skip showing the YouTube video and/or the USGS webpage.

Introduction: The Japanese American painter Chiura Obata was not only an accomplished portrayer of his favorite subject, "Great Nature;" he also used his artist's lens to document important historical events he experienced. In this lesson, we'll 1) look closely at how Obata captured the aftermath of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, 2) discuss what we can learn from an artist's depiction of such an event, and 3) create poems based on his paintings.

Procedure:

Day 1

1. If the students are unfamiliar with Obata's life and work, show the *Chiura Obata: American Modern* video, which provides a good overview (4 min. long). Then project the first artwork in the slideshow: *A Sad Plight* (October 8, 1942), which depicts a family's arrival to the Topaz incarceration camp.

Ask students first to take a few minutes to look closely at the artwork. Then use the "See, Think, Wonder" Artful Thinking Routine to generate discussion:

- What do you see or notice in this artwork? (Take responses)
- What do you think about what you see? Or, what kind of connections can you make between the artwork and what you know? (Take responses)
- What do you wonder about this artwork? Or, what questions do you still have? (Take responses)

2. At some point a student will ask in the “wonder” section about the writing on the artwork, and you can read the translation of the inscription:

*No roof,
No electricity,
No stove,
The ground is frozen at this elevation. The cold pierces the skin.
The rain has become sleet
And not enough bedding.
Forced to travel,
Broken in mind and spirit
Are these people from Santa Ana.*

Translation by Akiko Shibagaki

You can talk about how Obata’s words here sound like poetry and transition to explaining the Three Perfections:

- Painting, poetry, and calligraphy (beautiful writing) are known as the “Three Perfections” in traditional East Asian ink painting and are considered the highest forms of art. A painting wasn’t “complete” unless it had all three parts.
 - Chiura Obata continued the tradition of incorporating these “perfections” in some of his depictions of modern life; in a way, he was reinforcing his cultural roots.
 - Let’s look at some artworks by Obata that depict another momentous historical event that he experienced, the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake.
3. Provide some context for the artwork the students are about to see:
- a. Obata immigrated to San Francisco in 1903 at the age of 18; in 1906, he and his family survived the massive earthquake and fire that leveled the city. Share or summarize the National Archives webpage; highlight the photos on the page to give students a clear sense of the destruction caused by this event.
 - b. Share background on Obata’s watercolor series *San Francisco after the Earthquake*:

The watercolors in this series are dated beginning on April 25, exactly a week after the earthquake and three days after the fires subsided. Binding holes across the top show that the pages were once part of a sketchbook. This group includes

several locations of special significance to Asian Americans living in San Francisco at that time.

4. Distribute the index cards and pencils and give students the full class period to look closely at Chiura Obata's watercolors depicting the aftermath of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake. They can work in pairs or small groups. Tell them to spend one full minute on each image (there are 22 total).
5. Have students jot down on the index cards any details from the paintings that they find particularly powerful, thought-provoking, or moving. These details can be written as descriptive words or phrases. If they wish and have time, they can sketch these details on the other side of their cards. Tell them to use their imaginations and go beyond sight; what other sensory details might Obata's paintings convey? (Sounds? Smells? Textures?)

You can decide whether to provide the label information for the students. If you do provide it, be sure to have the students first do close-looking and detail-recording, to capture what they notice/what strikes them, *before* they read the label.

Tell students to keep their index cards for the next class period (or, you can collect them and re-distribute them at the next session).

Day 2

1. Give students a few minutes to review the details that they jotted on their index cards.
2. Discuss: What could they understand or learn from looking at Obata's artworks that they couldn't learn from looking at the photographs from the National Archives?
If the students don't bring up Obata's use of color, ask, What did his use of color help to convey?
3. Ask students to each look through their index cards again and have each student pick out the one that they think is most vivid or powerful. (Depending on how large your class is, it might be better for the students to work in subgroups sharing their cards and then creating different poems.)
4. Have the students place all of their chosen cards on a table and collaborate on how to order them so that they become a poem.
5. Have a student volunteer(s) read the final poem(s) out loud.
6. Ask students: How did writing poetry help us to understand what Obata witnessed and experienced?

Optional: Collect the cards in order and ask for volunteer(s) to transcribe them (either digitally or on paper), so the poem(s) can be preserved.

Lesson 8: “Bearing Witness” (Art Activity)

Grade Levels: 6th–12th Grade, College

Unit Duration: 1 Week (2 - 3 Class Periods)

Materials:

- Computer/Laptops with access to Internet
- Access to photos/video/content created
- **Optional:** [“Bearing Witness: Chiura Obata’s “San Francisco after the Earthquake”](#) from the Asian Art Museum’s Google Arts and Culture site. (Use if you didn’t do Lessons 6 and 7 above and want to show an example of personal documentation of a historical event.)

