

CRAFT IN AMERICA

REPRESENTING COMMUNITY EDUCATION GUIDE

"Representing Community...all of our stories matter. And we should celebrate them all."
—Roberto Lugo

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students are introduced to artist Roberto Lugo, whose decorative ceramic pottery combines the traditions of art from his Philadelphia neighborhood with varied art historical traditions including Ancient Greek vessels. Students first explore his website and record thoughts and questions about what they see. Students watch the Roberto Lugo segment and learn about his life, those who have influenced him, the communities he is a part of, and how those elements are evident in his artistic practice. Students explore the intentions behind his artworks. They play with juxtaposition. They borrow and create symbols and patterns that represent themselves, their interests, and their community connections. Finally, students work together as a class to create a school-based community project that represents their school, their neighborhood, and the individuals, including themselves, within it.

Grade Level: 8–12

Estimated Time: five 45-minute class periods

Craft In America Theme/Episode: EAST

Background Information

Roberto Lugo is a Philadelphia-based artist, ceramicist, social activist, poet, and educator. Lugo utilizes classical pottery forms in conjunction with portraiture and surface design. The pieces informed his North Philadelphia upbringing and hip-hop culture, highlighting themes of poverty, inequality, and racial injustice. Lugo's works utilize traditional European and Asian ceramic techniques reimagined with a 21st-century street sensibility. Their hand-painted surfaces feature traditional decorative patterns and motifs combined with elements of modern urban graffiti and portraits of individuals



whose faces are historically absent on this type of luxury item—people like Sojourner Truth, Dr. Cornel West, and the Notorious B.I.G., as well as Lugo's family members and, very often, himself.

Key Concepts

- Artists use juxtaposition to create new meanings.
- Artists can borrow symbols and patterns from different times, places, and cultures.
- Artists can be community builders.

Critical questions

- How do artists use juxtaposition to create new meanings?
- Why might artists borrow symbols and patterns from different times, places, and cultures?
- How can artists be community builders?



CRAFT IN AMERICA

REPRESENTING COMMUNITY EDUCATION GUIDE

Objectives

Students will:

- experiment with juxtaposing images to create new meanings.
- research symbols and patterns from different times, places, and cultures for possible use in their artwork.
- collaboratively build a community art work that represents their school and neighborhood and the people within these places.

Vocabulary

Collage, community art, graffiti, homage, identity, installation, juxtaposition, lineage, resilience, resourceful, spoken word poetry

Interdisciplinary connection:

- History/Social Studies: The history and present day of Kensington (Roberto Lugo's neighborhood within the city of Philadelphia) is characteristic of many American cities, and a worthwhile study. It experienced deindustrialization in the mid 20th century, followed by job losses and accompanying poverty, and more recently a trend of gentrification.
- Math: Patterns feature heavily in Roberto Lugo's work. This lesson includes the use of rulers to create a grid on which to design patterns through repetition. It explains how to make a five-pointed star using a compass and a protractor.
- Language Arts: Roberto Lugo is a spoken word poet. Students may be interested in trying this form of composition that is meant to be experienced as a performance rather than read silently.

National Standards for Visual Arts Education

This lesson addresses the following standards. The performance standards listed here are directly related to the lesson's goals.

- Creating:
Anchor standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
VA:Cr1.2.1a
Shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present-day life using a contemporary practice of art or design.

Anchor standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
VA:Cr2.3.1a
Collaboratively develop a proposal for an installation, artwork, or space design that transforms the perception and experience of a particular place.
- Presenting:
Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic works for presentation.
VA: Pr5.1.8a
Collaboratively prepare and present selected theme-based artwork for display, and formulate exhibition narratives for the viewer.
- Responding:
Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
VA:Re8.1.1a



REPRESENTING COMMUNITY EDUCATION GUIDE

Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts.

- Connecting:
Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
VA:Cn10.1.1a
Make art collaboratively to reflect on and reinforce positive aspects of group identity.

