

Artist Postcards...Creating, Communicating and Collaborating through Art Lesson Plan



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Participating Teachers: Cassidy Reinken and Erin Vance

Grade Level: 5th-8th

Collaborative Postcard Project Description: Artist Postcards are an exciting and innovative way of encouraging students to seriously consider the role of the viewer during the art making process. Students create five inch by seven inch works of art that they then address on the back and write a personal message to an art pal. During the art making process, students create works that utilize their basic knowledge of artistic processes, while also allowing them the freedom to experiment and choose the materials best suited for their visual message. Students are given roughly a week to create each miniature work of art. Students find time to work on their cards in between major assignments, during their free periods, and before and after school. In many cases, Artist Postcards are an extension of current assignments dealing with similar processes and materials. Upon completion of each card, students critique one another's work prior to mailing.

Objectives of the Collaborative Postcard Project:

Creative/Productive Objectives: The students will participate in a semester-long collaboration with a partner school. Schools from the U.S. as well as a middle school in Switzerland will be participating in this exchange. Each student will be assigned one to two students in which they will communicate with through their own artistic creations. The students will create a five inch by seven inch "Artist Postcards" for each of their pen-pals. The students will create the visual side of their cards experimenting with a variety of themes and artistic processes. The students will address the back of their postcards to their art pals, and begin a commentary that will continue with each mailing. Once the students complete their "Artist Postcards" the teacher will send them to the school in which they are addressed to.

Multicultural/Historical Objectives: The students will begin their experience with "Artist Postcards" by discussing the relevancy of the postcard form and it's role in society. The students will compare postcards to the other means of communication that they use on a regular basis. The students will look at a variety of historical and contemporary postcards and discuss their artistic and compositional characteristics. The students will use their understanding of the postcard as a communicative tool to enhance their own designs.

Affective/Expressive Objectives: While creating their "Artist Postcards" the students will experience a variety of media and processes. Through demonstration of these processes, the students will be expected to create "Artist Postcards" that are creative, aesthetically appealing and sensitive to their viewers. With each mailing, the students will also respond to their art pals via text. With the completion of each postcard

set, students will additionally participate in lively critique in which they discuss their process for creation, as well as the culminating imagery. Final postcard creations may be showcased in appropriate publications and/or displays.

Concepts/Vocabulary (Includes, but is not limited to...):

Postcards – an image that has space for a message, address and stamp on the back which can be mailed

Visual Media – any piece of media that incorporate the power of the visual image: billboards, magazines, newspapers, movie posters, commercials, fliers, etc.

Visual Culture – the elements of culture that invade the domain of the visual. Visual media makes up our visual culture.

Mail – the process of sending written communications to others via mail.

Communication – the means in which we share thoughts, ideas and opinions. Communication can be achieved through spoken word, written text, artistic creation, etc.

Iconography – a collection of visual imagery that represents a particular subject matter.

Protest – the act of addressing and issue that you feel is unfair or unjust.

Controversial – an issue that is extremely questionable or debatable.

Context – The circumstances that surround a particular event, situation, etc.

Individualism – Having the ability to express one’s individual beliefs and ideas.

Interpretation – An explanation of the meaning of another’s artistic or creative work

Visual Literacy – Comprehension of the visual communication expressed by a piece of artwork.

Characteristics – The unique elements that make up a particular individual.

Reflection – The process of observing and considering the influence of a person, place or thing on another individual.

Materials (Includes, but is not limited to...):

Visual Exemplars:

Teacher examples of postcards

Student examples of postcards

Media:

Computer access (or tablet access)

Digital camera (or tablet or smartphone access)

Adobe Photoshop (or similar editing software/editing app)

Tripod

Printer

Materials:

Printer ink

Photographic printer paper

Cardstock

Decorative paper

Magazines

Newspapers

Adhesive (glue, glue dots, tape, etc.)
Found semi-flat objects
Watercolor paper
Watercolor paints
Watercolor brushes
Water cups
Oil pastels
Sharpie markers
Colored markers
Colored pencils
Drawing pencils (a variety)
Erasers (kneaded and pink pearl)
Blender sticks

Motivation: The students will begin their exploration of “Artist Postcards” with a discussion of the role of postcards in today’s society. They will compare and contrast the characteristics of the postcard with other current and past means of communication.

Discussion Questions:

- What is the role of the postcard?
- What does a postcard represent to you?
- When was the last time you received a postcard?
- What images did you see on that postcard?
- What message was written on the back of the postcard?
- How often do we use postcards today?
- What do we use postcards for?
- What other means of communication do we use?
- How can we compare these new means of communication to the postcard?
- How can we contrast these new means of communication to the postcard?
- What does our current means of communication say about our broader society?

The students will look at and interpret a variety of teacher and student examples of “Artist Postcards.”

Discussion Questions:

- What are your impressions of the “Artist Postcards” viewed?
- How are these “Artist Postcards” similar to existing postcards?
- How are these “Artist Postcards” different from existing postcards?
- What “Artist Postcards” stand out to you?
- What makes these compositions visually engaging?

The students will then brainstorm and create their first “Artist Postcard” for their new Art Pal(s). These art pals have been organized with two partner schools located in the U.S. Swiss Sixth grade students will be paired with a group of fifth graders under the supervision of Cassidy Reinken in Iowa. Swiss seventh and eighth grade students will be paired with a group of seventh and eighth graders under the supervision of Erin Vance in Illinois.

Individual Postcard Prompts:

The following prompts can be used at the discretion of the organizing teachers. They can be presented in any order, and with a combination of media that compliments current curriculum objectives. Additional prompts that are of timely importance can also be introduced anytime during the postcard exchange.

