

Project-Based Learning: History through the Arts

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Source: *Creating Meaning through Literature and the Arts*, 5e. Boston: Pearson.

All Purpose Strategies

- Look and listen closely (e.g. period music, art, dance): Ask, what do you see? Hear? What's the meaning? Why?
- Paraphrase challenge: Ask students to explain the challenge differently.
- Coach with IQs: Ask instead of tell! (See separate Inquiry Question handout)
- Teacher in role interview: Become a TV reporter and interview students about an event—with each of them in role.
- ABC debriefing: Challenge trios (students labeled ABC) to respond to one another's conclusions (e.g. captions, titles). Example: A shares and BC tell what they see/hear and ask questions. Then B goes, etc.
- Art first: Present period music or artwork to introduce lessons. Art and music are appropriate for pre-writing as well. *Variation*: Students *make* art and then write about it.
- Showtime: Institute a Friday Theatre for students to sum up learning using arts performances (e.g. oral sharing of original poems, tableau presentations, monologues).
- Reference posters: Display the creative process, arts elements, and arts response options (see *Creating Meaning* book cited above).

STARTER TOOLKIT: Social Studies Seed Strategies

Challenge students to read, view and/or listen to word texts (fiction/nonfiction and narrative/expository) and/or arts texts (visual art, dance, drama or music) for the purpose of 1) synthesizing conclusions and 2) then showing them through...

1. Literary Arts: Poem (acrostic, quartet, diamante—any pattern)
2. Visual Art (collage, sculpture, painting)
3. Drama (scene, tableau, pantomime, one liner, write in role)
4. Dance (three-part dance)
5. Music/Song (new lyrics to known melody, original melody/rap with or without

VISUAL ARTS SEEDS

Title It. Create a Title/Caption for an historic photo or any artwork (e.g. portrait of King Philip of Spain.) Example websites: worldsfamousphotos and boredpanda (go to must-see-historic-moments).

Travel Journal. Any historical event involving a journey can be documented in a sketch journal. Example: Students take the role of Lewis or Clark and sketch event images, in sequence, from their remarkable trip (Riedmayer, 2013).

Group Compositions. Collaborative art projects involve students in cooperative work and demand individual responsibility. Examples include: group murals, class topic quilts (state, city,

transportation, etc.), group sculptures such as totem poles (cardboard boxes, tubes, or papier mâché) on topics such as exploration and colonization. Note: Art need not be representational (realistic) to convey important messages.

Peer Sculptures. Using historical paintings and sculptures (e.g., *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, *Guernica*) as examples, challenge students to take turns “sculpting” each other into original poses that represent a significant event. *Variation:* Half of the class assumes a famous (or original) pose while the other half pretends to be museum visitors who tour in pairs and dialogue about what they see (details and conclusions), how they feel, and reveal who they are (e.g. parent and child).

Portraits Squeeze: Biography, Show several portraits of the same historical figure, (e.g. Philo Farnsworth, father of television). Ask students to look closely at each to collect details and connect ideas in order to draw conclusions:

- 1) Face: What does it tell you about age? Personality? Emotions? Where is the person looking? Why?
- 2) Body: What is the person’s posture? Gestures? Clothing? What do these suggest?
- 3) Objects: What other things are in the picture? What might they mean (symbols)?
- 4) Setting: What is in the background? What suggest the place and time (seasons, time period, time of day)?

As individuals, or in groups, write a sentence or caption that summarizes conclusions for each portrait or do a synthesis statement from all three.

Signature Art. Show facsimiles of signatures (e.g., on Declaration of Independence). Give paper and choices of tools and media. Allow time to experiment with signature possibilities. Display products and discuss differences in size, color, lines, and shapes, and the effects. Go further to turn signatures into elaborate visual art by adding background, texture, etc.

Paraphs. Notables such as John Hancock and Queen Elizabeth I added “paraphs”(designs) to their signatures to prevent forgery. (See examples at Art Lex website). Discuss how art often is rooted in functional needs of people (e.g., antique tools now used decoratively). Give large paper to experiment with creating personal paraphs.

Immigrant Project. Challenge students to research an actual immigrant or invent a composite one. Using facts and details, each student becomes an immigrant and creates 1) a self portrait in a chosen medium, 2) writes a narrative/monologue about coming to America and performs it. Note: This can become a multi-disciplinary arts project (e.g. songwriting). Resources: *If Your Name was Changed at Ellis Island* (Levine, 2006); Scholastic website (search immigration).

