



The Storm That Swept Mexico | Lesson Plan: Revolutionary Art

“Their work doesn’t remain on the canvas, it goes much further than that. They try to envision a new reality.” — Laura Matute Gonzalez (Art Historian) Following the Mexican Revolution, the Mexican government supported the development of a new school of art to break with the dominance of the European tradition. This new movement sought to create a “real” Mexican art that would strengthen and reaffirm Mexican identity and the values of the Revolution. The Mexican Muralist movement was born as a means to provide a visual narrative of the post-Revolutionary vision of Mexican history and was driven by the ideal that art should be “by the public, for the public.” In this lesson, students will examine the use of art as historical narrative and social commentary, and create a mural inspired by the Mexican Muralist movement.

Lesson Summary

About the Film

The Storm That Swept Mexico tells the gripping story of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the first major political and social revolution of the 20th century. The Revolution not only changed the course of Mexican history, transforming economic and political power within the nation, but also profoundly impacted the relationships between Mexico, the U.S. and the rest of the world.

Leading the initial wave of 20th century worldwide political and social upheavals, the Mexican Revolution was the first major revolution to be filmed. *The Storm That Swept Mexico* incorporates photographs and motion pictures from the earliest days of cinema. Much of this material has never been seen before by North American and international audiences.

The first hour, “The Tiger is Unleashed,” charts the struggle by Francisco I. Madero and his followers to end the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, and traces the emergence of two remarkable rebel leaders: Emiliano Zapata and General Francisco “Pancho” Villa. But the Revolution was not merely an internal affair; it was an international event, profoundly influenced by U.S. and European foreign policy.

The second hour, “The Legacy,” examines international influence on the Mexican Revolution, investigating the extraordinary plan, hatched in Germany, to seek Mexico’s support against the United States, if it was to enter World War I. In addition to the warfare, there was a cultural revolution as well. Beginning in the 1920s, and continuing through and beyond the 1940s, Mexican artists burst onto the international cultural stage, and Mexico City became the nexus of an indigenous art movement. Against this backdrop, the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas in many ways fulfills the promises of the revolution. But

after Cárdenas's extraordinary administration, politics regress, and in 1968, shortly before Mexico City is to host the Olympics, a new type of revolution explodes.

Interviewing distinguished scholars from the disciplines of history, economics, literature, political science, women's studies, and art history, *The Storm That Swept Mexico* explores the beliefs and conditions that led to the revolution, influenced the course of the conflict, and determined its consequences over the century that followed.

Filmmakers:

- Producer/ Director: Raymond Telles
- Producer/Archivist: Kenn Rabin

Time Allotment

90-120 minutes + Assignments

Learning Objectives

Following the Mexican Revolution, the government supported the development of a new school of art to break with the dominance of the European tradition and create a "real" Mexican art form that would strengthen and reaffirm Mexican identity and the values of the Revolution. The Mexican Muralist movement was born as a means to provide a visual narrative of the post-Revolutionary vision of Mexican history, and was driven by the ideal that art should be "by the public, for the public." Using *The Storm that Swept Mexico: Revolutionary Art Film Module* as a guide, students will:

- Examine the use of art as historical narrative and social commentary and as a form of communication and education
- Understand the influence of historical events on artistic and cultural movements
- Understand the political and social issues presented in, or reflected by, Mexican Muralism
- Create a mural inspired by the Mexican Muralist movement and write an artist statement

Supplies

Film Module: *The Storm that Swept Mexico: Revolutionary Women Film Module*

LCD projector or DVD player

Audio speakers

Whiteboard or blackboard

Sticky notes or note cards (6 colors)

Pen and writing paper

Computers with Internet access

[Revolutionary Art Student Handouts](#)

1. Student Handout A: Reading Murals Worksheet

2. Student Handout B: Video Module Discussion Questions
3. Student Handout C: Research Worksheet
4. Student Handout D: The Dream Key

[Revolutionary Art Teacher Handouts](#)

