

PERSHING MURAL PROJECT CURRICULUM

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



THE PERSHING MURAL ~ A NEBRASKA CULTURAL LANDMARK

The History and Art of Mosaics

In this lesson, students will be invited to learn about the history of the artform of mosaics and understand their importance in our lives in modern times. In Activity One, the students will be asked to research a mosaic (ancient or modern), write a research paper, and present their findings in an oral presentation. Activity Two invites students to design and create their own paper mosaic.

Included in this Lesson:

- Lesson Plan: The History and Art of Mosaics
- Power Point: The History and Art of Mosaics

Nebraska Standards Addressed:

Present: FA 8.2.1 Students will use the creative process to investigate and communicate personal voice in artwork.

Connect: FA 8.2.1.a Investigate ideas and materials to demonstrate planning and refining.

Connect: FA 8.2.1.b Recognize personal voice and make stylistic choices to reflect personal identity.

Connect: FA 8.2.1.e Investigate and demonstrate the relationship between technique, skill, and craftsmanship.

Respond: FA 8.2.1.f Demonstrate respect for accepted procedures regarding responsible care of equipment and materials.

Create: FA 8.2.2 Students will understand and apply their knowledge of a variety of presentation and communication techniques.

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

Objectives:

- After a presentation about the history of mosaics, students will be able to list five facts they have learned about mosaics.
- Students will be able to research an historic or contemporary mosaic and write a report about their findings.
- The students will be able to give an oral and visual presentation about the mosaic they have researched.
- After watching a demonstration, the students will be able to describe the process and materials needed to create a mosaic.
- Based on their lesson, the students will be able to create their own paper mosaic.

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:

Any type of Paper - magazines, photos, postcards, newspapers, stamps, wrapping paper, letters, diaries, calendars, wallpaper, coupons, deeds, etc. (students could be asked to bring various types of paper from home), pencils, scissors, posterboard (background material for mosaics), paint (optional), white glue/glue sticks

Time Requirement:

4-6 (50 minute) class sessions

Vocabulary:

Mosaics: Art composed out of tesserae (small pieces of materials) to create patterns or pictures and can be abstract, realistic or nonrepresentational.

Mosaic as an Artform: The decorative art of creating pictures and patterns on a surface by arranging small colored materials and adhering the materials to the surface to make patterns and images

Mosaics as Utilitarian: Popular/practical materials incorporated in all forms of construction.

Tesserae: Cutting a stone, glass, ceramic or other hard material, into smaller pieces often in the shape of a square and using each piece to eventually assemble a mosaic.

Nonrepresentational Art: Art that does not focus on accuracy and may depict objects or people unrealistically.

Abstract Art: Art that does not represent accuracy in the subject matter but combines shapes, colors, form, and gestural marks to evoke emotion, moods and deeper meanings.

Realistic Art: Art that is an accurate depiction of the subject matter.

Symbolism as a Creative Tool: Using one thing to represent another (e.g. an owl represents wisdom, the American flag represents freedom, etc.)

Public Art: Art that is commissioned and created for public spaces and can include sculpture, paintings, murals, mosaics, landscaping, etc. It is also known as civic art in Urban areas.

Direct Instruction:

History of Mosaics

Mosaics have a long history. They originated in ancient times and have brought art and color to humanity for thousands of years. Some of the fabulous historic mosaic works were so detailed they looked like paintings.

This artform has evolved from a symbol of wealth and power to images visible in public spaces to be appreciated by everyone. Their hard-wearing nature has earned them the nickname 'eternal pictures.' Mosaic designs have been found all over the world and are one of the oldest and most beautiful forms of art in the history of mankind. Mosaic art can be dated back more than 5,000 years - to ancient Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq). Early examples of mosaics were used for amorphous (unrecognizable) decorative work used in flooring and pavement. These decorative, abstract designs were made up of ivory, seashells, small pieces of stone or rounded pebbles.

The Mesopotamians laid the groundwork for mosaics made thousands of years later by Classical (Greek and Roman) artists who chose to create pictures, patterns and motifs in their mosaics. Mosaics became an artform in the 4th Century BC by the Greeks used to decorate floors and walls, initially creating patterns using black and white pebbles. Later, their mosaics evolved into a sophisticated art form illustrating myths and legends as well as pastimes of their lives and times. During that time, mosaics were produced using precise geometric patterns to skillfully display people and animals.

