

PERSHING MURAL PROJECT CURRICULUM

Learning From the Past, Understanding the Present, and Discovering the Future



THE PERSHING MURAL ~ A NEBRASKA CULTURAL LANDMARK

Exploring Architecture: Creating an Imaginative Landscape Diorama

This lesson is part of the three-part study of Architecture in which the students will learn how models and dioramas play an important part in the architectural process by giving a vision and telling a story. Students will be invited to create their own diorama with an accompanying artist statement.

Included in this Lesson:

- Lesson Plan: Exploring Architecture: Creating an Imaginative Landscape Diorama
- Power Point: How to Write an Artist Statement

Nebraska Standards Addressed:

Present: FA8.2.2.a Analyze and present reflections of personal growth in an artist statement.

Connect: FA8.2.1.b Recognize personal voice and make stylistic choices to reflect personal identity.

Present: FA8.2.1 Students will use the creative process to investigate and communicate personal voice in artwork.

Connect: FA8.2.1.a Investigate ideas and materials to demonstrate planning and refining.

Respond: FA8.2.1.c Engage in the sensory experience and relate it to making expressive artwork.

Connect: FA8.2.1.e Investigate and demonstrate the relationship between technique, skill and craftsmanship.

Create: FA8.2.2 Students will understand and apply their knowledge of a variety of presentation and communication techniques.

Respond: FA8.2.1.f Demonstrate respect for accepted equipment and materials.

Respond: L.A.5.W.2 Use a recursive writing process to develop, strengthen, and produce writing appropriate to the audience

Create: EP6. Use English structures to communicate context-specific messages.

Objectives:

- The students will be able to define and describe the terms and art forms of Dioramas and Assemblage.
- After learning about the art forms, students will be able to create a landscape diorama (assemblage) which includes a mural of their own design.
- The students will be able to describe the elements of perspective and scale by positioning objects relative to where they would be placed in a landscape design.
- The students will be able to write a paragraph that explains the design and content of a mural they have created.
- After completing the assignment, the students will be able to write artists statements for the landscape diorama they have created.

Grade Level:

Written at 6th Grade Level (educators are encouraged to adjust the lesson to meet needs of Pre-K to 12th Grade)

Materials Needed:

Shoebox or another size of portable box (rectangle or square) that will accommodate the size of the diorama they have designed

Scissors, markers, construction paper, hot glue guns, foam core, cardboard, rulers, scissors, glue, markers, fabric scraps (burlap, felt, etc.)

Old magazines, wallpaper books, paint and paint brushes, beads, buttons, aluminum or small mirrors for water, cotton balls, Styrofoam balls

Tubs of an assortment of found objects

Miniatures of all types including human & animal figures/creatures, landscape materials purchased or found like rocks, flowers and twigs

Time Requirement:

4 – 6 (50-minute) class sessions

Vocabulary:

Artist Statement: Briefly describes the artwork, offers background information about the design process and what inspired the creative process. This explanation can help the viewer better understand the work.

Aesthetics: Creating a design that is well balanced creating visual harmony, beautiful, pleasing and interesting in appearance that take into consideration the visual relationship determined by light, shadow and contrast.

Assemblage: A 3-dimensional artwork combining mixed media, every day and found objects. Under the umbrella of assemblage artwork, diorama can be interchanged as they both reflect a style of artwork using a combination of objects within a 'box' to create a composition.

Balance: A unifying principle of design; distributing the apparent weight of the elements so that the work does not appear about to topple over from being heavier on one side than the other.

Composition: The way a combination of elements is arranged to form a whole.

Diorama: A model representing a 3-dimensional scene combining mixed media, every day and found objects.

Perspective: A technique in art used to create the illusion of depth. A system of representing the way that objects appear to get smaller and closer together the farther away they are from the viewer.

Scale: The size of one object in relation to another object. Artists use large-scale art and small-scale art to create different effects on a viewer through their perception of size.

Thumbnail Sketches: After a design problem has been introduced, these quick little imaginative, conceptual drawings provide creative possibilities to choose from for the best possible compositional solution.

