

Lesson Plan: Discovering Public Art Treasures

Topic/Theme: Discovering Public Art Treasure

Class Level: Middle School | High School

Duration: 45 minutes

Learning Experience: Brief Description of Unit:

This lesson is about discovery and expectation. Taught to expect significant sculpture only in a museum, we presume small public sculpture would be of lesser value. Examine expectations for public art that honor unique life narratives seen in a sculpture by a living artist inspired by the founding of America and one by an internationally recognized figurative artist of the 19th century.

Specific Learning Objectives:

Cultural Context: Students learn about what cultural context is and how to read it.

Artwork: Students learn about visual perception and how to ‘read’ an artwork

Materials: Students learn about fine art bronzes, and figurative art.

Public Art: Students learn about how public art and public stories are presented and valued.

Classroom Applications:

The teacher does not have to be the expert

The teacher has students to “read” the sculpture and its context; students share what is seen

Teacher allows students to begin research on art, to ask questions and get answers

Resources:

Artworks in Inglewood:

The Hand of God, Auguste Rodin

Location: Centinela Hospital Medical Center Exterior

Self Evident (for Sally Hemings), Tori Ellison Location: Inglewood Public Library, Interior, 2nd floor

Supplemental Materials:

Tori Ellison, American Artist <https://www.toriellison.com/about>

Monticello Families, <https://www.monticello.org/getting-word/families/madison-hemings-family>

August Rodin, *The Hand of God* at the Musee Rodin: Paris, France

<http://www.musee-rodin.fr/en/collections/sculptures/hand-god>

The Hand of God at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, New York

<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/08.210>

Background:

Civic sculpture honoring military and government leaders are common. Made of durable bronze, they often depict a man standing tall or astride a horse. Some artists create figurative bronze sculpture to honor the stories of lesser known women people and important ideas.

Self Evident (for Sally Hemings) is a sculpture titled after a phrase in the preamble of the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.” That phrase, drafted by Thomas Jefferson in 1776, meant freedom for Caucasian males,

but not to Jefferson's slaves or the women in his life.

Artist Tori Ellison won a commission to create a new artwork with a civic benefit. The art had to be appealing to general audiences and also has ideas important for people to consider and discuss. She proposed to honor Sally Hemings, a slave in President Thomas Jefferson's household and also the mother of several of his children. The bronze sculpture is not a portrait of Sally Hemings; it represents her through a dress incised with her family tree. A nearby plaque tells the fuller Hemings / Jefferson family story. Hemings won the freedom for her children, and eventual grandchildren, through her spirit and personal power.

Tori Ellison (1956 -) is a American artist working in sculpture, drawing and opera. She often explores the social expectations of women. She resided in Los Angeles when she worked on this sculpture, and research the dress in Monticello, where Hemings was enslaved.

The hand of God is a daunting subject for anyone. For Auguste Rodin, *The Hand of God* series features rough-hewn marble with a strong, sculptor's hand and small figures of Adam and Eve in embrace. Rodin's three carved marble pieces on this theme are in the collections around the world. Rodin oversaw some cast bronzes editions of his sculpture. Some casts were made after the artist died. One of the bronze casts is installed at the Centinela Valley Hospital.

Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) was a famous and controversial artist. His figurative sculptures of aggressive, muscular forms diverged from sculpture popular at the time. Initially criticized, he was eventually lauded as the father of modern sculpture. Blossoming in his mid-40s, Rodin was eventually recognized as the greatest artist since Michelangelo.

Open Ended Questions for Educators:

- What's going on in this sculpture? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can we find?
- Do you need to see all sides of a sculpture?

Specific Questions for Teachers:

Cultural Content:

Self Evident (for Sally Hemings) Look at the sculpture: what is the content? What is the subject?

Self Evident (for Sally Hemings) is a simple dress made of bronze, floating on the wall.

Who would wear this dress? Why would the artist make a tribute to Hemings and not sculpt her face?

Do you think Sally Hemings thought it self-evident that her children by the President were created equal? Did Thomas Jefferson consider it self-evident?

The Hand of God Look at the sculpture: what is the content? What is the subject?

The Hand of God shows a giant hand holding two small figures. Does the title describe an event? Is it literal? Why is the hand big and the figures small? Does the title tell you about the artist, religion or creation? The hand has been called the hand of the sculptor who saw himself as God; do you agree?

Physical Context:

Why is Hand of God in a Hospital garden? Would you think it was a religious statue from the location?

Why is Self Evident (for Sally Hemings) in the Library? Would you try to discover more about Sally Hemings, Thomas Jefferson or the Declaration of Independence if this work was in park or ballfield?

Public Settings

Does the setting influence what you think about the sculpture? Does it affect how facility users see the art? Does display site affect the meaning? Each artwork is relatively small and valuable; Is a guard or security system in place?

Value and Art in Public Places

Hospitals and libraries are often strapped for funding. Knowing this is a valuable sculpture, do you tell the hospital that they have something valuable? Given community needs, is public art spending smart or ethical? Is it ethical to sell a work of art to fund socially needed community benefit?

Researching Public Art

Making a bronze sculpture requires casting the very hot metal in a liquid form. How would you research more about bronze casting? Both works are bronze; why do you think the color of the bronzes differ? Does being outside affect metal? Besides sculptors, who works with metal?



Self Evident (for Sally Hemings), Tori Ellison



Auguste Rodin, Hand of God, Inglewood bronze



Rodin Hand of Rodin, 21st. c. bronze cast