Greek craftsmen developed the technique of *tesserae*, cutting stones, increasing the range of colors and forms that could be duplicated (reproduced). The ancient Romans' interest and enthusiasm in mosaic art transformed the use of mosaics from only the privileged few into a more main-streamed decorative medium. By the 8th century, glass tiles and stones in different colors were used to depict gods and create decorative pathways, religious scenes, everyday (domestic) themes, and geometric designs.

In Byzantium (known today as Istanbul), mosaic designs between the 4th and 14th centuries were perfected into an influential artform and, as a result, advancement took place in the use of techniques, materials and colors. Smalti (glass from northern Italy), became popular, backed by a silver or gold leaf allowing light reflection and refraction, providing an entirely new texture and feel to the mosaics created.

Modern Mosaics

Interest in mosaics were revived during the Art Nouveau (represented by curved, organic lines and shapes) movement of the 20th century. As a result, new techniques were introduced, such as the use of purpose-made and waste tiles to cover large surfaces of buildings. Today, designs created with mosaics are made by professional artists or by anyone as a popular craft.

The availability of mosaic tiles creates unlimited options for their use in a variety of environments: homes (bathrooms, kitchens, etc.), churches, businesses and public buildings (Murals), adding interest, creativity, color and elegance. In the 21st Century, the field of mosaics is full of novel approaches, techniques and ideas. However, mosaics tread a fine line - between art and handicraft - simply because they can be used to decorate a space as well as provide functional uses like flooring, ceilings, etc. Organizations such as the British Association for Modern Mosaic and The Society of American Mosaic Artists, exist to promote this artform.

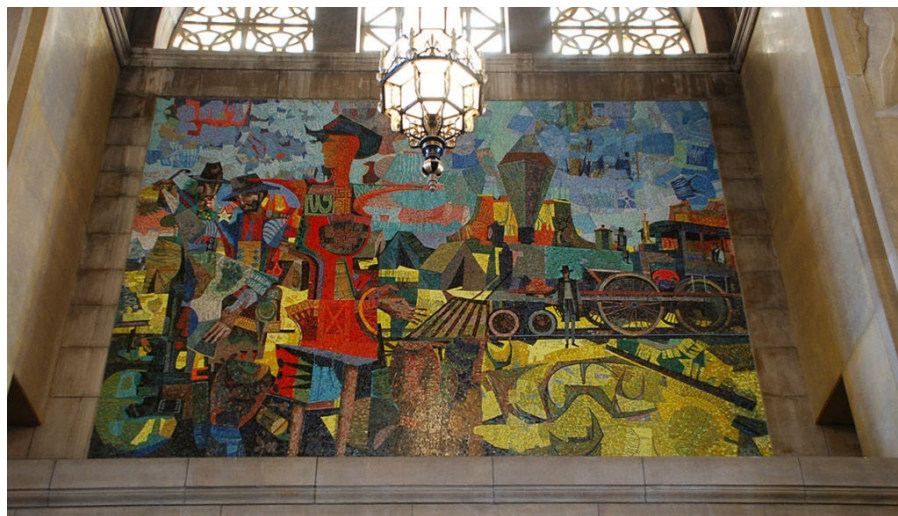
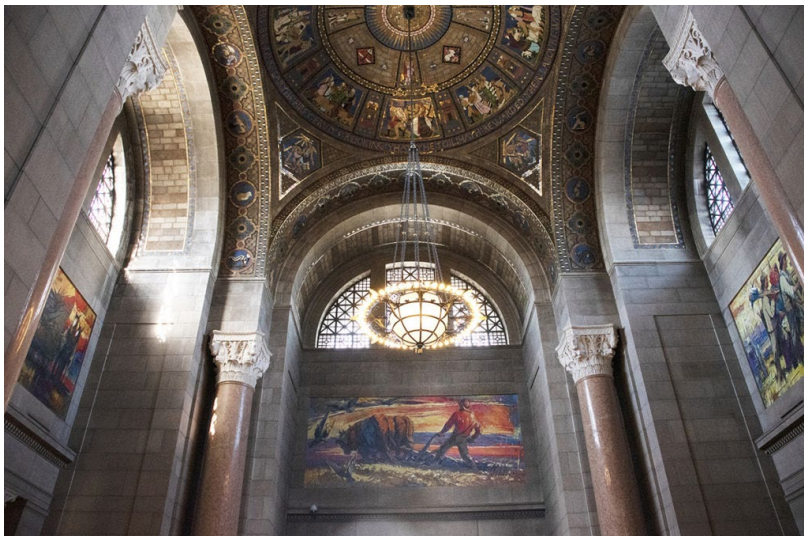
Modern mosaics can be found everywhere and are used to decorate buildings, subways, floors, ceilings, walls, benches, tables, sidewalks, restrooms, restaurants, parks, churches, public buildings, and homes. They are often used as decorative designs that usually include much color and multiple pieces to create one large composition (e.g., murals).