Holiday Art. Social studies is trivialized when holidays are studied in superficial ways and lack connections to standards. Avoid use of stereotypical and dictated art. Instead of tracing hand turkeys and coloring Pilgrim and Indian heads at Thanksgiving, challenge students to use a variety of media to create art about big ideas such as: (1) Rituals (e.g. meals are used to celebrate events across cultures), (2) Gifting (e.g. food) to show appreciation and bond, and (3) Thankfulness. Teach use of diverse art forms, media, tools, and techniques to expand access to more ways to express understanding. Personal construction of meaning, with fealty to important facts, is the goal.

DRAMA SEEDS

Character Meetings. Each student chooses an historical character everyone has studied. Partners then have conversations, in character, about their lives, problems, and so forth. Invite pairs to share conversation highlights with the class. *Variations:* During “highlights”

performances, build in freeze moments for the audience to suggest an emotion. When conversation begins again, characters use the emotion (e.g. Washington goes from ardent to delighted, but conversation must make sense).

The Chair. Person A sits in a chair. B takes a role and begins a conversation. A must discern who B is and respond accordingly. For example, B is Thomas Jefferson, and A is Hillary Clinton. Adapt for literature and current events. *Variation:* Partners sit back to back. Pairs take roles of a book characters, an occupation, or family role. On signal, they face and the first sets the situation. The second must figure out who his partner is and respond in role.

Teacher in Role Interview. Motivate any research or reading (e.g. social studies text) by forecasting that you will interview students the next day about assigned reading. Direct S to each choose a role (from the reading), and prepare to answer five W's questions, with the first being "What happened?" *Suggestion:* Teacher can be a reporter from a local TV station. Debrief about how preparing for the interview changed the assignment preparation.

Moments Tableau. Small groups choose an important moment from an era, such as Industrial Revolution or Spanish American War, and use their bodies/faces to form a "frozen picture" showing the moment, particularly relevant emotions. Groups perform, while the audience examines the tableau and then describes what they *see* and what it *means* (use a T chart if desired to record). Groups may caption tableaux and present title after the discussion.

Portrait Conversations. Challenge pairs to plan a conversation (written or oral) between two portraits of famous historical figures hanging side by side in a gallery. Challenge S to look closely to examine the works for clues about time period, values, cultural aspects, messages, and the like that give ideas for dialogue. *Variation:* Ask S to plan dialogue for figures in a painting (e.g., *Washington Crossing the Delaware* or *The Signing of the Declaration of Independence*).

Famous Portrait Monologues Use portraits of famous figures (e.g., U.S. presidents). Students research persons in the art and prepare 1-minute monologues, about the times, problems, values, economics, and customs, and present in first person.

What's My Line? Based on a 1950s television show, this role drama focuses on discovering occupations. Panelists might all have the same occupation or role (e.g., suffragettes). The audience can only ask yes or no questions and is given a time limit on number of questions (e.g., 5 minutes or 20 questions). The teacher acts as moderator, calling on audience members. To deal with monopolizers, use the rule that when a panelist answers "no," someone else gets a turn.

Biography Drama. Groups read biographies from an historical period and note actions to pantomime, special events, important scenes, and special lines of dialogue. Students plan with biography groups. For example, they might improvise dialogue for the scene leading up to Patrick Henry saying, "Give me liberty or give me death." *Suggestion:* Focus on actual words the person used and conflicting positions the person took (e.g., Jefferson owned slaves).

Key Word Stories. Choose a list of 10 words important to an upcoming reading assignment. Pair students to invent a story using all the words, and then read the assignment to compare word use. In Wolfe's study (2001) students remembered 90 percent of 120 words using this method versus 13 percent by the control.

Historic Quotes/Question Squeeze. Present a famous quote and challenge students to generate 5 W's and H questions about it. Example: According to legend, Abraham Lincoln greeted Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1862 by saying "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this Great War. Questions: What book? What war? Why did he say...?"

Famous Pairs. Sit in a circle. Challenge students to pick one of a famous pair (e.g. George Washington or George Bush) and tell how s/he is like that person.