1. Teacher Handout A: Mural Image: Diego Rivera's A Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park
2. Teacher Handout B: Essay Assignment Rubric
3. [Teacher Handout: Portrayal, Promotion, and Projection Artwork](#)
 - [The Storm that Swept Mexico: Revolutionary Art Glossary](#)
 - [The Storm that Swept Mexico: Revolutionary Art Educator Guide](#)

Learning Activities

PRE-SCREENING ACTIVITIES

The following Pre-Screening Activities are designed to prepare students to view *The Storm that Swept Mexico: Revolutionary Leaders* Film Module and introduce students to the ideas, themes and topics that will be explored in the Post-Screening Lesson.

Activity 1: Why Murals?

Time: 15 mins

You will need: white/blackboard, markers/chalk

Goal: Murals are believed to be one of the oldest human art forms. For over 30,000 years, artists all over the world have been telling the story of the human experience using paint on walls. In preparation for viewing the film and participating in the following activities, students will share their understanding and experience of murals and discuss some of the ways murals have been used throughout history and in their own community.

- What is a mural? Ask students to share all the words they think of when they hear the word "mural," and record their responses on the board.
- Where do we see murals? Have students share some examples of murals that they have seen and describe the artwork. Where were they? What did they look like? Who do you think painted them? What story do you think they were trying to tell? Why do you think they were painted?
- Why murals? Humans were painting images on walls to tell the story of their lives and communities long before written language was invented. What purpose do murals play in society? In what ways can public paintings be used as a form of communication? What are the benefits of telling a story in pictures instead of words? Ask students to consider how murals can help people share stories and information in communities where multiple languages are spoken, or literacy is limited.

- What role do murals play today? Have students consider the ways contemporary muralists use the art form. What role if any do murals play in your community? Is there a distinction between murals and graffiti? In the digital age, how might mural-making adapt to the virtual world of the internet?
- Have a volunteer(s) look up some formal definitions for murals, and as a class, develop a working definition for what a mural is and what functions it serves that also includes the results from the class discussion. This definition can be revisited and revised throughout the lesson.

Activity 2: Reading Murals

Time: 30 mins

You will need: pen/paper, white/blackboard, markers/chalk, Student Handout A: Reading Murals Worksheet, Teacher Handout A: Mural Image Diego Rivera's A Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park, computers with Internet access and an LCD projector.

Goal: Mexican Muralists used the visual language of painting to shape a new Mexican identity and make the history of the Mexican people available to all. This activity will introduce students to Diego Rivera's A Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park and they will work in groups to begin to "decode" the themes and message of the painting.

- Divide the class into multiple groups of 3-4 students and distribute a copy of the Student Handout A: Reading Murals Worksheet to each member of the team.
- Instruct the class that they will be introduced to a mural and each team will have 15 minutes to explore the image and complete the Student Handout A: Reading Murals Worksheet. (Note: Each student should complete their own copy of the handout.) Ask students to consider the story that the artist is trying to tell through the image, and tell them that they will be asked to create a title for the work and share their interpretations with the class.
- Since the image is so detailed it is preferable to project the image in large-scale using an LCD projector. If needed, the teams can be provided with a color copy of the image or the image can be displayed on a computer screen (one for each team).
- When time is up, reconvene the class and ask the teams to discuss the results of the activity. Each group will share their titles and interpretations of the story of the mural, followed by a group reflection using the following questions as a guide:
 1. What is happening in the image?
 2. What emotions does the mural evoke?
 3. What do your interpretations of the murals have in common? How are they different?
 4. When/where do you think this mural was painted? What visual clues can you find in the painting to support this?
 5. Why do you think the artist painted this mural?
 6. What message or messages do you think the artist is sending to the viewer?

- Ask the class to consider this discussion when viewing *The Storm that Swept Mexico: Revolutionary Art Film Module* and let them know they will be referring back to the completed *Student Handout A: Reading Murals Worksheet* and the artwork over the course of the lesson.

