



## Lesson Plan: Art As A Form of Protest

### OVERVIEW

This lesson plan is designed to be used with the film, *Belarusian Waltz*, which shows various ways that an artist protests the virtual dictatorship that governs his homeland of Belarus. Classrooms can use this lesson to explore the use of art as a form of protest and means of bringing about change. Note: This film has English subtitles.

P.O.V. documentaries can be recorded off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from the initial broadcast. In addition, P.O.V. offers a lending library of DVD's and VHS tapes that you can borrow anytime during the school year — FOR FREE! (Please note that the filmmaker's version of *Belarusian Waltz* contains scenes with nudity. To avoid such content, be sure to record the PBS broadcast version off-air or request the 'broadcast version' of the film from the P.O.V. lending library.)

Please visit our Film Library at [http://www.amdoc.org/outreach\\_filmlibrary.php](http://www.amdoc.org/outreach_filmlibrary.php) to find other films suitable for classroom use or to make this film a part of your school's permanent collection.

### OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Describe and react to the painting, "Guernica" by Pablo Picasso.
- Use viewing skills and note-taking strategies to understand and interpret video clips.
- Evaluate other examples of protest art and discuss their effectiveness as a means of bringing about change.
- Create an original piece of protest art.

### GRADE LEVELS

6-12

### SUBJECTS

Civics, Geography, World History, U.S. History, Current Events, Art

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Display method (varies by school) for showing the entire class online video clips and Web site resources
- Computers with access to the Internet
- A map that shows the location of Belarus
- Handout: [Viewing Guide](#) (PDF file)

### ESTIMATED TIME OF COMPLETION

One or two 50-minute classes, plus time outside of class for students to complete their projects

### SUGGESTED CLIPS

[Clip 1: Painting the Portraits](#) (length: 1:05)

The clip begins at 27:34 with the quote “I am painting one of twelve portraits...” and ends at 28:39 with the quote “...Belarus’s Independence Day from fascism.”

Clip 2: The Protest (length: 4:05)

The clip begins at 30:31 with President Lukashenko looking to the side and ends at 34:36 with Pushkin being dragged away by police.

## **BACKGROUND**

The country of Belarus was a province of other nations for most of the 20th century. Formerly a territory under the control of neighboring Poland, Belarus enjoyed a brief independence after the end of World War I. Then, it spent the next 70 years under the control of the Soviet Union, except during World War II, when it was occupied by Nazi Germany. Upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Belarus gained independence in 1991, but maintains close ties with Moscow. Belarus observes its official Independence Day on July 3, commemorating the country’s liberation from German occupation.

In 1994, Alexander Lukashenko was elected in a landslide as Belarus’ first president. The results of subsequent elections have been labeled “flawed” by international observers. Since taking office, Lukashenko has removed presidential term limits, and is able to pick the members of parliament. Lukashenko has described himself as an authoritarian, asserting that only a strong government can protect its people. Many government officials who have fallen out of favor or spoken out against Lukashenko’s authoritarianism have been forced to flee the country. There have also been accusations that Lukashenko’s government simply eliminated some of its internal enemies, including a former deputy prime minister and a former minister of internal affairs. Political dissent is not tolerated, and the government arrests those who speak out against it.

The film *Belarusian Waltz* includes a protest by artist Alexander Pushkin against the Lukashenko regime. Pushkin spent a year painting 12 portraits of people he considers historical heroes in the Belarusian resistance movement. (Official propaganda describes these people as traitors and collaborators.) Since the government wouldn’t allow him to exhibit these paintings in the National Museum in Minsk, he decided to show them on the steps of the National Museum on July 3, 2002, Belarus’ Independence Day. Along with the paintings, Pushkin also displayed Belarus’ former national flag, which is restricted by the Lukashenko regime. The video clips in this lesson show what happened. Following his arrest, Pushkin was held for 24 hours and eventually released.

## **ACTIVITY**

1. For a warm-up activity, display or provide handouts of the mother and child figure ([http://www.visualresistance.org/wordpress/images/quernica\\_template\\_woman.jpg](http://www.visualresistance.org/wordpress/images/quernica_template_woman.jpg)) from Pablo Picasso’s famous “Guernica” painting. (Note: To fit the image on one page when printing, go to “Print Preview” and “Custom” size to 40%) Alternatively, show students the entire painting, which is provided on many Web sites. (For a list of options, do a Google Image search for “Guernica.”) Ask students to study the image and then take five minutes or so to describe it in writing and then record their personal reactions.
2. Invite a few students to share what they’ve written with the class. Then, show that the mother and child figure is a cutout of a larger work that was painted in response to the bombing of the city of Guernica, Spain during the Spanish Civil War. Explain that the painting has been used to protest the violence and suffering of war, both when it was first painted in 1937 and in modern times. (See the Resources section for more details.)

3. Ask students if art can be an effective form of protest and a means for bringing about political and social changes. Ask those who respond to defend their answers.
4. Explain that you are going to show the class two video clips that show an artist in the country of Belarus who uses his paintings to carry out a political protest. Show students where Belarus is on a map and briefly provide some background information on the country (see the “Background” section of this lesson). Then, distribute the Viewing Guide and show the clips.
5. Discuss the questions on the Viewing Guide. What lessons can be learned from Pushkin’s protest? Be sure to let students know that after Pushkin was arrested, he was held for 24 hours and then released.
6. Ask students what kind of protest art they have seen. For each example, identify what message the artist was trying to convey? What symbols were used? What effect did it have on them? On the community or country? How does a country’s form of government affect the expression and influence of protest art? If students have difficulty coming up with examples, feature those included in the Extensions & Adaptations section of this lesson.
7. For homework, have students produce their own piece of art with the purpose of bringing about political or social change. Students can draw from their beliefs, personal experiences, current events, or other sources to inspire their creations. Provide a deadline appropriate for the needs of your class.
8. Once the student artwork has been turned in, allow time for a class “gallery walk” so students can view the work of their peers. Consider providing refreshments for the “event.”

