



Painting the Corners Thematic Unit of Study

I. Introduction – rationale, goals, target audience

Art is window into history and vision into the future. Artists throughout history have interpreted historical moments through prints, painting, drawing, sculpture and photography. In baseball art, the artist specifically tells a story of a significant moment in American history that can be analyzed and interpreted by the viewer. By examining artwork students will become investigators of life through the history of baseball. By using knowledge of history, art and baseball students will discover clues left by artists to tell the story of baseball as it relates to American culture.

II. Objectives – in completing this lesson, students will:

- A. **Examine** art that reflects images of baseball through various mediums.
- B. **Analyze** various pieces of art and discover the visual clues left by the artist that represent the time period it depicts.
- C. **Understand** the relevance of art, baseball and American history and their connection to each other.

III. Preparing the Students

A. Background

“Paint the Corners” is a baseball analogy that represents varying skills, different perspectives and individual opinions. The phrase refers to the black line that is painted around home plate. When the pitcher throws a ball and it crosses the plate over this line, it is usually called a strike by the umpire because it is said to be “on the paint” - meaning that it is just barely in the strike zone. The pitcher is then said to be “painting the corners.”

Similarly, artistic expression and the definition of art may be different according to personal taste and culture. Art can be appreciated for its subject matter, but more importantly it should be evaluated on its unique merits. Fine art depicting the game of baseball is gaining increasing respect because it reflects significant milestones in America’s history and is engrained in its culture. As baseball is deeply American, so too are examples of artistic expression that show how the sport is entwined in the fabric and character of our society.

B. Vocabulary

Abstract	Interpretation
Aesthetics	Jazz Age
Artifact	Medium
Asymmetry	Memorabilia
Caricature	Museum
Commercial Art	Perception
Era	Preservation
Expression	Retro
The Great Depression	Technique
Harlem Renaissance	Technology
Illustration	Three-dimensional
Integration	

C. Suggested Pre-Program Activities

- 1) Choosing an era from the table in this lesson, create a timeline to depict the life and impact of a famous artist or a series of historical events.
 - 2) Find examples of a medium and experiment with it in an artistic way to better understand its texture and application. These might include paint, wood, plaster, clay, paper, etc.
 - 3) Have students familiarize themselves with well-known players in baseball history. Each student should be responsible for studying a different player. When all students complete their research, have them present their profiles to assemble a montage of player biographies. This could also be done with famous artists.
- 1) Create a museum in the classroom by displaying a collection of artwork representing different artists and mediums. Have students develop exhibit text for each work that describes the artist and style (e.g. abstract or realistic), the era, medium, size, etc. Students should review the work and list their opinions.

IV. Presentation

A. Opening

- 1) Explain the phrase, "Painting the Corners," illustrating its meaning by using a cutout of home plate. Point out the corners of the plate and

demonstrate that the strike zone corresponds to the width of the plate, thus a pitch that “paints” or crosses the corners would be more difficult to hit.

- 2) Make the connection that a ball or strike is a judgment call – an opinion of the umpire. Use images (e.g. photos or video) to discuss current players with whom students are familiar who have been known to argue an umpire’s call. *INSTRUCTOR NOTE: Display a well-known photo of a manager or a ballplayer disputing an umpire’s call.*
- 3) Show that, likewise, interpretations and definitions of what is, and is not fine art are also sometimes a judgment call. Show examples of different baseball images (e.g. cards, posters, sculptures, paintings, photography, etc.) and ask students if these are works of art by definition. Discuss perceptions and opinions; compare and contrast the examples and responses given by students. There are no right or wrong answers.

B. Lesson

- 1) Discuss historical events in different eras of American history. Show photographs or illustrations that depict a general scene or milestone from each of those time periods. *INSTRUCTOR NOTE: Have the students create a timeline to complete the activity.*
- 2) Talk about that era and ask students to note key words that represent a defining characteristic of these chapters in American history. Help them to visually make the connection by providing a timeline they can mark or make notes on during this discussion.

