

LESSON PLAN & ACTIVITY: FRESCOES**Introduction**

In this lesson students will learn about why and how people have decorated their walls throughout time. They will be exposed to a variety of mural paintings around the world, focusing on the making of **frescoes**. They will examine fresco paintings from the courtyard of the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, as well as compare them to other mural traditions from many world cultures. They will then create their own "**cartoon**" for a mural that expresses something about their personal or cultural history and work on transferring it to a larger piece of butcher paper, canvas, or wall surface. This is a thematic multidisciplinary lesson primarily addressing the areas of art, social studies, language arts and science.

The Big Question for this lesson is "What is a mural and how does it communicate ideas about the person and/or culture who created it?"

Student Outcomes

After completing a unit on mural painting throughout time, students will understand:

- \= People have painted their walls since the beginning of time for decoration, expression of cultural values and history, and ritual.
- \= What a mural is and will be able to compare mural paintings throughout time from many cultures around the world.
- \= How a fresco is made and the permanence and purpose of using fresco as a medium.

Content Areas and Grade Levels

This lesson is intended for grades 4-8, but may be adapted for high school level as well. It addresses the concept areas of world history, art and art production. Students should have some drawing abilities and be able to grasp the concept that mural paintings can be done using a variety of techniques. Many different adaptations are possible for this lesson. You may want to consult your local arts council to see if there are any mural painters in your area who would come and work with your students. You may also want to complete this lesson in collaboration with the art teacher/ department, if you have one at your school. The lesson could be completed by having students just make a sketch for a mural or by actually creating a mural on a piece of canvas, butcher paper or on a wall.

Technology Usage

- \= Virtual tours on the world wide web

- \= Use of a digital camera and scanner
- \= Development of a slide show using the MS PowerPoint program
- \= Use of e-mail

Resources

On-line:

- \= A comprehensive site explaining the process and history of fresco painting. Links to images of artists' work throughout history as well as to contemporary artists working in fresco, www.truefresco.com.
- \= The virtual Diego Rivera web museum. Access to many of the murals painted by Diego Rivera, his biography, links and more, www.diegorivera.com.

Off-line:

- \= Visit the local library to consult books on fresco painting in many cultures around the world and throughout time: Pre-historic cave paintings, Minoan and Ancient Greek, Roman in Pompeii, Pre-Columbian (Mayan, Aztec, Teotihuacan), Egyptian, Chinese, Hindu, Italian Renaissance, Mexican muralists of the 20th century, and others.
- \= Consult your local Arts Council for guest artists who would conduct mural painting activities in your school.
- \= Contact your local museum(s) for speakers on the topic of fresco and/or mural painting from any particular culture group.

Process:

Tips:

Be as flexible as possible. It is a complex undertaking to complete a mural. This lesson could extend for several weeks or more. You may make it as simple or as in-depth as you would like. Consult with artists/ art teachers before you begin to assure for success in the hands-on part of the lesson. You, or you together with your class, may want to explore a variety of ways to create a mural before you begin. You should discuss with your students the difference between a mural made in fresco and one made using other painting techniques. Due to the skill required and potentially toxic nature of handling lime mixed with the plaster during fresco painting, this lesson does not attempt to have you complete a fresco, but rather one using other types of paint.

Materials:

- \= 9 x 12 drawing paper or any other standard size
- \= large roll of butcher paper or canvas
- \= pencils/ charcoal pencils
- \= tracing paper
- \= compass or aluminum pinwheel to make perforations in tracing paper
- \= stacks of newspaper to use underneath the drawing while perforating an outline of the image
- \= tempera or non-toxic acrylic paints (depending on painting surface)
- \= digital camera, throw-away camera or other camera
- \= scanner

Preparation:

- \= Consult the Museum of New Mexico's web site at www.museumeducation.org to access images of the frescoes at the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe. Print out images and accompanying text for classroom use and discussion.
- \= Identify resources in the community that have knowledge of mural painting or fresco art- i.e. local arts council, museums, community groups- to come to the school and give a presentation or conduct an activity with students.
- \= Locate sites in your community where students may view murals or frescoes or any other areas where restoration of wall surfaces is taking place. Some ideas include highway underpasses (although dangerous for students to visit- photos may be taken), water tanks, inside or outside public buildings such as post offices, court houses, etc.
- \= Search websites that contain images of frescoes and/or wall paintings in different locations around the world (see resources section). Print out any available images to use for classroom discussion.
- \= Gather library books with images of frescoes from different cultures.