Text and Image: Using the work of Barbara Kruger as inspiration, the students will create an “Artist Postcard” that creates a visceral response in the viewer using a combination of text and image. The students will be restricted to using only black, white and red in their color palette, and they must combine their own imagery with text. The students may use any combination of materials and technique to create their postcard imagery.

Pop Art: Using the work of Lichtenstein and Warhol as inspiration, the students will create an “Artist Postcard” that speaks to the Pop Art Movement. Students will employ elements of mass culture in their designs, such as advertising, comics and cultural artifacts. The students may choose the subject matter of their imagery, however the final result should have a cartoon-like effect. The students may use any combination of materials and technique to create their postcard imagery.

Pro-Art!: The students will create an “Artist Postcard” that promotes art education in today’s society. The students will envision their final product as a billboard, magazine advertisement or bumper sticker that will communicate their message to the masses. The students may use any combination of materials and technique to create their postcard imagery.

Surrealism: Using the work of Dali, Ernst, Miro and other surrealist artists as inspiration, the students will create an “Artist Postcard” that demonstrates their understanding of the surrealist movement. The students may use any combination of materials and technique to create their postcard imagery.

Extreme Close-Ups: The students will create an “Artist Postcard” that demonstrates an exaggerated zooming in effect. This can be a zoomed in image of a person, place or thing. The image should be so close up that it has an abstracted result, in which the recipient must guess what the original subject matter was. The students may use any combination of materials and technique to create their postcard imagery.

Art is Not Always Beautiful: The students will create an “Artist Postcard” that demonstrates how the art world does not always have to be beautiful in order to have a visual impact on viewers. The students may use any combination of materials and technique to create their postcard imagery.

Nostalgia: The students will create an “Artist Postcard” that evokes the feeling of nostalgia. This can be a reference to personal nostalgia or something bigger in the eyes of the artist. The students may use any combination of photographic techniques to create their postcard imagery.

The Self-Portrait: The students will create an “Artist Postcard” using themselves as the subject matter. The students will draw themselves in either a realistic manner or as a caricature, and in a

setting that visually describes an added element of their personality. The students may use any combination of materials and technique to create their postcard imagery.

My Fairytale: The students will create an “Artist Postcard” that centers around the theme of “Once upon a time...” The students will create imagery that depicts a fictional story. This imagery can be based on an existing fairytale or a story of their own creation. The students may use any combination of materials and technique to create their postcard imagery.

My Nightmare: The students will create an “Artist Postcard” that illustrates their worst nightmare. This imagery can be based on a dream they have had, or a story of their own creation. The students may use any combination of materials and technique to create their postcard imagery.

My Life’s Passion: The students will create an “Artist Postcard” that illustrates their current passion in life, or what they hope to pursue as they get older. The students may use any combination of materials and technique to create their postcard imagery.

Reflections: The students will create an “Artist Postcard” that incorporates reflection into their composition in an interesting and innovative way. This can be a literal interpretation of reflection (ie, water, mirror, etc) or a more symbolic expression of reflective thought. The students may use any combination of materials and technique to create their postcard imagery.

That’s Delicious!: The students will create an “Artist Postcard” that appeals to their viewer’s sense of taste. This postcard can be based on observation, in which students draw something tasty in front of them, or can be completely imaginary in it’s design and execution. The students may use any combination of materials and technique to create their postcard imagery.

That’s So Zen: The students will create an “Artist Postcard” that visually represents simplistic elegance while also evoking a feeling of relaxation and peace. Students should be able to envision this imagery enlarged and hung in a relaxing setting, such as a salon or spa. The students may use any combination of materials and technique to create their postcard imagery.

The Everyday as Art: The students will create an “Artist Postcard” depicting something they encounter in their everyday life in a visually engaging and creative way. The students may use any combination of materials and technique to create their postcard imagery.

Protest Art: The students will create an “Artist Postcard” that demonstrates their feelings on a controversial issue. The students will choose an issue that they feel passionate about and create a composition that addresses it in a powerful, yet appropriate way. The students may use any combination of materials and technique to create their postcard imagery.

School-Wide Initiative Inspired: The students will choose a current school-wide initiative and create an “Artist Postcard” of their own design and inspiration in response. This postcard could be about anti-bullying, about being a good citizen, about telling the truth, etc. The students are welcome to explore any and all media and processes they have learned during the course of their artistic experience to create a composition that is visually engaging, interesting and powerful.

Freestyle: The students will create an “Artist Postcard” of their own design and inspiration. The students are welcome to explore any and all media and processes they have learned during the course of their artistic experience to create a composition that is visually engaging, interesting and powerful.

Student Reflection and Closure:

Once the students complete each postcard, and before mailing, they will answer the following questions in reflection of their process. These questions can be posed during critique, and/or during a reflective writing assignment:

- What did you learn during this artistic experience?
- What did you intend to accomplish during the completion of your composition?
- Where you successful in this? Why or why not?
- If you were to begin this postcard again, what would you do differently?
- How do you think the recipient of your work will interpret your imagery?
- What expectations do you have for your recipient in return?

After the completion of all postcards and at the conclusion of the exchange period, the students will reflect upon their overall experience communicating with a peer through the creation of artwork. The students will answer the following questions as a class:

- What did you learn during this artistic experience?
- Did you enjoy the practice of exchanging “Artist Postcards?” Why or why not?
- Do you feel that you learned a lot about your pen pal through postcard exchange? Why or why not?
- Do you feel that your pen pal knows a lot about you? Why or why not?
- Do you plan on continuing your correspondence with your pen pal in the future? In what capacity will you continue this correspondence?
- What did you learn about yourself as an artist during this experience?

Preparation Time:

- Research and gathering of examples: up to 6 hours
- Creating teacher materials: up to 8 hours
- Time prior to each class for preparation: up to 1 hour
- Duration of each class period: 50 minutes, depending upon school