

Depression Era Art: The Federal Arts Project

Urban and Rural Life

Level: High School

- Purpose:*
- to help the student understand life in urban and rural areas of the United States during the Depression Era.
 - to help the student understand how art critics write about the elements of art and technique that artists use to express their feelings in their work

- Objectives:*
- The students will, after viewing the WPA unit online, and reading some of the offline resources, be able to
- tell how the artist of their choice in the WPA online unit interpreted life on a farm or in a city during the Depression by describing each element of the artwork that illustrates facts that they read. (See Ideas for Talking about Artworks with Your Students, http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/pdfs/cc_visual.pdf, and click on Visual Thinking Skills.
 - tell how the artist of their choice used line, color, shape, space, or other element, or a medium or technique to effectively express the subject of the artwork

- Materials:*
- print resources about life during the Depression
 - writing paper
 - pencils, pens, word processor
 - printout of one artwork image from the WPA online unit. Url

Motivation:

Discuss with the students what they know about life during the Depression in cities and on farms (see resource list). Show an example of a Depression artwork, from the WPA unit or from a book or print. Dialogue with the class about how the artist gave a mood to the painting, expressed suffering, poverty, isolation, hope, inspiration, etc., with the use of color, line, shape, or other element. This will be the model for the activity. Summarize what has been discussed and what the students will write about.

- Procedure:*
- Students will choose an artwork to print out from the WPA online unit.
 - They should have their print resources, such as the fiction and non-fiction from the resource list, library books, text, etc., to refer to for facts.
 - A list of art elements on the board or bulletin board can cue them to choose. They may want to consult a partner.
 - After a limited time for consultation and research, they should begin to write a paragraph about how the artist interpreted the facts of the Depression. Then they can be cued with a time to write about how the artist interpreted the theme in an expressive way using elements of art and techniques.
 - Continue the writing process with editing, drafts, and proofing until a presentable copy is completed.

Publication and Closure:

The descriptions can be used as labels in a display. The entire project could be combined as a book of student art criticism of the Depression.

Assessment:

The research element can be evaluated for accuracy of fact and thoroughness. Does the information from the resources fit the artwork subject? Was the connection clearly explained?

The critique of the art elements is the third element. Did the student find the art element(s) relevant to the artwork? Was the relationship to the message or mood of the piece described?