Vocabulary:

Cartoon - Tracings of the sinopia done on transparent paper. The edges of the images are perforated and used to place on top of the fifth layer of damp plaster (the intonaco) to use as a guideline for the finished painting.

fresco (buon fresco) - Italian word meaning fresh. A fresco is a type of a mural painting and is made by applying pigments dissolved in lime water to freshly spread, damp plaster.

fresco secco - fresco made by applying pigments to a dry plaster surface.

Intonaco - the last smooth layer of plaster (or fifth layer) that is used as the painting surface.

Mural - a painting applied directly to a wall or ceiling. From the latin "murus" or wall.

Pouncing - the process used to apply powdered charcoal through the perforations on the cartoon onto the wall surface.

Proportion - a part considered in relation to another part or to the whole; a relationship between things or parts of things with respect to comparative magnitude, quantity, or degree.

Ratio - relation in degree or number between two things. Scale - a relative level or degree

Sinopia - named after a red pigment used in Italy, it refers to the full-scale initial sketch of the mural that is drawn onto the plaster after the first three layers have been applied.

Slaking - the process of adding water to the powdered lime to turn it into lime plaster to use as a ground for painting.

Transfer - to convey a drawing or design from one surface to another.

Tasks:

Part I: Wall Decorations in our Lives

- ↳ Begin by asking your students, What is a mural? Where does the word come from? Have you seen any murals around town or in any other locations, i.e. sides of buildings, water tanks, highway underpasses? Why are they there? What do you think about seeing murals in public places? What do they express about the people living in that town? Who decides which murals to paint and why?
- ↳ Ask your students, What different ways are there to apply paint to a wall? You may want to discuss graffiti and spray paint markings, acrylic or other outdoor paint, and also indoor painting techniques for room color or decoration, etc.
- ↳ Continue with a discussion about what they see around the classroom on the walls. What do the images tell us about ourselves? Do you put up posters in your bedrooms? Why do you do that? What do they tell us about your interests and your culture? What's valuable and

meaningful to you? What other decorations do you have on your walls at home?

- ↳= With younger students, you may want to read *Harold and the Purple Crayon*. Discuss how Harold creates a world for himself by drawing on the wall. Ask them if they ever got in trouble for painting or drawing on a wall or was it encouraged and why?
- ↳= Have students take pictures with a throw-away camera, digital camera, or other camera of wall decorations in the classroom, in the school and in the community. Take a class field trip to different locations around your town to document wall decorations both on the exterior of buildings and on the interiors. Bring images back to the classroom and create a personal collage and/or class collage of photographs.
- ↳= Have the class do a collective collage of images from the school and the community and discuss what they say about the school culture or community's character.
- ↳= Have students write in an individual journal about what their wall images at home mean to them personally and what they say about their interests and personality. What do the images represent about the school's or town's history?

Part II: Wall Decorations and Frescoes throughout Time

- ↳= Discuss the earliest paintings known to humankind: cave paintings in Europe- the Caves of Altamira in Spain and the Chauvet Cave and the Caves of Lascaux in France. Why do you think people throughout time have painted their walls? You may want to cite a National Geographic article from July 2000 with photos of some early paintings on cave walls or petroglyphs/ pictographs from ancient American cultures. Show students pictures of a variety of wall paintings from many different cultures, if available.
- ↳= Introduce the concept of "fresco." Has anyone heard of the word? Has anyone heard of the villas of Pompeii in Rome, of Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel, or of Diego Rivera, the Mexican muralist?
- ↳= Show images of frescoes from the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico off the web site, www.museumeducation.org by the artists Will Shuster and Frederico Vigil. First look at the museum images without reading the text to the students. Have students talk about what they see in the paintings and what they think the images mean or represent. Then read the description to the students and discuss the questions provided in the text. Ask them, How is the description different from what you originally saw or thought about the images? Why do you think the artists chose the subject matters they did?
- ↳= Explain the technique of buon fresco more completely (refer to the **section on process** for a more detailed description). Show them the photos of Frederico Vigil at work on different stages of his mural. Explain that this technique goes back 30,000 years in human history, reaching its peak in 16th century Italy, and that artists within the last

