

Think Big Picture

Mural Art History, Technique, and Concept Development

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Grade Level	Secondary	**Time Frame**	435 minutes
Subject	Visual Arts	**Duration**	10 periods
Course	Visual Arts		

Essential Question

What are the defining qualities of the mural art form? How does large-scale public art serve as a canvas for community and cultural expression?

Summary

In this art lesson, students explore the history of mural art—the values and themes that informed artists in the format throughout history. Students will also see interviews with Oklahoma mural artists who speak on their creative process, the techniques they have used, and proposal writing. By the end, students will develop their own proposal and design ideas for a mural and then paint it.

Snapshot

Engage

Students consider their existing knowledge and beliefs about graffiti through a word splash writing activity.

Explore

Students learn some of the history of mural art through a honeycomb harvest, sorting historical examples by time, themes, and techniques.

Explain

Students hear from a local artist about the process and begin working on their own mural proposals.

Extend

Students paint a mural and apply what they've learned about design and implementation.

Evaluate

Students reflect on the mural creation process and what they learned.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Fine Arts: Visual Art (High School: Proficient (I)))

VA.P.1 : Utilize a variety of ideas and subject matter in creation of original works of visual art.

Attachments

- Honeycomb Harvest (Print)—Think Big Picture - Spanish.pdf
- Honeycomb Harvest (Print)—Think Big Picture.pdf
- Honeycomb Harvest—Think Big Picture - Spanish.pptx
- Honeycomb Harvest—Think Big Picture.pptx
- Lesson Slides—Think Big Picture.pptx

Materials

- Lesson Presentation Slides (attached)
- Honeycomb Harvest Slides (attached)
- Honeycomb Harvest (Print) (attached, optional)

30 minutes

Engage

Locate the Lesson Slides and use them to guide the presentation. Using the strategy word splash, display **slide 4** with the following word list:

- Art
- Expression
- Vandalism
- Colorful
- Rebellion
- Symbols
- Messages
- Voice
- Community
- Values

Have students use all of these words to write a brief statement of what they know or believe about graffiti. The idea for this activity is to pull out students' existing notions. Do they recognize that graffiti is not always vandalism but sometimes commissioned? Do they appreciate graffiti as an art form in the ways that more socially approved art forms are appreciated? They have to use all the words, but they can use them however they want so that their prior knowledge and assumptions will come through.

Move to **slide 5** and play the video about OKC's Plaza Walls gallery, a rotating collection of murals that adorn the businesses in the Plaza District of Oklahoma City. This video includes an interview with curators and several examples of murals, some in the graffiti style, but all sanctioned by the city through the Plaza Walls initiative.

Embedded video

https://youtube.com/watch?v=T67rl8EUHuw

40 minutes

Explore

Next, students will explore some art history examples of mural art. Provide time for everyone to access and make their own copy of the provided digital Honeycomb Harvest activity created in Google Slides: k20.ou.edu/bigpicture (**slide 6**).

Teacher's Note

If you have access to high quality color printing, you may choose to use a print version of the Honeycomb Harvest (attached). Be informed, however, that the digital version is preferred as the color aspects of the works are important.

The activity will be carried out in three phases.

1. First, move to **slide 7** in the Lesson Slides. Students will sort the works of art into what they think is chronological order. A key is provided on **slide 8** of the lesson presentation slides. After you show the key, point out that each hexagon links to a slide with larger images of the artwork, details, and a link to the source for the image, which likely provides more information about that work.
2. Next, move to **slide 9** and have students sort the works of art by the themes they feel are portrayed by the imagery or what they know about the time and culture in which the art was created. This activity is not about getting a "right" answer but about getting students to think about how the artwork conveys ideas. Follow with **slide 10** and have students share their sort with an elbow partner and discuss similarities and differences and why they chose to put things where they did. **Slide 11** shares an example theme sort. This slide is optional.

Teacher's Note: Discussion Support

The themes used here are pulled from those associated with human development over time as named by Spiral Dynamics Theory. This isn't a detail that we need to go into with students so much as a guide for how we select themes to use and determine which artworks might fall into themes based on the timeline associated with those themes. This theory states that themes that were dominating in prehistory, such as "survival/safety," don't go away but persist as a base layer as new themes begin to layer over them. The same is true as each layer builds on. "Morals/ethics" and "religion as authority" were the most dominant themes in the Middle Ages. Still, around the globe, these themes may have started to peek through earlier than that in some cultures and cycle into dominance for different cultures at different times, and all of the themes persist today and shine through based on life conditions for different people in different places. We see "survival/safety," for example, as very strong in Palestine due to the war/conflict and living conditions there at this time.

3. Finally, go to **slide 12** and have students sort by techniques. It's okay if they aren't sure; best guesses are fine. The goal for this slide is to introduce some vocabulary and terms for methods that are used by mural artists which can be talked about more deeply later in the lesson.

