STORIES ON THE WALL:
BRINGING HALE WOODRUFF'S MURALS TO LIFE
Grade Band: 9-12
Content Focus: Theatre & ELA



LEARNING DESCRIPTION

In this multidisciplinary lesson, students analyze two of *Hale Woodruff's murals at Talladega College (The Trial of the Amistad Captives* and *Building of Savery Library)* as visual texts, focusing on their positive messages of racial collaboration and justice. Students first observe the murals using the See/Think/Wonder visual literacy strategy, then receive a brief background about the murals' context. In small groups, they research how purpose, audience, and circumstances shaped the meaning of their assigned mural. Each group then creates a tableau — a frozen scene — to represent what their mural depicts. Finally, students write an artist's statement analyzing how purpose, audience, and circumstances influence the mural's meaning and how their tableau expresses this. They support their explanation with evidence from research and specific references to the murals.

LEARNING TARGETS

Essential Questions	"I Can" Statements
How do purpose, audience, and circumstances shape the meaning of a text, and how can we	I can analyze how purpose, audience, perspective, and historical circumstances shape a text.

express that meaning through performance and writing?	I can explain the positive messages in Woodruff's murals and how they reflect his perspective and historical context. I can work with my group to create a tableau that communicates my interpretation of the mural. I can write an artist's statement that explains my analysis and creative choices, using evidence and appropriate tone.

GEORGIA STANDARDS

Curriculum Standards	Arts Standards
9.T.C.1 Analyze the impact of purpose and audience on a wide variety of texts. 9.T.C.2 Evaluate how authors' and/or speakers' perspectives influence texts and how circumstances shape their creation. 9.T.T.2.d Apply expository techniques to develop a cohesive text, organized in a way that clarifies the relationship between ideas, includes multiple and varied types of information, and uses the appropriate tone to address a target audience and specific purpose.	TAHSFT.PR.1 Act by communicating and sustaining roles in formal and informal environments. TAHSFT.PR.1.a Observe and demonstrate aspects of verbal and non-verbal techniques in common human activity for performance (e.g. voice, breathing, posture, facial expression, physical movement). TAHSFT.CN.1 Explore how theatre connects to life experiences, careers, and other content.

SOUTH CAROLINA STANDARDS

Curriculum Standards	Arts Standards
ELA.E1.AOR.1.1 Analyze how perspective, context, and/or key elements deepen meaning or enhance style. ELA.E1.R.1.1 Conduct short and more sustained research to answer a question(s) or solve a problem(s) by: a. generating and answering a research question(s) about a topic; and b. using a variety of print and multimedia sources to refine the scope of inquiry as relevant to the topic, purpose, and audience.	**Anchor Standard 1:** I can create scenes and write scripts using story elements and structure. **Anchor Standard 3:** I can act in improvised scenes and written scripts **Anchor Standard 4:** I can direct and organize work for a performance to reflect specific content, ideas, skills, and media. **Anchor Standard 8:** I can relate theatre to other content areas, arts disciplines, and careers.

KEY VOCABULARY

Content Vocabulary	Arts Vocabulary
• Purpose — The reason the artist created the work (to inspire, to educate, to commemorate) • Audience — The intended viewers of the artwork and their expectations • Perspective — The artist's personal, cultural, and historical viewpoint • Circumstance — The historical and cultural events and conditions that shaped the creation of the text • Expository writing — Writing that explains and informs clearly and logically about a topic	• Tableau — A frozen picture representing a scene or moment in a story that occurs during a theatrical performance. When creating a tableau in theatre, the following principles should be applied: 1. Create body levels (low, mid, high); 2. Use facial expressions to communicate thoughts and feelings; 3. Show relationships between the various characters in the setting; and 4. Make sure the audience can all see your face.

MATERIALS

- Projector and images of Hale Woodruff's *Talladega College murals*:
  - *The Trial of the Amistad Captives*
  - *Building of Savery Library*
- Space for students to stage their tableau
- Student research guide handout for each student
- Paper and pencils for notes and writing
- Tableau creation checklist for each group
- See/Think/Wonder Artful Thinking Routine
- Optional: Props or fabrics to enhance tableaux

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Opening/Activating Strategy

- Engage students in the See/Think/Wonder Artful Thinking Routine. Teacher projects one mural at a time and asks students to write or discuss:
  - What do you see?
  - What do you think is happening?
  - What do you wonder about this scene?
  - ****NOTE: Each question in this routine should be asked and discussed/answered before moving on to the next question.*
- After each question, teacher facilitates a brief whole-class discussion to share ideas.
- Teacher provides brief background information on the murals, highlighting:
  - One mural depicts people of different races working together to build *Savery Library*, emphasizing unity and education.
  - Another mural shows the Amistad captives returning to Africa after being freed by the U.S. Supreme Court, marking a historic affirmation of freedom.
  - Both murals reflect Woodruff's positive vision of racial cooperation and justice.

Work Session

- Students divide into small groups and are assigned to one mural.
- Groups use the Research Guide to investigate:
    - What is the mural's purpose?
    - Who is the intended audience?
    - How did the historical and cultural circumstances influence its meaning?
    - What evidence from the mural and historical facts supports these ideas?
- Using what they learned, each group creates a tableau that depicts what the mural represents and reflects its positive message.
    - Emphasize use of levels, space, facial expressions, and symbolism to communicate clearly.
- As teacher circulates during the work session, they can prompt students using questions such as:
    - What clues in the mural tell you about its message?
    - How does the mural reflect the time it was painted?
    - What should the audience feel or understand when they see your tableau?

Closing/Reflection

- Groups perform their tableaux for the class.
- Each student writes an artist's statement explaining:
    - How purpose, audience, and circumstances influenced the mural's meaning.
    - How their tableau expresses that meaning.
    - Evidence from their research and specific details from the mural to support their explanation.

  ****Artist statements should be organized clearly, using appropriate tone and varied information.*
- Final reflection (oral or written): What did you learn about how art can communicate powerful messages about history and society?

ASSESSMENTS

Formative

- Participation in See/Think/Wonder and group discussion.
- Teacher observation of research and tableau creation.

Summative

- Completed artist's statement evaluated for the following (see rubric on page 3 of research guide):
    - Analysis of purpose, audience, and circumstances.
    - Explanation of tableau choices.
    - Use of evidence and specific references.
    - Clarity, organization, and tone.

DIFFERENTIATION

Acceleration:

- Groups can add symbolic props or a brief soundscape to enhance the tableau.
- Groups can research one of the other murals to compare/contrast.

Remediation:

- Provide scaffolded sentence starters, a model artist's statement, or additional examples of analysis.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[High Museum of Art: Rising Up: Hale Woodruff's Murals at Talladega College]

**This integrated lesson provides differentiated ideas and activities for educators that are aligned to a sampling of standards. Standards referenced at the time of publishing may differ based on each state's adoption of new standards.*

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