

Connecticut Explored Curriculum Lesson Plan

Topic: The Hartford Art School and its Contributions to the Arts

Article: “An Art School Forged in the Gilded Age” by Elizabeth J. Normen, *Hog River Journal*, Volume I, No. 4, http://connecticutexplored.org/issues/v01n04/art_school.htm

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Description: Students will use the material in Elizabeth J. Normen’s article “An Art School Forged in the Gilded Age”, to uncover the history of the Hartford Art School. They will learn about the school’s founders, its opportunities for women artists, and the institution’s contributions to the arts in the late 19th and 20th centuries. First, all students will be required to compose a 1 to 2 page letter to city officials urging them to financially support the school. Second, students will have a choice of either A) designing an ad for the Hartford Art School or B) creating a power point presentation on a founder, administrator, or teacher at the school and his/her significance to the school and the field of art. Students will discover that the arts are important components in defining a people and in reflecting social and cultural developments in a nation’s history. In the case of the Hartford Art School, women were provided an opportunity to become a professional artist.

State Standards Addressed:

Content Standard 1.2 – Describe the importance of significant events in local and Connecticut history and their connections to United States history.

- High School – Using local and state examples, analyze how events and people in Connecticut both reflect and have contributed to developments in United States history.

Content Standard 1.3 – Demonstrate an understanding of significant events and themes in world history.

- High School – Explain how the arts, architecture, music, and literature of a civilization/nation reflect its culture and history.

Essential Questions: How is late 19th century art reflective of social developments in American history? What need did the Hartford School of Art satisfy in Connecticut during the Gilded Age and beyond? Who were some of the most important personalities identified with the Hartford Art School? What were their contributions?

Objectives: After reading Elizabeth J. Normen’s “An Art School Forged in the Gilded Age,” students will be able to identify the key personalities associated with the early years of the Hartford Art School and define its cultural contributions to local, state, and the nation’s history. Students will design an ad for the art school or create a power point presentation on a founder, administrator, or instructor at the Hartford Art School and discuss his/her cultural contribution to local, state, and national history. Students will recognize the connection between the Hartford Art School and the women’s movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Historical Background: Inspired by the work of Candace Wheeler, an interior decorator with Louis Comfort Tiffany, Hartford’s Society of Decorative Arts provided a rare, professional artistic opportunity for women in the Gilded Age. Wheeler had summoned sponsors from cities across America to establish art societies to provide work for Civil War widows. The work would not only be profitable, but respectful of Victorian restraints regarding gender. Responding to Wheeler’s plea, a group of high profile and civic-minded women from Hartford helped to establish the school gathering students from throughout the northeast. When it opened on January 16, 1878, the school’s first class of 30 students included both men and women. Over time the school employed gifted artists including James Wells Champney, Dwight W. Tryon, Henry C. White, Dawson Dawson-Watson, and William Merritt Chase. Initially renting rooms in the Cheney Building (currently known as The Richardson on Main Street), the Society moved its operations to the Wadsworth Antheneum in 1884 and changed its name to the Art Society of Hartford. The school’s identification with such gifted painters introduced painting, still life, drawing, cast drawing, outdoor sketching, models for life study, and the beginnings of American Impressionism.

While the Art Society offered a variety of courses, employed gifted administrators and instructors, and managed to host exhibitions, musicales, and lectures, the school lacked an endowment and struggled to cover costs. After decades of financial uncertainty, in 1956, the Art School joined with the Hartt College of Music and Hillyer College to form the University of Hartford.

The founding of Hartford’s Decorative Art Society in 1878 occurred at a time of great excitement in American art. The years, circa 1860 and 1900, were adventurous and productive. According to art historian Matthew Baigell, these years were “rich” and “most complex”. While European styles had always influenced American art forms, this were much more in evidence after the Civil War. Munich and Paris became educational centers and attracted American artists who returned home eager to introduce their work. In addition, the building of museums and art schools accelerated: the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City (1870), the Massachusetts School of Fine Arts in Boston (1873), the California School of Fine Arts (1874), the St. Louis School and Museum of Fine Arts (1879), and the Rhode Island School of Design (1877) spearheaded this development. By 1882, claims Baigell, there were 39 art schools in the nation. Innovations included figure studies, Tonalism, introspective art, and, after the World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893, Impressionism gained immense popularity. American Impressionism, as represented by the work of J. Alden Weir, Child Hassan, William Merritt Chase, and others, who taught at the Hartford Art School, or who had their work exhibited there, provided tremendous incentive for students to explore new mediums and styles.

