

Decades Mural Project

How are murals a visual depiction of history?

Grades 6-8 Lesson: Decades Mural Project

Grade Band: 6-8

Arts Subject: Visual Arts, Media Arts

Other Subject: English & Literature, History

SUMMARY

In this 6-8 lesson, students will learn how to use primary sources, and work in groups to create murals about the events and trends of a decade of the twentieth century. Students will focus their research on a specific category relating to the culture of that decade, and then depict their findings through a mural.

PREPARATION

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Work cooperatively in groups to research and gather primary resources.
- Use technology to collaborate with a group.
- Create a mural depicting major events and trends of each decade from the twentieth century and early twenty-first century.
- Describe how visual arts can record history and represent cultural changes.
- Use evidence to support a claim or argument.
- Present historical information to an audience.

Recommended Materials

Editable Documents: *Before sharing these resources with students, you must first save them to your Google account by opening them, and selecting “Make a copy” from the File menu.*

- [Mural Planner: History Through the Decades](#)
- [Primary Sources Guide, Mural Summary](#)
- [Rubric: Decades Mural Project](#)

Websites

- [Primary Source Facts for Kids](#)
- [#metkids Time Machine: North America + 1900 - Present](#)
- [Timeline of the 20th Century](#)
- [US History: 1900 to the Present](#)



Additional Materials

- poster or butcher paper
- art supplies (markers, paints, colored pencils)

Teacher Background

Teachers should review the following resources before the lesson: [MoMA: Murals by American Painters and Photographers](#), [Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles](#), [Mural Arts of Philadelphia](#), [#metkids Time Machine: North America + 1900 - Present](#), [Timeline of the 20th Century](#), and [US History: 1900 to the Present](#).

Student Prerequisites

Students should have a basic understanding of what a mural is and familiarity with the events of the twentieth century.

Accessibility Notes

Modify handouts as needed and allow extra time for task completion. Adaptive scissors and other assistive technologies may be helpful throughout the lesson.

INSTRUCTION

Engage

1. Introduce students to the concept of primary sources - original documentation that serves as a record of historical events and trends. Examples range from printed materials (letters, diaries, interviews, newspapers, speeches, and oral histories) to objects (artifacts, tools, inventions, uniforms, fashion, and clothing) to images (photographs, fine art, film, and video) to audio recordings (oral histories, interviews, speeches). Primary sources introduce students to multiple perspectives on many issues of the past and present and greatly assist in students developing critical and analytic skills. Have students visit [Primary Source Facts for Kids](#) for additional explanations and examples.

2. Explain to students that each decade of the 20th and early 21st centuries had their own distinctive culture, with specific political events (both world and national), famous people, trends, and discoveries. *Ask students: What would your research approach be if asked to use primary sources to create a visual art mural?* Discuss with students how a mural, indeed all of the visual arts, can be a significant way to record history and represent cultural changes.

3. Share and review the resource, [Mural Planner: History Through the Decades](#). Break students into small groups to research a theme from each decade and create a mural representing a timeline from the 1900's - to 2009. Have students explore the fads and fashions, art and architecture, music, political events, and key facts from each decade through the web

resources in the planner. As they explore, groups should narrow a theme to focus on for their research and mural projects.

Build

1. Distribute the [Primary Sources Guide](#). Have each group brainstorm objects and images of people, events, concepts, etc. from each decade. For example, a flapper dress from the 1920s, a photograph of a famous abstract expressionist painting, a picture of an airplane from the 1950s, or a video recording of a famous political speech from the 1980s. *Ask students: What is the meaning of each object? How might an object communicate meaning and symbolism?*

Ask students to discuss this project with their family. Family collections and archives provide a rich source of objects and photographs from the past. Encourage students to bring in objects or images that represent the decade they are researching. Discuss with students how these items are primary sources. Have students reference the [Primary Sources Guide](#) for in-class and home research. Students may also bring in books from the library or their homes to use for research.

2. Have students discuss in their collaborative groups how to visually communicate the symbolism of these historical objects and images. Students will begin sketching ideas for their murals with a pencil. Encourage the integration of mixed materials and objects, including fabric, copies of sheet music, etc. Students can incorporate a few photographs or computer-printed images, but the mural must also include drawings and paintings.

Apply

1. Allow time for collaborative groups to work on their mural sketches. Play age-appropriate music in the background to represent each decade while students work. Facilitate through each group and provide feedback. Each group should turn in a final draft of their sketch. Review the final sketches and note any final comments or feedback prior to the creation of the larger mural.

2. Each group should transfer their final sketch to a large white poster or butcher paper. Have students sketch the design and place all objects and photographic images in their designated place. Have students add details like lettering and phrases associated with the decade. Once the outline has been transferred to the poster, students should begin to incorporate color, using tempera paint, colored pencils, chalk, or markers. Remind students that they must use elements such as shape, form, and contrast to communicate the symbolism that each part of their mural embodies. Encourage students to use peer review in their groups as they refine and complete their mural.

3. Have each group document the details of the mural in the [Mural Summary](#) resource. Tell students they will use the resource during their group presentations.

Reflect

1. Have each group present their mural to the class. Each group should discuss the cultural category depicted, the objects used and/or represented, describe the symbolism behind each object, and the historical significance. Hold a discussion after each presentation so students can ask questions or provide constructive, positive feedback about the historical content of a mural. Use the [Rubric: Decades Mural Project](#) to evaluate the group presentations.

2. Assess students' knowledge of mural depictions with the following writing prompt: *In what ways do you think visual history (e.g.: murals, paintings, sculptures, etc.) is an effective way to not only record but also interpret and analyze historic events? In your opinion, how effective is a visual record of history compared to a written record of history? Use evidence to support your claim.*

Credits

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