



Harriet Tubman: An Informative and Impressionistic Look

What can be interpreted from impressionistic art?



Grades: 3-5 | **Arts Subject:** Visual Arts
Secondary Subject: English & Language Arts, History



Summary

In this 3-5 lesson, students will conduct research on Harriet Tubman and **create original impressionistic artwork** based on information gathered from an inquiry project. They will explore impressionism and analyze impressionistic artwork depicting Tubman's life. Students will have a writing follow-up comparing their research and impressionistic analysis.

Learning Objectives



Research and gather information about the life of Harriet Tubman.

Analyze impressionistic artwork depicting the life of Harriet Tubman.

Infer information from impressionistic artwork.

Compare and contrast informative v. impressionistic resources.

Create an original impressionistic piece of art about a historical figure.



Standards Alignment



National Core Arts Standards

- 🍏 [VA:Cr1.2.3a](#) Apply knowledge of available resources, tools, and technologies to investigate personal ideas through the art-making process.
- 🍏 [VA:Cr2.1.3a](#) Create personally satisfying artwork using a variety of artistic processes and materials.
- 🍏 [VA:Re.7.1.4a](#) Compare responses to a work of art before and after working in similar media.
- 🍏 [VA:Re.7.1.5a](#) Compare one's own interpretation of a work of art with the interpretation of others.
- 🍏 [VA:Re.7.2.3a](#) Determine messages communicated by an image.
- 🍏 [VA:Re.7.2.4a](#) Analyze components in visual imagery that convey messages.



State Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.1](#) Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.2](#) Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.3](#) Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.7](#) Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur).
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1](#) Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.2](#) Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.3](#) Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.



State Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.7](#) Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.1](#) Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.2](#) Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.3](#) Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.7](#) Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.2](#) Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.2](#) Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.2](#) Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.



Next Generation Science Standards

🍏 1-LS3-1.

Make observations to construct an evidence-based account that young plants and animals are like, but not exactly like, their parents.

🍏 3-LS1-1.

Develop models to describe that organisms have unique and diverse life cycles, but all have in common birth, growth, reproduction, and death.



Background & Materials

Recommended Materials

- [Slide: Harriet Tubman Statues, Paintings, and Photographs](#)
- Book: *Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky* by Faith Ringgold
- [Harriet Tubman Inquiry Project](#)
- [Harriet Tubman Timeline](#)
- [Criteria for Success: Harriet Tubman Essay](#)

Teacher Background

Teachers should review historical information about Harriet Tubman from the following resources:

- 🍏 [Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center](#)
- 🍏 [Harriet Tubman Timeline](#)
- 🍏 [Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway](#)
- 🍏 [National Parks Service: Harriet Tubman](#)

Review photographs and information about the “Swing Low” statue of the Harriet Tubman Memorial in New York City:

- 🍏 [Harriet Tubman Memorial](#)
- 🍏 [Swing Low: Harriet Tubman Memorial](#)
- 🍏 [Slide: Harriet Tubman Statues](#)
- 🍏 [Paintings, and Photographs](#)

Student Prerequisites

Students should know general information about enslaved people, the Underground Railroad, and African American history.



Accessibility Notes

Modify the inquiry handout and resources as needed. Utilize appropriate assistive technologies for the inquiry project and essay portion of the lesson. Allow extra time to complete artwork.



Instruction

Engage



1. **Show a photograph of the “Swing Low” statue from the [Slide: Harriet Tubman Statues, Paintings, and Photographs](#).** Ask students: *What is she carrying? (a snake or serpent) What do you think that snake might represent? (In African American folk tradition, the snake represents one's enemies or evil.) What can you infer about her emotions? (determination, fortitude, drive, purpose, courage, commitment, passion) What is on her skirt? (faces and masks, depicting anonymous passengers on the underground railroad, and West African passport masks) Who do you think this person may be? The nickname for the person depicted in this statue is “the conductor.” Why do you think she was called that? What role did the artist play in bringing these emotions and attitudes to the statue? (She chose the posture, position, ornamentation, symbols, etc.) How did the artist learn about this person to bring these qualities to the statue? (research) What do you call artwork that includes the artist's perception? (impressionistic art)*

Note: On the base of the statue are traditional quilting patterns. Historians are currently debating the role of quilts in the Underground Railroad movement. Read more from this Smithsonian article, [Underground Railroad Quilt Codes: What We Know, What We Believe, and What Inspires Us](#).



