

Lesson Plan: Reading Public Art

Topic/Theme: This session addresses how we learn to look by using public artworks as a study guide. It is a two-part lesson intended to be very interactive and last up to two hours.

Class Level: Adult Education

Duration: 90 to 120 minutes

Learning Experience: Brief Description of Unit: This session teaches how to look by using public artworks as study tools. It is a two-part lesson intended to be very interactive and last 90 minutes to two hours. The public artworks are in close proximity; a site visit is encouraged.

Specific Learning Objectives:

Students learn to place public artwork in a historical and architectural context to understand how the circumstances surrounding the commissioning of a work impacts the final product.

Students learn to look carefully at works of public art and read their content and context

Students can gain confidence in articulating the information gathered from the artwork

Students learn about how location affects the experience of art in public places

Resources:

Public Artworks in Inglewood:

The History of Transportation, Helen Lundeberg

Location: Grevillea Art Park

Inglewood Stories, Michael Massenburg

Location: Public Library Lobby

Self Evident (for Sally Hemings), Tori Ellison

Location: Public Library 2nd Floor Landing

Supplemental Materials:

- The History of Transportation PDF:

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

Podcast: Michael Massenburg <https://www.inglewoodpublicart.org/projects/inglewood-stories/>

Background:

Part One begins with a brief description about how to look at art using locally known artworks to 'read' the scene. Start inside the Inglewood Public Library second floor with *Self Evident (for Sally Hemings)*, a life-sized bronze dress hung on the wall. On closer inspection, see the family tree of the enslaved Sally Hemings, her step-sister Martha Wayles Jefferson, and Thomas Jefferson, the American president and father of Hemings' children, inscribed on the bodice. A plaque hung near the bronze tells the Hemings - Jefferson story.

From the 2nd floor landing, view *Inglewood Stories*. This large mural uses recent photographs, historic letters and postcards to reflect Inglewood's diverse communities.. The writing and postmarks are clues to the stories and can be easily read from this viewpoint.

Part Two requires a walk to nearby Grevillea Art Park to the *History of Transportation*. Starting on the right side, have students walk along the wall to explore the artist's story of transportation. Discuss the experience of walking along a monumental work of art and what it might reflect the passage of time and history.

Classroom Applications:

Teacher asks students to "read" the artworks; the students share what they see

The teacher does not have to be expert on public art or art history

Students drive the visual exploration; the teacher guides discussion by asking questions.

Open Ended Questions for Educators:

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

Specific Questions for Teachers:

Self Evident (for Sally Hemings), Tori Ellison

- Look at the sculpture and read the framed plaque. What story does it tell?
- Why would the artist decide to make a life-sized bronze dress?
- The dress seems small compared to today's Americans. Why do you think it is so small?
- Does reading the Hemings' family tree on the bodice affect your understanding of the art?

Inglewood Stories, Michael Massenburg:

- The scene depicts Inglewood's generations in a large, central square. Is this appropriate for the Library entrance?
- Read the handwriting and postmarks on the mural. Do you have any insight into Inglewood's communities, cultures and lives?
- Do you see the astronaut's space suit? Why would the artist include this reference?
- The artist seems to have specific, recognizable faces in the mural, and hands. Does this add to how you read the mural?

The History of Transportation, Helen Lundeberg:

- Describe the history of transportation found as you walked along this mural. Does walking affect how you read the artwork?
- What do we see in this mural? Analyze the iconography. (Indigenous people, Spanish settlers, and American pioneers are represented with animals and machines)
- The artist includes many people in her mural without making portraits. Does this differ from how people are shown in *Self Evident* and *Inglewood Stories*?
- The mural was completed in 1940. Is the clothing similar? Are the airplanes similar to or different from what we see today?



Self Evident (for Sally Hemings), Tori Ellison



Inglewood Stories, Michael Massenburg



History of Transportation (detail), Helen Lundeberg