Strategies: This lesson should be introduced when covering the Gilded Age. It dovetails with any discussion and treatment of cultural history in the last three decades of the 19th century. It also reinforces women’s history during the period. The creation of the Hartford Art School was a significant achievement for the women who attended the school, especially at a time when opportunities for them were few. A quick introduction of art history, especially American Impressionism and modernism, will be instructive and provide background. Students will be able to use the Internet to research key figures of the school when composing their essays. A connection between the cultural history of the Hartford Art School and the greater art world at the time is important. Some important sites include the following: <http://AmericanArt.si.edu>, www.spencerart.ku.edu/resources/gilded_age/, www.oah.org/pubs/magazine/gilded/dickson-wallace.html, www.besthistorysites.net/USHistory_Gilded_Age.html, www.arttimesjournal.com.

Authentic Assessment Activities:

Assessment #1 – From the beginning, the Hartford Art School struggled financially. After reading Elizabeth J. Normen’s “An Art School Forged in the Gilded Age,” *Hog River Journal*, Volume I, No. 4, Summer 2003, write a 1 to 2 page letter to city officials urging them to financially support the institution by demonstrating the cultural importance of the Hartford Art School to the city of Hartford, the state of Connecticut, and the field of art during the Gilded Age. In your letter, be sure to provide date, salutation, and three reasons for supporting the school, conclusion, and signature.

AND

Assessment #2 – Design an ad in brochure format for the Hartford Art School that demonstrates a positive cultural contribution to the city of Hartford, the state of Connecticut, and the arts. Your brochure may include some of the following components: analogy, humor, irony, exaggeration, caricature, stereotype, symbolism, main idea, caption, historical reference, and cultural significance. Students may opt to use Microsoft Publisher Brochure to create the ad electronically.

OR

Assessment #3 – Create a power point presentation on one of the following: J. Alden Weir, H.W. Ranger, William Merritt Chase, Dwight W. Tryon, the Reverend Francis Goodwin, Henry C. White, James Wells Champney, Dawson Dawson-Watson, Cecelia Beaux, William Gedney Bunce, Candace Wheeler, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Elizabeth Colt, Olivia Clemens, Susan Warner, or Mary Bushnell. In your presentation, be sure to demonstrate the importance and impact of your selection on the Hartford Art School and the connections to broader United States art history. Helpful resources include the following: www.artcyclopedia.com/artists, www.arttrail.org/, www.allgetaways.com/cocob.html, emsworth.wordpress.com/.../American-impressionists-in-Old-Lyme-Connecticut, www.florencegriswoldmuseum.org.../essay_imprint.php.

Materials: Elizabeth J. Normen, “An Art School Forged in the Gilded Age,” *Hog River Journal*, Volume 1, No. 4, Winter 2003, http://connecticutexplored.org/issues/v01n04/art_school.htm

Annotated Bibliography

Baigell, Matthew, *A Concise History of American Painting and Sculpture*, Revised Edition, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996. This resource provides instructors and students with valuable information in a brief, manageable format.

Cashman, Sean Dennis. *America in the Gilded Age: From the Death of Lincoln to the Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*. New York: New York University Press, 1984. Cashman’s account examines the social, political, and economic background necessary for understanding the last three decades of the 19th century. Instructors can utilize this material as a backdrop for the founding of the Hartford Art School.

Craven, Wayne. *American Art: History and Culture*. Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark Publishers, 1994. Craven’s work is a compendium of art history in its American context. It provides greater detail on trends in the field for those instructors and students wishing to extend the lesson.

Lynes, Russell. *The Tastemakers*. New York: The Universal Library, 1954. Old but still valuable, Lynes’ work is a wonderful account on how some Americans established guidelines for cultural tastes in the nation’s history.

