

Journey Into Time -The Art of the Ancient Mediterranean



Title: Loaded Words

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Suggested grade level: 10-11-12

Length of time: 2-3 weeks of 1 hour per day classes

Subject Areas: visual art, history, language arts

Rationale:

The term “hieroglyph” translates roughly as “sacred carving” or “holy words”. Egyptian hieroglyphics are a complex written language displayed in the form of elaborate, low relief carvings, once brilliantly painted and discovered on ancient objects and architecture throughout Egypt. Early Western travelers to the Egyptian tombs occasionally carved graffiti on those ancient stones to record their journey to those remarkable places. Simple messages such as a name and date scripted on these great Egyptian monuments have lasted for centuries. If these early travelers had known how long these messages would last and how many people would see them, is it possible that they might have chosen something else to say?

Over time, this simple graffiti developed into its own complex form of visual communication vibrantly recorded on objects and architecture throughout the world. In this lesson, students will explore the communication and design challenges of making their own graffiti. They will choose one “loaded” word whose concept has a significant meaning such as “truth” or “life” and then create a design that communicates their ideas about this word in a graffiti style. Painted in large scale on mural paper and cut out, these paintings make powerful statements.

Logistics:

Classroom set up: This project can be completed by students working in teams of two as it reduces workspace and storage challenges of large-scale paintings and encourages unique combinations of ideas and designs. Large tables or clean floor space are useful for working on the long sheets of mural paper.

Materials:

- Sketch paper for each student.
- A roll of medium or heavy mural paper, brown or white. If the paper is too thin the paint will weaken the paper and wrinkle excessively or tear through.
- Liquid tempera or acrylic paints are preferable; block tempera is not ideal but will work.
- Large and small painting tools, paint trays, buckets for water, large and small paintbrushes, sponges/paper towels for spills.
- Masking tape to hang drying work
- Scissors to cut out finished works.

Suggested resources/images:

http://www.travellersinegypt.org/archives/2005/01/graffito_graffiti.html: a site with interesting pictures of ancient graffiti in Egypt

<http://www.graffiti.org/>: a site with modern graffiti from all over the world.

<http://www.graffiti.org/faq/stowers.html>: a good “graffiti history” paper

<http://www.graffiticreator.net/>: great for students who have special needs or those having difficulty creating their own designs, this website allows students to type a word and the program draws it while allowing the student to choose styles, colours and other details.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graffiti>: a very useful online “encyclopedia” with excellent definitions, images and links.

Suggested Outcomes:

While specific Department of Education outcomes have not yet been finalized for grade 11 and 12, some of the Key Stage Outcomes that can be achieved by this project are as follows:

- Students will be expected to create and or present collaboratively and independently expressive products in the arts for a range of audiences and purposes.
- Students will be expected to demonstrate critical awareness of and value for the role of the arts in creating and reflecting culture.
- Students will respect the contributions to the arts of individuals and cultural groups in local and global contexts and value the arts as a record of human experience and expression.

Introduction

Explore ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs with class while considering the following discussion questions:

- Speculate on why a society might have used images as an alphabet of sorts and why this society considered these images to be holy?

- How are hieroglyphs similar to or different from the English alphabet?
- Has the graffiti on ancient Egyptian architecture ruined these monuments or caused them to be viewed as more sacred? Why? Why not?
- How might students have left their mark if they had traveled to these places?

Provide, or ask students, to research a short history of modern graffiti. One helpful source of information on this topic is: <http://www.graffiti.org/faq/stowers.html>

Consider these discussion points:

- Can you distinguish between different kinds of graffiti? How?
- Is graffiti art or vandalism?
- Why do people create graffiti?
- Why do they choose particular areas in which to create it?
- How has the nature of graffiti changed since early Egyptian times?

Introduce the idea of the “**loaded word**”,

- a word that can have powerful meaning or one that might be interpreted in different ways by different people - words such as; love, family, friendship, truth, racism etc. Ask students to brainstorm words that might work well for this project and write them on a board as a source of inspiration for the class as they develop their plans. Two groups may use the same word but choose a different interpretation. The lettering style, colours, and compositions that students choose should serve to effectively communicate the groups' interpretation of the word they have chosen. For example, the word “peace” might be painted in a broken or dripping style with camouflage colours and a red background or it might be painted in white bubble style letters with 3-D edges featuring rainbow colours.

Suggestions for Teaching and Learning:

1. Invite students to form teams and brainstorm to find the “loaded word” they will use. Students might write a short paragraph in journal or sketchbook describing their reasons for their choice and what they hope to communicate through their artwork.
2. After an investigation of the stylistic innovations of graffiti from around the world such as 3D lettering, creative colour pallets, unreadable text, inclusion of images etc, ask each student to make 3-5 sketches of graffiti designs, each one an improvement on the last. These sketches will serve as an important assessment tool. This process of developing the design is an essential element of this project and students should be encouraged to explore their options by choosing colours and styles that reflect the interpretation of the word they hope to communicate. *When the graffiti words are cut off the mural paper with an irregular edge (as shown in the example with the light blue background at the top of this lesson), choosing a background colour enormously improves the overall effect*
3. Student teams can negotiate one final design that incorporates the best elements of all of their designs while checking with the teacher for suggested improvements.

4. Each student or team should use the largest sheet of mural paper that can be accommodated in the room. Designs are drawn on and then painted using tempera or acrylic paints.
5. Wet paintings can be taped to walls vertically (or suspended on long, strong clothesline). The paper will wrinkle and buckle as it dries but this will illustrate to students the difficulties entailed in making art on brick or concrete 😊

Extension of Ideas

- For grades 7-9, a simplified version of this project might see students developing graffiti designs using their own names or a word that can be placed somewhere in the school environment as a kind of inspirational message e.g., “school pride”, “respect”, “learning” etc.
- Modern graffiti might be illustrated by the creation of low relief sculptures carved in clay or plaster tiles.
- Graffiti designs would also make interesting prints in silkscreen or linoleum.
- Research the history of writing throughout the world from Egyptian hieroglyphics to Chinese calligraphy. Develop a visual language as a class using ancient tools or materials.
- A local graffiti artist might mentor students in a collaborative large-scale graffiti project for a specific location in the school.
- Digital graffiti! Students might “photoshop” their design onto the monuments of the world using computer graphics programs.

Suggestions for Assessment

- Self-assessment can be accomplished through rubrics developed with the class to deal specifically with the challenges that can arise in group projects. Nova Scotia’s Visual Arts 10 curriculum has a useful example in *Appendix G* for this kind of rubric.
- Design sketches can be assessed for evidence of comprehension of the “development” process.
- Discuss with class how the finished graffiti communicates its intended meaning. What elements and principles of art have made them successful? Alternatively, students might be asked to complete a question sheet that requires them to describe ways in which their project uses the elements and principles of art to communicate meaning.