Can art reflect the pain of the Holocaust?

Death March by Samuel Pruchno

Supporting Question

1. What can Holocaust survivor art tell us about the life circumstances of the artist?

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Focused Inquiry – Holocaust Survivor Art

Compelling Question	
Can art reflect the pain of the Holocaust?	
Standards	ART.VA.IV.7.2; ART.VA.IV.8.2 - Articulate an understanding of the historical, social, and cultural contexts of artwork.
Disciplinary Practice	Art, Social Studies, Social Science, English, English Language Arts
Staging the Question	Defining the word *interpretation*

Supporting Question
What can Holocaust survivor art tell us about the life circumstance of the artist?
Formative Performance Task
Use Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) to examine a painting from a Holocaust survivor. Write a microstory in connection with the painting *Death March*.
Featured Sources
Source A: *Death March* - Painting by Samuel Pruchno

Summative Performance Task	**ARGUMENT:** Students will develop a claim that art partially reflects the life circumstances of the artist and does not tell the whole story. Students will cite particular characteristics of the painting and sections of the artist statement to develop and support their claim.
	EXTENSION: Students will read about Emmanuel Mittelman, a Holocaust survivor who was in multiple camps and survived a death march. His story can be found at Portraits of Honor: Our Michigan Holocaust Survivors Story. http://portraitsofhonor.org/POHSurvPage.aspx?svid=250

Modifications	**English Language Learners:** Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) eight components. Examine the checklist developed by Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2015, 2017)
	Students with Disabilities: Modifications identified by the National Endowment for the Arts (2015) and ArtShop are recommended.

Overview

Inquiry Description

This inquiry focuses on examining a painting from a Holocaust survivor and the artist statement to explore how art provides a partial understanding of the life circumstances of the artist but does not provide a complete understanding. The questions, tasks, and sources in this inquiry asks student to examine one piece of art using Visual Thinking Strategies then use their observations of the painting to develop a microstory connected to the painting. Students will check the accuracy of their microstory based on the artist statement and will then have the opportunity to revise their story to provide a more accurate and comprehensive story of the event depicted in the painting.

This inquiry highlights the following standards.

- ART.VA.III.7.1; ART.VA.III.7.2; ART.VA.III.8.1; ART.VA.III.8.2 - Critically observe, describe and analyze visual characteristics. Interpret artwork searching for embedded meaning, function and personal connections.
- ART.VA.IV.7.2; ART.VA.IV.8.2 - Articulate an understanding of the historical, social and cultural contexts of artwork.
- WHG 7.2.3 - World War II and WHG 7.2.6 - Case Studies of Genocide
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1.A; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1.B; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.1.A; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.1.B - Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence.
- C3 Framework Indicators: D2.His.4.9-12 – Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced perspectives of people during different historical eras; D2.His.5.9-12 – Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives; Dimension 3 – Developing claims and using evidence

This inquiry is expected to take one to two class periods. The inquiry time frame could expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (e.g., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, featured sources, writing). Teachers are encouraged to adapt the inquiry to meet the needs and interests of their particular students. This inquiry lends itself to differentiation and modeling of historical thinking skills while assisting students in reading the variety of sources.

Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question, students will have a greater understanding how the pain of the Holocaust can be expressed through art and the voices of people who lived through the experience. The formative performance task provides students with an opportunity to practice the three-step Visual Thinking Strategy technique to examine art and to determine the story reflected in the painting. Ultimately, students take the information they acquired using Visual Thinking Strategies to develop and support a claim that art partially reflects the life circumstances of the artist and does not tell the whole story.

Staging the Compelling Question

Write the word *interpretation* on the board and have students write what they think the word means on a sticky note. Once they have completed writing their definition, have students place their sticky not on the board around the word. Once all the sticky notes are posted, students will review the definitions and start to cluster the sticky notes that are similar in definition. The number of clusters will determine the number of student groups. Have students count off by the number of clusters. These student groups will then write a full sentences definition of *interpretation* based on the information on the sticky notes. Each group will then read their definition to the other groups. Explain to the students that this lesson focuses on the interpretation of a work of Holocaust art.

The staging task is not designed to delve too far into the specific content of the compelling question. Instead, it's intended to provide a frame of reference and context for the inquiry. This task may be completed in a brief period of time, depending on how much overall time is available for the inquiry. If following the guidelines described in the inquiry overview (one or two 50-minute class periods), then this staging task would likely only last 10-15 minutes.