Activity 3 (Optional): The Revolution and the Revolutionaries

Time: 15 mins

You will need: Pen and paper and *The Storm that Swept Mexico Glossary*, Computer and LCD projector

Goal: To prepare students to view *The Storm that Swept Mexico: Revolutionary Leaders Film Module*, by introducing a summary of the history of the Mexican Revolution and reviewing key figures and terms referred to in the film module. (NOTE: If students have been introduced to aspects of the Mexican Revolution in class, you may adjust this activity as needed. Teachers can also provide this activity as a take-home assignment to be completed prior to the commencement of the Revolutionary Leaders Lesson Plan.)

- Provide students with a summary of the Mexican Revolution from one of the following links:
 1. EDSITEment, The Centennial of the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920: <http://edsitement.neh.gov/centennial-mexican-revolution-1910-2010>
 2. The Mexican Revolution and its aftermath, 1910–40, Britannica.com: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mexico/The-Mexican-Revolution-and-its-aftermath-1910-40>
- Working in pairs, instruct students to research the following terms:
 1. Key Figures: Emiliano Zapata, Pancho Villa, Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Silvestre Revueltas Nellie Campobello
 2. Key Terms: Public Art, Villista, Zapatista, Soldaderas, Porfiriato
- Once the students have completed their research, ask for volunteers to share their results with the class. Instruct students to keep their notes and use them as a reference during the screening.

VIEWING THE FILM

Time: 15 minutes

You will need:

pen and paper, LCD projector or DVD player, *Student Handout C: Film Module Discussion Questions* and *The Storm that Swept Mexico: Revolutionary Art Film Module*

- Read the summary for the film *The Storm that Swept Mexico* and explain to the students that they will be viewing the Revolutionary Art Film Module.

- Instruct students to take notes as they view the video using the following Film Module Discussion Questions as a guide:
 1. What art forms does the film illustrate post-revolutionary Mexican artists working in?
 2. What are some common themes that artists were addressing in their work?
 3. According to the film, how are the artists using their work to shape “Mexican identity” and the telling of Mexican history?
 4. How is art used as an educational tool?
 5. Why was it important that the artists were making “public” art?
 6. What impact did they want their work to have on Mexican society? How did they hope to effect social change?

POST-SCREENING ACTIVITIES

Time: 60 minutes

You will need: pen/paper, Student Handout D: Research Team Worksheet, Student Handout E: The Dream Key, Teacher Handout A: Diego Rivera’s A Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park, computers with Internet access and an LCD projector.

Goal: Using *The Storm that Swept Mexico: Revolutionary Art Film Module* as a guide, students will revisit Diego Rivera’s *A Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park* from *Prescreening Activity 2: Reading Murals* and examine the work within the political and cultural context of post-Revolutionary Mexico.

Review:

- Begin by discussing the screening of *The Storm that Swept Mexico: Revolutionary Art Module* and review the students’ responses to the Film Module Discussion Questions.

1. Introduction

- Ask for a volunteer to read a brief summary of the painting to provide a context for the team’s research:

A Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park was painted by Diego Rivera in 1947. The mural represents three eras of Mexican history (The Spanish Conquest, The Porfiriato Dictatorship, and The Mexican Revolution of 1910) and depicts an imagined Sunday stroll through Alameda Park, Mexico City’s first city park, built on the grounds of an ancient Aztec marketplace. In the center of the image is the artist who painted the mural, Diego Rivera, at the age of ten being led by the hand by the Dame Catrina (“La Calavera Catrina”), a skeleton figure.

- Instruct the class that they will be revisiting Diego Rivera’s *A Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park* and will be working in teams to investigate the historical figures and cultural images that Rivera used to tell the story of Mexican history. Each team will research a section of the image and when the research is complete, the class

will share their results and discuss the impact that their research had on their understanding of the mural's message.

