

Wood, Lake Rocks

Art of the Wild West at Woolaroc

Objective

Students will learn about the western art on display at Woolaroc museum near Bartlesville, research and write reports on some of the art and artists and examine the elements of select works of art.

Background

What we know as the American Wild West took place after the American Civil War, when many of those who had served in the war moved west, seeking opportunities in land mostly held by Native American tribes. The culture of the Wild West centered around cowboys on horseback, moving cattle along trails like the Chisholm Trail from Texas to Kansas City, where they were loaded on trains and shipped east to feed a growing population. Scenes from the Wild West were, and still are, a favorite topic of artists, and art museums in Oklahoma hold some of the best examples of that art. The Gilcrease in Tulsa is one museum known worldwide for its collections of western art. The national Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum is famous for its collection of contemporary western art, celebrated each year with its Prix de West, a prestigious invitational art exhibit of over 300 Western paintings and sculptures by the finest contemporary Western artists in the nation .

One of Oklahoma’s greatest treasures of western art is Woolaroc, near Bartlesville, which holds a diverse assortment of western art and artifacts collected by Frank Phillips, founder of Phillips Petroleum Co. The collection is on display for the public on Phillips’ 4,000-acre ranch, now a museum. The name Woolaroc comes from three words—woods, lake and rocks, which refers to the woods, lakes and rocks that make up the beautiful Osage Hills of northeast Oklahoma, where Woolaroc is located.

On entering the building that houses the museum, visitors are greeted by a sculpture called “The Cowboy.” The sculptor, Jo Mora, was a Uruguayan-born American cartoonist, illustrator and cowboy. Mora wrote and illustrated children’s books about the west. The model for “The Cowboy” was George Miller, one of the famous Miller Brothers of the 101 Ranch, near Ponca City.

Another sculpture on the Woolaroc grounds is called, “Thanks for the Rain,” by Joe Beeler. It shows a cowboy kneeling on the ground next to his horse. Cowboys on the range were as dependent as farmers on rain to water the grass needed to feed the cattle. Beeler grew up in Osage Country, on the borderland between Oklahoma and Missouri. He learned early how to rope, ride and hunt, and soon developed a knack for drawing cowboys, Indians and horses. Beeler helped start the Cowboy Artists of America to help popularize and legitimize western art. He died in the saddle, helping neighbors brand calves.

Inside the museum, one of the most striking works of art is a very large

Oklahoma Academic Standards

GRADE 4

Speaking and Listening:
R.1,2,3; W.1,2. Research:
R.1,2,3; W.1,3. Multimodal:
R.1; W.1,2
Visual Art: 1.2; 2.1,5; 4.4

GRADE 5

Speaking and Listening:
R.1,2,3; W.1,2. Research:
R.1,2,3; W.1,2,4.
Multimodal: W.1,2
Visual Art: 1.3,4; 2.1,5; 4.4

GRADE 6

Speaking and Listening:
R.1,2,3; W.1,2. Research:
R.1,2,3; W.1,2,4.
Multimodal: W.1,2
Visual Art: 1.3,4,5; 2.1,2,5;
4.4

GRADE 7

Speaking and Listening:
R.1,2,3; W.1,2. Research:
R.1,2,3; W.1,2,4
Visual Art: 1.3,4; 2.1,2; 4.4

GRADE 8

Speaking and Listening:
R.1,2,3; W.1,2. Research:
R.1,2,3; W.1,2,4.
Multimodal: W.1,2
Visual Art: 1.3,4,5; 2.1,2; 4.4

Pioneer Woman

Created in 1929 by English-born sculptor Bryant Baker (1881-1970), the Pioneer Woman statue is located in Ponca City. According to its dedicatory plaque, the sculpture was created “in appreciation of the heroic character of the women who braved the dangers and endured the hardships incident to the daily life of the pioneer and homesteader in this country.” Depicted is a woman, Bible under her arm, leading her young son bravely, confidently into the future. The twelve-thousand-pound, seventeen-foot-tall, cast-bronze piece stands atop a pyramidal, silverdale-stone base. The entire presentation rises to forty feet. In 1926-30 Ernest W. Marland, wealthy oilman and future governor of Oklahoma (1935-39), developed the project. In cooperation with a New York gallery, Marland held a competition for the statue’s design. Twelve prominent artists, including A. Stirling Calder, James Earle Fraser, Maurice Sterne, and H. A. Macneil, were invited to prepare models. Each received a brief, written description of the concept, two authentic sunbonnets, and a \$10,000 advance fee. In 1927 the gallery unveiled the models and toured them to New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Dallas, Fort Worth, Oklahoma City, and Ponca City. At all venues, the public voted. More than 750,000 votes were cast, and Bryant Baker’s model, titled “Confidence,” won the commission and a \$100,000 prize (Macneil’s entry scored second place). The twelve models, and a Baker-designed “Pioneer Man” model, are housed at Woolaroc museum, near Bartlesville. Marland deeded the Pioneer Woman statue and associated site to the State of Oklahoma.

painting of a Sioux man behind a plow, looking at the skull of a bison lying on the ground. The painting is “Visions of Yesterday,” by William Robinson Leigh. Leigh was born after the Civil War on a plantation in West Virginia and raised in Baltimore. early in his career he was an illustrator for Scribner Magazine, but an offer by the railroad to travel west and paint the Grand Canyon changed his focus.

