Diego Rivera

Allegory to California

Fresco Mural. 1931  43.2 square meters

Vocabulary

**Fresco painting** - A method of wall painting in which water-based pigments are applied to wet, freshly laid lime plaster.

**Renaissance** - Meaning re- birth a cultural movement that spanned roughly the 14th to the 17th century in Europe

**Mural** - Painting done on the surface of walls, usually public buildings

Lesson Plan

Meet the Artist

1. **Diego Rivera** (Dec 8, 1886 to Nov 24, 1957.) was a prominent Mexican painter born in Guanajuato Mexico, and husband of **Frida Kahlo** (1929–1939 and 1940–1954). His large wall works in fresco helped establish the Mexican Mural Movement in Mexican art.
2. Between 1922 and 1953, Rivera painted murals among others in Mexico City, San Francisco, Detroit, and New York City. In 1931, a retrospective exhibition of his works was held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

3. **Diego Rivera.** Rivera began drawing when he was only three, just a year after his twin brother’s death. He had been caught drawing on the walls. His parents, rather than punishing him, installed chalkboards and canvas on the walls for the young painter to make use of.

4. He began to study painting at an early age and in 1907 moved to Europe. Spending most of the next fourteen years in Paris, Rivera encountered the works of such great masters as Cézanne, Gauguin, Renoir, and Matisse. He stayed for many years and became friends with Picasso and was known as the “Mexican Cowboy.” He did over 100 cubist paintings but while in Italy he began to study the art of the Italian Masters and the Renaissance. It was in Italy that he learned about the technique of “Fresco” painting.

5. Rivera was searching for a new form of painting. It was not until he began to study the Renaissance frescoes of Italy that he found his medium. It was with a vision of the future of the fresco and with a strong belief in public art that Rivera returned to Mexico.

6. **Frescoes** are mural paintings done on fresh plaster. Using the fresco form in universities and other public buildings, Rivera was able to introduce his work into the everyday lives of the people.

7. To Rivera the frescoes’ size and public accessibility was the perfect canvas on which to tackle the grand themes of the history and future of humanity.

8. Throughout the twenties his fame grew with a number of large murals depicting scenes from Mexican history. Rivera saw the workers’ struggle as a symbol and for Rivera; the foundation of history could be seen in the working class, whose lives were spent by war and industry in the name of progress.

9. In 1930, Rivera made the first of a series of trips that would alter the course of American painting.

10. In November of 1930, Rivera began work on his first two major American commissions: for the American Stock Exchange Luncheon Club and for the California School of Fine Arts.

11. In 1932, at the height of the Great Depression, Rivera arrived in Detroit, where, Henry Ford commissioned a mural. In this first commission and all of the American murals to follow, Rivera would investigate the struggles of the working class.
12. Rivera’s radical politics and independent nature had begun to draw criticism. In 1933 the Rockefellers commissioned Rivera to paint a mural for the lobby of the RCA building in Rockefeller Center. “Man at the Crossroads”.

13. In the painting, Rivera included a scene of a giant May Day demonstration of workers marching with red banners. It was not the subject matter of the panel that inflamed the patrons, but the clear portrait of Lenin leading the demonstration. When Rivera refused to remove the portrait, he was ordered to stop and the painting was destroyed. That same year, Rivera used the money from the Rockefellers to create a mural for the Independent Labor Institute that had Lenin as its central figure.

14. Rivera remained a central force in the development of a national art in Mexico throughout his life. In 1957, at the age of seventy, Rivera died in Mexico City.

15. Perhaps one his greatest legacies, however, was his impact on America’s conception of public art. In depicting scenes of American life on public buildings. Both his original painting style and the force of his ideas remain major influences on American painting.

Possible Questions

- Ask the students to describe what they see in the mural
- What are the people doing
- What do they represent
- What do they think Rivera was trying to convey
- Discuss with the class the importance in sharing a story through art, and explain how Rivera soul mission was to convey to the world, the life of Latin American peasants and the American work force of that time. Have a brief dialog, asking them where else do they see similar images today, conveying social messages (Magazines, TV etc)

Supplies

- White Construction paper
- Pencil
- Oil or Chalk pastels
- School bus template

Process
Explain to the students they they are going to make their own mural, and their story will be to show themselves on the first day of school.

- Each student will depict themselves. Let them have total freedom in choosing their scene
- Suggest to them playing in the playground or in class at their desk, with friends, sibling, parents, teachers etc… A large template of a school bus will be available to mount as a centerpiece for the mural.
- Pass out construction paper, and be sure they write their names on the back.
- Pass out a little of oil pastels and colored pencils, and let the magic happen organically
- On the bulletin board mount template and if you have time have students help in arranging the mural.