



## CAN I FEEL YOUR PAIN ? A Sculpture Project



Level: high school  
Course: art, sculpture

### Rational

Central to any art course is the understanding that artists respond to the world in which they live. Studying the shifts which occur in some Latin American governments and the often resultant oppression will provide for students a focus on an issue of which they may or may not have first hand knowledge, but nonetheless will encounter in the future. The process of engaging in critical thinking by learning and researching this issue (and attendant ones), drawing conclusions, and acting upon them by creating an artwork is the cycle of an artist responding to the world. Students as artists spark an awareness in their peers as audience, and this is also part of the cycle, an empowering part. High school students are very young adults who are to soon step into our larger global world as active voting participants. Extremely important and pressing issues such as human rights, media bias, governmental hidden agendas, and racial/class inequities are appropriate realms to acknowledge, debate, and react to in a creative atmosphere. These are real problems which our students will inherit. Our young adults live in the same world as their Latin brothers and sisters, and hold a stake in possessing an active awareness of repression and the fight for freedom.

### Lesson Overview

To accomplish these goals, it will be necessary to establish a knowledge-base (that is, to determine the students' level of

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awareness concerning the above-mentioned subjects, possibly through a “free-writing” exercise), and lay a foundation of information and research sources, (including technological). The concepts of human rights, human rights violations and governmental repression of freedoms will be presented through readings and videos. Students will be expected to reflect and journal on these, as well as conduct research on a specific Latin American country (of their choice) to determine the degree of freedom its citizens enjoy, and the circumstances surrounding it. Students may seek the responses of that country’s artists, (although this will be incidental learning and is not the primary focus of the lesson). They will design and execute a sculpture which conveys a message of the following to the viewer: information, reaction and opinion. Students will report to their classmates research findings, as well as the story of their artwork. A descriptive statement, written by the student artist will be displayed with the sculpture exhibit, in school.

## Objectives

Students will:

- \* demonstrate the ability to convey a viewpoint in a clear manner in their work (both written and studio production).
- \* demonstrate an understanding of a repressive political situation in a Latin American country by explaining their research and its implications (both verbally and in written work). *Note to teachers: care should be exercised during discussions to insure that students have an understanding that not all Latin American governments are repressive, and there are many aspects of repression in other countries as well.\** Students will show an understanding of an artist’s impact on raising community awareness, telling a story, educating and touching the soul through their art works.
- \* gain an increased knowledge-base of certain Latin American countries and their citizens’ struggles for freedom.
- \* generalize this knowledge and in turn, gain a deeper appreciation of the freedoms often taken for granted in our country.\* Students will demonstrate the ability to research an issue, using a variety of media (including on-line modern services).\* Students will demonstrate appropriate work skills, including a concern for cooperation, respect, honesty, and so on.
- \* Students will strive for creativity and excellence in the presentation of their artwork.\* Students will demonstrate competence in producing a successful in-the-round sculpture.

## Time Needed

3 Weeks, 2 Days. Initial presentations, overview, discussions, readings and videos: 2 class periods. Demonstration of on-line abilities and research into subject: 3 class periods. Proposals: to be done as ongoing homework, during this time. Studio production time (actual sculpture-making): 2 weeks. Written statement (homework), class presentation, and final large group critique: 2 days.



## Materials

For sculpture, mixed media; that is, a variety of media may be used. Students will be required to identify in their proposals what media they would prefer to use, as well as the dimensions of their finished product. Choices will include: clay, wood, found objects, metal, paint and so forth.

## Procedure

The introduction of this assignment will begin with a general discussion of students' knowledge of human rights, and governmental actions. Perceptions will be probed as to their opinion of what constitutes freedom, in our country and abroad. During these first two days of the assignment, students will view the videos "El Norte" and "We Are Guatemalans," as well as read the poem "Two Women" and selections from the following books: *A People's History* (Zinn), *Hear My Testimony* (Tula), *Gift of the Devil-A History of Guatemala* (Handy), *Inside Haiti* (Farmer), and *In the Time of the Butterflies* (Alvarez).

The next three class periods will focus on the use of a modem on-line service to access information from sources such as the Latin American Data Base. As an exercise, students will be asked to find and cite the location of an entry dealing with some aspect of human rights in Latin America. The remaining time will be spent researching their country. Students will be asked to find some instance of repression which absolutely touches them to the degree they are moved to create a response. Time at the beginning of each class will be set aside for students to sit together in small groups and share the information they have found as well as discuss ideas for their sculptures.

