

Spanish Civil War and “Guernica” Project

An interdisciplinary approach to understanding an important and traumatic social event.

Upper School History teacher Dr. Erhart and Art Instructor, Chris Fox developed this unit. The goal was to help students in Dr. Erhart’s “World Dictators” course develop a deeper understanding of the time period of the Spanish Civil war and to think about researching and presenting historical evidence and opinions in ways other than an essay.

Mr. Fox was invited to present to the class on Pablo Picasso’s painting “Guernica” and it’s historical significance. Mr. Fox’s presentation sought to help provide background on Picasso, Cubism, the art world in general at the time. See the slides from the presentation here. [Click here to see slides from presentation.](#)

Mr. Fox suggested the structure of an art critique as the format for trying to understand an artwork in its historical context.

Description: What are we looking at?

Context: When, where and why was it created?

Analysis: What did the artist do? How did he/she organize things? Why did he/she do those things?

Interpretation: What meaning(s) do we get from this work? What is being communicated?

Once students understood why and how Picasso developed Guernica they were presented with the challenge of developing their own research-based visual work, using considerations similar to Picasso’s. Since Picasso’s Guernica was produced for a Exposition in Paris and was based on the news reports he saw from the bombing of the village in Spain students were challenged to use the search tools at their disposal to look for images that depicted in important and traumatic social event. With those images as their starting point they created collages attempting to describe and depict their chosen even. Since there was obviously not time to dedicate to producing a wall sized painting like Guernica, it was understood that the works students produced were to be developed prototypes for a large mural.

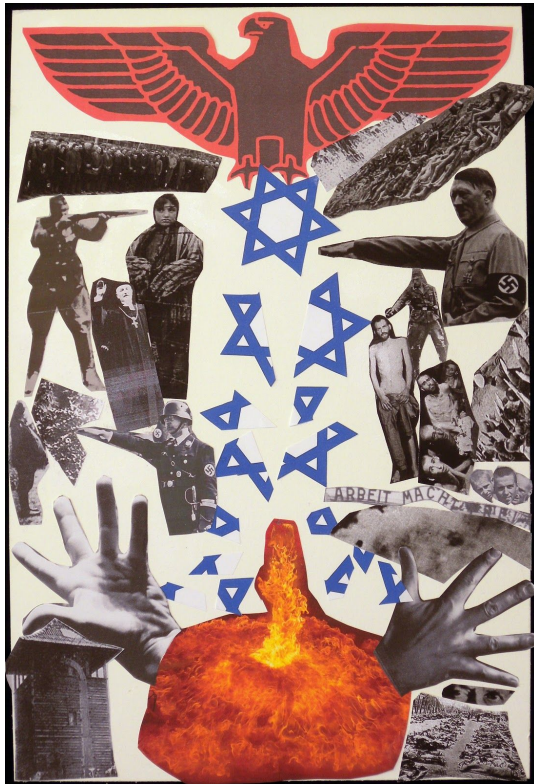
The challenge as presented was:

The “World Historians’ Association” is offering you the opportunity to submit proposals for a mural that will be featured at the upcoming world conference to be held next year. Because not everyone is a professional artist, you only need to submit a scale rendering of your proposal, there will be a team of artists to assist in the making of the final mural, should your design be selected. There will be a €100,000 prize for the winning entry and your mural will occupy the 6 meter by 10 meter wall in the lobby of the W.H.A. headquarters in Dubai.

Students were given instruction on the use of collage materials and given a 15” x 20” piece of illustration board on which to construct their collage. [Collage](#) was chosen because many of the students in Dr. Erhart’s class had little artmaking experience and would have had difficulty with drawing or painting these images.

Students first engaged in some research and brainstorming of possible “traumatic social events” that they might choose as subject matter. Using Google image search students were able to see what kinds of raw images might be available for their different ideas. Students were encouraged to print out, at least in black and white some versions of their images at different sizes and to then cut out the important parts of their images. They were then able to prototype layouts for their final composition. Students were reminded of how Picasso’s composition of Guernica complemented the main idea of the chaos and trauma of that event.

Once students had developed a strong composition they used glue sticks to adhere their images to the backing board.



An image dealing with the Kristallnacht



An image dealing with the Tiananmen Square protests.



An image dealing with the British colonial rule in India.