Supporting Question

The supporting question asks, "What can Holocaust survivor art tell us about the life circumstances of the artist?" The Holocaust is sometimes taught through a limited perspective which conveys a message that victims, survivors, and liberators of the Holocaust had similar experiences. It is important for students to understand that various experiences and perspectives of the Holocaust exist and using a variety of sources helps provide a better and more comprehensive understanding of the Holocaust and specific events of the Holocaust such as liberation. Each source of information is unique and helps add to the story. This supporting question challenges students to understand how the accounts of those who lived through the Holocaust provide a more accurate story of what occurred and teaches the Holocaust by focusing on the human story.

The featured sources include one work of art, a quote, and a longer testimony from three Holocaust survivors.

- **Source A:** *Death March* - Painting by Samuel Pruchno

The formative performance task is for students to use Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) to examine a painting created by a Holocaust survivor and to use their analysis of the painting to create a microstory about the scene in the painting.

Part 1: The first component of the formative performance task consists of two analytical frameworks for studying art – the *Structural Framework* and the *Personal Framework*. The Structural Framework analyzes how style, symbolism, and structural elements contribute to meaning and message and the Personal Framework analyzes how artwork reflects the personal feelings, thinking, and life circumstances of the artist and how viewer interpretation is influenced by their life experiences.

Students are shown the painting *Liberation* by Samuel Pruchno (Source A). Students will use Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) when examining the painting. Students will first look at the art in silence then be asked the following VTS questions:

(1) What's going on in this artwork?
(2) What do you see that makes you say that?
(3) What more can you find?

When asked "What's going on in this artwork?" the teacher will point to the artwork. As students respond, the teacher will point to the areas of the artwork the student mentions and will paraphrase what they said. "What I hear you saying is…" The teacher will look for confirmation from the student. If the teacher is unsure of what the student means, the teacher will ask the student "Do you mean…?"

When students provide an interpretive remark, the teacher will ask students, "What do you see that makes you say that?"

When students have exhausted their initial response of what they see, the teacher will ask, "What more can you find?"

Part 2: After examining the painting *Death March*, students will write a microstory to provide a narrative of what they believe is the story related to this painting. The goal of the microstory is to use their VTS examination of the painting and interpret the painting in the form of a story. What is the story/context behind what we see in the painting? The microstory should be 300 words or less. After writing the microstory, ask for student volunteers to read their story while showing the class the painting to provide a visual for the story. Teacher note: This task is purposefully named a microstory and not microfiction. We want to avoid terminology that encourages fictionalizing the Holocaust.

Part 3: Read to students the story about the painting provided by Samuel Pruchno. Ask students to identify the similarities and differences of what they describe in their microstory to the story provided by Samuel Pruchno. Explain to students the definition of interpretation. First re-read the definitions of interpretation they created in the Staging the Question activity then share with them a dictionary definition. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, interpretation is "an explanation or opinion of what something means."
https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/interpretation

The teacher will decide how long to extend VTS. For more information on VTS:
https://sjmusart.org/sites/default/files/files/Understanding%20Basics.pdf

Modifications for English Language Learners may include various Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) strategies from the eight SIOP components such as:

- Adapting content to all levels of student proficiency (Preparation)
- Integrating lesson concepts with language practice opportunities (Preparation); Explicitly link past learning to new concepts (Building Background)
- Using a variety of techniques to make concepts clear such as modeling and gestures (Comprehension Input); Use scaffolding techniques consistently (Strategies)
- Use a variety of question types (Strategies)
- Give opportunities for student to clarify key concepts (Interaction)
- Provide activities to integrate all language skills (Practice/Application)
- Pace the lesson appropriately (Lesson Delivery)
- Provide feedback to students regularly (Review/Assessment)

Modifications for Students with Disabilities may include recommendations from the National Endowment for the Arts (2015) and ArtShop such as the following:

- *Provide a copy of the artwork to look at prior to the formal lesson – talk together.* Enlarge the photo, if possible, making the details clearer.
- *Mark on the artwork copy – circle, underline, x, cut out – as they answer questions asked of them about the art.* This creates a more sensory-rich experience as they hold and "work" the art piece.
- *Provide personal modifications for student comfort during the lesson – weighted blankets, fidgets, headphones, etc. – while working with the art piece.* This will allow the experience to be physically comfortable.
- *Allow students to answer – provide extra wait time, ask questions in a simple, concrete manner, focus on items they can see or relate to.* Art is the perfect medium as there are so many answers that can be discovered to understanding the work.
- *Select a simple focus for the art piece – a theme that can be easily followed (color, shapes, light, dark, shadows, positioning of items, etc.) as you talk about the piece.* This allows a continual thread to run through discovering more and more about the art.