Mumford, Lewis. *The Brown Decades: A Study of the Arts in America 1865-1895*. New York: Dover Publications, 1971. Originally presented as the Guernsey Center Moore lectures at Dartmouth College in 1929, Mumford recounts the creative genius in American art in the Gilded Age. Brief but informative, the book provides background in the field of art precisely at the time of the founding of the Hartford Art School.

Nye, Russel, *The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America*. New York: The Dial Press, 1982. Nye's study is valuable as it discusses aristocratic control of the arts in early American history and the challenge of emergent egalitarianism.

Schlereth, Thomas J. *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1991. Schereth's account is a lively discussion of the tremendous transformations in American history in the decades following the Civil War. The book complements Cashman's work cited above in providing teachers and students with another reference for Gilded Age history.

Stokstad, Marilyn. *Art History*. Revised Edition, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1999. This comprehensive source, some 1100 pages, is an inclusive work that covers every aspect, genre, key personality, and trend in the history of art. Particularly helpful are the discussions of European influences on American art.

Winterer, Caroline. *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780-1910*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. Winterer's study is an examination of America's fascination with the intellectual genius of antiquity and the classical model in art and architecture. It is helpful in examining sculpture throughout American history.

Field Trip Option(s): This lesson provides an excellent opportunity to schedule a visit to a local art museum. The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, the newly-expanded New Britain Museum of American Art, Florence Griswold Museum, Yale University Art Gallery, Lyman Allyn Art Museum, Joseloff Gallery, Davison Art Center, William Benton Museum, and the Mattatuck Museum are possibilities. Exhibits on colonial or "primitive" art, the Hudson River School of Art, American Impressionism, the Ashcan School of Art, Regionalist art, Abstract Expressionism, and other genres can creatively supplement material covered in American history textbooks.

Lesson Journal: Exploring history through art provides opportunities beyond the lesson. For those students considering a career in the arts, this lesson will hopefully be a source of inspiration. Those students particularly interested in museum work can assume the role of educational docent, and prepare and present a series of short talks on a number of historic paintings of their choice. Artistically gifted students might wish to present a personal painting on an event in history with personal interpretation and commentary. Students with an interest in architecture can prepare and present drawings representing urban buildings or other structures. Most importantly, students recognize the relevance of artistic expression that has varied over time and has reflected the social and cultural development of a people.

Name _____ Date _____

Rubric for Design an Ad

<u>Components</u>	<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Student Self-Evaluation</u>	<u>Teacher Evaluation</u>
Includes positive cultural contributions from Hartford Art School to the city of Hartford	20		
Includes positive cultural contributions from Hartford Art School to the state of Connecticut	20		
Includes positive cultural contributions from Hartford Art School to the Arts	20		
Historical accuracy	10		
Correct grammar and spelling	10		
Colorful and attractive	10		
Neat	10		
<u>total score</u>	100		

Name _____ Date _____

Rubric for Powerpoint Presentation

<u>Components</u>	<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Student Self-Evaluation</u>	<u>Teacher Evaluation</u>
Title slide ~ includes title, picture, name, date	10		
Introduction slide ~ with picture	10		
Information slide #1 with picture ~ demonstrates the importance and impact on the Hartford, and/or United States art history	10		
Information slide #2 with picture ~ demonstrates the importance and impact on the Hartford, and/or United States art history	10		
Information slide #3 with picture ~ demonstrates the importance and impact on the Hartford, and/or United States art history	10		
Information slide #4 with picture ~ demonstrates the importance and impact on the Hartford, and/or United States art history	10		
Information slide #5 with picture ~ demonstrates the importance and impact on the Hartford, and/or United States art history	10		
Conclusion	20		
Websites used	10		
<u>total score</u>	100		

Rubric for Letter to City Officials

<u>Components</u>	<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Student Self-Evaluation</u>	<u>Teacher Evaluation</u>
Accurate spelling and grammar	10		
Includes date, salutation, and signature	10		
Reason # 1 for supporting school	20		
Reason # 2 for supporting school	20		
Reason # 3 for supporting school	20		
Concluding Paragraph	20		
<u>total score</u>	100		