*For Modifications:

- 8.5x11in Paper, Writing Utensils, Glue, Scissors

Modification(s): If access to technology is not available, have students bring physical printouts of photos to create a physical collage.

Introduction: Over the past two years, we have been learning how to heal and to unpack from events like the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide protests on social justice issues (Black Lives Matter, Stop Asian Hate, Reproductive Rights, etc.)

As we are “bearing witness” to historical events unfolding in front of us, we want to reflect on the past two years and document how we experienced those events. For this assignment, you are to make a collage using images you have taken or created over the past two years. The theme of your collage is up to your interpretation but must answer the following questions: Who am I? How have I changed? How has my community been affected?

Procedure:

Preparing your Collage:

1. Brainstorm: Write a short reflection on the past two years (i.e. If this year is 2022, think about 2020–2022) answering the following questions:
 - a. If you were to show what your life was like in the past two years, what would you show?
 - b. What were the major news headlines during these times?
 - c. What challenges did you face?
 - d. What are some lessons, skills, or ideas that you have learned?

- e. What do you want people to know that was not in the headlines?
2. Based on your reflection, choose photos, text/message conversations, screenshots, drawings, news headlines, etc. that have held significant importance to you from the past two years.
 - a. Students are encouraged to look through their own phone's camera roll.
 3. While looking through your photos and images, some additional questions to think about may include:
 - a. What are some memories in the past two years that brought you the most joy?
 - i. Were you able to attend big events? (concerts, rallies, protests, etc.)
 - b. Where did you spend the majority of your time? (e.g. home, school, community centers)
 - c. Who were you with?
 - d. Was there anyone you wish you could have spent more time with?
 - e. Were you able to reconnect with anyone?

Creating your Collage:

1. Using the images you have selected, visualize what your project may look like. Slowly decide which images will fill in the spaces on your artwork.
2. Sketch a rough draft of the composition of your collage.
3. Construct your collage by manipulating (cutting out, ripping, tearing, layering, etc.) your images and gluing them onto your paper.
 - a. Consider using programs such as [Canva](#), [Google Jamboard](#), or [Pixlr](#) to allow students to create their collages digitally.
4. Have students display their collages and do a "gallery walk" to appreciate each other's work.

Optional: Have students journal write on the experience of doing this project:

- How did going through their photos and texts make them feel?
- How do they feel looking at their own collages and those of their classmates?
- Were their depictions of the last few years similar or different to their classmates'?
- What are their takeaways from doing this project?

Resources

Image credit - <https://www.brainpickings.org/2018/03/23/chiura-obata-yosemite/>

Lesson 2

Popova, Marina, "Chiura Obata's Stunning Paintings of Yosemite," *Brainpickings*,
<https://www.brainpickings.org/2018/03/23/chiura-obata-yosemite/>

Lesson 3

Siber, Kate, "Wood Blocks & Water Colors," *National Parks Conservation Association*, Summer 2013, <https://www.npca.org/articles/1041-wood-blocks-water-colors>

Shumaker, Susan, "Untold Stories from America's National Parks - Chiura Obata," *PBS, National Parks, America's Best Idea*.
[PBS, National Parks, America's Best Idea.](https://www.pbs.org/wnet/national-parks/america-s-best-idea/untold-stories-from-americas-national-parks-chiura-obata/)

Lesson 4

Durbin, Doug, "Using Primary Documents: The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake," *PBS News Hour Extra*, 13, March 2006
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/lessons-plans/using-primary-documents-the-1906-san-francisco-earthquake/>

Further Resources

Teacher Guide: Earthquakes, Cal Academy
<https://www.calacademy.org/educators/teacher-guide-earthquakes>

Lesson 5

Consuming and Creating Political Art, Teaching Tolerance
<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/student-tasks/do-something/consuming-and-creating-political-art>

Backman, Marjorie and Gonchar, Michael "Teaching Japanese-American Internment Using Primary Resources, Rarely Seen Photos of Japanese Internment." *New York Times*, 7 Dec 2017
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Lesson 7

Google Arts and Culture. "Bearing Witness: Chiura Obata's 'San Francisco After the Earthquake' Series." <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/KwXhq5wnh0-kQA>

—"Earthquake: The Chinatown Story: The Rebirth of Chinatown 1906-2006."
https://artsandculture.google.com/story/earthquake-the-chinatown-story-chinese-historical-society-of-america/bgWhgn_sGgcA8A?hl=en

Hirasuna, Delphine. *The Art of Gaman: Arts And Crafts From The Japanese American Internment Camps 1942-1946*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2013.