Pass and Pretend. After a unit study, sit in a circle. Pass around an ordinary object (e.g. scarf). Challenge each student to assume a role from the unit and use the object to show their identity. Example: Pretend scarf is a pen and sign the Declaration like Hancock would have.

I Heard It First. Use a famous song, such as “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Break into small groups to research the history and then plan a scene. Example: The audience’s reaction, the first time it was ever heard. Scenes should have a beginning, middle, and end.

Song Skits. Play a piece of music connected to a unit (e.g., Grand Canyon Suite). Challenge students to create a scene with a beginning, middle, and end. Example: Sit about how the composer may have used creative process to compose the piece. Remind S to include conflict in the beginning, and have a resolution at the end. Coach students to use start and stop signals and to make events seem real or believable through concentration and use of imaginative details.

DANCE SEEDS

Shape Break. Take a lesson pause and challenge students to create body shapes to express emotions or ideas. Example: Pearl Harbor Unit: Use music of the era to march like a World War II soldier or move in slow motion as you evacuate a ship or show fear of bombing by moving backwards. Signal changes with “Freeze” or a drum. At conclusion, ask S for “Take Aways” (something learned) about Pearl Harbor (Brandon, 2013).

Character Walk. Form two facing rows, one on each side of a room. Challenge first in each row to change places with opposite person by walking across in the role of someone recently studied. Example: Governor Menedez, Senora Menendez, Jean Ribaut, King Philip,

Get to Work. Brainstorm ways people work: picking, washing, sweeping, raking, fixing. You may want to set the “work” in a period of time or culture (e.g. Indian culture in Santa Elena regions). Each person or small group creates a work dance based on a real or imaginary prop associated with work (e.g., broom) and moves in creative ways. Music can be added. Dance should have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Suggest: “Freeze, Move, Freeze” dance sequence. Variation:

Magic Wand. Display a full-length portrait such as a narrative scene from history containing multiple figures. Each S assumes posture of one figure. When touched by a wand, s/he moves like the figure might. Coach students to move in different ways (e.g. bend and walk, using curved and straight lines) and add emotions and motives: “Move as if you are worried about going to the battle front.” See BEST Dance Elements

Country or State. Narrate a tour of a place while students show “terrain” using level changes (high, medium, low). Students can also show the size of the state or country in relation to other countries or states as a leader calls them. Example: Texas versus Rhode Island. *Variation:* Challenge students to show what they know about a place (products, industries, climate, or plant life) by imaginatively interacting with objects using creative movements.

Historical Event. Brainstorm movements that could have been part of a special event such as the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Explore variations on movement using slow motion, changing rhythm and space, and so on. Coach students to create mood using body shapes and moves.

Current Events Dances. Brainstorm movement possibilities for current events. Examples: the Olympic Games or national elections can inspire sports dances or dances related to the opening or closing event.

Cultural Dance. View videos of dances (e.g. folk dances such as the Andalusian Spanish flamenco). Ask students to notice BEST dance elements in each dance and hypothesize what is

being communicated. Focus on the structure of the dance (beginning, middle, end) and what is repeated. Video sources: YouTube and Folk Moot USA.

MUSIC SEEDS

Introduce a Time Period. Play period music. Ask, “What do you hear? What does it tell you about this time? How does this music sound different from contemporary music? Why?”

Cultural Contrasts. Use a Venn diagram (two overlapping circles) to compare music from countries, cultures, and ethnic groups with familiar music. Use music elements to categorize likenesses and differences. *Variation:* Contrast two songs about the same topic (e.g., WWII music).

Music and Culture. Explore a culture by listening to its music and songs. For example, South African freedom songs provide a sense of social context and culture and can be compared with African-American spirituals. Discuss what the music shows about the culture (values, ideas).

Possible questions:

- How does the music feel? What does it sound like?
- Who makes the music?
- How is music made? What instruments are used?
- Why would a culture create this kind of music?
- When was the music made?
- What kind of music is this? How is it like other music?
- How has music in the culture changed over time?

Variation: Challenge students to create an imaginary culture and answer questions about its music.

Summary Songs. Song writing is a valuable way to synthesize information and is most effective when students write their own, as opposed to memorizing others’ songs. Why? “The person doing the work is the one growing the dendrites” (Wolfe, 2001, p. 187). Example: I am Jean Ribaut, Santa Elena, Santa Elena, June 22, 1576. (Tune=Frere Jacques)

States and Capitals Rap. Students use drums or sticks to develop a basic beat and compose a mnemonic for chanting cities and states (e.g., Columbus, Ohio; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Atlanta, Georgia; Sacramento, California).

