

Discovering the Story: A City and Its Culture

Song Paintings

An Arts Enrichment Activity for
Grades 4-8

Based on *The Underground Railroad, 1893*
by Charles T. Webber



Charles T. Webber (1825-1911)
United States (Cincinnati)
The Underground Railroad, 1893
Subscription Fund Purchase, 1927.26

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OBJECTIVES

- Students will examine [*The Underground Railroad*](#) painting and observe and discuss the events it depicts.
- Students will examine spiritual code songs, which enslaved people used to communicate messages, including messages about seeking freedom.
- Students will understand that ideas can be communicated both through images and music.
- Students will create a landscape painting that visually narrates a code song.

PRE- VIDEOCONFERENCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

VOCABULARY

Definitions can be found in the [Glossary](#) on the [Discovering the Story](#) Website.

Code

Landscape

Metaphor

Realism

Songs

Spirituals

MATERIALS

- Print reproduction of [*The Underground Railroad*](#) – class set downloaded and printed from the [Discovering the Story](#) website
 - Collection of sheet music, spiritual songs or songbooks borrowed from the music department
 - Musical recordings of code songs
 - Tape Recorder/CD Player
 - Pencils
 - Paints--watercolor or tempera
 - Paintbrushes of various sizes, including small brushes
 - Thick paper--ideally 12"x18" or larger
 - Containers for water
 - Paper plates for paint and mixing colors
 - Paper towels or rags for wet brushes
 - Newspaper or other large paper for protecting tables
- (dry media such as crayons or colored pencils may replace painting supplies)

BRAINSTORMING/GETTING STARTED

- Look at an image of *The Underground Railroad* painting and review the concept of the Underground Railroad.
- Discuss how this painting relays the artist's attitude toward the event. The artist relayed his attitude through the way he chose to create his picture. What do you think Webber's attitude toward slavery was? What makes you say that? What clues to his feelings does his picture reveal?
- Pass out lyrics of code songs and play them for the students. These songs are full of metaphors that would have been apparent to enslaved people, but not to their slave owners. These metaphors allowed enslaved people to sing their true feelings-- attitudes about their masters, their condition and the desire for freedom. Listen for these metaphors and identify lyrics that you think say one thing, but symbolize something else. Look again at the painting. Locate the musical instrument. Why do you think the artist might have included this detail?
- Read/listen to the song lyrics again. This time imagine a landscape where these songs could take place, and imagine the people in the landscape doing something.
 - What time of year is it in your landscape?
 - What time of day?
 - What are the people doing in this landscape? Ask for volunteers to describe the scene of their imaginations.
- Tell students that next they will be making a painting that illustrates this scene.

PROCEDURE

1. Cover tables with newspaper and distribute paper and pencils.
2. Ask students to lightly sketch their song illustrations.
3. Distribute paints, brushes, water and paper towels.
4. Ask students to paint on top of their sketches and to think about how color can help relay their messages. For example, it can indicate time of year or time of day, as well as help create a mood or feeling in their paintings.
5. When students are finished, allow the paintings to dry, then hang them on walls of the classroom to display them.

DISCUSSION/PREPARATION FOR VIDEOCONFERENCE

- Allow time for students to present and discuss their Song Paintings to the class. Time allowing, students may also present Song Paintings to the Museum staff member during the videoconference.

VIDEOCONFERENCE

OBJECTIVES

- Students will interact with the Cincinnati Art Museum staff through a sixty-minute [videoconference](#).
- Students will learn about Cincinnati's contribution to the Underground Railroad.
- Students will use Museum objects to reinforce activities completed in preparation for this [videoconference](#).

CONCEPT

A [videoconference](#) conducted by the Cincinnati Art Museum staff extends student learning through emphasis on the viewing and discussion of art objects. During this [videoconference](#) with the Museum, students will explore Cincinnati's place in the story of the Underground Railroad movement and major tristate figures, such as Levi and Catharine Coffin, John Parker and John Rankin.

