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The following lessons were created by **Katrina Smith**, a teacher participating in the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute for Teachers entitled Touch the Past: Archaeology of the Upper Mississippi River Region.

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Symbols – Past, Present, & Future

Grade Level: Middle School

Subject: Art

Objectives:

Students will be able to...

- Analyze symbols used by ancient peoples (petroglyphs, hieroglyphics, pottery, etc.)
- Understand the basic concepts and methodologies used by archaeologists
- Design a time line of their life constructed solely of symbols (abstract or literal)
- Compare their timelines with those made by others in the class
- Guess about the experiences that their classmates were trying to convey through their symbols
- Examine symbols that we use and see today (logos, tattoos, written language, etc.)
- Discuss what people 2,000 years from now might think about our culture based on our symbols

Standards:

- NY State Art Standard 1: Creating, Performing and Participating in the Arts
Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performance in the arts (dance, music, theatre, and visual arts) and participate in various roles in the arts.
- NY State Art Standard 4: Understanding the Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of the Arts
Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

Duration:

This project unit would take roughly 2 weeks to complete with 45-minute periods every day. However, it can be shortened or lengthened depending on time restraints.

Materials & Supplies:

- PowerPoint Presentation
- Examples or pictures of artifacts containing ancient symbols
- Timeline Assignment Introduction Sheet
- Receipt paper
- Color pencils
- Scissors
- Rubric for grading
- Examples of symbols we see every day (Logo application)
- Space for displaying all timelines for comparison

Vocabulary:

- **Archaeology** – The study of human activity through the recovery and examination of artifacts left behind
- **Petroglyph** – rock art and images created by removing part of a stone surface by incising, picking, carving, and abrading
- **Symbol** – A drawing used to represent an idea, feeling, experience, etc.
- **Logo** – A symbol representing a company or organization
- **Timeline** – A linear representation showing particular events that have taken place
- **Event** – Specific experiences or things that have happened
- **Sequence** – How events flow together and are connected
- **Representation** – Displaying one thing in another way
- **Self-Reflection** – Thinking about yourself, what you've done, and how you feel about it

Background:

In order to implement this project, the teacher will need to develop a background understanding of archaeological processes, methodologies, and artifacts. This project can be used with students of various ages, backgrounds, and interests. It can be adapted into a short term activity or a longer term project. Students need no special background understanding of ancient art. They can investigate and learn about this as part of the process.

Procedure:

Introduction – Connection to the Past

- Do Now: If you were to come across this symbol left behind by an ancient civilization, what might you infer they were trying to portray?
- Ask the class to come up with examples of ancient symbols (petroglyphs, hieroglyphics, potter, cave paintings, etc.)

- What do these symbols tell us? Make a connection to archaeology and archaeological processes, procedures, and ethics.
- Use the example activity from “Intrigue of the Past” by Shelley Smith (p.97-98) looking at different analyses of one art panel to show that there is not one correct interpretation of ancient symbols. Some symbols are very obvious but others are up for debate.

Middle – Connection to the Present – Timeline Project

- Ask students what a timeline is and how they are used.
 - Give examples of various timelines.
- Introduce Project (see attached assignment sheet)
 - Pass out project rubric
- Designate time for students to create a timeline of their lives out of 10-15 symbols (no written language) using receipt paper and color pencils
- Share out and compare timelines
- Discuss symbols of today (logos, tattoos, written language)
 - Play logo application game to see how good the students are at guessing logos

Closure – Connection to the Future

- Share “Mysteries of the Motel” by David Macaulay. This book tells the story of people living in the year 4022 looking back at our culture and making inferences about our society.
- Look back at the students’ timelines and discuss what future people might infer about us based on the symbols.

Evaluation:

Have students reflect and evaluate their own projects based on the rubric. Give a grade based on their self-reflection in combination with a grade from the teacher.

Links/Extension:

This project can easily be linked to world history courses. A connection might be made to foreign language, especially Chinese language symbols. In art class, this project might lead directly into a realistic self portrait project.

References:

Macaulay, David. Mysteries of the Motel. Graphia (October, 1979). ISBN #0395284252

Smith, Shelley J., Jeanne M. Moe, Kelly A Letts and Danielle M. Paterson. Intrigue of the past: Investigating archaeology : a teacher's activity guide for fourth through seventh grades. The United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management (1996). ASIN: B0006OYFMO

Symbols: Past, Present, & Future

Assignment

We will be studying symbols and using symbols to represent different parts of our lives on a time line. We will start by investigating ancient symbols and archaeological processes and procedures. Then you will design three symbols to represent three specific life experiences. Afterward, you will use a long piece of receipt paper to represent your entire life visually in a sequence of symbols. You will need to design 10-15 symbols and you cannot use any written language. Your symbols can be literal (and look like recognizable items or ideas) or they can be abstract (and not look like something another person might recognize).

Background

What is a Timeline?

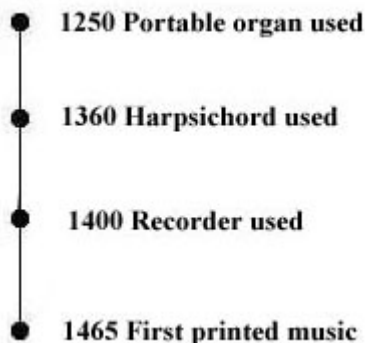
A timeline is an actual picture of events that happened in history. Timelines can be LINEAR or COMPARATIVE:

A **linear timeline** shows a picture of events as they occurred in a certain period of time. Use a linear timeline for one subject and time frame. A linear timeline can be written horizontally or vertically, for example:

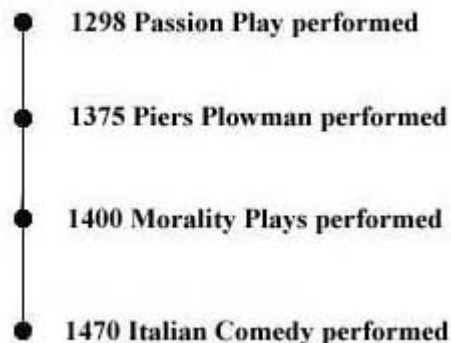


A **comparative timeline** shows two or more subject areas which occurred at the same time; it shows readers the "big picture." A comparative timeline might compare historical events in two or more countries or compare two or more subjects like music and theater. A comparative timeline could look like this:

MUSIC



THEATER



Materials

- Pencil (please bring your own)
- Practice paper
- Receipt paper
- Color pencils
- Markers
- Scissors

Vocabulary

- **Archaeology** – The study of human activity through the recovery and examination of artifacts left behind
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Rubric for *Symbols: Past, Present, & Future* Project

1	2	3	4	5
Student did not hand in the assignment.	The assignment was unfinished on the due date. Many of the directions were not followed (for example: there may have been only a few symbols completed) and there is little evidence of creativity in the project.	The assignment was unfinished on the due date. One or more of the directions were not followed (example: written language was used and/or less than 8 symbols were completed) but there is evidence of creativity in the project.	The student completed the assignment on time. It may not look completely finished but there is evidence of creativity. 10-15 symbols were completed and no written language was used. All directions were followed in completing the assignment.	The student completed the project on time or early. It was completed correctly following all the necessary directions. 10-15 symbols were completed and no written language was used. The student demonstrated appropriate creativity.