

Who is Cyrus Dallin?

Cyrus Edwin Dallin (1861-1944) Springville, Utah
Sacajawea, 1915
Sculpture-bronze cast, 36"

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING (History, Aesthetics, Criticism)

What is this art form called? (Sculpture.) Who is the sculpture of? Would this be as interesting an artwork if it was an unidentified young Native American woman? Why? Does this sculpture depict more than one person? (Yes, the infant son of Sacajawea is carried papoose style on her back.) What could the statue be trying to portray about Sacajawea in her stance, gesture and position? What are some advantages and disadvantages of sculpture over painting? (Many kinds, especially bronzes, last basically forever, can have more than one copy made, have 3 dimensions, can be huge or small--expensive materials and processes, needs a large studio with special materials and equipment.)

ACTIVITIES

1. Visual Arts-expressing

Objective: The students will demonstrate an understanding of American monumental sculpture by discussing, researching, and analyzing a piece of sculpture.

Show the class the image of Sacajewea, and of Paul Revere and images of other sculpture from before Dallin's time. Use some of the following information in discussing the reasons for monumental sculpture and its history in the early United States.

In the introductory essay to the catalog of a show of Dallin's small bronzes and plasters at the Rockwell Museum in New York, Fred Licht says that monumental sculpture went through a period of inactivity that started with the French and American revolutionary wars. He states that monumental sculpture's purpose is to celebrate and to hand down to future generations the ideas and values of the past. He also asserts that a society that erects sculptures is one which holds some common religious beliefs in eternity--the length of time the sculptures will last--and in a divine right of rulers. This belief in a divine right means that the community will see military victories as God-given and kings, religious, and political rulers as part of a long, sanctified chain of office, irregardless of the worthiness of a given ruler. The monuments celebrate... "the power behind that individual's destiny." Post-revolutionary Europe and America had forever lost the belief in a rule by divine right and had deliberately and violently separated themselves from the past.

Another pragmatic consideration is cost. Sculptors need large studios and work with expensive materials. Although kings and those who had ruled by "divine right" never answered to the public for such costs, a parliamentary government was made up of representatives who would be censured for spending the public's money on "luxuries" like monumental sculpture.

Licht goes on to state that America faced some separate and peculiar challenges about monumental sculpture. Monuments flourish in stable communities where members assume their children and grandchildren will remain in the community to receive the values transmitted through the sculpture. America, except for the native population, was composed entirely of immigrants who had already undertaken long journeys to arrive in this country. Having journeyed so far, they were willing to pull up tenuous roots and move again. For example, within ten years of the establishment of the pilgrim colonies in Massachusetts, a group had broken off and followed Roger Williams to begin the colonization of Rhode Island. The country remained a mobile, diverse mixture.

Another practical concern was that America, throughout most of the 19th century, had neither the materials nor the techniques for producing large sculptures, so Americans who wanted to sculpt had to travel to Europe.

In addition, monumental sculpture is an urban genre, and until after the civil war America's inhabitants lived more in rural areas than in urban. However, Licht points out that while the rural culture was an obstruction to the development of a monumental tradition of sculpture, it facilitated the development of experimental and original sculpture such as land art or Calder's mobiles, which took the accepted definitions of sculpture and turned them upside down.

The last point Licht makes about the course of American sculpture is the conflict with religion. Until the time of the reformation, the Catholic religion and Church was a unifying force for the production and display of both secular and religious sculpture. After the Reformation however, the Protestants sought to avoid any touch of idolatry in their lives and one of the sacrificial emblems was sculpture. So strong was America's Protestantism--even where there was no practical Catholic tradition, that for many years weather vanes and decorative objects were the only acceptable sculpture.

However, during the 19th century, a growing tradition of erecting monuments to America's cherished values brought about the resurgence of monumental sculpture and established several American sculptors as major contributors; among these was Cyrus Dallin.

Licht, Fred. 1995 *Random Thoughts of an Outsider: Monumental Sculpture in America*. Cyrus E. Dallin: His Small Bronzes and Plasters. Rockwell Museum, Corning. 9-19

Adapt the above information to your class' age level and time constraints for the activity. The most important idea for the children to understand is that the American Revolution permanently changed some political and religious ideas that influenced monumental sculpture. From the ashes of the old sculptural tradition, a new tradition was formed that had some vital differences.

Cyrus Dallin is one of a group of American sculptors who featured Native Americans in much of his work. While his *Sacajewea* is a standing figure, he gained prominence for a series of male Indian figures mounted on horses.

Show the children some examples of Early European sculpture and then show them examples of Dallin's pieces. Ask what the differences are.

2. Visual Arts-making

Objective: The students will explore the limitations on creativity by creating an artwork within imposed boundaries

Show the students *Sacajewea* and talk to the students about bronze sculpture. (See Fairbanks a, General Sculpture Information at the end of the Activities.) Ask the students what kinds of limitations bronze puts on artists. Then discuss other art media and their inherent limitations. Ask students what other kinds of limitations an artist might have. (Lack of training, physical disability, lack of natural talent, money for supplies, etc.)