The next two weeks will be spent in studio production, that is, the actual making of the sculpture. This process will begin with the students, again in small groups, sharing their plans with and receiving feedback from the members of the group. These proposals will then be made to the large group by each student. Depending upon the inclination of the class, the next portion of the work could be done by an individual student, or in a large group. (The overall progress of the group during these two weeks will determine if there is a need to readjust the due date).

The conclusion of this assignment will be each student's giving a brief oral report on the country they researched and also an explanation of their work. The large group will be assembled to provide feedback on the completed sculpture (critique). As homework, the student will have completed an artist's statement about the work to be displayed alongside of it in an exhibit to be placed somewhere on campus. During the entire process, students are also expected to journal about their progress and feelings about their work. As much as possible, students will be encouraged to make use of their social studies materials and instructors as resources, as well as anyone they may personally know who has first hand knowledge of a Latin American country. As instructor, I intend to collaborate with the following departments in preparing this assignment: Language Arts, Spanish, Social Studies, and Business Education (this is the department which currently houses a modem which we may access).

## Bibliography

Alvarez, Julia. In the Time of the Butterflies. New York: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1994.

This book is a fictionalized account of the four Mirabal sisters who lived through the regime of Gen. Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. The stories begin in the year 1938 and continue through to the death of three of the sisters in a questionable automobile "accident" in 1960. The fourth sister's thoughts bring us forward to 1994.

"Assassinations in Guerrero." Centroamerica. Vol. 10, Num. 7. July 1995: 6.

A recent account of multiple assassinations committed in June, 1995, in this Mexican state. All the assassinations have political overtones.

Burgos, Elizabeth. Translated by Ann Wright. I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala. New York: Verso, 1994.

An account of this woman's experience with imprisonment and torture—her own, her family, and other friends and acquaintances.

"El Norte." Cinecom International Films. U.S.A. 1983.

A movie about the plight of a Guatemalan brother and sister who risk their lives traveling north to America in search of freedom. Their parents have been killed by military forces in retaliation for the death (in self defense) of a military officer.

Farmer, Paul. Inside Haiti-Policy and the Plight of a Nation. New Jersey: Pamphlet Series Publishers, 1994.

A pamphlet which outlines the most recent history of Haiti, the United States foreign policy regarding Haiti, and human rights abuses by the military.

Handy, Jim. Gift of the Devil. Mass.: South End Press, 1984.

This book traces Guatemala's history from pre-colonial times to the present. The focus is on the struggle of the indigenous peasants to preserve their lives and land.

LADB (Latin American Data Base). URL: <http://ladb@unm.edu>

An subscription-based Internet site, which makes available information on economics, politics, and other areas of interest regarding Latin America.

Latin America Related International Information Services. Peacenet: "The Vanished Gallery."

URL: <http://www.igc.apc.org/peacenet/>

"The Vanished Gallery" is an attempt to document the thousands of "desaparecidos" (disappeared) who vanished under the military junta in Argentina during the '70s.

"Mexico Deports Three Priests." Centroamerica. Vol. 10, Num. 7. July 1995:7.

A brief article on the deportation of three priests who have been working in Chiapas for decades on the charge they incited violence.

Novas, Himilice. Everything You Need to Know about Latino History. New York: Plume/Penguin, 1994.

A useful, concise reference book which answers the who, what, where and whys of Latino culture.

"Protesters Shot." Centroamerica. Vol. 10, Num. 7. July 1995: 7.

A brief account of protesters who were shot in June, 1995 in the Dominican Republic by riot police. The article identifies issues sparking the protests, including: street repairs, normalization of electricity, drinking water supplies and the disappearance of a journalist.

"School of Assassins." Maryknoll World Productions. P.O. Box 308, Maryknoll, NY 10545.

A short video which discusses the controversial role of the School of the Americas (Assassins) at Fort Benning in the United States in it's training of military personnel from other countries. Many of these soldiers have returned home only to have become involved with the political assassinations of opponents of government. Examples of specific cases, including Latin American military personnel are presented.

Tula, Maria Teresa. Hear My Testimony. Mass.: South End Press, 1994.

The story of a Salvadoran human rights organizer and activist. This is Maria's account of poverty, imprisonment and torture, during war-torn years in El Salvador.

"Two Women." Poem from Quincentennial Course Packet. University of New Mexico Publications Center. 1973.

A poem in two voices which contrasts a woman of privilege with a woman of poverty, due to situations of government oppression.

"We Are Guatemalans." Maryknoll World Productions. P.O. Box 308, Maryknoll, NY 10545-0308, 1995.

A brief video about the raid of an Indian village by military troops and their subsequent return to that village after twelve years exile.

Zinn, Howard. A People's History. New York: Harper Perennial, 1990.

A wide-ranging book which chronicles the oppression of a variety of peoples by others through the means of governance, class structures and so forth.