century - beginning with the Mexican muralists in the 20th century - have now revitalized it. It was also used throughout pre-Columbian America among the Mayan, Aztec and Teotihuacan cultures in the temples; in Anasazi kivas or ceremonial centers in the Southwest; in Egypt in the tombs and pyramids; in Ancient Greece among the Minoans, on the island of Crete and elsewhere; in ancient Rome in the region of Pompeii; among the Chinese; in Hindu cultures in India and elsewhere; throughout the Renaissance period; among Mexican muralists and others of the 20th century and today.

- \= Divide your class into small groups of two to four students each. Have them choose a culture group and/or artist that created frescoes to research in the library and/or on the world wide web. If on the web, search with these keywords: "fresco painting" or by "murals" and see what comes up. Also, have them search for images on www.truefresco.com for classical fresco images by individual artists. For Mexican muralists, there are many relevant sites. Check www.diegorivera.com to view Diego Rivera's murals on line. Check the resource list for other sites. Have them select one or more frescoes addressing the following questions, What is the subject of the painting(s)? Why do you think the artist(s) chose this subject? What does it communicate about the time and place in which it was created? Does it reflect a moment in history? If so, how is that represented?
- \= After the groups have completed their research, have them develop a PowerPoint presentation on their findings to present to the class.
- \= Have one student from each group join to form new groups to compare their culture group/ artist with other students. Have them write and/or report on their findings of the similarities and differences among the wall paintings of the various culture groups. How do those cultures compare to our home and school culture and our community today?

Part III: The Making of a Mural

1. Arrange for an artist-in-residence who is experienced with painting murals to come to your school and work with your students, if possible.

Note: There are many ways to create a mural. Use your own resources and creativity. Base the class mural on the painting from the Museum of Fine Arts by Frederico Vigil, "Exodus: Influencias Positivas y Compadrazco" by selecting a topic that reflects a moment in the school's history, the history of their community, their state, their nation or their world.

If an artist is not available, you may try the following procedure:

- \= Have students draw a single image, symbol or entire scene that represents an important moment in their personal history. Have students present and share their drawings to the rest of the class and/or write about it in their personal journal.
- \= Draw a grid pattern on the wall surface (butcher paper or canvas) with sections the same size as their drawing paper. Have them then trace their drawing onto tracing paper.
- \= Give a stack of newspaper to each student and a compass. Have the students perforate the outline of their drawing.
- \= Next, have the students transfer their drawing on the tracing paper to the larger wall surface using a "pouncing" technique. They could trace over their drawing with a charcoal or regular pencil to create an outline of their design.
- \= Fill in the outline with tempera paint if using paper or acrylic paint if using canvas. Be sure to take necessary precautions when not using water-based paints.

An alternative class project:

- \= Choose a topic that the whole class will contribute to, such as mentioned above with the resident artist. Have the students discuss the content of the mural, then have each student select a section to paint and proceed as described above.

Note: You may also want to employ the use of an overhead projector. Try drawing the image on a piece of transparency then projecting it on to the wall and tracing the outline of the images, then painting it.

Presentation

- \= Have students present their class mural to another class in the school or during an assembly to a larger group of students and/or at a parent's night. Have them describe the content of the mural, why they chose the topic they did and what it tells about their cultural history. They may also discuss the process of creating the mural and/or have documented the process using a camera and/or through their journal notations.
- \= Display the process of creating the mural for the other class or school by creating a photo board or other method of display. You may want them to put together a class book representing the process from the start with their research, field trips, etc. to the completion of the class mural.

