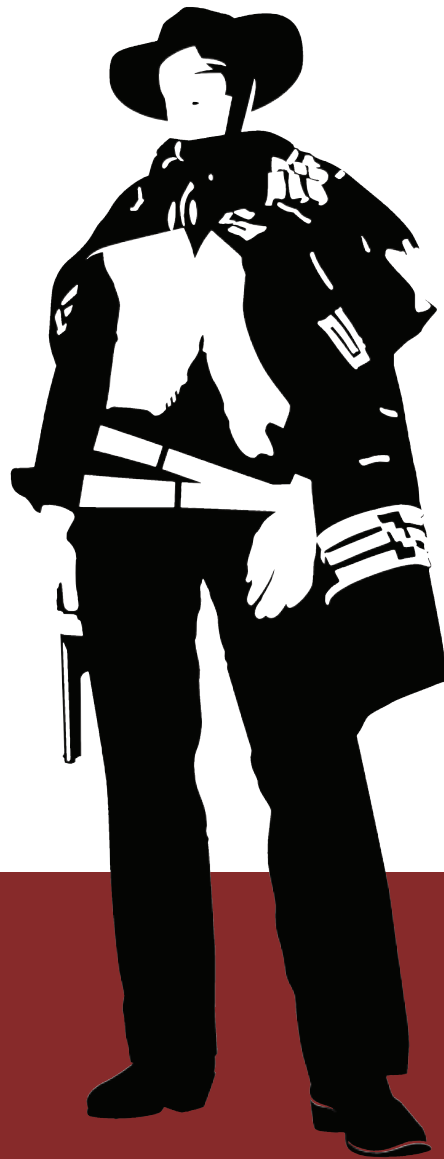


Pre-Visit
Lesson Plan



Iconic Figures of the American West



Autry National Center

Introduction

Over the past four decades, Western-genre films have touched generations of moviegoers.

The Imagination Gallery at the Autry's Museum of the American West features men and women of Wild West shows, Western-genre movies, radio shows and television series as well as Western paintings and decorative arts of the 20th century. In this humanities-based lesson, students will watch a film, either in the classroom or as a home-work assignment. In the culminating project, students will research and prepare presentations focusing on icons of the American West.

Objectives

Using the Italian-Western films directed by Sergio Leone and starring Clint Eastwood, students will:

- Examine the plots, characters, and sound in films
- Prepare presentations focusing on icons of the American West, demonstrating abilities to connect the past with the present to inform our shared future; in the culminating project, students will prepare presentations focusing on American
- Critically analyze media clips, essays, interviews, and artifacts featured in the exhibitions at the Museum of the American West (either individually as a home-work assignment or as a group through a class fieldtrip to the museum)
- Understand the concept of icons and its relationship to ideals that are valued in American culture
- Work together in small groups
- Practice writing persuasively and for presentation purposes
- Conduct research using Internet sources and primary source material
- Share what they have learned in an oral and visual presentation

Learners

This lesson is designed for high-school students studying American history, humanities, media skills or language arts. The lesson can easily be extended to additional grades by altering some of the teaching activities.

Ideally, teachers will need to show a Western film in the classroom prior to visiting the Autry National Center. A list of ideas is included in this packet. You can borrow or rent a DVD or video from local libraries or stores.

Materials

- Images of iconic buildings or monuments (e.g., Flat Iron Building, Empire State Building, Mt. Rushmore, Washington Monument, Statue of Liberty (you can find these from any search engine, such as "Google")
- VHS tape or DVD of the film *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*
- Board and/or chart paper
- Handouts of Web resources if computers are not available in the classroom
- Assignment worksheet (provided in this packet)

Students will also need the following supplies in the classroom and at the Museum:

- Computers with the capacities indicated above
- Notebook or journal
- Pens/pencils

Examples of images of icons for the classroom lesson:

- Man on the Moon
<http://history.nasa.gov/ap11ann/kippsphotos/apollo.html>
- Three firefighters hoisting the American flag after 9/11
www.groundzerospirit.org
- Mr. Rogers
<http://pbskids.org/rogers>
or Sesame Street characters
www.sesamestreetworkshop.org
- Any corporate logos that would be meaningful to your students, downloaded from the company's web sites
- Airplanes flying into the World Trade Center towers
www.dailyherald.com/extras/photogallery/tradecenter/index.asp
- Images of American figures (e.g., past American Presidents, dignitaries, friends and foes, popular culture celebrities known to your students)

Content Standards

English-Language Arts

Grades 11-12

Research and Technology

1.6 — Develop presentations by using clear research questions and creative and critical research strategies (e.g., field studies, oral histories, interviews, experiments, electronic sources).

1.7 — Use systematic strategies to organize and record information (e.g., anecdotal scripting, annotated bibliographies).

Visual and Performing Arts

Grades 9-12

2.0 — Creative Expression

Students apply processes and skills in acting, directing, designing, and script writing to create formal and informal theatre, film/videos, and electronic media productions and to perform in them.

1.0 — Artistic Perception

Students observe their environment and respond, using the elements of theatre. They also observe formal and informal works of theatre, film/video, and electronic media and respond, using the vocabulary of theatre.

3.0 — Historical and Cultural Context

Students analyze the role and development of theatre, film/video, and electronic media in past and present cultures throughout the world.

In addition, this lesson focuses on the development of communication and research skills and helps students to think critically.

Procedure

To conduct this lesson, you will need one hour for an introductory lesson about icons, 90 minutes to view a Western film in class, or as a homework assignment (this lesson uses the Italian-Westerns films of Sergio Leone), two sessions - one to explore icons and one for presentations, and additional class time (two class periods may suffice) to work on final project and presentations.

Introduce the concept of icons by showing your students images of various iconic people or events (see suggested images above). For each image, the class should brainstorm about the following questions.