Time Period	Clues	Artwork
1839 to 1899	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The game is played simply (illustration) • The Civil War helped spread the popularity of baseball (illustration) • After 1890 segregation existed in baseball 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Catcher” by Jonathan Scott Hurley
1900 to 1929	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World War I occurred during this time (photo) • The Jazz Age and the Harlem Renaissance • The Negro leagues (photo) • Babe Ruth and the advent of steel and concrete stadiums (photo) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Mighty Babe” by Robert Thom • “Cool Papa Bell” by Tom Rodriguez

1930 to 1939	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Stock Market crash and the Great Depression • Baseball provided an escape from economic hardships • Lou Gehrig, Babe Ruth and the advent of night games (photo) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Mine Baseball” by Mervin Jules • “The First Night Game” by J.M. Mott Smith
1940 to 1959	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World War II: prosperity, new jobs and women in the factories (Rosie the Riveter illustration) • The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (photo) • The Baby Boom era • Jackie Robinson integrates the Major Leagues (photo) • Art during this period was more vibrant, brighter, and upbeat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Listening to the World Series” by Steven Dohanos • “Stan Musial” by John Falter
1960 to 1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space travel; (photo) • The Vietnam War • New, larger, more modern baseball stadiums (photo of the Astrodome) • Mickey Mantle, Hank Aaron, Willie Mays and Roberto Clemente (photos) • Art during this period included abstract, and pop art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Willie Mays” by William Bennalack-Hart • “Time Out” by Vincent Civiletti
1980 to Present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Gulf War (photo) • Brief return of professional women’s baseball • Smaller retro stadiums with modern amenities (photo) • Ozzie Smith (photo) • Advances in technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Ozzie Smith and Mike Schmidt” by Dick Perez • “The Hall of Famer” by LeRoy Neiman

3) Show the three-dimensional depiction of Lou Gehrig’s farewell speech by artist Steve Sax. Discuss with students to which era they would attribute this artwork. Ask what clues helped them identify and determine which time period the piece represents (e.g. uniforms, stadium style, etc.). **IMPORTANT:** Explain that some artworks may represent various eras depending on the subject matter, the medium and when it was created. Again, there may not necessarily be a right or wrong answer. *INSTRUCTOR NOTE: Reference the “Seeing Questions” for this lesson plan at baseballhalloffame.org to help guide students through an analytical discussion about art.*

- 4) Show the students a series of pictures or baseball artwork from each of the discussed eras – without disclosing when the personality, event or moment actually emerged. Assign a letter to each picture. When the picture is discussed, ask students to note the corresponding letter on their timeline to denote the era in which they think it may have occurred. Again, ask what clues helped them identify and determine which time period the piece represents.

As the lesson progresses, in addition to the interactive timeline, consider calling on individual students to contribute their opinions. When the picture is discussed, call on specific students to explain the era they believe the picture represents and why. Doing so would further encourage student participation and interaction.

C. Conclusion

- 1) Summarize the discussion by referring back to the home plate diagram and the five ways to study art: describe it; relate it; analyze it; interpret it; and evaluate it.
- 2) Remind students that art – particularly sports arts – may be on the margin, either just inside or outside the traditional definition of fine art.
- 3) Baseball art is a reflection of American culture because it captures many moments in the parallel histories of the game and our nation.

V. Enrichment and Assessment Activities

- A. Create a museum in the classroom by displaying a collection of the *students'* own original sports artwork. A suggestion might be to re-create a postcard, advertisement, postage stamp or nostalgic baseball card representing a player from an earlier era. Have students research and develop exhibit text for each work that describes their style (e.g. abstract or realistic), the era represented, medium, size, etc. Students should review each others' work and list their constructive opinions. Invite other classes to tour the museum.
- B. Have students participate in a teacher-designed Web quest to find answers to research questions about sports art.
- C. Develop a creative plan for a new baseball team in your community. Include artistic renderings of team colors, a logo, mascot, uniform ensembles and marketing materials.
- D. Write a short essay, haiku or poem about a specific piece of sports artwork. Refer to the work's importance, expression and/or representation of a particular moment or milestone in history.

VI. Additional Resources

A. Literature

National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum. *Baseball as America*. National Geographic Books, 2002.

Ruscoe, Michael. *Baseball: A Treasury of Art and Literature*. Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, Inc., 1993.

Smithsonian Institution. *Diamonds are Forever*. Chronicle Books, 1987.

Thorn, John. *Treasures of the Baseball Hall of Fame*. Villard, 1998.

Warren, Elizabeth V. *The Perfect Game: America Looks at Baseball*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2003.

