

EXPLORING THEMES THROUGH PRINTMAKING

Grade Band: 9-12

Content Focus: VISUAL ARTS & ELA



LEARNING DESCRIPTION

Students will analyze a text to determine a universal theme and track its development over the course of the text. They will then design and carve a symbolic representation of the theme onto a styrofoam plate for printmaking. Each student will contribute their individual print to a class-wide gallery display that visually represents diverse perspectives on universal themes. This high school printmaking lesson encourages critical literary analysis while allowing students to express their understanding through symbolic artwork. It fosters collaboration, creativity, and deeper engagement with universal themes in literature.

LEARNING TARGETS

Essential Questions	"I Can" Statements
How do authors develop universal themes in literature?	I can determine and analyze a universal theme in a literary text.
How can symbols visually communicate abstract literary themes?	I can explain how key details contribute to a theme's development.
How does artistic interpretation deepen our understanding of literature? What connections can we draw between literary themes and contemporary issues?	I can create a symbolic representation of a theme through printmaking. I can critique and compare my artistic interpretation with my peers'.

GEORGIA STANDARDS

Curriculum Standards	Arts Standards
9th Grade Literature and Composition: ELAGSE9-10RL2 Determine a theme and/or central idea of text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text. 10th Grade Literature and Composition: ELAGSE9-10RL2 Determine a theme and/or central idea of text and closely analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.	VAHSVA.CR.1.a Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. VAHSVA.CR.1.b Consider multiple options, weighing consequences, and assessing results. VAHSVA.CR.3 Engage in an array of processes, media, techniques, and technology through experimentation, practice, and persistence.

SOUTH CAROLINA STANDARDS

Curriculum Standards	Arts Standards
ELA.AOR.2: Evaluate and critique the development of themes and central ideas within and across texts. English I: ELA.E1.AOR.2.1 Determine a universal theme(s) and explain how key details contribute to its development over the course of a literary text. English II: ELA.E2.AOR.2.1 Analyze the development of universal themes across literary texts from different time periods, places, and/or cultures. English III: ELA.E3.AOR.2.1 Evaluate the development of universal themes across literary texts from different time periods, places, and/or cultures. English IV: ELA.E4.AOR.2.1 Evaluate and critique the development of universal themes across literary texts from different time periods, places, and/or cultures.	Anchor Standard 1: I can use the elements and principles of art to create artwork. Anchor Standard 2: I can use different materials, techniques, and processes to make art. Anchor Standard 5: I can interpret and evaluate the meaning of an artwork. Anchor Standard 7: I can relate visual arts ideas to other arts disciplines, content areas, and careers.

KEY VOCABULARY

Content Vocabulary	Arts Vocabulary
• <u>Theme</u> – The central or universal idea explored in a text • <u>Symbolism</u> – The use of images or objects to represent deeper meanings	• <u>Printmaking</u> – The art or technique of making prints, especially as practiced in engraving, etching, dry point, woodcut or serigraphy • <u>Relief print</u> – A printmaking technique in which a design is carved into a material and inked for printing • <u>Brayer</u> – A tool used to roll ink evenly onto the printing plate • <u>Composition</u> – How an artist arranges the Elements of Art (line, shape, form, value, color, space, texture) to create an artwork • <u>Contrast</u> – The arrangement of opposite elements in a composition (light vs. dark, rough vs. smooth, etc.); similar to variety, which refers to the differences in a work, achieved by using different shapes, textures, colors and values

MATERIALS

- Literary text (short stories, poems, novel excerpts)
- Sketchbooks/pencils
- Styrofoam sheets
- Dull pencils or ball point pens
- Brayers
- Water based printing ink
- Printing paper (white, colored, textured)
- Colored pencils or art sticks
- Drying racks or designated drying space

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Opening/Activating Strategy

Engage (Text Selection & Theme Analysis)

- Students will read and analyze a short story, poem, or novel excerpt (e.g., *Of Mice and Men*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Othello*).
- As they read, students will annotate how key details develop the theme over time.
- In groups, they will identify a universal theme (e.g., power and corruption, isolation, identity, loss of innocence, resilience, fate versus free will) and discuss its relevance.

Work Session

Explore (Symbol Development & Sketching)

- Students will brainstorm symbols that represent their theme (e.g., a broken clock for time's passage, a tree with missing branches for loss, etc.).
- Each student will sketch at least two possible symbols, refining their designs through peer feedback.
- The class will discuss how symbols communicate deeper meaning in both literature and art.

Create (Printmaking Process):

- Follow the printmaking process below.
- **Prepping the Styrofoam Plate:**
 - Use a dull pencil or ballpoint pen to carve designs—press firmly but avoid puncturing all the way through.
 - Encourage students to sketch lightly first before carving to avoid mistakes.
- **Carving Techniques:**
 - Keep lines simple and bold for clear prints; intricate details may not transfer well.
 - Reverse letters or numbers if including text, as prints will be a mirror image.
 - Vary line thickness for added depth—thicker lines hold more ink, while thinner lines create subtle details.
- **Inking the Plate:**
 - Roll out a thin, even layer of ink on a tray before applying to the plate with a brayer.
 - Make sure ink covers the entire design, but avoid excessive ink, which can cause smudging.
 - Test prints on scrap paper before the final collaborative print.
- **Printing Process:**
 - Place the inked plate face down on the final paper and press evenly with hands or a clean brayer.
 - Avoid shifting or sliding the plate while printing to prevent smudging.
 - Lift the plate carefully to reveal the design.
 - Encourage students to appreciate the imperfections as part of the artistic process!
- **Creative Enhancements:**
 - Try different colors – Experiment with layering multiple prints in different colors.
 - Overlap prints – Print the same design multiple times on one page to create patterns.
 - Use mixed media – Combine printmaking with drawing, collage, or watercolor backgrounds for unique effects.

Classroom Tips:

- *Encourage students to work carefully.*
- *Make sure there is a piece of newsprint under each printmaking station.*

Extension:

- *Virtual Gallery: Upload finished prints to Padlet or Google Sites for peer review.*
- *Video Reflection: Students can record a short video explaining their theme and artistic choices using Flipgrid or Canva Video.*

Closing/Reflection

- Students will display their final prints in a class gallery.
- They write a reflection explaining their theme, symbol choice, and how it connects to the text in paragraph form.
- Students will participate in a peer critique, providing constructive feedback on how effectively their peers' work communicates meaning.

ASSESSMENTS

Formative

- Class Discussions: Check for theme identification and text analysis through guided questions.
- Sketch and peer review: Monitor symbol development before carving begins.

Summative

- Final print and reflection: Students submit their printmaking piece with a written analysis of their symbol, theme, and artistic choices.
- Gallery walk participation: Students will evaluate and compare different artistic interpretations of universal themes.

DIFFERENTIATION

Accelerated:

- Encourage students to layer multiple prints to represent contrasting themes within one text.
- Compare themes across two different texts and create a dual print composition.
- Research how historical artists have used printmaking to explore social themes (eg: José Guadalupe Posada).

Remedial:

- Provide graphic organizers to help break down theme development step by step.
- Offer symbol examples and guided sketching activities.
- Allow students to work in pairs to carve a shared printing plate.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [What Is Printmaking? The Met](#)
- [Printmaking - Tate Museum](#)

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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