

Holocaust Art: Making Abstract Ideas More Concrete

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Abstract: Students often have difficulties conceptualizing the atrocities of the Holocaust. Midway through or at the end of reading Night by Elie Wiesel, students will view and discuss pieces of art by Holocaust survivor David Olere to try to understand more clearly the pain and horrific events the concentration camp victims endured. By the end of the lesson, students will demonstrate that they have made clear connections from the images presented to the text they have read.

Enduring Understandings/Essential Questions:

- How does art allow one to share painful experiences with others?
- How does a visual representation of ideas allow for a deeper understanding of an individual's experiences and that of history as well?

Assessment: Students will use the information gathered from observation and discussion of the art to complete art analysis worksheets. Ultimately, students will write a short composition in which they connect their observations to what they read in Night. Hopefully, they will be able to return to Night and cite direct quotes that correlate back to the art they observed and studied.

Setting the Purpose: After students have read at least half of Night, students will examine primary sources and several pieces of art by Holocaust survivor David Olere. They will try to understand the history shown within the art and discuss the images Olere chose to create. Students will then discuss how the visual images enhance the written material by Wiesel.

Duration: Two class periods.

Procedure:

- This activity will serve as an anticipatory set for the lesson. Place students into groups of five. Ask each student to get out a piece of paper. Distribute a copy of the piece of art "Unable to Work" to each group face down. Or, you could make this an overhead transparency and project it for the class. After each group has a copy of the art, tell them to turn it over and study it for several

minutes. After several minutes have passed, ask each student to respond to the following questions on his/her piece of paper. "What did you observe in the piece of art? What stands out in your mind after viewing it?" Give students two to three minutes to write.

- After two to three minutes have passed, ask the students to pass their papers to the right. They should read what was written and respond to it. They can respond in agreement, disagreement, or make a connection they hadn't thought of before. Again, they get two to three minutes to write, and you repeat the process. This continues until they've responded five times and the papers are back to the original owners.
- Hold a short class discussion in which students can share thoughts and observations with the entire class.
- Read the biography of David Olere together and discuss the importance of his work as primary documents. Ask questions such as "Why is it important that he create this art?" "How is his art different from others who weren't there?" "Why is it important to study primary documents not only here but in other aspects of history as well?"
- Keep the students in groups and distribute copies of other works of Olere's to them. Each group should see two to three other pieces. There are many to choose from; I would probably use "Food of the Dead for the Living," "Destruction of the Jewish People," and "For a Crust of Bread." Each group member should also complete an art analysis worksheet for each piece of art viewed. This will continue for the rest of the hour and probably into tomorrow.
- This will most likely be the start of Day 2. Depending on how far you got yesterday, review what was finished or allow students to finish completing their worksheets.
- Students will review their notes and worksheets and also observe the pieces of art one more time. This will be done in preparation for their final assessment.
- Final assessment: Each student will write three well developed paragraphs responding to three different pieces of art viewed and connecting that art in some way to their reading of Night. See assignment on following page.

List of Materials and Resources:

Artwork of David Olere:

<http://fcit.usf.edu/Holocaust/resource/gallery/olere.htm>

Biography of David Olere:

<http://fcit.usf.edu/Holocaust/arts/DOBio/DOGaller.htm>

Night by Elie Wiesel

Art analysis worksheet. Adapted from U.S. National Archives and Records
Photo Analysis Worksheet.