- *What does the image represent to you?*
- *Put yourself in someone else's shoes; now what might these same images convey? Does each photograph or image have the same meaning for everyone?*
- *Why do most people know these images?*
- *Why are these images considered so powerful?*
- *Why do these images have staying power? Which of these have more staying power? To whom? Why?*

General answers to the brainstorming questions may include, (1) the image reminds them of childhood, (2) the image is something that most Americans know, (3) the image conjures up both happy or sad memories, (4) the image has been copied, mimicked and/or used in many different ways and in many different media, and/or (5) the image represents a particular time and place in history.

(Optional) Ask students to bring in or find other examples and repeat the discussion above.

Next, ask the students, *"What is an icon?"* Chart these answers so that students can refer to the list of "criteria" when choosing their own icons for the final project. Possible answers include: an image or a representation; in computers, a picture that represents a file, window, or program; a picture or representation of a religious figure; an important and enduring symbol.

Pose the following questions:

- *Of the images that you have just seen and discussed, some are news-related photographs, some are logos, and some are pictures of people. Why are all of them icons?*
- *How do these icons convey what is valued in American culture?*

Tell students that these are some of the questions they will be exploring during this unit.

Prepare students to watch one of the Western DVDs/videos on the list that appears at the end of this lesson. While this can be assigned as homework, the discussion is richer when students watch it together in class, even if you need several class periods to complete the film.

For the purpose of this lesson the film *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* is used as the example. This is an Italian film made to portray an American Western. Introduce the film to students by stating that Clint Eastwood is considered an American icon.

Direct students to take notes as they watch the video. Tell students to focus on the following areas.

- The main character: The “Good” played by Clint Eastwood as a taciturn, enigmatic loner in search of a cache of stolen gold. *Is Eastwood’s character really good? How? Yet, why is he not?*
- The rivals: The “Bad” played by Lee Van Cleef, the ruthless bounty hunter and the “Ugly” played by Eli Wallach, a Mexican bandit.
- The film’s title reveals its ironic attitude toward the canonized heroes of the classical western. It portrays the American West as a world of violence, fear, and brutal instincts. About the plot, the film’s director, Sergio Leone said, “In pursuit of profit there is no such thing as good and evil, generosity or deviousness.” *What does he mean by this?*

Divide the class into five groups, with a different group focusing on: (1) the “good” actor, (2) the “bad” actor, (3) the “ugly” actor, (4) the director, and (5) the musical score. Each group should brainstorm the answers to the following question:

- *What values or ideals does this film present to make it considered iconic?*

Give students time to work on the questions you presented. If possible, give students access to a TV, VCR, and DVD or videotape of the film so that they can review the segment related to their topic.

Give students time to work in their groups to prepare a presentation that answers the questions posed above. Encourage students to use presentation software such as PowerPoint or Hyperstudio. Ask students to use images, photographs, and other graphics from the Internet and require students to cite their sources.

Bring the class together again so that students can present their findings.

Following the presentations, divide the class into groups of two to three. To provide further discussion of what an icon is, have students select a famous person or character that could be considered an icon. Ask them to list the characteristics that give the person his or her status as an icon.

Extensions (Cross-Curricular)

History and Law — Ask students to watch the first two films in the “Dollar Trilogies” of director Sergio Leone. *What do these films communicate about violence and justice in the West?* Decide if this is accurate or mythic. Defend your point of view using other research to make your case.

Music — Record musical cuts from various films or songs. *How does the score help the viewer to anticipate what happens next? How does it set the tone or feel that the director is trying to convey?* Conduct research to learn who they are and why they are considered icons in the music world.

Speechwriting — Propose the following scenario to students: Clint Eastwood will be honored with a lifetime achievement award. Your task is to write the speech introducing him. *What will you say?* Turn in the research you used to support your speech.

Evaluation (After the Museum Visit)

Now that the students have had sufficient practice with the concept of icons, divide the class into groups of 2-3 people.

Each group will be assigned one of the following groups:

- icons of America in the 19th century
- icons of America in the 20th century
- icons of America in the 21st century

Each group must select five icons and corresponding images for the century/topic they are assigned. As part of the final project, the groups will present their images and the explanations for their choices. Inform students that the images do not necessarily have to be photographs. Students will also include an accompanying caption that describes the contents of the photograph or image and the reason for their choice.

After you assign the task, discuss with students how they will go about choosing their images. Their suggestions may include the following ideas:

- key moments in U.S. history
- looking at *Time Magazine's* "Man of the Year" selections
- advances in technology in the U.S.
- leaders and their impact on America and the world
- their history textbooks

As the students go through the process of selecting images, they may have to pare down their collections to reach the maximum of five images. Remind them to keep the discarded images because they will need to present their reasons for not including them.

Allow time for presentations, comparisons, and discussion.

Credits & References

The American Masters series on the PBS website provided the impetus and format for this lesson, which was adapted by staff at the Autry National Center for use prior to museum visits.

Iconic Figures of the American West

Names of Group Members

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Task

Your task is to put together a presentation of iconic images from a certain time period in history (see below). Be sure to circle the time period your group chooses.

- icons of America in the 19th century
- icons of America in the 20th century
- icons of America in the 21st century

Requirements

- You must have five images only! Remember, the images do not necessarily have to be photographs.
- Write an accompanying paragraph that describes the contents of the photograph or image and the reason for the group's choice. Make sure everything is grammatically correct.
- List and show all of the other images that were in contention. You need to explain why you discarded these choices during your oral presentation.
- Present your images on a posterboard or in an electronic presentation (using software such as PowerPoint or Hyperstudio).

Credit:

Education staff at the Autry National Center modified this assignment sheet; the original assignment was prepared by Anna Chan Rekate and found on the PBS website.