LESSON PLANS

PORTRAIT OF AN AMERICAN HERO

Grade Levels: 7–12
Estimated Time: 2.5–3 hours

Introduction:
The subject of most American sculpture in the early 1800s was portraiture. Like other artists, many of William Rush's subjects were the pioneers of the new American nation. General Andrew Jackson (see page 22) was certainly a fitting choice for Rush in 1819. Fresh from military victory against the British in New Orleans in 1815 in the last major battle of the War of 1812 and his defeat of the Seminoles in Florida in 1817, the general was regarded as a national hero who exemplified courage and patriotism. (Ten years later, Jackson would begin to serve the first of two consecutive terms as President of the United States.)

Rush was committed to capturing Jackson's character and appearance, evident by the fleshy chin and slightly crooked nose. The artist's only concession to idealization was the replacement of Jackson's stiff, wiry hair with soft curls that signify noble qualities in Neoclassical sculpture. Neoclassicism emerged as a significant force in both European and American culture beginning in the mid-18th century. Admiration for ancient democratic (Greek) and republican (Roman) forms of government inspired early American political leaders and writers as well as artists, who saw in the aesthetics and values of the classical world an embodiment of enduring virtues to be emulated. (See page 23.)

Lesson Objectives:
• Define and identify Neoclassicism in terms of American art and architecture of the early to mid-1800s.
• Understand how art and architecture can be used to shape the identity of both a nation and a person.
• Create a timeline.
• Research and identify information to write a short biography.

Key Terms:
• biography
• sculpture
• portrait/portraiture
• neoclassical
• idealization

Instructional Materials:
• access to research tools, including books and the Internet
• pen and/or pencil
• paper
LESSON PLANS

Procedures:

Discussion:
- Have students look at General Andrew Jackson using image 3 or the enclosed CD. Define "Neoclassicism" for the class, using the information in the sidebar on page 23. As a class, list Neoclassical elements.
- Looking at the sculpture, have students discuss their impressions of the image. Does Jackson appear strong? Dignified? Respectable? What is it that they see that makes them say this? Why do you think Rush chose to portray him this way? What Neoclassical elements did Rush use?

Activity:
- Have students individually research Andrew Jackson and identify seven key events in his life.
- In groups, have students compare their findings and create timelines based on what they determine to be the most important seven events in his life.
- Using their research and timeline, have each student write a mini-biography of Andrew Jackson. At the end of their essays, have students write whether they think the sculpture depicts Jackson accurately.

Follow-up:
Have students research Neoclassicism in American art and architecture during the Federal period (1783–1815). In a short essay, have students choose a work from this period, identify its Neoclassical elements, and outline why American artists would choose to use Neoclassicism at this time in American history.

Evaluation:
Students should be evaluated on their contributions to discussion and to the group activities. Timelines should be evaluated on the inclusion of key information and the demonstration of thorough research. Mini-biographies should be evaluated on the inclusion of key research.

Illinois Learning Standards:
Fine Arts: 26, 27
English Language Arts: 3, 5
Social Science: 16

For more detailed information on the Illinois Learning Standards, see http://www.isbe.state.il.us/ils/

American Art