Like Leigh, Oscar Berninghaus got his start painting scenes of the west when he was hired by the railroad to do illustrations for their promotional literature. On his way there he met the artist Bert Geer Phillips who was recruiting artists to come and paint the landscapes of people of the region around Taos, NM. With others, they formed what would become known as the Taos Society of Artists. Woolaroc has several paintings by Berninghaus and other Taos artists. “Threshing Time at Taos” depicts a herd of horses driven round and round a large stack of grain within a corral, separating the grain from the straw.

Charles M. Russell is considered one of the greatest artists of the American West. He created more than 2,000 paintings of cowboys, Indians, and landscapes set in the western United States. He is best known for his bronze sculptures. At Woolaroc, a bronze casting of his “The Night Herder” is one example of his work

“Bronco Buster “ is an example of sculpture by another great western artist, Frederic Remington. Like Russell, Remington was expert at many forms of art. He was a painter, illustrator, sculptor, and writer.

English Language Arts

1. Read and discuss background and vocabulary.
 - Students will select one of the artists listed in the background and use online search engines or library references to research the artist.
 - Students will find out where the artist was from, what he/she was known for, what school of painting he/she belonged to, and other examples of the artist’s work and/or life that is related to farming or ranching.
 - Students will write research papers from the information they find or use online resources to produce computer generated presentations showing examples of the artist’s work.
2. Students will work in groups to research one of the following topics and present their findings to the class in oral presentations, PowerPoint, posters, etc.
 - 101 Ranch
 - Pioneer Woman Statue
 - Taos School of Artists
 - Chisholm Trail

Visual Art

1. Provide copies of the “Ag in Art” questionnaire included with this lesson.
—Review and discuss The Elements of Art, summarized on the questionnaire.
—Students will select three of the works of art listed on the questionnaire and find images of the art using an online search engine.
—Students will answer the questions based on their impressions of the selected works of art.
2. Students will select two or more of the works of art listed in the background.
—Students will compare and contrast the two works using the questions on the worksheet.
3. Students will use the Elements of Art to create an original work of western art, using a variety of materials, techniques, and sources for ideas.
—Display the students’ artwork and invite other classes to view your “Western Art Gallery.”
—Students will teach the other classes about 1) the elements of art 2) appropriate behavior for an art gallery.

Extra Reading

Durham, David Anthony, *Gabriel’s Story*, Doubleday, 2001.

George-Warren, Holly, *The Cowgirl Way: Hats Off to America’s Women of the West*, Houghton-Mifflin Books for Children, 2010.

Harris, Lois, *Charlie Russell: Tall-Telling Cowboy Artist*, Pelican, 2010.

Murdoch, David Hamilton, *Cowboy*, *Eyewitness Books*, DK Children, 2000.

Savage, Candace, *Born to Be a Cowgirl: A Spirited Ride Through the Old West*, Tricycle, 2004.

Vocabulary

artifact—a usually simple object (as a tool or ornament) showing human work and representing a culture or a stage in the development of a culture

contemporary—of the present time

cowboy—one who tends cattle or horses

culture—the characteristic features of everyday life shared by people in a particular place or time

diverse—differing from one another

illustrator—one who creates pictures or diagrams intended to explain or decorate

invitational—by invitation only

legitimize—cause to be recognized as meeting certain standards

plantation—an agricultural estate worked by laborers

popularize—make popular

prestigious—having importance in the eyes of other people

promotional literature—materials used to help increase the sales of something

range—open land over which livestock may roam and feed

sculpture—a work made by shaping, carving or molding

threshing—separating seed from a harvested plant

Elements of Art

Find the works of art from Woolaroc below, using an online search engine. Select one or more and answer the following questions about the work of art you have selected.

“The Cowboy,” by Jo Mora

“Thanks for the Rain,” by Jo Beeler

“Visions of Yesterday,” by William Robinson Leigh

“Threshing Time at Taos”, by Oscar E. Berninghaus

“Night Herder,” by Charles M. Russell

“Bronco Buster,” by Frederic Remington

TEXTURE is what you would be able to feel with your sense of touch if the work of art were real. Describe the textures you see in this work of art.

FORM is the element of a work of art that makes it look three-dimensional, showing the subject’s height, width and depth. Describe the three-dimensional forms in this work of art.

SPACE includes the background, foreground and middle ground. It is the distances or areas around, between or within components of a work of art. There are two types of space: positive and negative space. Positive space is the space representing the subject matter. Negative space refers to the space around and between the subject matter. Describe the use of negative and positive space in this work of art. Is their more negative or positive space?

SHAPE—Shapes in a work of art can be geometric (e.g.: square, circle, triangle, hexagon, etc.) or organic (such as the shape of a puddle, blob, leaf, boomerang, etc.) Describe the shapes you see in this work of art.

COLOR—Make a list of the colors you see in this painting. Are they mostly primary colors (red, yellow, blue) or are there more secondary colors (green, orange, violet)? How do the colors make you feel (cheerful, sad, etc.)?

TONE (VALUE)—Value, or tone, refers to the use of light and dark, shade and highlights, in an artwork. Describe the tone in this work of art.

LINE—Line pertains to the use of various marks, outlines and implied lines in a work of art. Implied line is the path that the viewer’s eye takes as it follows shapes, colors, and form along a path. What lines do you see in this work of art? Are they mostly vertical or horizontal?

What is going on in this work of art? Mention whatever you see happening, no matter how small.

What do you see in this work of art that is related to ranching or farming? What does it teach you about the time and place in which it is set?

Does this work of art tell a story? If so, write what you think the story is. If not, use your imagination and write your own story.

Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom is a program of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry and the Oklahoma State Department of Education.