Give the students various media (or all the same kind) and build in some challenging limitations. For example, a very small piece of clay, two or three paint or pastel colors, one writing implement, a huge piece of paper and a pen, three sheets of paper and nothing else, a group of found objects, etc. Give the students a specified amount of time to work within the given limitations of their media and produce an artwork.

After the time is up, have everyone display their finished pieces. Then discuss the experience. How do they feel about their pieces? Were the limitations only a difficulty or did the limitations become part of the solution? How does this art experience relate to life in general?

Variation: Use the same introduction but allow students to choose the area they want to work in, or have the whole class do the activity for dance, music, or literature. Many good examples of work within set limitations is available: Haiku, sonnets, short stories, 12-tone row music, found-sounds music, dances using specific props, music, patterns. (The Alvin Ailey Dance Ensemble does a marvelous piece called "Dance With Three Army Blankets.") Also, see the following music activity.

3. Music

Objective: The students will learn expand their understanding of music by exploring the possibilities of the pentatonic scale.

This activity requires a piano, some rhythm instruments, and at least one class member, parent, visitor, or teacher with music experience.

Show the students the images of Sacajewea and Indian Burial. Tell the students that although many cultural differences exist among Native American tribes (you may want the students to name some), all their music is built on the pentatonic scale--the notes played by the black keys on a piano. If possible, play some excerpts from recordings of Native American music. Then divide the children into two groups and assign each one of the following four-beat patterns:

pattern A. | 1 | 1/2 1/2 | 1 | rest |

pattern B. | rest | rest | 1/2 1/2 | 1 |

Have the students practice clapping the two rhythms. Then give a student from each group the chance to make up a pattern that fits their group's rhythm pattern and uses the black keys of the piano. Have the two students play on the low and middle ranges of the piano, and have your music person improvise on the high range. Students not playing the piano can play rhythm instruments (using the patterns) or dance.

You also can have the students dancing use one of the two rhythm patterns and make up a simple stepping pattern in that rhythm.

Give as many students as possible, or as are interested, a chance to play the piano or a specific percussion instrument. If you have students who play other instruments, you can have them do the same activity. You will need to group instruments according to their key, or to have students play different notes so they sound good together. Get your music person to help with this.

Evaluation: Unless this is a music class, you will probably want to evaluate the students' learning by giving check marks for participation. You may also want to give a brief, fill-in-the-blank quiz using questions such as the following: What scale is Native American music played in? (Pentatonic.) What does the name mean? (Five tones or notes.) How do you play that scale on the piano? (Play just the black keys.)

4. Social Studies

Objective: The students will increase their understanding of early U. S. History by reading, listening to, researching, writing, or drawing illustrations about the journey of Lewis and Clark (and their Indian guide, Sacajawea) to find a Northwest Passage to the Pacific Ocean.

As an introduction to the story of Lewis and Clark's journey to find a Northwest Passage, show *Sacajawea* and ask the class if anyone knows or can guess who the sculpture depicts. Then ask the students why this particular woman was important enough that an artist chose to sculpt her many years after she died. Explain her contributions to the success of the journey either now or during the activity. Point out her particular language skills and knowledge of the geography and how this came to be.

Choose an age-appropriate and interesting format for teaching the students the story of this important exploratory journey. Many resources are available, including actual diary excerpts, maps, and drawings done by members of the expedition. A few possible ideas are to read and tell the class the basic story, to have the class act out an important scene, to make a bulletin board with each student assigned to portray one specific scene, or to make a large map with the journey traced and important events recorded or illustrated by the students.

Evaluation: Because there are endless possible versions of this activity, it is impossible to provide specific evaluation strategies. A short answer test may be appropriate, an evaluation of accuracy of detail, comparison with specific criteria for the content and language usage in written work, or just whether the child sat reasonably still while listening to a story version.

5. Language Arts-storytelling/character development and Theater

Objectives:

1. Students will create a story that teaches a principle.
2. Students will observe the sculpture *Sacajawea* by Dallin and make some judgments about what the sculptor is trying to portray.

Resources needed:

1. Image or replica of *Sacajawea*.
2. Native American story that teaches a principle.

Teacher Preparation:

1. Be prepared to tell a Native American story without reading it.

Student Preparation:

1. Show the students the image or replica of *Sacajawea*.
2. By looking at the sculpture answer these questions (or similar questions). Tell why you give the answers you do:
 - a. What kind of character do you think she has?
 - b. How do you think the sculptor feels about this person?
 - c. What kind of mother do you think she was?
 - d. What kinds of things do you think she taught her son?
 - e. How do you think she taught him?

Perhaps the students could be divided into groups, each with their own picture of *Sacajawea* (or a large image of the sculpture could be shown so all could see it well). Each group could answer the questions and then share their answers with the rest of the class in a teacher led discussion.