Direct Instruction:

Note to Teachers: A great way to start this lesson would be to show examples of dioramas/assemblages created by professional artists found on the internet. In particular, the designs created by professional artist Sophie Hacker will serve as an inspiration for students to better understand the creation and purpose of dioramas.

Following are some examples of dioramas and “how to” videos that may be helpful:

<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/dioramas-miniatures>

https://www.instagram.com/hifructosemag/p/C3k6clsxr4n/?img_index=1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_UiQWdo9Bw

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yt1GukPwBGc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtuxmLDFpq8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=haL6XikKx5g>

<https://www.instructables.com/How-to-Make-a-Landscape-Hill-Diorama/>

Introducing Landscape Dioramas:

When Pershing Mural Artists Leonard Thiessen and Bill Hammon were conceptualizing and designing the Pershing Mural, they didn't have computers, software, and digital tools to help them with the massive

project. They relied heavily on scaled models as part of the design process to visualize the final product.

Architects and Artists often use physical models and even dioramas when designing a project and presenting their ideas to their clients. Landscape Dioramas are a wonderful art form that allows the viewer to see a scene in three dimensions. They are an excellent way to showcase learning on a subject matter or topic through craft projects. Dioramas can illustrate an academic subject, reveal the plot of a story, or record an event in history.

They:

- tell a story
- spark the viewers' imaginations
- create a sense of wonder and curiosity
- provide a unique way to observe nature and habitats
- create connections to develop empathy and awareness

Landscape dioramas can be small, fit on a table, or be hung on the wall. A diorama can also be life-sized and found in natural history museums, galleries, etc. They are 3-dimensional artworks combining mixed media with every-day and found objects. The terms assemblage artwork and dioramas can be interchanged as they both reflect a style of artwork using a combination of objects within a 'box' to create a composition.

Often a mural will serve as the backdrop for a diorama. For instance, if a student were to create a diorama based on a visit to the Pershing Mural, the mosaic would be featured in the background and the foreground would include seating, greenery and figurines visiting the site.

Guided and Independent Practice:

Students will begin by creating a variety (at least 3) thumbnail sketches of landscape diorama design possibilities. Students should be encouraged to 'think outside the box' as their designs can be real, imaginative, historic - the 'sky is the limit!':

- historic scene
- a scene from a book or movie
- science fiction
- various climate settings (rainforest, arctic, desert, etc.)
- celestial/atmospheric setting

- favorite period of time (pioneer, Victorian, ice age, etc.)

Encourage the students to determine the story they want to tell or message they want to convey in each sketch. This will make it easier to make a selection. Part of their thumbnail sketches will be to incorporate a free-standing mural of their own design superimposed within the environmental setting as a background. This mural will be included within their landscape diorama.

As part of their final presentation to the class, an aesthetic drawing of their mural will be required. This drawing will show the design elements used for the background of the diorama as it relates to the other elements of the 3-dimensional work. As part of their assignment, students will be asked to write a brief statement (three paragraphs) that describes the elements they incorporated into their mural and what went into the design they created.

After the students have completed their three sketches, they will select their favorite design that will fit easily inside a box. They should now have a good idea of the size of box that will be required for their design and will bring a portable box (rectangle or square) that will accommodate the dimensions of the diorama they have designed on paper. Make sure the students know that the box they select must be stable and can stand up on one side, providing a landscape (horizontal) view.

Next, have the students brainstorm and list the elements/items they could include in their landscape diorama to tell their story. Encourage students to bring imaginative items from home that will help make their dioramas come alive:

- miniatures of all types including human & animal figures/creatures
- landscape materials purchased or found (like rocks and twigs)
- miniature items found at local arts & crafts stores, thrift shops, flea markets, garage sales, etc. (miniatures such as flowers, park benches, lamp posts, cars, etc.)

Students should keep “scale” in mind when gathering and selecting the items to go into their dioramas. For instance, in a prehistoric landscape diorama, a miniature dinosaur in the background will be smaller than a saber tooth tiger in the foreground.

