



LESSON PLAN: WPA : FROM FEDERAL TO LOCAL

Topic/Theme:

The Works Project Administration and the Federal Art Project - in Inglewood

Class Level:

Middle School / High School

Duration: 45 minutes

Learning Experience

Brief Description of Unit: There has been a tremendous amount of discussion in the news about using federal laws to improve infrastructure. How does that get translated to the fine grain on the local level? This class is about how federal programs become local. It uses the example of the WPA, Works Project Administration which employed out-of-work artists and architects to create many new public facilities. The Inglewood Post Office and the Recreational buildings at Edward Vincent Jr. Park were built by the WPA. Inglewood also has three works of art commissioned for the facilities and another work, *The History of Transportation*, which was the largest mural created for the program. This class will look at that.

Specific Learning Objectives

- 1. Historical:** Students Learn about the WPA, Federal Art Project, and TRAP
- 2. Context:** Students learn to place artwork in a historical context and begin to understand how the circumstances surrounding the commissioning of a work impacts the final product.
- 3. Artwork:** Students learn to look carefully at works of art
- 4. Restoration:** Students learn what is preserved and about how artworks are preserved

Resources

Inglewood Artworks:

- *The History of Transportation*, Helen Lundeberg
- *Centinela Springs*, Archibald Garner
- *Lion, Buffalo, Ram and Bear*, Gordon Newell and Sherry Peticolas
- *Aguaje de la Centinela: Centinela Springs Monument* Archibald Garner

Inglewood Buildings & Facilities:

- Inglewood Post Office on Hillcrest Avenue
- Veterans Memorial Building at Edward Vincent Park
- Tennis Courts & Recreational Complex at Edward Vincent Jr. Park



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Podcast: Rosa Lowinger: http://inglewoodpublicart.org/History_of_Transportation.html

The History of Transportation PDF:

http://inglewoodpublicart.org/pdf/About_The_History_of_Transportation.pdf

Off the Wall: New Deal Post Office Murals, by Patricia Raynor:

<http://postalmuseum.si.edu/research/articles-from-enroute/off-the-wall.html>

New Deal Fresno:

<http://www.fresno.gov/NR/rdonlyres/2D40DBCC-E313-4473-88D0-B1B2DBDBAE51/23133/HPCNewDealBrochure.pdf>

The Art Story: <http://www.theartstory.org>

Brief Description

Background:

Elected to the presidency in 1932 to combat the economic hardships associated with the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt initiated his New Deal; this effort was spearheaded by a multitude of Federal Programs that are commonly denoted by their respective acronyms: the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

The goals were ambitious. The idea was to employ as many Americans as possible rebuilding the country's infrastructure. It would create a design excellence program where the best designed, most beautiful government buildings and facilities both large and small would be built in every community around the country. Thousands of post offices were built including one in Inglewood. 8192 parks were built. Inglewood saw the creation of Centinela Park with the Springs monument. 13,156 tennis courts were constructed; Inglewood got 6. There were 15,000 new recreational buildings; Inglewood got the Veterans Memorial Building. WPA would spend more than \$11 million in employment relief in the nine years before it was canceled in 1943; at its peak 3.5 million people were employed.

The WPA supported tens of thousands of artists, by funding creation of 2,566 murals and 17,744 pieces of sculpture that decorate public buildings nationwide. Much of it was commissioned under the Federal Art Project. Inglewood got the largest mural commissioned, Helen Lundeberg's 240' long *History of Transportation* which was fitting as Los Angeles grew in response to transportation developments. Murals were placed in post offices; the Inglewood got two, one on the outside depicting California animals and on the inside depicting a scene at the Centinela Springs.

Artists were selected through anonymous competitions where the jurors were often other artists. For smaller competitions, the jury might consist of the postmaster, a member of the architectural firm, and a prominent citizen. Artists were also awarded commissions based on designs submitted



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for previous competitions. One percent of the building construction funds was to be set aside for “embellishment” of the federal building, and artists were supposed to be paid from these funds.

