

Illinois State Museum – MuseumLink Art
Depression Era Art: The Federal Arts Project
Lesson Plan: Themes

Purpose: to help the user understand the themes of the WPA/FAP art programs by looking at this Web site and its resources

Objectives: the student will, after having gone through the material about the WPA arts programs, be able to

- explain or demonstrate the basic themes that artists used for subject matter and inspiration.
- choose a typical subject from life today relating to one of those themes **American scene, workers, social realism, modern sensibility, stolen moments**)
- produce a work of art showing a scene on this chosen theme.



Grade Levels: 7-10, but can be adapted downward to K-6.

Time Required: one or two 50-minute periods

Materials: sketch paper, pencil, pen, marker, ink, charcoal, pastel, paint, drawing paper, picture mats for presentation

Motivation: After having viewed the Web site, its artworks, and text, and other resources according to age and ability, the students will discuss the subject matter that artists chose to depict.

- Compare topics of life today that are similar to those depicted during the Depression.
- List the purposes of making representational art (illustration, expression, protest, comment, documenting).
- Point out how artists' attitudes toward their subject shows in the works (nostalgia, anger, happiness).
- Brainstorm and list some topics that would make topical paintings about society today.
- Talk about choices of media students could make to achieve specific moods, amounts of details, overall effects.

Procedure: Students will:

- choose a subject to depict.
- choose an appropriate medium to help tell their story.
- sketch their composition, perhaps in thumbnail size, until they produce a composition that works best.
- transfer that sketch to a final drawing paper of their choice.
- finish the art work.

Publication and Closure: Have students decide if they want to display the drawings by themes, media, as a format for group exhibit and critique.

Assessment: Students and teacher can discuss how the drawing communicates the chosen theme.
Does the medium help tell the story? Accomplish the mood?
Is the composition well worked out?



Illinois State Board of Education Goals and Standards addressed:

Social Science:

Early High School:

15.E.4a: Explain why government might interfere in a market economy.(WPA)

16.B.4: Identify political ideas that have dominated U.S. historical eras (New Deal).

Visual Art:

27.B: Understand how the arts shape and reflect history, society, and everyday life.

Early Elementary: 27.B.1,

Late Elem.-27.B.2,

Middle-27.B.3,

Early High-27.B.4a and b,

Late High- 27.B.5