“The Art of War”:
Trench Art of World War I

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Grade Level:
6 – 8

Objectives:
At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to
- Gain an understanding of the involvement of art in World War I and also how World War I changed the world of art dramatically

Guiding Question:
How do art and warfare impact each other?

Connections to Common Core:
CCSS.ELA–Literacy.RH.6–8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
CCSS.ELA–Literacy.RH.6–8.7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
CCSS.ELA–Literacy.RH.6–8.8 Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.
CCSS.ELA–Literacy.RH.6–8.9 Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

Connections to C3 Framework:
D1.5.6–8. Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple points of views represented in the sources.
D2.His.1.6–8. Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.
D2.His.5.6–8. Explain how and why perspectives of people have changed over time.

Documents Used:
Articles for Teacher Background Knowledge:
Reed Johnson, “Art Forever Changed by World War I”
http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jul/21/entertainment/la-et-cm-world-war-art-20120722

“Australian Veteran’s Health: WWI.”
Donna Kaiser, et al. “Call for Art Therapy Research on Treatment of PTSD.”
http://www.americanarttherapyassociation.org/upload/callforresearchptsd.pdf

Diary Entries / Sketches:
Albert Earl Robinson – (140th Infantry, 35th Division). Born in Bangor, Maine, Robinson lived in Boston, but was attending art school in Kansas City. After the war, he worked in the editorial department of the Kansas City Star for many years. He wrote many feature stories and made many drawings for the Star, some about World War I. He also wrote short stories and several one-act plays which were published in magazines. One of these plays, Canvas Arches, won a local theatre prize. His wife published his memoir, An Epic Day, after his death in 1964. Some material from the scanned diary is published in this book.
www.theworldwar.org/NHD

Audio Recording:
http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/item/1237

Images and Artifacts included in PowerPoint:
“French in Trench”
www.theworldwar.org/NHD

Bohnenberger, Gustave. Photograph, 1915
Family collection of the author.
Gustave Bohnenberger was born in 1898 in Huchenfeld, Germany. He was in the German trenches in Belgium during the Christmas Truce of 1914.

Bohnenberger, Gustave. Christmas Card River Pebble, 1914
Family collection of the author.
Gustave was in the German trenches in Belgium during the Christmas Truce of 1914 where he painted this Christmas “card” to his Mother. It is painted on a river pebble with natural minerals found in the trenches. He was 16 years old at the time.

Bohnenberger, Gustave. Photograph collection, 1918–1928
Family collection of the author.
These family photographs of Gustave Bohnenberger show his wartime service in the Belgian trenches in 1918, as well as Gustave with friends shortly after the end of the war. Shortly after the war, Gustave married his wife Erna, but suffered from PTSD from his experiences in the war and therefore he had a very hard time adjusting. Ottmar was born in 1919. Gustave experienced two failed suicide attempts in 1920 and 1921. In 1922,
the family moved to the United States in the hope that Gustave would fare better in a new environment. Sadly, he committed suicide in 1928, and was found by his son, Ottmar.

“Letter Opener Trench Art”
http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/gwa/document/8762/2604
This letter opener was made from bullets and scrap metal by Sid Roberts. He was gassed twice and returned to another regiment, the Engineers. Being gassed saved his life as rest of his comrades were all killed.

“Candle Holder Trench Art”
http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/gwa/document/8941/3606
This candle holder was made from a cut-down 18 pounder shell case, with an added handle. The case was manufactured in 1916 and last refilled in November 1917.

“Patch Work Cushion Trench Art”
http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/gwa/item/7820?CISOBOX=1&REC=1
This patchwork cushion contains a birthday wish message. It is decorated with pins, beads, and an Army Service Corps badge, made by F. Thompson while convalescing after being wounded in the feet.

Otto Dix, *Storm troopers advancing under a gas attack from the portfolio War*, 1924

“Princess Mary Christmas Box”
These boxes were decorative brass tins sent by Princess Mary to members of the British, Colonial and Indian Armed Forces for Christmas 1914. Over 426,000 of these tins were distributed to those serving on Christmas Day 1914. The tins were filled with various items including tobacco, confectionary, spices, pencils, a Christmas card and a picture of the princess.

**Lesson Description:**

**Overview:** Throughout history, the creation of art has been a natural remedy for stress. This lesson will look at World War I as the first modern war as a result of modern weaponry and atrocities. As a result, PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) occurred in large numbers. However, this stress related disease had not yet become a diagnosis at that time, but was dubbed “Shell–Shock” and viewed as a “moral deficiency” of someone’s character. Most soldiers suffered in silence. The only relief that many soldiers had for this illness was art, and art in all types was created in the horrific conditions of the
trenches on the Western Front. Before this lesson is taught, students should have been taught about trench warfare.

**Time:** This lesson can range from one to five days depending on the depth of knowledge that the teacher would like the students to acquire.

**Materials:**
- Albert Robinson letters
- “Australian Veteran’s Health” article
- Veterans Health Graphic Organizer
- PowerPoint file: Art and World War I (includes teacher notes)
- Primary Source Analysis Sheet
- Article and discussion questions: “Art Forever Changed by World War I” (for optional activity)

**Lesson Preparation:**
- Make one set of Robinson letters for each group of 5–6 students
- “Australian Veteran’s Health” article – copy 1 set for each group of 5–6 students
- Make one copy of the veteran’s health graphic organizer and primary source analysis tool per student

**Day 1 Procedure:**
- Give each group (5 to 6 students) one copy of each of the Robinson letters, and the “Australian Veteran’s Health” article.
- Give each student the Australian veterans health graphic organizer and a cartoon analysis sheet. They should read the article and letters and fill out the graphic organizer and cartoon analysis. A class discussion should follow about the horrors of World War I trench warfare, “shell shock,” how health professionals and the population in general looked at this affliction, and Robinson’s experiences and his artwork. The following question should then be posed to the class and answered in a paragraph with supporting evidence from the article and letters.
  - “Why do you think Robinson drew the cartoons on each of his letters?”