KCET. *Masters of Modern Design*: "Artbound: The Art of the Japanese American Experience" Season 10, Episode 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpvhVmDNuho>

Mono Lake Committee. "Section of Tioga Pass named the Chiura Obata Great Nature Memorial Highway."
<https://www.monolake.org/today/section-of-tioga-pass-named-the-chiura-obata-great-nature-memorial-highway/>

National Park Service. "*Presidio of San Francisco*: 1906 Earthquake: Chinese Displacement."
<https://www.nps.gov/prsf/learn/historyculture/1906-earthquake-chinese-treatment.htm>

Additional Resources on the topics covered in Lesson 6, 7 and 8:

Asian Art Museum. [Teacher Resources](#) on *Pattern Recognition* (2020) by Jenifer Wofford. (The four Japanese American artists celebrated on Wofford's mural were all incarcerated during WWII.)

Denshō: <https://densho.org/> (Digital archive of oral histories by Japanese Americans incarcerated during World War II)

Hirasuna, Delphine. *The Art of Gaman: Arts And Crafts From The Japanese American Internment Camps 1942-1946*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2013.

KCET. *Masters of Modern Design*: "Artbound: The Art of the Japanese American Experience" Season 10, Episode 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpvhVmDNuho>

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Nolte, Carl. “Black, Asian population left out in historians’ accounts of S.F.’s 1906 quake and fire.” *SF Chronicle*. April 16, 2022. <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/nativeson/article/san-francisco-earthquake-1906-17085074.php>

Partridge, Elizabeth (author) and Lauren Tamaki (illustrator). *Seen and Unseen: What Dorothea Lange, Toyo Miyatake, and Ansel Adams's Photographs Reveal about the Japanese American Incarceration*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2022.

Schwartz, Richard. “How Anti-Asian racism manifested in Berkeley after the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire.” *SFGate*. June 20, 2021. <https://www.sfgate.com/news/bayarea/article/How-Anti-Asian-Racism-Manifested-In-Berkeley-16261624.php>

Further Resources

Chiura Obata papers, circa 1891-2000, 1942-1945 “The papers of Japanese American artist Chiura Obata measure 1.4 linear feet and date from 1885-1975. Included are biographical material relating to Obata's internment; administrative files regarding the establishment and management of art schools at Tanforan and Topaz detention sites; writings by Obata; teaching files from the University of California, Berkeley; project and exhibition files; personal and professional correspondence; photographs; artwork including sketchbooks and loose drawings by Obata and printed material.” <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/chiura-obata-papers-17607>

Kuramitsu, Kristine C. “Internment and Identity in Japanese American Art.” *American Quarterly*. Vol. 47, No. 4 (Dec., 1995). 619-658. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2713369?seq=1>
Sue Kunitomi Embrey and Manzanar National Historic Site, The National Parks: America’s Best Idea, Untold Stories Discussion Guide http://www.pbs.org/nationalparks/media/pdfs/untold_stories_manzanar.pdf

Teaching Japanese American Incarceration Through Comics & Graphic Novels, Smithsonian, National Museum of American History, [Incarceration Through Comics and Graphic Novels](#)

Resources Shared by Kimi Hill:

“Home - Topaz Stories.” n.d. Accessed March 20, 2023. <https://topazstories.com/>.
(Japanese American WWII incarceration History)

Institution, Smithsonian. n.d. "Chiura Obata's Glorious Struggle." Smithsonian Institution. Accessed March 20, 2023. <https://www.si.edu/sidedoor/chiura-obatas-glorious-struggle>.
Podcast on Chiura Obata –12/15/2021 on Sidedoor

"NJAHS - National Japanese American Historical Society." n.d. NJAHS. Accessed March 20, 2023. <https://www.njahs.org/>.
(National Japanese American Historical Society (in the San Francisco Japantown) has school curriculum resources, exhibits and tours.)

"The National Parks | Great Nature | Season 1 | PBS." n.d. Wwww.pbs.org. Accessed March 20, 2023. <https://www.pbs.org/video/the-national-parks-the-national-parks-great-nature/>.
(Video excerpt from PBS The National Parks: America's Best Idea)

"What Does It Mean to Be an American?" n.d. To Be Americans. Accessed March 20, 2023. <https://www.whatdoesitmeantobeanamerican.com/about>. (High school or curriculum from the Mineta Legacy Project)

Example: Students relate their own immigration stories
<https://www.whatdoesitmeantobeanamerican.com/students-immigration-stories>

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Comic book: <https://americanart.si.edu/art/art-comics/kay-sekimachi-comic>