

People at Work

Objective: Using WPA artworks from the ISM as a springboard for ideas and theme, students will observe people at work and draw them in pencil or charcoal in high contrast values.

Grade Levels: 5-12

Time Required: one to two class periods

Motivation: WPA works of art were made by artists who were hired by the government during a time of economic depression to create works of art for display, installation, and exhibits. The works also recorded life as it went on during the depression. Artists made paintings, drawings, prints, murals, and sculptures depicting the people they saw around them pursuing their work and other daily activities. Simple art materials were used. Artists worked in the styles of the day (1930s and 1940s, regionalism, cubism, expressionism) or in some cases, individualistic styles.



List some of the people you see at school, in public, and at home doing their jobs and other activities. Do you think these activities make interesting subjects for art? Why or why not? How does recording these activities in artwork make statements about our society?

Notice that many of the print and drawing WPA works contain high contrast of values that makes the compositions strong and exciting. What other elements of the pictures make them memorable? How can you use pencil or charcoal on paper to make compelling images of people in their everyday situations? What can you enhance in the composition to create a larger statement or evoke a stronger reaction in your audience?

Materials:

Drawing paper

Black drawing pencils or pens or charcoal, chalk

Erasers

Procedure:

Assign the students to go out and make several sketches of individuals or groups of people working or doing everyday activities in their usual environments. Students will choose one of these to rework into a finished drawing. Students may want to practice techniques in pen, pencil or charcoal to create a high contrast in values in a composition.

Presentation: Have students mat or frame the finished drawings. Make wall labels for each work (see Creating Wall Labels in MuseumLink's Behind the Scenes module's Activities and Resources). Hang the exhibit in a public place. Have students act as docents to guide other student groups through the exhibit. They will prepare a few words

to say about the meaning of their own work, the media, and the work or activity in the drawing as the theme of the exhibit.

Assessment:

Do the drawings exhibit high contrast of values?

Do the drawings exhibit the subject matter of the theme?

What does the drawing say about the culture? — the artist's view of the culture?

Students may self-assess, the teacher may assess, or groups may critique.

Illinois State Board of Education Goals Addressed:

Social Studies: Social Systems

18.A.2 Explain ways in which language, stories, folk tales, music, media and artistic creations serve as expressions of culture.

18.B.2a Describe interactions of individuals, groups and institutions in situations drawn from the local community (e.g., local response to state and national reforms).

Visual Arts:

25.A.2d Identify and describe the elements of 2- and 3-dimensional space, figure ground, **value** and form; the principles of rhythm, size, proportion and composition; and the expressive qualities of symbol and story.

B.2 Understand how elements and principles combine within an art form to express ideas.