

ANNOTATED LESSON PLANS

Below are resources available as of winter 2017 for teaching about Frida Kahlo in the k-12 classroom. She is of incredible importance when discussing artists who have changed the ways in which we think about female identity and the role of women in society. We've made great strides in gender equality, and it's important to recognize the multitudes of women (and men) who have helped to make that happen. I particularly appreciated the discussion in the article "[Embracing the Modern Female Heroine—In All Her Forms](#)" by the Children's Book Cooperative (CBC). It's vital that we continue to highlight the ways in which we are challenging and redefining what it means to be a woman in today's society because it is certainly happening and our students need to be aware of it:

While the challenges of ethnic, racial, and sexual diversity still loom large, I found some comfort this past year in seeing an emergence of strong, complex, and challenging female characters depicted in modern entertainment. Women depicted making morally questionable choices. Women whose principal dilemmas didn't revolve around a dashing leading man. Women who took on what society often dictates as standard male personality traits (physical and emotional strength, relentless determination, and even questionable moral conduct) and redefined them as their own. Women who traveled down paths of their own making, shaped by a clear understanding of who they are as people, and holding onto that identity with all they have.

(From [Embracing the Modern Female Heroine—In All Her Forms](#))

The Tate Museum offers a description of Kahlo that demonstrates the ways in which she fits much of the description offered above:

Frida Kahlo can be seen as one of the most significant artists of the twentieth century, not just in her native Mexico, but worldwide. Repeatedly painting her own image, she built up a body of work that explored her identity as a woman, artist, Mexican, disabled person and political activist. A remarkable range of self-portraits show how she constructed an image for herself, and, with her flamboyant Mexican costumes, jewelry and exotic pets, ultimately made herself into something of an icon. Other artworks reveal how she explored the pain she suffered from a spine injury and the difficulties of her relationship with Diego Rivera, the famous Mexican muralist whom she twice married. As well as taking inspiration from her own life, Kahlo drew upon a wide range of influences including Surrealism, ancient Aztec belief, popular Mexican

folklore, eastern philosophy and medical imagery. (From the [Tate Museum: Introduction to Frida Kahlo](#))

Following the lesson plans listed below, you'll find an annotated bibliography of children's, young adult, and adult literature about Kahlo. With so many excellent books on Kahlo, it is easy to mix and match the lesson plans shared here with a literacy unit on historical fiction or biography. The complementary multimedia, audio, and visual resources could further enhance a unit focused on Kahlo.

[Frida Kahlo: Information and Activity Pack for Teachers](#) created by Tate Modern Museum

Through their unit plan students explore pairs of works that are studied and analyzed as they relate to specific themes, such as "Belief Systems and Links with Nature," "Constructing Identities," "Relationships, Politics and Constructing Identities," "National Identities," and "The Broken Body, Illness, Disability." For each theme there is an activity created for primary and secondary classes. To give you a sense of what you'll find throughout the guide, for one theme, primary students learn how to make mood masks, while secondary students look at body language and clothing through keeping a sketch book journal.

[Frida Kahlo and The Art of Self-Portraiture](#) from the Teacher's Network

This unit was created by Jessica Rivera and is based on lesson plans implemented with third grade students. While teaching about Kahlo, the unit also covers a number of technological and academic subject objectives. Students will be exposed to skills and rules for using the internet, along with practice in using other technology tools such as scanners and/or digital cameras. Students will also learn how to create a virtual museum. Reading and writing across genres is also incorporated into the unit.

[Frida Kahlo: A Portrait of a Woman in Art](#) from the Kimball Art Center

This lesson plan focuses entirely on teaching students how to draw a self-portrait within the context of teaching about Kahlo. It is a simple and straightforward unit plan that can be easily adapted for a variety of grade levels. Although no longer available directly through the Kimball Art Center, the lesson plan can be accessed as a [Word document](#) from the LAI's Vamos a Leer blog.

[The Life and Times of Frida Kahlo: Personal or Political?](#) from PBS

This lesson plan draws upon the PBS documentary of the same name, which offers an intimate biography of a woman who gracefully balanced a private life of illness and pain against a public persona that was flamboyant, irreverent, and world-renowned. Kahlo was an eyewitness to a unique pairing of revolution and renaissance that defined the times in which she lived. In this lesson plan, students will consider what makes art political, debate the relevance of the term "political art" to Frida Kahlo's work, and create their own self-portraits using the style of Frida Kahlo as inspiration.

[Frida Kahlo and Expression through Self-Portraits](#) from Scholastic

Students learn about the Mexican painter, and then create self-portraits while considering the question, "What is important to you?"