**Day 2 Procedure:**
- The teacher should play the audio recording by Henry Williamson describing the Christmas truce of 1914 for the students. Then the teacher should show the image of the Princess Mary Christmas Box and pose the following question to the students:
“How do you think the soldiers in the trenches feelings would differ, if they received a utilitarian box, rather than a beautiful box, filled with the same necessities?”

- Using the available PowerPoint file, students should then try and analyze the pictures of Gustave Bohnenberger’s and other soldiers’ artwork that was created in the trenches during World War I. Ask students to infer the answers.
  - “What was the object originally?”
  - “What was the object made into?”
  - “How they were made in the trenches?”
  - The answers to the questions are in brief summaries in the “notes” section of the PowerPoint.

Day 3 Procedure (Optional):
- Depending on the class’ maturity level, the teacher can discuss consequences of PTSD on Gustave Bohnenberger. Bohnenberger had two attempted suicides in the early 1920s and committed suicide in 1928.
- The students will then read the article, “Art Forever Changed by World War I,” by Reed Johnson and answer the discussion questions.
- They will then analyze the painting by Otto Dix, *Storm troopers advancing under a gas attack from the portfolio War* (1924). The following questions should be posed to the students:
  - What images are in the painting?
  - What is happening in the painting?
  - What is the artist trying to portray in the painting?
  - How does the painting make you feel when you view it?

Assessment Materials:
- Response to Robinson letters
- graphic organizers
- class participation in discussions

Methods for Extension:
- The main lesson is on day 1. If time permits the lesson can be extended with day 2.
- The lesson can also be extended further by having students do independent research about an artist, other than Dix, or another piece of artwork that was influenced by World War I. They would then write a short essay of his/her analysis.
• The student would then record a podcast of his/her analysis which can be posted to share with classmates. The URL of the audio can then be linked to an image of the artwork with a QR code (which can be attached to the artwork by printing the QR code and gluing it to an image of the artwork). QR codes can be created very easily on a QR website. The students can then have an artwork “walk” where each student uses an iPod or phone to access the QR code and listen to the student’s analysis of his/her artwork.

• The artist research could also be done across the curriculum in tandem with an art or language arts teacher.

Adaptations:
• “A picture is worth a thousand words.” This old saying is very true when special needs and English Language Learner students are concerned. These students can benefit from a visual of a concept and will make connections at a more rapid rate when more than one modality is used such as auditory and visual.
Bibliography:

**Primary Sources**


**Secondary Sources**


“From the fiction of Hemingway to the savagely critical paintings of Otto Dix, WWI reshaped the notion of art, just as it forever altered the perception of war.”

-By Reed Johnson
Los Angeles Times; July 21, 2012

“Art therapists have reported remarkable results from work with combat veterans, traumatized children…and survivors of major disasters including the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Theorists have identified psychological and neurological mechanisms that most likely are operating in art therapy indicating it has unique capacities to promote recovery from PTSD.”

-Call for Art Therapy Research on Treatment of PTSD
2005 American Art Therapy Association, Inc.

Life in the Trenches
- Australian Veteran’s Health: WWI article
- Albert E. Robinson Letters and cartoons
Audio Description of the Christmas Truce

- Henry, Williamson: *Description of Christmas Truce, 1914.*
- In 1914 he was a private in the London Regt, and later served as officer with 208th Coy Machine Gun Corps in GB. This is a description of a conversation with German officer and on Western Front, during Christmas truce, 12/1914
Princess Mary Christmas Box

“How do you think the soldiers in the trenches feelings would differ about receiving a beautiful box, rather than a utilitarian box, filled with the same necessities?”

Gustave Bohnenberger
Belgium Trenches 1914

Why do you think he took the time and effort to paint a rock?
What do you think the rock says?
Who do you think the rock was intended for?

In the United States 1927

In Germany after the war early 1920s
War is something so animal-like: hunger, lice, slime, these crazy sounds. War was something horrible, but nonetheless something powerful... Under no circumstances could I miss it! It is necessary to see people in this unfettered condition in order to know something about them.

– Otto Dix

Art Forever Changed by World War I

By Reed Johnson; LA Times; July 21, 2012
### Australian Veteran’s Health: World War I Graphic Organizer

Fill out the chart below with information from the article: *Australian Veteran’s Health: WWI*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health Issues</th>
<th>Summary and effects on soldiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of Population who were Soldiers</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Injuries and Deaths</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Wounds and Treatment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disease in the Trenches</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chemical Warfare</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychological Trauma</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answer the following questions:

1. How was psychological trauma looked at by medical professionals and how did they treat the condition?

2. How did Albert E. Robinson describe life in the trenches in the letter?
Describe what you see.

What do you notice first?

What people and objects are shown?

What, if any, words do you see?

What other details can you see?

What's happening in the cartoon?

What tools were used to create this?

What do you see that looks different than it would in a photograph?

What was happening when this cartoon was made?

Who do you think was the audience for this cartoon?
Discussion Questions: *Art Forever Changed by World War I*

What causality did the art world have as a result of World War I?

What is Modernism as described by the author?

List three writers who emerged from World War I.

List three painters who emerged from World War I.

What was Morpurgo’s quote about how the British people felt about World War I?

What two fields of art arose from World War I?

According to the author, what was the war’s most enduring legacy?