2. **Read *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky* by Faith Ringgold.** Ask students: Who was Aunt Harriet? (Harriet Tubman) What was the Underground Railroad? (A south to north passageway for enslaved people to escape.) Why do you think the author put the words "in the sky" in the title? (Enslaved people used the sky to guide them north on their journey.) What do you think it felt like trying to escape slavery? What role do facts (real information) play in this story? (They provide foundational information on which the author can place her own interpretation or impression.) What role do the illustrations play? (Illustrations tell part of the story. The words tell the other part. These illustrations are child-like as the story is seen through the eyes of children on a sky journey.)

3. **Have students take another look at the "Swing Low" statue from the [Slide: Harriet Tubman Statues, Paintings, and Photographs](#).** Ask students: What similarities do you notice between the statue and the picture book? (Both show an artist's interpretation or impression of a determined African American woman who played an important role in history.) What differences do you notice between the statue and the picture book? (The statue is 3-D, the book is 2-D; the statue stands alone; the words and illustrations are part of a whole (book); other answers may vary.) Why do you think this statue faces south rather than north? (Harriet had the determination to return south after each trip north to guide other slaves to freedom. She risked her life each time she did this.) Who do you think may have determined the statue's direction? (the artist in her interpretation) How did the composition of each photograph influence your interpretation of the statue?

Build



- 1. Create a “KWL” chart on chart paper or an interactive board. (K = know, W = want to know, and L = learned).**
Ask students: What do you know about Harriet Tubman? Put their responses in the “K” column.
- 2. In the “W” column, ask students: What do you want to know about Harriet Tubman?** Write student responses in the “W” column.
- 3. Divide students into collaborative inquiry groups.** Introduce the [Harriet Tubman Inquiry Project](#) handout and web resources. Assign one or all of the questions from the “W” column to each group.

Encourage students to record their findings as accurately as possible, including dates, locations, source, etc. Ask students to cite their sources. Allow time for students to research and record their findings.

- 4. Have students present their findings.** Use this as an opportunity for students to compare the information they gathered. If there are conflicting facts, model for students how to confirm cross-check sources for accuracy.
- 5. Record what teams learned in the “L” column.**

Apply



- 1. Share the [Harriet Tubman Timeline](#) with students.** Ask students: *What information from the timeline did we already know from our knowledge and research? What information on the timeline did we learn?* Add this information to the “KWL” chart.
- 2. Share the remaining slides from the [Slide: Harriet Tubman Statues, Paintings, and Photographs](#).** Have students examine the artwork and have a class discussion. Ask students: *What do you notice about the artwork? How are the artwork and photos different? (some show full body, some show just face; some include props, some show just her; etc.) How did the artist or photographer influence the viewer? (inclusion of props, captured facial expressions, clothing, background, etc.) Are photographs realistic or impressionistic? (Although photographs capture a real moment in time, portrait photographers can influence our impression of the person by choices he or she makes in composition.) What information can we take from artwork? (We can view an event in history through the eyes of the artist. They can show emotions from that moment in time. We see their understanding of the event. We must remember, however, that each piece of artwork is only one person’s impression. They are not facts.)*
- 3. Write a compare and contrast essay.** Using information gathered from the “KWL” chart, inquiry project, and personal impressions of artwork, write an essay comparing and contrasting information and impressionistic artwork about Harriet Tubman. Review the [Criteria for Success: Harriet Tubman Essay](#) with students.



- 1. Assess students' knowledge by having them create original impressionistic art that depicts facts about Harriet Tubman.** Ask students to use the resources from the lesson to assist in creating original artwork. Remind students they have control of what the viewer sees or interprets—consider body parts, expression, activity, props, background, illustration style, emotions, character traits, etc. Offer students a variety of drawing or digital illustration tools for this project.
- 2. Create a Harriet Tubman art gallery.** Display students' artwork in the classroom or hallway. Allow time for students to view and interpret the works of art.



- 1. Introduce students to 3-D illustrations, sculpting clay, or modeling software like [SketchUp](#).**
Create 3-D artwork depicting the life of Harriet Tubman.
- 2. Compare picture books, paintings, statues, or other forms of art about a historical figure.**
Examine the artist's technique or style.
- 3. Experiment with portraiture photography.**
Demonstrate for students how different portrait styles offer the viewer diverse interpretations of the same person.



Credits

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“Lesson Connection: A Butterfly’s Life Cycle Dance,”

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