[Studying the Biographies of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera](#) from Yale National Initiative

The purpose of this unit is to introduce students to the genre of non-fiction, specifically focusing on biographies. This unit will introduce biographies by reading brief biographies of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. Students will read two short biographies of Kahlo and compare how the stories vary from author to author. By the end of the unit they will be very familiar with the lives of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. They will have read, analyzed and compared biographies by different authors. They will also be given brief biographies of various people to read and paraphrase. Finally students will create an autobiography booklet of themselves.

[Understanding Frida in Context through her *Still Life: Pitahayas*](#) by MMOCA

This short lesson plan focuses on Frida's still life painting, *Pitahayas*, as a way to delve more deeply into understanding her and her work. Each object in *Still Life: Pitahayas* tells us something about Frida Kahlo: where she lived, her interest in her native Mexican culture, her physical pain, and her attitudes toward life and death.

[Frida Kahlo and the Symbolic Self Portrait](#) by the [Albright-Knox Art Gallery](#)

Frida Kahlo was largely known for her symbolic self-portraits reflecting her life, loves, joys, and sorrows. Influenced by her Mexican culture, she uses vibrant color and meaningful imagery to

portray her self-identity to the viewer. In this lesson, students will make connections to the artist while creating a self-portrait celebrating their own self-identity.

Frida Kahlo as a Biographical Study

Suggestion: Use biographical studies as a jumping off point to explore Frida Kahlo and her art. The [Art Story](#) has created a relatively thorough yet accessible biographical summary of Frida's life, including a useful, annotated compilation of her images. As you shape this exercise, you might consider this brief introduction to "[Why Teach with Biographies?](#)" as well as this article from the NYTimes on "[Children's Books: Putting Life into Biography.](#)" This could help frame how to approach the unit. Then, use one of the following lesson plan modules as a starting point to conceptualize the best activity to fit your classroom needs: "[Introducing the Biography Genre](#)" from Scholastic; "[Writers' Workshop: The Biographical Sketch](#)" from ReadWriteThink; or "[Exploring Elements of Biography and Autobiography](#)" from the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Frida and the Art of the Selfie

Suggestion: It might be an interesting exercise to connect Kahlo's practice of creating *autorretratos* with the art of digital selfies. Teacher Kristy Placido has written a unit on "[Incorporating Selfies and Self Portraits with Frida](#)" that takes students through the art of taking a selfie as inspired by Frida, using digital imagery and mixed media materials. To further deepen the connection between *autorretratos* and selfies, we suggest reading this article by the New Statesman on "[What Frida Kahlo Can Teach Us About the Art of the Selfie.](#)"

Politics and the Self: Self-Portraiture and "Where I'm From" Poetry

Suggestion: One means of encouraging students to think deeply about Kahlo's biographical and political context is to ask students to engage in a combined art and literary exercise. Begin by having students craft a "Where I'm From Poem" (lesson plan available on the LAII's [Vamos a Leer blog](#)). Then, after examining a variety of Kahlo's self-portraits, ask students to create a self-portrait that incorporates elements of their own biographical history or political values. [Art is Basic](#) has a "Mixed Media Self-Portraits" lesson plan that could be easily adapted for this.

Building Self Affirmation: Soy Yo and “Where I’m From”

Suggest: To explore Kahlo's strong sense of self and self-affirmation, you might consider combining art and music. Once again use the “Where I’m From Poem” lesson, but complement it with the song [Soy Yo by Bomba Estereo](#), a piece whose lyrics and music video both, as [NPR writes](#), “pays tribute to what’s inside of you.”

Examining Frida Kahlo through Visual Literacy Strategies

Suggestions: Apart from self-portraiture and biographical studies, another method of bringing Frida Kahlo into the classroom would focus on [visual literacy](#) strategies, or strategies that help students critically interpret and negotiate the meaning of visual content. The following resources are not specific to Kahlo's work, but offer useful frameworks for guiding classroom discussions focused on visual literacy.

[Visible Thinking Pictures of Practice](#) by Visible Thinking

This web resource offers a number of visual thinking strategies to encourage students' independent reflection and critical thinking skills. Stephanie Martin created the Thinking Keys routine with a colleague as a way to help students reflect on their own thinking. The four keys and associated questions give children the vocabulary necessary to think about and discuss their thinking. The four keys are: Form: What is it like?, Function: How does it work?, Connection: How is this like something I have seen before? and Reflection: How do you know?

[Common Core in Action: 10 Visual Literacy Strategies](#) by Edutopia

Edutopia has compiled a list of ten different approaches for building visual literacy skills and then tied them to Common Core Standards.

[Practice Looking at Art](#) from The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Engaging with a work of art is a meaningful and lasting experience. The following four-step process, designed by Museum staff, encourage close looking and careful thinking with any work of art that you view with your students, either in your classroom or in the Museum.