

Lesson Plan:

Inglewood and Federal Art Programs

Topic/Theme: The Works Progress Administration and Treasury Relief Art Project efforts led to three Inglewood artworks: Bas-Relief Sculptures at the Inglewood Post Office and the History of Transportation Mural at Grevillea Art Park.

Class Level: Adult Education

Duration: 1 hour

Learning Experience: Brief Description of Unit: This class examines the history of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP) through the lens of the Inglewood bas-relief sculptures and murals.

Specific Learning Objectives:

- Students learn to place artwork in a historical context to understand how the circumstances surrounding the commissioning of a work impacts the final product
- Students learn to look carefully at works of art
- Students can gain confidence in articulating the information gathered from the image
- Students learn about the purpose and funding of art in public places

Resources:

Public Artworks in Inglewood:

The History of Transportation, Helen Lundeberg

Location: Grevillea Art Park

Lion, Buffalo, Ram and Bear, Gordon Newell and Sherry Peticolas

Location: Exterior, United States Post Office, Inglewood
Centinela Springs, Archibald Garner

Location: Interior, United States Post Office, Inglewood

Supplemental Materials:

Podcast: Rosa Lowinger: http://inglewoodpublicart.org/History_of_Transportation.html

The History of Transportation PDF:

http://inglewoodpublicart.org/pdf/About_The_History_of_Transportation.pdf

Off the Wall: New Deal Post Office Murals, by Patricia Raynor:

<http://postalmuseum.si.edu/research/articles-from-enroute/off-the-wall.html>

New Deal Fresno: <http://www.fresno.gov/NR/rdonlyres/2D40DBCC-E313-4473-88D0-B1B2DBDBAE51/23133/HPCNewDealBrochure.pdf>

The Art Story: <http://www.theartstory.org/org-wpa.htm>

Background:

- Elected to combat the economic hardships of the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt initiated his New Deal in 1932. He implemented federal employment programs best known by acronyms: the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), Treasury Relief Arts Project (TRAP) and Works Progress Administration (WPA).

- Under Director Harry Hopkins, the WPA used over \$11 million in federal funds on employment relief before the program ended in 1943.
- The WPA mostly employed men; only 13.5 percent of WPA employees were women at the program's peak in 1938. Ellen Woodward, WPA director of the women's programs, pushed for women's inclusion in the Professional Projects Division. In this division, professional women and men were treated more equally, especially in awarding artists federal art, music, theater, and writers' projects.
- The WPA supported tens of thousands of artists who created 2,566 murals and 17,744 sculptures to adorn public buildings nationwide. Federal program brought fine art out to the public and out of museums. The WPA art program led to the National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities, which led to today's National Endowment for the Arts.
- Roads and Post offices, found in every community and experienced by most Americans, offer democratic sites for fine art. Artists were hired to complete a work along a highway, post office or other federal site under construction. One percent of the building construction funds was allocated to "embellish" the federal building. Artists were hired through these funds. Artists were chosen by a panel reviewing designs without attribution. The jury would include other artists, the postmaster, an architect, and a prominent citizen.
- Post office artists were provided with guidelines and themes for the art. Local scenes and events were deemed most suitable. Artists were invited to submit design sketches for a particular post office and were strongly urged to visit the site. Once awarded a commission, the artist negotiated with the Post Office Department, the town, and the WPA Section in lengthy process to realize the final work. Artists, regularly reminded that the communities were the patron, worked to address community concerns throughout their commissions.

Classroom Applications:

- The teacher allows the students to read the images; students share what is seen
- The teacher does not have to be expert on the WPA, TRAP, or art murals
- Students drive the exploration; the teacher guides discussion through questions

Open Ended Questions for Educators:

- What's going on in this image?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can we find?

Specific Questions for Teachers:

The History of Transportation, Helen Lundeberg:

- This is the largest freestanding Federal Art Project Mural. Made of petrachrome, a slurry of cement, pigment, and crushed stone, each panel was made on masonite boards then assembled as a group.
- What do we see in this mural? Analyze the imagery (Indigenous people, Spanish settlers, pioneers, and Inglewood founder Daniel Freeman, are shown.)
- Describe the history of transportation in the mural. What happened in the 1930s and 40s?
- The mural was first sited along Florence Boulevard, one of Southern California's most traveled commuter arteries. Was this a good site for art?

Lion, Buffalo, Ram and Bear, Gordon Newell and Sherry Peticolas:

- These murals are on the exterior of the building that holds *the Post Office*. Do they have relevance for southern California?
- How does the style of the murals fit with the Art Deco architecture style?
- Is the work inspirational in any way? What do the animals symbolize?

Centinela Springs, Archibald Garner:

- What do you see here? Analyze the iconography; does it fit in a Post Office?
- The scene show early residents getting water from Centinela Springs, a valued source of spring water in coastal Southern California. How does the mural depict this?
- How is water in Southern California valued today? Can this image be used appropriately today? Can it be seen as inappropriate?
- Centinela Springs is carved wood. How is the medium in this mural compare to *The History of Transportation* stone?

Further Research: Related information and works by the artists:

- Helen Lundeberg was a noted post surrealist painter. <https://www.helenlundeberg.com>
- Sherry Peticolas and Gordon Newell created the *Transportation of the Mail in San Fernando*, (1936), with seven panels depicting a truck, ship, horse, airplane, train and stagecoach. Compare this to *Centinela Springs*. How are they similar and different?

Archibald Gardner, *Justice*, Fresno, Post Office, (1940). Other relevant information can be found in Fresno, California: <https://www.fresno.gov/darm/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2016/11/HPCNewDealBrochure.pdf>

Overall Questions:

- Looking at the WPA artworks, do you think they helped boost morale in Inglewood? Around the country? How does public art impact public buildings?
- Does adding visual art to public space help a city? If so, how?



Ram, Gordon Newell and Sherry Peticolas



Centinela Springs, Archibald Garner



The History of Transportation, Helen Lundeberg