2. Research

- Divide the class into four teams and provide each team with *Student Handout D: Research Team Worksheet* and *Student Handout E: The Dream Key*.
- *The Dream Key* divides the mural into four sections: The Spanish Conquest, The Porfiriato Dictatorship, The Revolution of 1910, and Diego Rivera. Assign each team a section of the image to research and have each team complete a Research Team Worksheet. (Note: For larger class sizes, teachers can divide the class into more than four groups and have more than one team researching each section of the image.)
- Have a projection or printed copies of the original mural available to the teams for reference as they complete their research.

3. Presentation: Putting the Pieces Together

- When the teams complete their research, have each group quickly guide the class through their section of the image. The teams should identify the historic figures and cultural clues that they discovered in their research and how each relates to their section of the image.
- Record the feedback that the teams provide on each section of the mural to use as reference for the class discussion.

4. Class Discussion: What's the Story?

- Review the class' collective research and ask the students to discuss their findings using the following questions as a guide:
 1. What story/stories is the mural telling and what/who is the mural's story about? (Mexican history? The artist? Both?)
 2. Which themes discussed in the Revolutionary Art Film Module are represented in this mural? What themes does Diego Rivera address in this mural?
 3. Why did Diego Rivera mix historic images and fictional images to illustrate the story of Mexican History? How do you think this relates to the mural's title?
 4. What message (or messages) do you think the mural is trying to convey?
 5. What function do you think Diego Rivera wanted the mural to serve in Mexican society?

5. Reflection

- Reflect on the students' experience of the film and the lesson plan activities using the questions below as a guide. These reflection questions can also be used as prompts for journal entries and/or smaller group discussions:
 1. What themes and aspects of the mural's story were we able to understand before our research? What were we able to learn from the mural just by observing it?
 2. How has our understanding of the mural's story and message changed as a result of our research?
 3. As stated in *The Storm That Swept Mexico*, "These murals also have an educational purpose, because at this time a large percent of the Mexican population doesn't know how to read or write. Therefore their access to Mexican history is more attainable through painting." Based on our activities, do you think Diego Rivera's mural serves an educational function? In what ways?
 4. Why do you think Diego Rivera put himself in the mural as a young boy? What do you think he was saying about how Mexico's history and vision for the future have shaped his own story?
 5. What, if any, social impact do you think Diego Rivera wanted this mural to have?
 6. What are some ways that public art can inspire social change today? (Consider other forms of public art such as performance art, radio, graffiti, architecture, etc)

Culminating Activity

Assessment: Mural Making and Artist Statement

Using the film module and previous activities as a guide, instruct students to create their own mural and write an artist statement about their work:

Making the Mural

- Working individually or in groups, have students identify circumstances in their school or community that they would like to address or improve and have them develop a mural that will raise awareness of the issue. The mural can be made physically with paint, tiled photographs, or mixed-media collage and hung in the classroom or school hallways. Students can also develop digital murals using photography, graphic design and/or digital video. Completed digital murals can be posted on a class blog or school webpage. The following websites can be used as resources to create and display digital murals:
 1. Prezi - online, interactive, animated presentations: www.prezi.com
 2. Glogster – digital posters made of text, images, music and video: www.glogster.com
 3. Flavors – a digital wall/homepage created from images, text, links and video: www.flavors.me
- Like Diego Rivera, the students should place themselves in the image and illustrate what role they would play in the story of this issue. Provide the following prompts as a guide for students as they develop their mural ideas:
 1. What medium will best tell your story?

2. What colors, shapes or symbols should you include to illustrate your themes?
3. What is the history of this issue?
4. Who are the people involved in the story?
5. How would you participate to improve the situation?
6. Whom would you work with?
7. What outcome do you hope to achieve?
8. How would your community benefit if you were to succeed?

Developing the Artist Statement

- Once the students have completed their mural, have them write an artist statement about their work. Their essay should answer the following question:
 1. What issue is this mural addressing?
 2. Why is it important to you?
 3. What is your role in the story and whom are you working with to achieve your goals?
 4. What theme or themes are included in your mural?
 5. What materials did you choose to make your mural and how do they help illustrate the story?
 6. How do the colors, shapes and images in your mural shape the mood and themes of the image?
 7. Who is the audience for this mural and why?
 8. What do you want people to learn from your mural?
 9. What impact would you want it to have?