SCHEDULE

- **5 minutes** Introduction to CAM staff (*This is also buffer time in case of connection complications*)
- **10 minutes** Brief discussion of student pre-videoconferencing activities.
- **10 minutes** Museum staff will lead students in an in-depth investigation of C.T. Webber's painting *The Underground Railroad*
- **15 minutes** Museum staff will lead an interactive discussion with students on Cincinnati's place in the story of the Underground Railroad movement.
- **10 minutes** Questions and student sharing of art projects.
- **5 minutes** Closing (*This is also buffer time in case of connection complications*)

ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS

NATIONAL STANDARDS: VISUAL ARTS

Grades 5–8

Standard 1: Understands and applies media, techniques and processes related to the visual arts.

Benchmark 1: Understands what makes different art media, techniques and processes effective (or ineffective) in communicating various ideas.

Benchmark 2: Knows how the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques and processes can be used to enhance communication of experiences and ideas.

Standard 2: Knows how to use structures (e.g., sensory qualities, organizational principles, expressive features) and functions of art.

Benchmark 1: Knows some of the effects of various visual structures (e.g., design elements such as line, color, shape; principles such as repetition, rhythm, balance) and functions of art.

Benchmark 2: Understands what makes various organizational structures effective (or ineffective) in the communication of ideas.

Benchmark 3: Knows how the qualities of structures and functions of art are used to improve communication of one's ideas.

Standard 4: Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

Benchmark 1: Understands similarities and differences among the characteristics of artworks from various eras and cultures (e.g., materials; visual, spatial, and temporal structures).

Benchmark 2: Understands the historical and cultural contexts of a variety of art objects.

Benchmark 3: Understands how factors of time and place (e.g., climate, resources, ideas, technology) influence visual, spatial or temporal characteristics that give meaning or function to a work of art.

OHIO STANDARDS: VISUAL ARTS

Creative Expression and Communication: Students create artworks that demonstrate understanding of materials, processes, tools, media, techniques and available technology. They understand how to use art elements, principles and images to communicate their ideas in a variety of visual forms.

Grades K–4

Benchmark A: Demonstrates knowledge of visual art materials, tools, techniques and processes by using them expressively and skillfully.

Benchmark B: Uses the elements and principles of art as a means to express ideas, emotions and experiences.

Benchmark C: Develops and selects a range of subject matter and ideas to communicate meaning in two- and three-dimensional works of art.

Grades 5-8

Benchmark A: Applies knowledge of materials, tools, media, techniques and processes to communicate subject matter, themes or ideas in a variety of visual forms.

Benchmark B: Creates two- and three-dimensional original artwork that demonstrates personal visual expression and communication.

Benchmark C: Achieves artistic purpose and communicates intent by selection and use of appropriate media.

Historical, Cultural and Social Contexts: Students understand the impact of visual art on the history, culture and society from which it emanates. They understand the cultural, social and political forces that, in turn, shape visual art communication and expression. Students identify the significant contributions of visual artists to cultural heritage. They analyze the history, cultural, social and political contexts that influence the function and role of visual art in the lives of people.

Grades K-4

Benchmark A: Recognizes and describes visual art forms and artworks from various times and places.

Benchmark B: Identifies art forms, visual ideas and artistic styles and describes how they are influenced by time and culture.

Grades 5-8

Benchmark B: Creates a work of art that incorporates the style or characteristics of artwork from a culture other than their own

Analyzing and Responding: Students identify and discriminate themes, media, subject matter and formal technical and expressive aspects in works of art. They understand and use the vocabulary of art criticism to describe visual features, analyze relationships and interpret meanings in works of art. Students make judgment about the quality of works of art using the appropriate criteria.

Grades K-4

Benchmark A: Identifies and describes the visual features and characteristics in works of art.

Benchmark B: Applies comprehension strategies to respond to a range of visual artworks.

Grades 5-8

Benchmark A: Applies the strategies of art criticism to describe, analyze and interpret selected works of art.