PICTURING WAR AND DEVASTATION

Grade Levels: 9–12
Estimated Time: 2 hours

Introduction:
José Clemente Orozco, a leading figure of the Mexican mural movement during the 1920s and 1930s, began his artistic career at the same time as the Mexican Revolution (1910), and the atrocities he witnessed greatly influenced his art and political views. One of the rebel leaders of the Revolution was Emiliano Zapata (1879–1919), a peasant from southern Mexico. The charismatic Zapata crusaded to return the holdings of wealthy landowners to the peasants. In 1911 he led an uprising and secured control of the southern part of the country. Particularly after his assassination, Zapata became a heroic figure throughout Mexico. Orozco, while supportive of the ideas behind the Revolution, was deeply disturbed by its bloodshed. Orozco's Zapata (see page 61) depicts the rebel leader as an ominous character.

Peter Blume finished The Rock (see page 70) in 1948, three years after the end of World War II (1939–1945), a time of worldwide destruction and disbelief. The war, including the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, illustrated both the capability of humanity to inflict pain and devastation on itself and the catastrophic effects of new technology. Although Blume’s work often eludes clear interpretation, images of decay and rebirth recur throughout his paintings. The Rock is a powerful evocation of this theme.

Lesson Objectives:
- Analyze and compare two artworks.
- Learn about the Mexican Revolution and World War II.
- Write a compare-and-contrast essay.

Key Terms:
- Surrealism
- metaphor
- symbolism
- composition

Instructional Materials:
- Venn diagram worksheet
- pens or pencils

Procedure:
Discussion:
- Have students look at Zapata and The Rock (see images 22 and 26 or the enclosed CD). Using the information in the introduction and on pages 61 and 70, briefly outline the subjects of each work, telling students when each painting was created. Tell students that these paintings are each artist's response to war.
LESSON PLANS

• In groups or as a class, examine each painting separately, having students describe in detail what they see. Use the following questions to help guide the discussion:
  — Who is in this painting? Describe the figures, their gestures, and facial expressions.
  — What action is taking place?
  — Do the figures have any props or other attributes? If so, what do they tell us about who the figures are and what they are doing?
  — Where are they? Describe the setting.
  — What is the mood of this painting? How does the artist create the mood? Think about color, light, and composition.
  — How does the artist feel about the conflict depicted? What is he trying to tell the viewer about war?
  — Introduce relevant historical information from pages 61 and 70 throughout the discussion, as needed.

• Divide students into small groups and distribute the Venn diagram worksheet (copied from page 106). Have groups compare and contrast the two paintings, noting their differences and similarities using the worksheet.

• Distribute supporting essays on Zapata and The Rock from this manual. Using their worksheets and these essays, have students compose a 600–800 word essay comparing and contrasting the two paintings as artistic responses to the devastation of war. Students should pay particular attention to how the artists use color, light, and composition to communicate their particular message.

Evaluation:
Base students’ evaluations on their participation in discussion, their observations about the paintings, and the success of their compare-contrast essay.

Follow-up:
Have students choose The Rock or Zapata, and have them research the Mexican Revolution, the aftermath of bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Surrealism, or the Mexican Mural movement. Tell students to use this information and their essays to write a new essay that explores the historical context of the painting.

Illinois Learning Standards
English Language Arts 3, 5
Fine Arts 25, 27
Social Science 16

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