

# Civil Rights and Photography

# Life Learning Academy Project-Based Curriculum

**Project Title:** Joining the Movement: Civil Rights Movement Photo-History Project

**Project Design Team and/or Instructors:** Craig Miller, Justin Warren

**Subject Area(s):** Art/Photography, US History

**Grade Level(s):** 10 – 11

## Project Overview:

This project can be a culminating lesson to apply the historical information students have covered in a larger unit on the Civil Rights Movement.

Students browse through historical photographs of the Civil Rights Movement and choose several that they find engaging or important, or that elicit a strong emotional reaction. They describe in writing what is literally in the photo, and also what the photo symbolizes in the broader context of the CRM. Then the students consider how they would have felt or reacted if they had been present at the moment in history depicted in the photo. They create a Human Sculpture (a posture with their body) that shows their reaction to the photograph, or demonstrates the physical posture they imagine themselves assuming if they had been there in person. Next, the Human Sculpture is photographed by a classmate and the shape captured in the photo is transposed onto colored transparent plastic film. This transparency is then superimposed on the historical photo, creating a finished mixed-media artwork that demonstrates the student's vision of inserting him/herself into a historical moment.

## Educational Standards Addressed:

California History-Social Science Content Standards:

11.10 Students analyze the development of federal civil rights and voting rights.

California Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards:

### 1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

*Processing, Analyzing, and Responding to Sensory Information Through the Language and Skills Unique to the Visual Arts*

### 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

*Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Visual Arts*

2.1 Solve a visual arts problem that involves the effective use of the elements of art and the principles of design.

2.6 Create a two- or three-dimensional work of art that addresses a social issue.

### 4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

*Responding to, Analyzing, and Making Judgments About Works in the Visual Art.*

Students analyze, assess, and derive meaning from works of art, including their own, according to the elements of art, the principles of design, and aesthetic qualities.

4.1 Articulate how personal beliefs, cultural traditions, and current social, economic, and political contexts influence the meaning or message in a work of art.

4.4 Articulate the process and rationale for refining and reworking one of their own works of art.

## 5.0 CONNECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, APPLICATIONS

*Connecting and Applying What Is Learned in the Visual Arts to Other Art Forms and Subject Areas and to Careers.*

Students apply what they learned in the visual arts across subject areas. They develop competencies and creative skills in problem solving, communication, and management of time and resources that contribute to lifelong learning and career skills.

5.2 Create a work of art that communicates a cross-cultural or universal theme taken from literature of history.

### Expected Student Learning:

Objectives	Outcomes
Students will know...	Students will be able to...
1. key events, people, and social and political groups related to the Civil Rights Movement.	1. identify photographic images of important people, groups and events of the Civil Rights Movement.
2. the significant role that key people and social or political groups played in the formation, progress and success of the Civil Rights Movement.	2. articulate ways in which the Civil Rights Movement's individual participants and social/political groups had a significant and direct effect on national opinion, action and policy.
3. that sculpture, photography and other forms of artistic expression can allow them to respond to historical events directly and individually.	3. create a human sculpture and a mixed-media artwork that appropriately responds to a known historical event or person.
4. that individual colors carry symbolic meaning and can convey specific moods and emotions.	4. choose a color for their human sculpture silhouette that effectively conveys the appropriate mood or emotion for the context into which it is placed.

### Project Outline:

PART 1 -- Historical Photos: selection, analysis and interpretation

PART 2 – Human Sculpture: reacting to the past and joining the movement

PART 3 – Color: defining mood and symbolic meaning

PART 4 -- Photographing students' Human Sculptures

PART 5 – Creating the colored silhouette

PART 6 – Combining the elements

PART 7 – Project Summary

### **Texts and Supplemental Instructional Materials:**

Johnson, Charles, and Alderman, Bob. KING: The Photobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr. New York: Penguin Group, 2000.

Moore, Charles. Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore. New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1991.

Project worksheet (see attached)

### **Other Materials:**

Computer with flatbed scanner and printer

Digital Camera(s)

Photographic gels, or similar colored transparent plastic film (many colors)

Exacto knives

Rulers

Matte board or cardboard

Spray adhesive

Masking tape

Frames or other mounting materials

Double-sided mounting tape

### **Key Assignments:**

Choose Civil Rights Movement photos

Create a Human Sculpture

Photograph Human Sculptures

Cut silhouettes from photographic gels

Attach silhouette to CRM photo

Trim and mount artwork

Write summary

### **Assessment Methods and/or Tools:**

Preparation Worksheets: Students will complete written worksheets that will describe each photo piece in words and drawings.

Student Presentations and Peer Review. Students will make short presentations to the class describing their vision for each piece, including their Human Sculpture pose, and receive feedback and creative suggestions from their peers.

Composing and Constructing Artwork. Students will follow the necessary steps to construct their final artwork.

Written Summary and Reflection. Students will write a one page descriptive summary of their project that includes the projects purpose, process used to complete artwork, a personal justification for why they decided to do each piece and a title for each one.

## **History of Project Development:**

This project developed as an extension of another collaborative project with teachers from the organization Facing History and Ourselves. Throughout the fall semester, a group of Academy students participated in a series of Facing History workshops that focused on issues of personal identity, community and story telling. The students were exposed to a range of story-telling methods and through “drama games” developed their own performance skills to learn how to teach history through visual and performing arts. As one part of the Facing History curriculum, students created Human Sculptures in order to recreate historical moments and share personal experiences.

Drawing from Facing History, we developed this project in order to allow students to superimpose their Human Sculptures directly on an image of a historical moment from the Civil Rights Movement. We wanted the Human Sculpture to be rendered as a two-dimensional shape so that it could be superimposed onto the historical photo.