B. Web Links

<http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/art2/>

Eyes on Art: A “Learning to Look” Curriculum

baseballhalloffame.org

Official site of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum

nrm.org

Official site of the Norman Rockwell Museum at Stockbridge

nlbm.com

Official site of the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum

guggenheim.org

Official site of the Guggenheim Museum

curtispublishing.com/gallery/categories/baseball.htm

Curtis Publishing Company: Reproductions of Saturday Evening Post covers

getty.edu/artsednet

The Getty’s Art Education Web Site

http://www.dickperez.com/psg_main.asp

Perez Steele Galleries

<http://www.artofthegame.com>

Internet Sports Art Gallery

C. Multimedia Gallery

Photograph of the AAGPBL

Photograph Jackie Robinson
Photograph of the Astrodome
Photograph of Mickey Mantle
Photograph of Hank Aaron
Photograph of Willie Mays
Photograph of Roberto Clemente
Photograph of Retro stadium
Photograph of Ozzie Smith

Art images:

“The Three Umpires” by Norman Rockwell
“The Catcher” by Jonathan Scott Hurley
“The Mighty Babe” by Robert Thom
“Cool Papa Bell” by TomRodriguez
“The First Night Game” by J.M. Mott Smith
“Listening to the World Series” by Steven Dohanos
“Stan Musial” by John Falter
“Willie Mays” by William Bennallack-Hart
“Time Out” by Vincent Civiletti
“Ozzie Smith and Mike Schmidt” by Dick Perez
“The Hall of Famer” by LeRoy Neiman

D. Videoconference Resources

- 1) Painting the Corners diagram of homeplate listing art study criteria
- 2) Blank timeline page with space for notes
- 3) Printed versions of selected artwork from the Hall of Fame’s Web site at baseballhalloffame.org

VII. Relevant National Learning Standards

A. History

- 1) Describe how regional artists and writers portrayed American life.
- 2) Investigate new forms of popular culture and leisure activities at different levels of American society.
- 3) Analyze how working conditions changed and how the workers responded to new industrial conditions.
- 4) Explain how principles of scientific management and technological innovations, including assembly lines, rapid transit, household appliances and radio, continued to transform production, work and daily life.
- 5) Analyze how radio, movies, newspapers and popular magazines created mass culture.
- 6) Examine the contributions of artists and writers of the Harlem Renaissance and assess their popularity.

- 7) Assess how increased leisure time promoted the growth of professional sports, amusement parks and national parks.
- 8) Analyze the impact of the Great Depression on the American family and on ethnic and racial minorities.
- 9) Explain the cultural life of the Depression years in art, literature and music and evaluate the government's role in promoting artistic expression.
- 10) Explain how the United States mobilized its economic and military resources during World War II.
- 11) Explore how World War II fostered cultural exchange and interaction while promoting nationalism and American identity.
- 12) Analyze the effects of World War II on gender roles and the American family.
- 13) Analyze the effects of the GI Bill on American society.
- 14) Explain the reasons for the "return to domesticity" and how it affected family life and women's careers.
- 15) Explore the influence of popular culture and analyze the role of the mass media in homogenizing American culture.
- 16) Explain the origins of the postwar civil rights movement and the role of the NAACP in the legal assault on segregation.
- 17) Analyze how social change and renewed ethnic diversity has affected artistic expression and popular culture.
- 18) Explain the influence of media on contemporary American culture.
- 19) Explain the reasons for the increased popularity of professional sports and examine the influence of spectator sports on popular culture.

B. Fine and Visual Arts

- 1) Students select media, techniques and processes; analyze what makes them effective or not effective in communicating ideas; and reflect upon the effectiveness of their choices.
- 2) Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas.
- 3) Students generalize about the effects of visual structures and functions and reflect upon these effects in their own work.

- 4) Students employ organizational structures and analyze what makes them effective or not effective in the communication of ideas.
- 5) Students select and use the qualities of structures and functions of art to improve communication of their ideas.
- 6) Students use subjects, themes, and symbols that demonstrate knowledge of contexts, values and aesthetics that communicate intended meaning in artworks.
- 7) Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures.
- 8) Students describe and place a variety of art objects in historical and cultural contexts.
- 9) Students analyze, describe, and demonstrate how factors of time and place (such as climate, resources, ideas and technology) influence visual characteristics that give meaning and value to a work of art.
- 10) Students compare multiple purposes for creating works of art.
- 11) Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry.
- 12) Students describe and compare a variety of individual responses to their own artworks and to artworks from various eras and cultures.
- 13) Students compare the characteristics of works in two or more art forms that share similar subject matter, historical periods, or cultural context.
- 14) Students describe ways in which the principles and subject matter of other disciplines taught in the school are interrelated with the visual arts.
- 15) Students compare in two or more arts how the characteristic materials of each art (that is, sound in music, visual stimuli in visual arts, movement in dance, human interrelationships in theatre) can be used to transform similar events, scenes, emotions or ideas into works of art.

C. Language Arts

- 1) Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
- 2) Students adjust their use of spoken, written and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

- 3) Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
- 4) Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language and genre to create, critique and discuss print and non-print texts.
- 5) Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
- 6) Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
- 7) Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions and social roles.