Supporting Question	
Featured Source **A**	*Death March* Painting by Samuel Pruchno

Death March

Painting by Samuel Pruchno

About Samuel Pruchno:

Samuel Pruchno was born 1927 in Shavl, Lithuania. Of approximately 40 members of his family, only his brother, brother-in-law, and Sam survived the Holocaust. During the Holocaust, Sam experienced life in the Shavl ghetto and was sent to the Stutthof camp upon liquidation of the ghetto where he did hard labor, was beaten, and became very ill at one point. From Stutthof, Sam was transferred to Dachau where he was given the task to build underground factories to be hidden from Allied bombings and had experienced a Death March. Upon liberation, Sam went to Munich, Germany where he found a job washing pots. Sam came to the United States in 1951 and settled in Detroit, Michgan where his brother had settled first. Sam began working in small shops and eventually started a metal cutting machining company. He married and has two children, 11 grandchildren, and four great grandchildren.

About the painting:

One morning the German guards walked the inmates out of camp, ostensibly to go to another work camp. In fact, they were being walked away from the approaching Americans on what would come to be known as the Death March. They were given neither food nor water. Those who fell behind or those who fell to the ground and could not get up were shot. Sam became weaker by the hour, his brother Al, and brother-in-law, Yechiel, took turns supporting him, as shown in the lower left corner of the painting.

Later that night they stopped to rest in an open field near Kaufering. Sam was desperate enough that while the German guards slept, he crawled on his belly and stole one of their backpacks. It contained three loaves of bread and four cans of condensed milk, which they divided evenly. The fourth can of milk, Sam drank as well; it shouldn't go to waste. At daybreak they heard the guards threatening punishment to the thief, but there was no search, besides, the evidence was safely in their stomachs. They were simply ordered to start marching again. A few hours later, the milk caught up with Sam and he started feeling a pain in his stomach that worsened by the minute. All he could think about was escaping into the woods; he didn't want to be a burden. Sam mentioned this to his brother-in-law, Yechiel, who said the Americans were too close to take any chances.

Summative Performance Task - Overview for the Teacher

Constructing an Argument

At this point in the focused inquiry, students have examined a painting from a Holocaust survivor. Using the painting as a resource, students will construct a claim that art partially reflects the life circumstances of the artist and does not tell the whole story. Students will cite particular characteristics of the painting and sections of the artist statement to develop and support their claim. Constructing this claim provides an opportunity for students to rigorously analyze the source and apply information and observation from the source. The claim may be explicit and/or implicit.

This response may take the form or forms that the teacher deems most appropriate for their students. For example, the claim could be in the form of a detailed outline, graphic organizer, poster, essay, video, or any other creative format the teacher and student may decide is best for constructing their claim and supporting it with evidence.

This portion of the focused inquiry addresses *Dimension 3* of the *C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards* and the *Developing Claims* and *Using Evidence* section. If the claim is in the form of an essay, it is important to examine the *English Language Arts/Literacy Common Core Connections* section of *Dimension 3*.

Extension

Portraits of Honor: Our Michigan Holocaust Survivors is an interactive educational exhibit of the Program for Holocaust Survivors and Families, a service of Jewish Senior Life of Metropolitan Detroit. Portraits of Honor was developed in 1999 under the direction of Dr. Charles Silow, the son of Holocaust survivors. Its purpose is to document the lives of Holocaust survivors who have lived in Michigan for education and for posterity. After the Holocaust, these survivors came to America and made their way to Michigan. They learned a new language, a new culture, and built new lives. Most

married, worked hard, and raised families. Portraits of Honor is a learning tool about the lives of survivors through their photographs, biographies, and historical references.

There are two ways to find a survivor using this interactive exhibit. You can search by name if you know the name of a survivor or by experience. Portraits of Honor organizes experiences into the following categories: Death camps, concentration camps, labor camps, ghettos, resistance, escape, hiding, and child survivors. Each survivor story includes basic biographical information, a map of their journey during the Holocaust, a Read More section that has additional details regarding their story, and an audio message from the survivor. The following is a link to Portraits of Honor: Our Michigan Holocaust Survivors. http://portraitsofhonor.org/Default.aspx

Portraits of Honor: Our Michigan Holocaust Survivors is a permanent interactive exhibit at the Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus in Farmington Hills, Michigan. More information about this exhibit is at the following link: https://www.holocaustcenter.org/exhibitions/exhibits/portraits-of-honor/

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The Covenant Foundation