Worksheets

- Worksheet 1: Welcome to My Neighborhood
- Worksheet 2: Playing with Patterns

Resources

- Craft in America EAST episode, craftinamerica.org/episode/east, Roberto Lugo's segment, and Craft in America's website, craftinamerica.org
- Roberto Lugo's website, robertolugostudio.com
- A selection of Roberto Lugo's work from the artist's website
- Philadelphia has a stunning collection of murals created through their mural arts program. Roberto Lugo's work is featured on their site. Students will enjoy scrolling through the examples. muralarts.org
- Start a reference bulletin board of symbols and patterns (such as those on Roberto Lugo's large community sculptures and on the Greek pottery as seen in the video), lettering styles, fabric swatches, magazine cutouts, and digital prints, etc. Invite students to add to the collection as the project progresses.
- Look for old maps and game boards of different kinds to use as possible design inspiration for the mural arrangement.
- Post these vocabulary words on a board, a poster, or share in the student's digital classroom (collage, community art, graffiti, homage, identity, juxtaposition, lineage, resilience, resourceful, spoken word poetry)

Materials

- Sketchbooks
- Pencils and pens
- Markers
- Paper: white and colors
- Ephemera such as local menus, junk mail, greeting cards, handwritten notes, old calendar pages, magazines, etc. for collage and for practice with juxtaposition.
- Graph paper in various scales
- Rulers
- Compasses (and scraps of cardboard for protecting surfaces from compass points)
- Protractors
- Drawing stencils: Letters, numbers, and shapes
- Fabric scraps for collage
- Scissors
- Paints and brushes
- Printer for online imagery
- Tape
- White glue

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Video and discussion

Before viewing

Tell students they will be viewing a video about artist Roberto Lugo, and that they will eventually use his work to help them imagine and create a larger community art project. Introduce the website of Roberto Lugo to students and allow them to browse for several minutes. Ask students to use their sketchbooks to draw quick sketches of things they notice such as the vessels, and the faces, scenes, detailed patterns, symbols, and lettering that decorate the works.

As you circulate, encourage students to consider some questions.

- What do you notice most as you look at Roberto Lugo's work?
- What do you imagine the artist wants you to think about when you look at his work?
- What would you like to ask him about his work?

Students can write some observations in their sketchbooks. After they have explored the site, ask students to share some of their notes. Finally, share the background information (above) with students as a further introduction to Roberto Lugo.

During viewing

Hand out Worksheet 1: Welcome to My Neighborhood for students to use while watching the video. You may want to encourage students to work in small groups to allow for collaboration in answering questions. Pause at intervals to give students time to respond to the questions.

After viewing

Go over the worksheet with students, sharing answers and discussing their ideas and reactions.

Worksheet 1: Welcome to My Neighborhood

Teacher guide with possible answers

1. Where is Roberto Lugo from?
He grew up in Kensington, a neighborhood in Philadelphia.
2. What does he say about his neighborhood?
He said, "I come from Kensington in Philadelphia. Another name for Kensington is "The Badlands."
3. Why is it called "The Badlands"?
There has been crime and lots of drug sales and drug use. And there is poverty. He says, "It's where a lot of impoverished people live." Note: "The Badlands" is a slang term for neighborhoods that are considered unsafe to visit or to live in. Originally, it means a geographical description of dry, degraded terrain that may be hard to travel through or to use for farming. It is also the name of a national park in South Dakota that is beautiful because of the mountainous and dry, rocky formations.
4. What does Roberto Lugo say to let you know he does not agree with that name?
He likes his neighborhood. He says, "That's how people look at it from the exterior but from the inside I see that it's a community of resourceful people and there's a lot of creativity that happens in this place." He likes working in his neighborhood.

CRAFT IN AMERICA

REPRESENTING COMMUNITY EDUCATION GUIDE

5. How does Roberto Lugo describe himself?

He says, "I am a potter, poet, an artist." He also talks about being a teacher. He is obviously friendly, and he is encouraging. He invites people to try the pottery wheel, and he says to the little girl, "You're doing so good, Mia!"

6. How did Roberto Lugo get started in art?

He talks about wanting to be like his older cousins. "We all did graffiti together...Years later I took a community college art class and the teacher just happened to be a potter." He immediately liked working with the clay.