3. Native Americans often teach their children about how to behave through stories. *Sacajawea* may have taught her son through a story like the one I'm going to share with you. Share the story you have prepared. (An example of a story is included.)
4. Have the children role play the story as you tell it again. No dialogue.
5. If there is interest, play through the story again, allowing the children to interject dialogue if they choose to.
6. Evaluate the playing.
7. Discuss with the students what the story is teaching.
8. Brainstorm with the students and list on the board some other kinds of behaviors or principles that parents usually want their children to learn.
9. Ask the students to choose one of those behaviors or principles and write their own story using animal characters to teach the behavior or principle.

The Deceived Blind Men

[Menomini story, taken from Hoffman, "Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology," xiv, 211.)

[This story should be told in your own words, perhaps adding some more dialogue, sound effects, or action to make it more interesting when it is acted out by the students.]

There was a large settlement on the shore of a lake, and among its people were two very old blind men. It was decided to remove these men to the opposite side of the lake, where they might live in safety, as the settlement was exposed to the attack of enemies, when they might easily be captured and killed. So the relations of the old men got a canoe, some food, a kettle, and a bowl and started across the lake, where they built for them a wigwam in a grove some distance from the water. A line was stretched from the door of the wigwam to a post in the water, so that they would have no difficulty in helping themselves. The food and vessels were put into the wigwam, and after the relations of the old men promised them that they would call often and keep them provided with everything that was needful, they returned to their settlement.

The two old blind men now began to take care of themselves. On one day one of them would do the cooking while the other went for water, and on the next day they would change about in their work, so that their labors were evenly divided. As they knew just how much food they required for each meal, the quantity prepared was equally divided, but was eaten out of the one bowl which they had.

Here they lived in contentment for several years; but one day a Raccoon, which was following the water's edge looking for crawfish, came to the line which had been stretched from the lake to the wigwam. The Raccoon thought it rather curious to find a cord where he had not before observed one, and wondered to himself, "What is this? I think I shall follow this cord to see where it leads." So he followed the path along which the cord was stretched until he came to the wigwam. Approaching very cautiously, he went up to the entrance, where he saw the two old men asleep on the ground, their heads at the door and their feet directed toward the heap of hot coals within. The Raccoon sniffed about and soon found there was something good to eat within the wigwam, but he decided not to enter at once for fear of waking the old men; so he retired a short distance to hide himself and to see what they would do.

Presently the old men awoke, and one said to the other, "My friend, I am getting hungry; let us prepare some food." "Very well," replied his companion, "you go down to the lake and fetch some water while I get the fire started."

The Raccoon heard this conversation and, wishing to deceive the old man, immediately ran to the water, untied the cord from the post, and carried it to a clump of bushes, where he tied it. When the old man came along with his kettle to get water, he stumbled around the bush until he found the end of the cord; then he began to dip his kettle down upon the ground for water. Not finding any, he slowly returned and said to his companion, "We shall surely die, because the lake is dried up and the brush is grown where we used to get water. What shall we do?"

"That cannot be," responded his companion, "for we have not been asleep long enough for the brush to grow upon the lake bed. Let me go out to try if I cannot get some water." So taking the kettle from his friend, he started off.

So as soon as the first old man had returned to the wigwam, the Raccoon took the cord back and tied it where he had found it, then waited to see the result.

The second old man now came along, entered the lake, and getting his kettle full of water, returned to the wigwam, saying as he entered, "My friend, you told me what was not true. There is water enough, for here, you see, I have our kettle full." The other could not understand this at all, and wondered what had caused the deception.

The Raccoon approached the wigwam and entered to await the cooking of the food. When it was ready, the pieces of meat, for there were eight of them, were put into the bowl and the old men sat down on the ground facing each other, with the bowl between

them. Each took a piece of meat, and they began to talk of various things and were enjoying themselves.

The Raccoon now quietly removed four pieces of meat from the bowl and began to eat them, enjoying the feast even more than the old blind men. Presently one of them reached into the bowl to get another piece of meat, and finding that only two pieces remained, said, "My friend, you must be very hungry to eat so rapidly; I have had but one piece, and there are but two pieces left."

The other replied, "I have not taken them, but suspect you have eaten them yourself," whereupon the other replied more angrily than before. Thus they argued and the Raccoon, desiring to have more sport, tapped each of them on the face. The old men, each believing the other had struck him, began to fight rolling over the floor of the wigwam, upsetting the bowl and the kettle, and causing the fire to be scattered. The Raccoon then took the two remaining pieces of meat and made his exit from the wigwam, laughing ha, ha, ha, ha; whereupon the old men instantly ceased their strife, for they now knew they had been deceived. The Raccoon then remarked to them, "I have played a nice trick on you; you should not find fault with each other so easily." Then the Raccoon continued his crawfish hunting along the lake shore.