Evaluation

- Use *Teacher Handout B: Essay Assignment Rubric* to assess student's work. Share the rubric with students to guide their process.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Kahlo and Campobello: Envisioning a New Reality

Following the Mexican Revolution, artists were working to create a "real" Mexican art that would strengthen and reaffirm Mexican identity and reclaim Mexico's rich cultural heritage, beginning with the pre-Conquest era.

- Have students examine the role that Frida Kahlo and Nellie Campobello had in recovering and reconstructing Mexican cultural identity and compare and contrast how this theme was expressed in their work.

- Based on their research, students can develop an imagined dialogue between the two women.

2. The Chicano Mural Movement

The Chicano Mural Movement began during the 1960s in the southwest United States. Although they were heavily influenced by the Mexican Muralist Movement, the work of these artists was not commissioned, supported or even sanctioned by the government. Their work was a reaction to the social situation of the times and they used murals as the medium to speak out against injustice and bring about social and political change. Instruct students to research the Chicano Mural Movement and its impact on community identity.

- Have students consider the following quote from *The Storm that Swept Mexico*: “Their work doesn’t remain on the canvas, it goes much further than that. They try to envision a new reality.” How do the “new reality” of the Mexican Muralists compare to the “new reality” of the Chicano Muralists?
- What were the similarities and differences between their goals, methods, and messages? How do you think either group was able to shift or shape changes in society? In what ways does their work inform contemporary muralist movements?
- Have students develop a PowerPoint presentation responding to these questions using the work of both art communities to illustrate their responses.

3. Is graffiti art or vandalism?

Have your class work together to develop a working definition for both public art and graffiti and explore the similarities and differences between the two. Is graffiti public art? If art is illegal is it always “wrong”? Is all graffiti created equal? Discuss how class, race, and place shape access to resources and inform our ideas about art.

- Examine the culture of graffiti and street art and share examples of notable creators such as Basquiat, Faile, Shepherd Fairey, and Banksy. Are they artists or criminals?
- Based on the class discussion, have students create a visual map of their neighborhood by photographing the “art” and “graffiti” they find. Ask students to identify which images are art and which are graffiti and write a persuasive essay defending their definitions for each term.
- Students can also engage in a class debate on whether graffiti is art or vandalism. For more information and resources on marginalized art and artists, check out PBS’ Independent Lens series, *Art on the Periphery*, at <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/marginalized-art/>

4. Los Tres Grandes

Los tres grandes (“the three great ones”) was the name given to the three artists, Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who shaped the landscape of post-revolutionary Mexican art and inspired generations of muralists across the world.

- Have your students examine the work of each of these revolutionary artists and discuss how their personal vision for Mexico was illustrated through their art.
- To take the exploration of the Mexican Muralist Movement further, additional resources and an expanded 3-4 week unit can be found in the Denver Public Schools Mexican Muralist Movement and Exploration of Public Art created in partnership with the Metropolitan State College in Denver: etls.dpsk12.org/documents/Alma/units/MuralistMexican.pdf
- For more information on the life and work of Jose Clemente Orozco, screen the ITVS film, *Orozco Man of Fire*, for your class (<http://www.itvs.org/films/orozco>).

5. A New Deal for the Arts

In 1935, the Works Progress Administration was created with the goal of providing economic relief to Americans who were suffering through the Great Depression. Inspired directly by the work of the artists in post-revolutionary Mexico, the Federal Arts Project was established to provide employment for artists resulting in the creation of over 5,000 jobs and 225,000 works of art.

- Have students research the influence the post-revolutionary Mexican art movement had on the development of the WPA and the impact that government support had on the development of these artistic movements.
- What are the benefits and pitfalls of government support of artists? If the government pays for it, does it make a difference?
- Have students debate the merits of government support of the arts and consider the following question: Should the Federal Arts Project be reinstated today?

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