We decided to make the Human Sculpture into a silhouette and chose to provide various colors of photographic gels from which students could make silhouettes. This material was best because it allowed for bright colors to overlap a black and white photograph, while allowing viewers to see through the medium so that the entire photo would remain visible.

## **Lesson Activities**

### **PART 1 -- Historical Photos: selection, analysis and interpretation**

Individually or in small groups, students browse through photographs of the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) and choose two to three images to use to complete project. Students are encouraged to choose photos that evoke a strong emotional reaction or have a direct connection to a personal experience. Students complete a Worksheet for each photo they choose (see attached).

After choosing photographs, students are required to study them in detail and to consider both the literal content and the symbolism evident in the image. Students must also consider how the specific moment captured in the photo relates to the larger historical context of the CRM. Finally, students choose one descriptive word that best captures the action and mood of each image.

After completing these steps (Worksheet Part 1), students report to the class which images they chose, what elements comprise the basic content of the photo, what the photo represents symbolically, and what word they feel describes the photo best.

### **PART 2 – Human Sculpture: reacting to the past and joining the movement**

Students begin to consider their own reaction to the photo and imagine how they would respond if they could be in that moment in history. Using the symbolism they identified

in the image, they consider a symbolic response to the image. For each photo, the student creates a Human Sculpture – a physical position with their body – in response to the scene captured in the image. They describe their imagined Human Sculpture in words or drawings (Worksheet Part 2). Students then demonstrate for the class their Human Sculptures (one per photo) and state the emotion or symbolic meaning of the posture.

Students learn that their Human Sculptures will be captured photographically and made into a two-dimensional shape (silhouette) cut from transparent, colored plastic film. This shape will overlay the original historic photo from the CRM, creating a composite piece that combines the black and white photo with a colored silhouette on top.

### PART 3 – Color: defining mood and symbolic meaning

Before choosing what color to use for their silhouette, students discuss how color relates to mood and symbolizes emotion. Class discussion leads to the completion of a table wherein students identify colors and record the mood or symbolic meaning that they associate with each color. Students are encouraged to complete this process based on their own sensibility about color, and discouraged from drawing their color-mood connections from outside sources. For instance, "blue" need not always represent "sadness," it may just as well symbolize strength. After consideration and discussion, students choose appropriate colors to use for their silhouettes, and describe why they chose the selected colors (Worksheet Part 2).

### PREPARING MATERIALS

Facilitators isolate the students photographs and make duplicates for the students to use in their artwork. Duplicates can be made using a photocopy machine, or, for better quality, images can be scanned and printed on a computer printer.

Facilitators provide students with transparent plastic film of various colors from which they can cut out their silhouettes.

### PART 4 -- Photographing students' Human Sculptures

Students prepare to have their "Human Sculpture" body posture photographed by rehearsing their pose. Using a strong projected light on a wall, students fine-tune their posture using their own shadow as a reference. By practicing with shadows, students can see a preview of what shape their posture will create when it becomes a flattened silhouette.

When they are satisfied that their posture will convey the message and feeling that they intend to apply to their selected CRM image, a classmate photographs their Human Sculpture. Conventional photos can then be developed and enlarged, or, if possible,

digital photos can be printed on a computer printer. Either method will render a two-dimensional representation of the 3-D Human Sculpture.

#### PART 5 – Creating the colored silhouette

Students use the photograph of their Human Sculpture to create a colored, transparent silhouette. They start by placing the photo on an expendable surface (a layer of matte paper or cardboard works well) and fastening it in place with masking tape. Next, they take a sheet of transparent, colored film and fasten it on top of the photograph with tape. Using an Exacto knife, the students cut along the edges of the Human Sculpture photograph, tracing the outline of the posture with the blade. When cutting is complete, the student has created two silhouettes – one is a “positive” version that mirrors the shape of the posture in the photo; the other is represented by the “negative” (empty) space left in the colored material. The student may choose either one to overlap their historical photo. (Note: students could be required to use either style exclusively, or both styles.)

#### PART 6 – Combining the elements

Students place the silhouette of their Human Sculpture on top of their CRM photo. Using spray adhesive, the silhouettes are fastened in place on the original CRM photograph creating a multi-layer, mixed-media artwork. To finish, students trim the edges of the assembled piece (as needed) and mount the art in a frame.

#### PART 7 – Summary and reflection

Using their project worksheets as a reference, each student writes a one page descriptive summary of the project, including its purpose, the process they used to make the artwork, why they decided to do each piece, and a title for each completed work.

**APPENDIX A: LESSON WORKSHEET 1**

**Civil Rights Movement  
Photo/History Project**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Worksheet 1**

Browse through the photos of the Civil Rights Movement. Choose one image and use it to complete the worksheet below.

**PART I**

1. I chose an image of \_\_\_\_\_

because it shows \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

2. Symbolically, the photo represents \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

3. The one word that describes my photo best is \_\_\_\_\_.

**PART II**

4. For this photo, I plan to create a body sculpture that symbolizes \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

**OVER →**

5. Use words or drawings to describe one or more postures that will show the emotion or feeling you wish to create with your human sculpture:

### **PART 3**

6. Choose a color for your human sculpture: \_\_\_\_\_.

7. Describe how the color matches the mood and message of your human sculpture:

---

---

---

### **PART 4** (complete after your artwork is finished)

8. Describe your finished artwork.

Is it different from how you had planned it to be? If so, describe how it is different and why you decided to change your plans.

If it is the same as you planned it originally, does the artwork satisfy your expectations? Why or why not?

9. How well do you feel the message of the human sculpture comes across in the finished artwork? Explain. (Attach more paper if needed.)