Mosaics allow individual expression to add unique and artistic touches in making personal choices to express one's unique and innate creativity. They can be very complex, with many colors and shapes creating intricate patterns and pictures, or very simple in design. The technique can be used on small two and three-dimensional objects or large-scale surfaces to decorate a floor, a wall or in some cases a ceiling.

Mosaic montages are created by arranging small colored pieces of items to design a complete composition. Examples of materials that can be used in as mosaic include: stones, pebbles, clay, tiles, beads, glass, mirrors, parts of old jewelry, photographs, toys, shells, paper, and found/recycled objects. It is interesting to note that it is not necessary for a mosaic artist to limit themselves in terms of media as various forms of material can be used together in the same piece to create a mixed-media mosaic.

Mosaic-making (drawing, arranging and shaping small mosaic pieces) requires precision and skill and will ultimately enhance manual dexterity, spatial awareness, strengthen hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills. Once the artist has completed their design, the pieces of materials they used in their art is adhered to a surface and held together by adhesive grout (or another bonding element within each adhered piece). When dry, the residue is removed from the surface of the design.

There are exquisite mosaics to be found in Nebraska's beautiful State Capitol Building. Teachers are encouraged to explore these resources and take students on a "Mosaic Exploratory Tour" of the Capitol.



Diffendal, Jr., R.F. *Fossils on the Floor: Mosaics in the Rotunda of the Nebraska State Capitol*, 2nd Edition, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2022

Diffendal, Jr., R.F. *Fossils on the Floor In the Nebraska State Capitol, A Coloring and Activities Book*, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Revised Edition, 2015; 2018

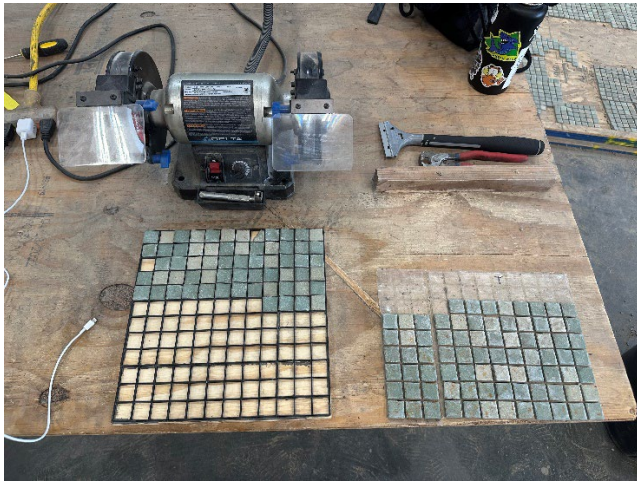
Luebke, Frederick C., Editor. *A Harmony of the Arts, The Nebraska State Capitol*, University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln & London, 1990

Nebraska's Mosaic

The Pershing Mural, with its 763,000 ceramic tiles is also a form of a mosaic. If you look at the massive mosaic up close, it is difficult to determine just what you are seeing; but when you step back and take in the Mural from a distance, you are able to make out all the characters and elements the artists incorporated into the work.

Based on the design of the artists, to prepare for the original installation of the Pershing Mural in 1957, the tiles were assembled in reverse and glued onto sheets of paper, in a manner similar to bathroom floor tile. Then these sheets, most of them 12' x 24" were applied to about-to-set cement and pressed in. After the tiles were set, the paper was moistened, the soluble glue loosened, the paper taken off, and the joints grouted. This was quick and easy compared to the Renaissance method, which involved a laborious, exacting process often taking years to complete a single work.

When the Mural was removed from the side of the Pershing Auditorium in 2023, the painstaking process of cleaning and remapping each tile began to prepare it for its new home at Wyuka Cemetery and Park.