The next step is for the students to design and create their mural that will serve as a background for their diorama. Special care should be taken to make sure the mural does more than serve as a backdrop for the scene. It should also tell a subtle story in its composition and color palette. Once complete, a color copy of the Mural design should be minimized by the teacher on a copy machine in several appropriate sizes. This will help the students to make the best decision about what size will work best within the scale of their diorama.

Once, the box has been selected, the mural completed and sized to fit the structure, and all the possible items that could be included in the diorama have been gathered, it is time to assemble the assemblage. Note: Throughout the construction process, students should be reminded to think through the design process by carefully referring back to their selected drawing.

For the construction and installation of the diorama, students should:

- 1) Paint and/or add construction paper to the outside (top and two sides) of their box in colors that will complement their landscape diorama's composition. If using paint, let the outside of the box dry completely – overnight – before starting the design on the inside area of their landscape diorama.
- 2) Add color (paint or paper) to the inside area of their Landscape diorama. When adding the design elements, work from back to front, placing smaller items in front of larger ones.
- 3) Add layers of materials to create depth. Keep in mind that each item needs to be in scale (or the appropriate size) for the diorama's landscape.
- 4) Select the color copy that will work best within the landscape diorama and adhere it onto foam core, cardboard or another study material.
- 5) Position the mural into its preferred position and glue it into place. Next, place each item within the landscape in relation to the Mural. Space out the objects evenly to create a well-balanced, overall scene.
- 6) Once satisfied with the arrangement of the design elements, glue everything down to make it secure for transport.

Once construction of the landscape diorama is complete, students will:

- 1) Give a title to their landscape diorama

- 2) Write an Artist Statement—now is a good time to review and view the power point “*Writing an Artist Statement*”.

Each student will make an oral presentation of their landscape diorama to the class. Their presentation should include:

- 1) The title of their landscape diorama
- 2) A brief explanation as to the theme of the art and what they were trying to convey to the viewer
- 3) Brief descriptions of the various elements of the diorama

The students will turn in the following for evaluation:

- 1) stable and mobile landscape diorama
- 2) 3 thumbnail sketches
- 3) aesthetic drawing of the background mural with a written statement describing their design process and the elements that were included
- 4) Artist Statement composed of three paragraphs using correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation

Discussion Questions:

- What were some of the challenges you faced in designing your dioramas? How did you overcome them?
- What process did you go through to create your background mural? What story were you trying to tell?
- Do you have a different appreciation now for the artists Thiessen and Hammon as they were creating the Pershing Mural? What story do you think they were trying to tell?
- Were there any unusual materials/elements you included in your diorama you'd like to share. How creative did you have to be to find or create the items included in your work?
- Is there anything you would do differently in creating your diorama?
- What did you learn from viewing and hearing about the dioramas your classmates created?

Evaluation:

The students will be evaluated on:

- 1) Use of class time
- 2) Participation in class discussion

- 3) Completion and submission of:
 - a) Landscape diorama
 - b) Three thumbnail sketches
 - c) Enlarged aesthetic drawing of background mural with accompanying paragraph describing the process
 - d) Artist statement comprised of three paragraphs using correct grammar, spelling and punctuation
- 4) Originality and creativity
- 5) Craftsmanship and construction techniques employed

Closure:

Dioramas are a way to incorporate art and craft projects into the understanding of and elaboration on a topic or subject. They allow students to illustrate a subject, plot of a story, or event in history. They enable students more freedom and creativity by displaying three dimensional scenes. They are especially helpful for those who are blind or visually impaired to experience the diorama in a tactile way. In addition to encouraging development of motor skills, dioramas are a fun activity that involves using their imaginations while they perform craft and art activities such as designing, coloring, cutting, pastings, etc.

Resources:

Schleicher, Robert, *Scenery for Model Railroads, Dioramas & Miniatures*, 3rd Edition, Krause Publications, Iola, WI, 1999

North Carolina Museum of Art, NCMA Learn,
<https://learn.ncartmuseum.org/>.

Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Grades, American Institute of Architects ("AIA") Michigan/Michigan Architecture, www.k5architecture.org

Ivar Kangur, *Diorama Design*, 2017

Will Kalif, *How to Make Fantasy and Medieval Dioramas*, Will Kalif and Kalif Publishing, 2012

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