7. What is Roberto Lugo's art about?

He tells stories about his neighborhood. He draws connections with other times and other artists, like ancient Greek potters. He pays tribute to others he admires, like singer Nina Simone, and Tariq Trotter from The Roots (depicted on the mural at The Clay Studio.) He says, "My practice became defined when I started to acknowledge where it is that I'm from. It was telling the stories of Kensington, but also paying homage to all the people that paved the way for me to be here."

8. In what ways does Roberto Lugo help his community? How is he a community builder?

He takes his pottery wheel out in the neighborhood to let people try it. He teaches art classes. He also gets positive attention for his community, and he tells the stories of people who live there. (Refer to Roberto Lugo's quote heading this worksheet.) As people learn the stories of others in their community, they have the opportunity to feel empathy and a sense of pride.

Experimenting with juxtaposition

Continue with a discussion explaining juxtaposition, and Roberto Lugo's use of it.

Here is one possible example: (as you draw, or arrange some cutout images on a piece of paper) A simple definition for juxtaposition is putting two things side by side. But in artworks, using juxtaposition can create surprises or new meanings. Here is a turtle. I'm going to add a clock next to it. Now I have a turtle and a clock. But I also have a story. Why are these two things together in this artwork? Turtles are slow. Clocks keep track of time. Maybe the turtle is late. If I add a textbook and a pencil, the meaning could be a story about procrastinating on homework. Maybe the turtle is a student!

Lead students in finding juxtapositions in Roberto Lugo's work. Roberto Lugo talks about people underestimating his neighborhood, and thinking of it as "The Badlands." He wants to show his neighborhood in a more positive way, and make sure his neighbors' stories are told. So he places, for example, a young man he knew who ended up in prison on a large vessel of a kind that usually only depicts characters with high status, like gods and historic heroes. Now the viewer might be surprised, and wonder about and pay attention to the young man's story. Roberto Lugo elevates the status of those he depicts, and honors them by placing them in honored traditions of art.

Have students look for more examples of juxtaposition in the images of Roberto Lugo's art, and have them share their discoveries with the class.



CRAFT IN AMERICA

REPRESENTING COMMUNITY EDUCATION GUIDE

Here is one example: Roberto Lugo juxtaposes graffiti lettering in his work and in art exhibits next to older, traditionally respected art forms. The surprising effect of this juxtaposition acts as a claim that graffiti is also a respectable art form, and worthy of study and admiration. Give students some time to play with juxtaposing images (by either drawing them or using the ephemera you've gathered) and sharing them with each other.

Studio Production

Explain to students that they will be creating a representation of themselves that will eventually be part of a large group work: They will create representations of themselves. They will work together to create a map on a hallway wall of their school and its surrounding neighborhoods, and then place their avatars on that background.

Show images of Roberto Lugo's large community art pieces (the large vessels in the neighborhood parks, and the murals) as examples of community art projects, noting how the colors and patterns make them stand out. Hand out and explain Worksheet 2: Playing with Patterns.

For Part 1 of the worksheet, allow students time to sketch a self-portrait featuring their interests, followed by an imaginary map of their various community connections. As you circulate and see their ideas, encourage students to compare their drawings with each other, looking for similarities and differences in what they portrayed. They will complete Part 2 of the worksheet after some demonstrations.

Share some self-portrait ideas with the class, letting them know that these need not be limited to an image of their face, but can be varied: Their name in stylized lettering, a cartoon image, a shape (such as a star shape or a tee shirt shape) filled with symbols and patterns. Let students know that collage, in addition to drawing, is another option for their work.

Note: Demonstrations can occur at different times, allowing students to practice with one technique before moving on and demonstrating the next one.

Demonstration: Creating a grid

Note: You can use graph paper in different scales, or draw several kinds of grids and copy them for student use. However, creating at least one of their own grids is a valuable skill for students to practice and aids in their visualization of space and placement.