Its reinstallation returns the Mural to its original majesty in its new home.



Discussion Questions:

- What do you think it means when it is said that mosaics are designed to be “hard-wearing”?
- Is the Pershing Mural “hard-wearing?” Why or why not?
- Can you describe any mosaics you have seen in your travels or in your community?

- What is the difference in your interpretation of the art when you look at a mosaic up close versus at a distance?
- What skills would you need to possess to physically lay out a mosaic?
- What materials would you like to incorporate into your own mosaic? Think outside the box.
- Why is artwork/mosaics such an important part of the State Capitol Building?

Guided and Independent Practice:

Activity One: Research Paper and Presentation

After the teacher has introduced historical information about mosaics, students will be asked to write a research paper (outside of class time as homework) from a list of mosaic examples provided by the teacher (or of the students' own personal choices).

- 1) The mosaic each student selects may have been created in the past (ancient) or be contemporary (modern times) and
- 2) The mosaic may be found in a museum, public art installation (e.g. Pershing Mural), building, architectural projects, etc.
- 3) Background information should be provided about the artist (if known), date when the mosaic was created and country where the mosaic can be found, materials used for the mosaics composed composition, size, etc.
- 4) A color visual of the mosaic must accompany the students' presentation to the class.
- 5) A listing of resources used.

Each student will present their research to the class accompanied by a visual of the mosaic they researched with time allowed for questions. Following the presentation, the student will hand in the written report to their teacher. Depending upon the age group participating in the activity, the teacher will set the criteria for: length of paper, number of resources to be used, etc.

Discussion Questions:

- Did you have any surprises about the mosaic your researched?
- What were some unusual subject matters of mosaics that you discovered?
- Were there any especially unusual places you found where mosaics were displayed?
- What differences can you list between modern and ancient mosaics? In materials used? In the subject matter?
- Why do you feel it is important to preserve and protect ancient mosaics?
- What stories can mosaics tell?

Evaluation:

The students will be evaluated on:

- 1) Content of their research paper which includes:
 - a) An introduction
 - b) Body of the paper
 - c) Closing with observations
 - d) Listing of resources used
- 2) The body of the paper should include:
 - e) Description of mosaic (ancient or modern)
 - f) Where the mosaic can be found and how it was used
 - g) Background information about the mosaic's artist (if available) and any information about the origins of the artwork
 - h) Date the mosaic was finished (if known)
 - i) Country where the mosaic can be found
 - j) Materials used in the creation of the mosaic
 - k) Characteristics of the mosaic (size, colors used, theme, etc.)
 - l) Any interesting information or observations about the mosaic
- 3) The mechanics of the paper:
 - a) All required information is included
 - b) Neatness of presentation
 - c) Accuracy of information provided
 - d) Correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation
- 4) Oral presentation to class:
 - a) Facts and observations from the research are conveyed in the oral presentation

- b) A visual of the mosaic is included in the presentation
- 5) Listing of any resources they used.

Activity Two: Creating a Paper Mosaic

Students will learn the process of creating mosaics using paper as their medium. Using paper allows students both freedom and flexibility to cut the sizes and shapes they need to create their mosaic. Creating mosaics nurtures careful planning, critical thinking, problem-solving, and organizational skills. Challenges are sometimes encountered while working on intricate designs fitting irregularly shaped pieces together or successfully achieving the desired color balance. By drawing their own unique design, students will identify and express their creativity.

- 1) Students will draw several designs (at least three), real or abstract, with the thought of creating their own mosaic.
- 2) When finished, they will be asked to select their favorite design and enlarge the drawing (lightly with pencil) on the background paper (in various colors) provided by the teacher.
- 3) The students should select a title for their mosaic that corresponds with its theme.
- 4) When selecting the background paper for the mosaic, the students should consider its color will show and be a part of the mosaic's composition.
- 5) Students will next select from the paper provided by the teacher (or brought from home) the colors they want to use in their mosaics.
- 6) They will then cut the paper into small pieces in various shapes and sizes and begin adding the pieces of paper within and around the drawing they created, making sure to cover any pencil lines.
- 7) Students should be encouraged to experiment and take time to plan their ideas and color/pattern possibilities.
- 8) Once they are satisfied with the layout of their mosaic, they should neatly adhere/glue the paper pieces in the desired design.