Assessment

- \= Did the students successfully photograph images of wall decorations in their home and/or community?
- \= Did they participate in the discussions? Did they share ideas and contribute to the research phase? Did they contribute to both their original research group as well as to the mixed groups?
- \= Were they successful in drawing some aspect of their personal history or larger class history?
- \= Did they successfully transfer their image onto tracing paper and then eventually onto the wall surface? Were they able to paint the image effectively?

Were they able to communicate effectively and share ideas about the finished mural image?

Extensions

- \= Find out if the school has any empty wall spaces to paint. Have a school contest to submit different ideas for the content of the mural. Have your class select their favorite choice or a combination of choices. Work with a resident artist to execute the mural.
- \= Visit mural sites in a different city. Document their trip and describe the similarities and differences with murals or wall decorations in your own community.
- \= Use the internet to e-mail images of the finished class mural to another school that may also have completed a mural. Share ideas with that other school.
- \= Take pictures of their class mural to post on the school's web site with a description of the content of the mural and of the process it took to create it.

Curriculum Integrations

- \= Experiment with different plasters and their abilities to absorb pigment colors. Be cautious to observe all safety precautions when handling any lime. Try different pigments, such as crushed leaves or berries, food coloring, etc. (science).
- \= Study different pigments, where they come from, how to process them. Explore what minerals and plants make different colors (science).

- ↳ Make a personal drawing, then impose a grid on top of it. Have the students measure the sections of their drawing. Using the concepts of scale and ratio, transfer their image to a larger wall surface (math).
 - ↳ Find and describe how the artist used geometric shapes in a mural of choice (math).
 - ↳ Create a class poem, gathering descriptive words and phrases about the mural (language arts).
 - ↳ Write a letter or a story describing the mural image and explaining its meaning to send to a pen pal in another country (language arts).
 - ↳ Select a fresco from a particular culture to dramatize. Create characters and write a play based on the image (performing arts/language arts).
 - ↳ Create dance movements to express some of the ideas in the mural (dance).
 - ↳ Interpret the mural using different sounds and musical instruments. You could make your own instruments or use existing ones (music).
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More Online Resources:

- ↳ Images of the works of the Mexican muralists Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, geography.berkeley.edu/CoursePages/Geog_159/Murals.html.
- ↳ Spanish language site posting images from and information about several Mexican muralists: Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, www.spin.com.mx/ilustrado/murales/introduccion.html.

Lesson Plans:

- ↳ Educational web site for the J. Paul Getty Museum. Lesson plan on "Mexican American Murals: Making a Place in the World," www.artsednet.getty.edu/ArtsEdNet/Resources/Murals/index.html
- ↳ Activity on Mexican muralists for students created at San Francisco State University, students.itec.sfsu.edu/edad728/Ineilan/artproject.html.
- ↳ Lesson produced for students on Mexican muralists at the University of Massachusetts, www.umassd.edu/SpecialPrograms/ArtsLinks/b2/StudentLessons/MarionOV.html.

Books to consult:

Hoccombe, Sarah. Fresco Painting for Home & Garden. London: David & Charles., 1999.

Honour, Hugh & Fleming, John. The Visual Arts: A History. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982.

Janson, H.W. History of Art. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. and New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1977.

Meiss, Millard. The Great Age of Fresco: Discoveries, Recoveries and Survivals. New York: George Braziller in association with The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1970.

Rochfort, Desmond. Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera & Siquieros. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998.

Children's Books:

Johnson, Crockett. Harold and the Purple Crayon. Harper Collins Publishers, 1955.

Winter, Jeanette. Diego.

Rosy's Book: Diego Rivera.

Citations:

Information on fresco painting and on the artists, Will Shuster and Frederico Vigil, was provided by the Museum of Fine Arts Library, Mary Jebsen, Librarian, mjebsen@mnm.state.nm.us. For additional information, contact Ellen Zieselman, Curator of Education, Museum of Fine Arts, ezieselman@mnm.state.nm.us.

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