Continents Song. Use familiar tunes to summarize facts (e.g., the names of the seven continents). Example: Tune= She’ll Be Comin’ Round the Mountain with the lyrics: “There are seven continents on the earth (2X). We have seven great big landforms, seven great big landforms. There are seven continents on the earth. There are North and South America. Australia, Africa and Europe. Then there is Asia and Antarctica. Asia and Antarctica. Asia and Antarctica make it seven.”

Song Sources. Review purposes and types of songs: lullabies, work songs, sea chanteys, patriotic songs, etc. Ask for examples of social and historical events that use certain types, such as birthdays and weddings. Read about an event and brainstorm types of songs people or characters might sing, play, or compose. Ask students to explain their reasons. *Notes:* Share picture books based on songs (e.g., “Follow the Drinking Gourd”) and discuss “then and now” purposes of songs (e.g. work songs such as “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad” and “Erie Canal”).

History through Music. Find music that reflects the environment and times, for example songs about historical events and values (e.g. “Battle Hymn of the Republic”). Research origins of period songs and mine songs for attitudes, worries and values of the time. Example: “Dixie” had

to do with a currency issued by a southern bank. Dix is the French word for 10.

Song Experts. Invite students to become experts on the history of important songs. Have a group sing interspersed with short reports or start a daily “song a day” routine. Example: In 1916, President Wilson ordered all Army and Navy bands to cease playing “America the Beautiful” (the national anthem) and instead play “The Star-Spangled Banner,” a song considered almost un-singable. Why the change? When Wilson knew the United States would have to enter the Great War, his wife insisted “America the Beautiful” was too peaceable for a country about to declare war.

Music Time Line. Read about composers of time periods and plot contributions on a time line. Add other events (composers’ birthdays, song or music events). *Variation:* Make a time line of periods (Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and 20th century) and find example music pieces/songs for each. Combine pictures of artwork, clothing, architecture, dances, or theatrical productions from the time. Discuss how art reflects societal changes and investigate the materials and technology available at the time or in the area.

Design an Instrument. Use this idea with a unit on early human history. Explain our ancestors did not have the kind of musical instruments we have today. Music was made about feelings and experiences using available materials. They plucked, blew through, and struck using bones, rocks, wood, and shells. Invite students to design an instrument from an item in their environment and use plucking, blowing, or striking. *Variation:* Each student researches an instrument played in the manner of the one made and presents findings.

Music Current Events. Start the weekly routine “Music in the News”. Invite students to find music-related stories and/or write songs based on news events using familiar tunes. *Note:* Many folk songs are old tunes with new lyrics (e.g., civil rights songs were based on spirituals).

Multicultural Music and Dances. Analyze songs as historical records of how people felt, thought, and acted. Research the significance of songs—how music has influenced history (e.g., France’s “La Marseillaise” or the Mexican American workers’ “De Colores”). Other music possibilities include Native American, civil rights, mountain, cowboy tunes, patriotic, and African tribal music. Guide students to understand that music helps create identity and expresses a people’s values and passions. For example, the Apache song “I Walk with Beauty” (based on a Navajo poem) indicates a concept of beauty in which all things living in harmony.

Song Box. Challenge students to create artwork based on lyrics from a historical song. For example, a cereal box could be collaged or painted with images related to geography concepts in “America the Beautiful,” with information about the composer, maps, facts, and photos inside.

Community Sing. Start the day or week with a “community sing” to bond the class, in the way singing bonds culture groups. Write or sing patriotic, camp, folk, or appropriate contemporary songs. A collaborative class anthem can be written to share student beliefs about school and learning, and special songs can be found or written to celebrate people, seasons, or special events, such as Secretary’s Day. *Variation:* Ask the music teacher for examples from different cultures or use the songs recommended the National Conference of Music Educators.

Song Source. Ross and Stangl’s *The Music Teacher’s Book of Lists* is a good starter source for songs about wars, immigration, westward expansion, cowboys, slavery, Negro spirituals, work songs, civil rights/protest songs, patriotic and holiday/seasonal songs and the national anthems of various counties.