

Opening Doors: Artistic Influences

Grade Level: 6-12

"The artist who opened the visible world to me when I was fifteen years old was Wyeth."
-James Welling

BASED ON



Andrew Wyeth
Henry Teel, 1945
Tempera on panel
Bequest of Paul E. Geier, 1983.62

OBJECTIVES

- After viewing a variety of photographer James Welling's work, including his "Wyeth" photographs, students will compare and contrast Welling's work with that of Andrew Wyeth.
- Students will choose an artist whose work they admire greatly. This may be assigned as homework or in class using art history books, art magazines, and the Internet. After a short writing activity in which students consider their interest in this artist's work, students will develop a work of art that reflects this interest.
- Upon completion of their pieces, students will display their work accompanied by a short statement about how the work reflects the influence of their chosen artist.

CONCEPT

In 1966, while in ninth grade, James Welling received a book of Andrew Wyeth paintings. That same year, he was taking art classes at The Wadsworth Athenaeum in Connecticut. He would often visit the galleries at the museum, and it was there that he encountered "Northern Point" by Andrew Wyeth. His interest in the work focused on Wyeth's precise way of presenting his subject matter-that of everyday objects, people and places. Welling states "Wyeth taught me that it was okay to look very closely at things, to be intense, to be very focused."

Another influence Welling credits to Wyeth is his use of framing, such as with the edges of doorways and windows, as well as his interest in light on form. Although he chose photography as his medium, he was able

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(sometimes subconsciously) to use what Wyeth's work taught him and incorporate it into his own. It was after many years of not thinking about Wyeth that he rediscovered his early mentor, producing the body of work entitled "Wyeth" (see Resources). It was at this time he states, that he was "...able to follow my obsession with Wyeth, and to discover the things I've borrowed from him. Yes, it is an homage, but that homage becomes a portal that opens onto my own work and my own interests."

Wyeth's painting in the Cincinnati Art Museum's collection, *Henry Teel*, is an excellent example of the artist's use of detail, precision, light and composition that inspired the young James Welling and which continues to do so today.

In this lesson, students will explore what it means to be influenced by another artist's work, discover their own artistic influences and make a work that is inspired by this connection. They will consider the following questions:

- "How are artists influenced by each other?"
- "How is this influence demonstrated in their work?"
- "How does someone else's unique qualities help me develop my own?"

MATERIALS

Access to art history books, art magazines, and/or Internet resources for student research
Handouts for reflection, one per student
Materials and media as needed for individual student work

PROCEDURE

- Give students some time to choose an artist they admire. This may be assigned as homework or in class using art history books, art magazines, and the Internet.
- Once they have made their choices, students can use the worksheet to consider their interest in this artist's work.
- Introduce James Welling's work through a variety of his photographs. See Resources for a link to the Wako Works of Art pdf. file of Welling's *Wyeth* photos.
- Explain that Welling became interested in Andrew Wyeth as a young teenager. Center a discussion on the questions "What do these two artists have in common?" and "What do you think James Welling learned from Andrew Wyeth and how did he incorporate it into his own work?" (See Worksheet) Guide the class to the idea that Welling admired Wyeth's use of light, composition and portrayal of everyday subject matter and that these continue to influence his work today.
- You can also show examples of other artists and their influences, such as the impact of African art on early Modern artists, or the impact of Beuys and Goya on contemporary artist William Kentridge. (See Resources)
- Once they have developed their ideas, students can create a work of art that reflects this interest. Upon completion, they will write a short statement about how the work reflects the influence of their chosen artist, and how the work is uniquely their own.
- Display both works and statements. These pieces can help engage students to see the many ways an artist's work reflects the influence of others.

ASSESSMENT

- Students will compare and contrast Welling's work with that of Andrew Wyeth using a Venn diagram on the worksheet.
- Students will choose an artist whose work they admire greatly. After a short writing activity on the worksheet in which students consider their interest in this artist's work, students will develop a work of art

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that reflects this interest. Written work should demonstrate thoughtfulness in the planning of their pieces. The work itself should be well crafted and somehow reflect the influence of their chosen artist.

- Artist statement should describe their piece and discuss how it reflects the influence of their chosen artist, what student has learned from this artist and how the piece is uniquely their own.

NATIONAL STANDARDS

Visual Art

- Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols and ideas
- Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their [a student's own] work and the work of others

Social Studies

- Individual Development and Identity: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

- Language Arts: Study the literary influences of writers or poets
- Music: Explore musical influences on other musicians or visual artists.
- Social Studies: Study how one culture or civilization can influence another, such as the Etruscan and Greek on Ancient Rome.

RESOURCES

Art: 21. William Kentridge: Anything is Possible. William Kentridge discusses his artistic influences in this 53-minute video. <<http://www.art21.org/anythingispossible/>>

Art Institute of Chicago. *Andrew Wyeth*. Catalogue from an exhibition organized by the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 1966.
<www.artic.edu/sites/default/files/.../AIC1967AWyeth_comb.pdf>

Craft, Rachel. New Flash Points: Influence. Art: 21 Blog. Short introduction to the idea of artistic influences.
<<http://blog.art21.org/2010/11/01/new-flash-points-influence/>>

Metropolitan Museum of Art. *African Influences on Modern Art*. Essay on how artists of the early 20th century were influenced by African art.
<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/aima/hd_aima.htm>

Wadsworth Atheneum. *James Welling: A Window on Wyeth*. 62 minute talk by James Welling on the relationship between his work and that of Andrew Wyeth.
<<http://vimeo.com/39387276>>

Wadsworth Atheneum. James Welling: "Wyeth". Interview with James Welling on his exhibition *Andrew Wyeth: Looking Beyond*- <http://www.thewadsworth.org/welling/>

Wako Works of Art Co. Ltd. *Wyeth: James Welling*. Catalogue of the exhibition *Wyeth*.
jameswelling.net/assets/uploaded/pdf/james_welling_wyeth_final.pdf



Andrew Wyeth
Henry Teel, 1945
Tempera on panel
Bequest of Paul E. Geier, 1983.62