Have a student next to you, following your instructions to make their own grid so that students can watch a peer. Use a ruler and an 8 ½ by 11-inch sheet of paper. From one edge of the paper demonstrate making a tick mark at every inch across the paper. Move the ruler to about the middle of the paper and repeat making the marks at every inch. (On this size paper you will have an extra ½" widthwise.) Then use the ruler to connect the tick marks on the first line with those made on the second line, creating lines from one edge of the paper to the opposite edge. Turn the paper one quarter turn and repeat the process to create a grid of squares. After students practice making grids, gather them for the next demonstration: creating a pattern.

Demonstration: Creating a pattern

Demonstrate using the grid to create patterns that vary by counting sequences (every other space, every two spaces, etc.) Using a ready-made copy, demonstrate choosing a symbol and copy it in every square, then in every other square, every three squares, etc. Allow time for



CRAFT IN AMERICA

REPRESENTING COMMUNITY EDUCATION GUIDE

students to explore and play with making their own patterns. After this demonstration, students can return to Worksheet 2 and complete part 2.

Demonstration: Lettering

There is a good chance your students have some lettering skills in their areas of preference, whether graffiti style, blackletter, bubble letters, or other. Encourage them to share a demonstration with their classmates. Also identify the available stencils they can use, and have a student demonstrate using these.

Demonstration: A five-pointed star

While exploring motifs and patterns, gather students again to create a shape using a compass, a protractor, and a ruler. Show them how to draw a circle on paper with a compass, demonstrating the use of a cardboard layer to protect the table. (Making the star takes patience, but once students practice they can create all sorts of other shapes by dividing the 360-degree circumference using different numbers.) Point out the center of the circle—the mark left by the compass. Match the center point of the protractor's straight edge to the center of the circle. Dividing the 360-degree circumference of the circle by 5 (for a five-pointed star) results in 72 degrees. Using the protractor, make a tiny mark every 72 degrees around the edge of the circle, making five marks. Using a ruler, connect each mark to the two marks across the circle. A star will form. Change the star's size by measuring out from the center of the circle through the point of each ray, by a larger or smaller measurement. Reconnect the points to complete the new size.

Self-Portraits

Now that students have seen the demonstrations, made sketches, and thought about ideas, have students create their self-portraits.

The final group project

Working together, students first create a background map of the school, including bird's eye views of classrooms, cafeteria, gym, and other favorite locations. Situate the school in a background of the surrounding neighborhood, to which they can add cars, bikes, favorite pathways and detailed highlights of other features important to them. They decide where to place their portraits. Refer back to Roberto Lugo's work to remind them how color and pattern can add to the complexity and beauty of the work, and perhaps invite more positive attention. Can they use juxtaposition anywhere to add interest or meaning?

Also inspired by Roberto Lugo, students may decide to invite others within the school to an art session, wherein students demonstrate to others how to create a self-portrait to be added to the work.

Share ideas with students and see where they take it, allowing for their own choices. To invite others into the production, including staff, your students may want to design a template and cut-out figures (for example, a chibi-style human-gingerbread shape) for participants who can then fill them in with designs and color.

CLOSING STRATEGIES

Leave the artwork up long enough for others to enjoy it. Take time to discuss and appreciate the work.



CRAFT IN AMERICA

REPRESENTING COMMUNITY EDUCATION GUIDE

Reflection

Ask students:

- Is there anything you would change?
- Did people stop and examine the work?
- Did they show interest or ask questions?
- What effect if any did the artwork have on the school community?

Highlight the students' ability to work with each other, and their contributions to the project's success.

Assessment

Through discussions with the student, examining their worksheets, and witnessing their participation and production of the final project it should be evident that the student:

- Experimented with juxtaposing images to create new meaning
- Researched symbols and patterns from different times, places for possible use in the artwork
- Helped to build a community art work that represents connections within their school and neighborhood

Extensions

If students are interested in further exploration of patterns, see the Craft in America lesson on artist Bisa Butler, whose quilted portraits feature exciting and colorful patterns. If students enjoy creating designs with the protractor, see the lesson on the Poakalani Quilters who create quilts in traditional radial designs.

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