Show the video of an artist talking about different scaling techniques on **slide 13**.

Embedded video

https://youtube.com/watch?v=FzsNxjiTDWk

Then show the example on **slide 14** and discuss what we think the best answers are.

Teacher's Note: Discussion Support

It's not always easy to find information about which artists used a grid, freehand, or other scaling technique. Sometimes, many artists work on one mural over a long period of time, and different artists may use different strategies, such as in the Maestrapeace. The same artist may use a grid for one work of art and freehand another. It's generally accepted that Egyptians used the grid method for scaling art into murals. We also know that Rosenquist used the grid method, mimicking the Egyptian methods, by using chalk and string. We know that Rivera used fresco on many of his murals and that many 9th-century chapel artworks employ a combination of fresco and mosaic techniques.

Move to **slide 15** and have students use all of the same words provided for the Engage word splash activity to write a new statement of what they know or believe about graffiti now that they've explored more of the history of murals as an art form.

- *Art*
- *Expression*
- *Vandalism*
- *Colorful*
- *Rebellion*
- *Symbols*
- *Messages*
- *Voice*
- *Community*
- *Values*

100 minutes

Explain

Show the video on **slide 16** of a professional mural artist discussing her career journey and design process.

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=s8XEgjVnevg

Review design examples on **slide 17** of how Lindsay Zodrow made considerations for space in her design choices as a way to get students thinking about how the space can inspire the work. At this point you may already have a space at your school or in you community in mind that students can be designing for. Then, have students begin working on design ideas using the 4-2-1 strategy (instructions on **slides 18-22**):

- Have students create one sketch independently.
- Then have four students get into a group and share their sketches. As a group of four, have them come up with two new sketches for ideas that emerged from looking at their four individual ideas.
- Then, have two groups of four pair up and share their sketches.
- They should decide on one new idea that emerges from looking at the four ideas they brought.
- Have all the groups share this one new idea with the whole class
- Have the class vote on the one idea they think should be included in their mural proposal.

Show the video on **slide 23** of an artist describing how to prepare a proposal for a mural. Then, have students write a proposal inspired by the design brainstorming process individually or in small groups.

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=1OJW5zQhJBE

Teacher's Note

Part of the proposal will be to make a mock-up for the mural. This should be a small painting or colored drawing that fleshes out the idea that will be painted large scale in the space. It should be made clear that the 4-2-1 brainstorming activity was meant to generate and share ideas around what we think will work well in the space for this client. Any ideas that emerge can be a source of inspiration to anyone in the class as they make a mock-up to go in their proposal.

The proposal should contain (slide 24):

1. Executive summary (1-2 paragraphs): Who you are, what is the mural, when will you do it, where will it be, why do you want to make this mural here, how will you make the mural?
2. Two concept sketches/mock-ups: Can you show how the design will look in the space?
3. Brief artistic narrative describing the intent, style, colors, media, and how each concept meets the mission/goals/content that was requested by the commissioning body
4. Preparation needs: How does the space need to be prepared for the artists to begin work?
5. Budget
6. Timeline giving an outline of the starting date, dates for major milestones, and the completion date, as well as total hours needed to complete the work
7. Maintenance needs/plan
8. Artist/s resume/portfolio

250 minutes

Extend

Students will apply their learning to design and implement a mural for a location in their school or community. The mural should be created over the course of a week. **Slide 25** shows a timelapse video of an artist working on a mural painting in a commercial setting.

Embedded video

https://youtube.com/watch?v=aF1VovOP6qM

Teacher's Note

This amount of time is variable. If you have multiple sections of art, you might consider using a grid and assigning different squares to different periods.

15 minutes

Evaluate

Use the strategy Rose, Bud, and Thorn on **slide 26** to Reflect on the mural creation process, the aspects that were most rewarding or challenging, and the skills they look forward to developing in the future as a result of having worked on this project. Students should write out their answers and turn them in to you or share with the whole class.

Resources

- I am Detour. (2023). 4 Methods on How to Scale up your Art for Murals and Street Art [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzsNxjiTDWk
- I am Detour. (2023). How to Write a Mural Proposal Letter for Painting Murals and Street Art [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OJW5zQhJBE
- K20 Center. (n.d.). 4-2-1. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/142
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Honeycomb harvest. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/61
- K20 Center. (n.d.). K20 ICAP - Mural Artist from Yo Bro - Think Big Picture [Video]. YouTube.https://youtu.be/s8XEgjVnevg
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Plaza walls with Jesse Warne [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/R3Y26ZnpAyE?si=hvtiUBnZmQgrzPgd
- K20 Center. (n.d.) Rose, bud, and thorn. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/2224
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Word splash. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/199