Once all the mosaics are complete, they should be displayed around the room or presented individually and the "artists" should explain their process and what they were trying to achieve with their creations.

Discussion Questions:

- Did you have any difficulty coming up with ideas for your mosaic?
- How difficult was it for you to design and create your mosaic?
- What challenges did you run into in creating your mosaic?
- What would you do differently now that you've created your first paper mosaic?
- What thought went into choosing the color palette for your design?
- Was it difficult "seeing the big picture" when you used so many small pieces of paper in your design?

Evaluation:

Students will be evaluated on:

- 1) Use of time
- 2) Following the process of creating their mosaics
- 3) Originality and creativity
- 4) Craftsmanship
- 5) Neatness
- 6) Class presentation and respectful participation in class discussion

Supplemental Activities:

Public art is a term used for art forms that occur in public spaces. These artistic expressions reflect the culture of the community and identify and define a city. Public art projects have a positive impact on a community by inspiring, educating, and engaging the public. They can take many forms, including murals, mosaics, sculptures, monuments, gardens, and plazas. The goal of public (civic) art is to create timeless community values and help define cultures at the same time it promotes beauty and creativity.

Funding for public art and deciding what art will be approved to be created varies from community to community. Much thought goes into what and who the art represents and the story it is trying to tell.

- 1) Ask students to identify public art found in their community. Their assignment is to use their phones to capture images of the art they

find. Once they have all submitted their photos, a slide show of all the images can be created to share with the class.

- 2) Ask students to select a site in their community that would benefit from a mosaic or mural (e.g. wall of an alley, sidewalk or plaza, building facade, park, garden area, etc.). Their assignment will be to design a mural or mosaic for the space based on a theme that is fitting with the community. For instance, a mosaic for Nebraska City may be based on apples or trees, two themes with which the city is identified. Ask the students to complete an artist statement to accompany their work.
- 3) Give the students 3"x3" or 4"x4" white tiles and ask them to create designs to be applied to the tiles using art materials that have been supplied. A theme such as school or community spirit associated with the school they attend can be their inspiration. Once all the tiles have been completed and sealed, they can be adhered and grouted to a wall of the school to form a mosaic.

Closure:

Mosaics are significant not only as art, but as evidence of where and how people lived, worked, and thought. They can also be an historical record that captures scenes from daily life, important events, and cultural practices. They provide valuable insights into the customs and traditions of ancient societies.

It is fascinating to see how artists combine colors, shapes, and texture to create complex art. Creating mosaics allows us to add unique and artistic touches to spaces that are beautiful as well as functional. They enhance the spaces in which we live and they tell our stories.

Resources:

Susan Seymour, 2005, *Perfect Paper Mosaics*, New York: Sterling Publishing Co.

Canal, Maria Fernanda & Chavarria, Joaquim, T. (1999) *The Art of Mosaics*, New York: Watson-Guption Publications.

Cheek, Martin. (2002). Making Mosaics, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Creative Publishing International, Inc.

Fleming, William. (1970). Art, Music & Ideas, (1st ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

Gombrich, E.H. (1995). The Story of Art, (16th ed.) London: Phaidon Press Limited.

Goodwin, Arthur. (1985). The Technique of Mosaic, London: B.T. Batsford Ltd

Goodwin, Elaine. (2003). Encyclopedia of Mosaic, North Pomfret, Vermont: M. Trafalgar Square Publishing.

Paradise Garden Foundation, Mosaic Lesson Plans, <https://paradisegardenfoundation.org/education>

Mosaic Makers, <https://learn.ncartmuseum.org/lessonplans/mosaic-makers>

Magazine Mosaics – <https://kinderart.com/art-lessons/craft/magazine-mosaics/>

A Brief History of Mosaics, <https://www.aquablumosaics.com/blogs/news/a-brief-history-of-mosaics>

Mosaic Art Defined,
<https://www.oberk.com/theartandhistoryofglassmosaics>

History of Mosaics, www.mozaico.com

Mosaic Art, Types, History of Mosaics, <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/mosaic-art.htm>

19 Great Mosaic Art Projects for Elementary Students,
elementaryassessments.com

How to Make A Mosaic, <https://mosaicartsupply.com/illustrated-mosaic-instructions/>

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and the



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Pershing Mural Historic Preservation Project

