

Discovering the Story: A City and Its Culture

Expressive Message Collages

An Arts Enrichment Activity for Grades 9-12

Based on *The Underground Railroad, 1893*
by Charles T. Webber



Charles T. Webber (1825-1911)
United States (Cincinnati)
The Underground Railroad, 1893
Subscription Fund Purchase, 1927.26

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OBJECTIVES

- Students will examine [*The Underground Railroad*](#) painting and observe what event is being depicted, and how the artist is expressing his ideas about the event.
- Students will research a variety of primary sources, such as historical photographs, advertisements and books to develop a personal, informed response toward the history of slavery in the United States.
- Students will look at examples of art by collage artists to expand their understanding of this means of expression.
- Students will create a collage that expresses personal opinion about a topic (courage, tolerance, equality or civil rights) relating to the Underground Railroad.

PRE- VIDEOCONFERENCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

VOCABULARY

Definitions can be found in the [Glossary](#) on the [Discovering the Story](#) Website.

Advocate
Art Elements
Collage
Political Art
Principles of Art

MATERIALS

- Pencils and paper
- Glue
- Lightweight cardboard or mat board, any size
- Felt-tip markers
- Magazines
- Fabric scraps
- Scissors
- Small, lightweight found objects relevant to their idea (optional)

BRAINSTORMING/GETTING STARTED

- Look at an image of *The Underground Railroad* painting and review the concept of the Underground Railroad.
 - Why do you think Charles T. Webber chose to paint this painting?

- What do you think the painting reveals about his attitude toward this event?
- Does it affect your feelings about the Underground Railroad? How?
- Do you think art/images can be a vehicle for change? How?
- Show students examples of collage art by a variety of artists. Some sample artists/artworks: Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, also works by Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden, Bettye Saar, and many works from the Dada art movement (1916-1923).
 - What kinds of materials do these artists use?
 - How does the choice of materials add to their message?
 - What kinds of messages are these artists conveying?
- Tell students that they will each be creating an Expressive Message Collage, exploring a topic relating to the Underground Railroad.
- Students will research the Underground Railroad primary sources to develop a topic and an informed opinion about the movement, and respond to their research through their collage.

PROCEDURE

1. Ask students to make a series of small, quick sketches responding to their researched topic.
2. Students shouldn't worry about drawing skill in these sketches; these are simply to experiment with imagery and explore composition.
3. Ask students to try a number of different versions of the same idea, changing certain aspects. For instance, changing the size of a main character in proportion to the size of the paper, changing the time of day, etc.
4. Distribute cardboard and collage materials.
5. Ask students to try a number of different arrangement solutions before gluing items in place.
6. Consider how visual interest can be created--through color, color contrast, size, texture. Also, what meaning do we associate with different colors, textures and materials, and how can these be manipulated to most effectively put forth a desired idea?

DISCUSSION/PREPARATION FOR VIDEOCONFERENCE

- Hang up the completed works for display.
- Which ones are the most successful and why? Are different pieces successful for different reasons? (Craft, visual impact, message?)
- What examples of Underground Railroad primary sources did students find most influential when doing research for their collages?
- What would be the ideal venue for these Expressive Message Collages and why? The classroom, the hallways of the school, a museum, a bus stop, a billboard, the Internet, a political protest? Time permitting, some students may share their collages with the Museum staff member during the videoconference.

VIDEOCONFERENCE

OBJECTIVES

- Students will interact with the Cincinnati Art Museum staff through a sixty-minute [videoconference](#).
- Students will learn about Cincinnati's contribution to the Underground Railroad.
- Students will use Museum objects to reinforce activities completed in preparation for this [videoconference](#).

CONCEPT

A [videoconference](#) conducted by the Cincinnati Art Museum staff extends student learning through emphasis on the viewing and discussion of art objects. During this [videoconference](#) with the Museum, students will explore Cincinnati's place in the story of the Underground Railroad movement and major tristate figures, such as Levi and Catharine Coffin, John Parker and John Rankin.

SCHEDULE

- **5 minutes** Introduction to CAM staff (*This is also buffer time in case of connection complications*)
- **10 minutes** Brief discussion of student pre-videoconferencing activities.
- **10 minutes** Museum staff will lead students in an in-depth investigation of C.T. Webber's painting *The Underground Railroad*
- **15 minutes** Museum staff will lead an interactive discussion with students on Cincinnati's place in the story of the Underground Railroad movement.
- **10 minutes** Questions and student sharing of art projects.
- **5 minutes** Closing (*This is also buffer time in case of connection complications*)

ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS

NATIONAL STANDARDS: VISUAL ARTS

Standard 1: Understands and applies media, techniques and processes related to the visual arts.

Benchmark 1: Applies media, techniques and processes with sufficient skill, confidence and sensitivity that one's intentions are carried out in artworks.

Benchmark 2: Understands how the communication of ideas relates to the media, techniques and processes one uses.

Standard 4: Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

Benchmark 1: Knows a variety of historical and cultural contexts regarding characteristics and purposes of works of art.

Benchmark 2: Knows the function and meaning of specific art objects within varied cultures, times and places.

Benchmark 3: Understands relationships among works of art in terms of history, aesthetics and culture.

Standard 5: Understands the characteristics and merits of one's own artwork and the artwork of others.

Benchmark 1: Identifies intentions of those creating artworks.

Benchmark 2: Understands some of the implications of intention and purpose in particular works of art.

Benchmark 3: Knows how specific works are created and relate to historical and cultural contexts.

OHIO STANDARDS: VISUAL ARTS

Creative Expression and Communication: Students create artworks that demonstrate understanding of materials, processes, tools, media, techniques and available technology. They understand how to use art elements, principles and images to communicate their ideas in a variety of visual forms.

Benchmark A: Demonstrates mastery of materials, concepts and personal concentration when creating original artworks.

Benchmark B: Creates expressive artworks that demonstrate a sense of purpose and understanding of the relationship among materials, techniques and ideas.

Historical, Cultural and Social Contexts: Students understand the impact of visual art on the history, culture and society from which it emanates. They understand the cultural, social and political forces that, in turn, shape visual art communication and expression. Students identify the significant contributions of visual artists to cultural heritage. They analyze the historical, cultural, social and political contexts that influence the function and role of visual art in the lives of people.

Benchmark A: Explains how and why visual art forms develop in the contexts in which they were made.

Benchmark B: Compares works of art to one another in terms of the historical, cultural, social and political influences evident in the works.

Benchmark C: Explains the characteristics and content of culturally and historically representative artworks to demonstrate understanding of how visual art reflects historical issues, events and cultural traditions.

Analyzing and Responding: Students identify and discriminate themes, media, subject matter and formal technical and expressive aspects in works of art. They understand and use the vocabulary of art criticism to describe visual features, analyze relationships and interpret meanings in works of art. Students make judgment about the quality of works of art using the appropriate criteria.

Benchmark A: Applies the knowledge and skills of art criticism to conduct in-depth analyses of works of art.

Benchmark C: Critiques their own work, the works of peers and other artists on the basis of the formal, technical and expressive aspect in the works.