

Abraham Lincoln and the Arts

Overview:

Students will examine paintings and sculptures that celebrate the life and legacy of Abraham Lincoln.

Note: This can be used as a culminating lesson in the unit on Lincoln.

Materials:

The Standing Lincoln (1887) by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Chicago, Illinois

(<http://www.nga.gov/feature/shaw/img-n/s131n.jpg>)

The Seated Lincoln (1911) by Gutzon Borglum, Newark, New Jersey

(<http://www.newarklandmarks.org/images/lincolnstatue.jpg>)

The Lincoln Memorial (1922) by Henry Bacon and Daniel Chester French,

Washington, D.C., <http://www.illinoisfamily.org/content/img/f26997/Abe-Lincoln%20Memorial.jpg>

The First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation (1864) by Francis Bicknell Carpenter (GLC02598)

(http://www.gilderlehrman.org/search/display_results.php?id=GLC02598)

Lincoln and the Contrabands (ca. 1921) by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris

(http://www.howard.edu/msrc/AbrahamLincoln/PrintsPhotos/pages/Picture15_jpg.htm)

Aim/Essential Question

How has the life and legacy of Abraham Lincoln been portrayed in the visual arts?

Background Information:

After Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in 1865 his image was reproduced in paintings and lithographs, and in bronze and marble sculptures. Lincoln and his legacy became part of the American cultural landscape, and even today artists still work to convey Lincoln's story to successive generations.

Objectives:

1. Students will explain how Lincoln's image came to dominate the national cultural landscape.
2. Students will discuss the importance of interpretations of Lincoln as part of America's cultural heritage and determine if they are accurate portrayals of history.
3. Students will explain why Lincoln's image may be the most familiar presidential figure to Americans.

Motivation: Tell students that they are going to assume the role of historians and/or museum curators in order to develop a traveling Lincoln Bicentennial Art Exhibition.

Methods of Analysis: When looking at a piece of artwork students should consider the following:

1. What do you see or notice about the object?
2. Explain the point of view of the artist.
3. What are your interpretations of each work of art?

Procedures:

1. After viewing the images, ask students to list as many adjectives as possible to describe Lincoln.
2. How does each piece of art reflect Lincoln's legacy?
3. Have students categorize each of the paintings and sculptures into one of three categories: Commander-in-Chief; Great Emancipator; and Preserver of the Union. Note that some images might fit in more than one category.
4. Students report on their categorization and record their responses on the chalkboard.
5. Students defend their choice of category.
6. Ask students to connect some of Lincoln's words that they have read in previous lessons with the various paintings, sculptures, and illustrations.

Summary Questions:

1. Why is Lincoln the subject of more monuments across the United States than almost any other figure from our history?
2. Which of these images best portrays Lincoln's legacy? Explain your choice.
3. How may the assassination have influenced artistic interpretations of Lincoln?

Application Question:

Ask each student to write a one-paragraph proposal for the traveling art exhibition explaining how he or she would arrange the images to best tell the story of President Lincoln.

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