- Mural artists for post offices, for instance, were provided with guidelines and themes for executing their mural studies. Scenes of local interest and events were deemed to be the most suitable. Once awarded a commission, the mural artist engaged in an often lengthy negotiation between the Post Office Department, the town, and the Section before finally getting the finished mural on the wall. Many local communities deemed the approved designs unacceptable due to theme, content, method of expression or design elements. Artists were constantly reminded that the communities were their patron and they went to great lengths to satisfy the desires of everyone involved in the project in order to save their commissions.

Classroom Applications:

- The teacher does not have to be the expert about the history of the WPA or the murals
- The teacher allows the students to “read” the images;
- The students tell the class what they see
- Students drive the visual exploration; the teacher guides discussion by asking questions

Open Ended Questions for Teachers:

- What’s going on in this picture?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can we find?

Specific Questions for Teachers:

The Inglewood Post Office

What does a post office mean to the community? What kind of civic presence should they have? What kind of identity should a post office have? Should you know when you are near a post office that that is the function of the building? Is it possible to convey that through art? What kind of artwork is appropriate to embellish them? Should it be community based? Should it reflect the surrounding city? Should it be figurative? What happens to a community when the post office is no longer needed.

Lion, Buffalo, Ram and Bear, Gordon Newell and Sherry Peticolas:

- These murals are on the exterior of the building that holds *Centinela Springs*. Compare and contrast the two murals.
- How does the style of the murals fit with the Art Deco style of the architecture?
- Is the work inspirational in any way? What do the animals symbolize?

Centinela Springs, Archibald Garner:

- Why is this mural made out of carved wood?



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- What do you see here? Analyze the iconography? How does this fit with the space knowing that this is in a Post Office?
- The scene depicts early California residents getting water from Centinela Springs, a valued source of local spring water in coastal Southern California. How does the mural depict this?
- How is water in Southern California valued today? How can this image be used appropriately today?

Aguaje de la Centinela: Centinela Springs Monument Archibald Garner

- Garner was commissioned to sculpt the monument at the Springs at approximately the same time. Do you think that the monument relates to the scene in the carved mural?

Other Works by the artists that are similar:

Sherry Peticolas and Gordon Newell, *Transportation of the Mail*, San Fernando, (1936), Wooden bas relief sculpture, seven panels depicting a druck, ship, horse, airplane, train and stage-coach. How does this mural compare to Centinela Springs? This mural is in the same building as Archibald Gardner's work of the same title. How are they similar and different?



Archibald Gardner, *Justice*, Fresno, Post Office, (1940).

Looking at other New Deal bas reliefs, murals, and architecture, what styles are similar?

(See information here: <http://www.fresno.gov/NR/rdonlyres/2D40DBCC-E313-4473-88D0-B1B2DBD-BAE51/23133/HPCNewDealBrochure.pdf>)



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The History of Transportation, Helen Lundeberg:

- This mural is the largest freestanding Federal Art Project Mural. It was made of Petrachrome, a terrazzo-like substance made of cement, pigment, and crushed stone. Panels were made by attaching the material to masonite boards.
- Describe the history of transportation as depicted in this mural. What was happening in the 1930s and 1940s that seemed progressive?
- What do we see in this mural? Analyze the iconography. (Indigenous people, Spanish settlers, American pioneers, and the founder of Inglewood, Daniel Freeman, are shown.)
- Given the history of the WPA, can you think of why this might be an appropriate mural for the time? How is this difference seen through the eyes of a female artist?
- The mural was originally situated along Florence Boulevard, one of Southern California's most traveled commuter arteries. How was this an appropriate space for the mural?
- This mural was made by mortar and crushed rock. How does this help or hinder the style of the mural?
- For information about the restoration of the mural, see "The History of Transportation" PDF: http://inglewoodpublicart.org/pdf/About_The_History_of_Transportation.pdf

Centinela Park (currently Edward Vincent, Jr. Park)

What was the importance of Recreation in the 30's. Why do you think that tennis courts were commissioned ?