### **ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS**

Students can be assessed on:

- Completion of the Viewing Guide.
- Participation in class discussions.
- Clarity of the protest messages in their works of art.

### **EXTENSIONS & ADAPTATIONS**

- View and discuss an online [video clip](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2008/lastconquistador/for_video2.html) ([http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2008/lastconquistador/for\\_video2.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2008/lastconquistador/for_video2.html)) from another P.O.V. film that presents an example of protest art. *The Last Conquistador* tells the story of a public arts project in El Paso, TX that features a Spanish conquistador named Juan de Oñate, who brought the Spanish language and culture to the El Paso region, but who was also responsible for the deaths and foot amputations of many Acoma Pueblo Indians. (For more background information, please see the related [lesson plan](#).) (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2008/lastconquistador/for.html>) As part of their protest of this public arts project, the Acoma created a statue of an amputated foot and made signs that said, “Oñate My foot.” After watching the clip, compare and contrast the Acoma’s strategy of using art to protest the government with Pushkin’s efforts in *Belarusian Waltz*.

- Tap other P.O.V. films that include forms of protest art, such as *Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars*, which features music with political themes, or *Wrestling with Angels*, which features plays with political and social messages. Each film has companion Web site resources and educator activities to support their use in the classroom.
- Learn about a group of artists who paint protest images to honor the fallen at the sites of suicide bomber attacks in Sri Lanka. The FRONTLINE/World Web site feature, "Fighting Terror with Paint Brushes" includes a slide show (<http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/srilanka/slideshow.html>) of the work of these "road painters" who use their art to spread their slogan, "Secure the sanctity of life." Watch the slide show to expand the class discussion of protest art strategies, emphasizing how art could be used to promote healing in the wake of community violence.
- Find out how other artists in Belarus are sharing their work despite the restrictions of the Lukashenko government. Listen to the NPR story, "Belarus' Arts Underground Chips Away at Regime" (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5450403>) and outline what these artists are doing to bring about social change. Review what risks they take to share their art. Would students be willing to face the same dangers?
- Examine additional examples of art designed to bring about change. An excellent source of thought-provoking artwork is provided by the British artist Banksy's Web site (<http://www.banksy.co.uk/>). (Be sure to preview the site to determine what is appropriate for your classroom.) One recommended Banksy work (<http://www.banksy.co.uk/indoors/01.html>) shows shopping carts and other trash in Claude Monet's famous Water Lily Pond. Have students identify the message of the piece and evaluate its potential as a tool for promoting change.
- Explore court cases that affect how the First Amendment does or does not protect artistic expression. The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression provides a number of case studies (<http://www.tjcenter.org/ArtOnTrial/index.html>) that summarize court cases involving artwork and any surrounding issues (e.g., censorship, artistic expression in public schools, political commentary). Have student groups each review an assigned case, summarize it for the class, and assess whether the outcome of the case is consistent with their views for what should be protected by the First Amendment. (Warning: Some examples contain sexual content. Be sure to preview before classroom use to select the cases you want to feature.) Ask students to also read the article, "Artistic Freedom: Government Challenge" (<http://art.sdsu.edu/geninfo/homepages/art157/resources/index.html>), in which an art professor shares his reflections on artistic freedom in China and the United States. Use these resources as the basis for a debate on the question: Does the First Amendment effectively protect artistic freedom?
- Consider whether political cartoons are a form of art that can bring about social change. Have students bring in examples of political cartoons to analyze. With a partner, students should identify what real people, if any, are depicted in their

cartoons and how they are portrayed. Also, what symbols are included in the cartoon and what do they represent? What is the central message of the cartoon? What events or issues inspired the cartoon? Ask pairs to conference with another pair to show and tell about their findings.

## **RESOURCES**

### **“Art for a Change”**

<http://www.art-for-a-change.com/blog/>

This blog by artist Mark Vallen features monthly posts since 2004 that focus on how people can use their art to change the world.

### **“Guernica” (painting)**

[www.images.google.com](http://www.images.google.com)

Type in “Guernica” to find pictures of the painting.

## **STANDARDS**

These standards are drawn from "Content Knowledge," a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>.

### **Arts and Communications**

Standard 2: Knows and applies appropriate criteria to arts and communications projects.

*Level IV, Benchmark 8:* Critiques art works in terms of the historical and cultural context in which they were created.

Standard 3: Uses critical and creative thinking in various arts and communications settings.

*Level IV, Benchmark 8:* Knows ways in which different sources are used to produce art forms.

### **Civics**

Standard 2: Understands the essential characteristics of limited and unlimited governments.

*Level IV, Benchmark 4:* Understands how relationships between government and civil society in constitutional democracies differ from those in authoritarian and totalitarian regimes.

Standard 26: Understands issues regarding the proper scope and limits of rights and the relationships among personal, political and economic rights.

### **Visual Arts**

Standard 4: Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

### **Geography**

Standard 13: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface.

### **Language Arts**

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

### **World History**

Standard 44: Understands the search for community, stability, and peace in an independent world.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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### **Background Sources**

"Country Profile: Belarus." British Broadcasting Corporation. Updated March 5, 2008. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country\\_profiles/1102180.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1102180.stm); "Profile: Europe's last dictator?" British Broadcasting Corporation. September 10, 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/116265.stm>.