

# Who is Cyrus Dallin?

Cyrus Edwin Dallin (1861-1944) Springville, Utah  
**Appeal to the Great Spirit**, 1912  
Sculpture-bronze cast, 39" x 37-3/4"

## SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

### QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING (History, Aesthetics, Criticism)

What is this artwork made of? Why do artists use bronze for sculptures? What other materials do artists use for sculpture?

This is Dallin's most famous statue; it stands in front of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Why do you think it is better known than all the rest of his sculptures? What is happening? How do you think the young man feels? Why? Why would someone make a statue of an Indian on a horse? Why would a museum in Boston want this sculpture? How did the artist feel about the man in his sculpture? What makes you think that? How do you feel about him? Is this a sculpture about one Native American man? Is it symbolic? How?

What art elements or principles has the artist used? Would this sculpture look better if it were colored? Why? How would it change the way you see and feel about this piece? This sculpture is life-size, the size of a real man and horse. Is this a good size for an outdoor statue? Why or why not? How does a life-size statue make you feel about what is being portrayed? How would the sculpture be different if it were only 12 inches tall?

If it were 12 feet tall? Do you like this piece of art? Would you buy it to put in front of a building you owned? Why or why not?

If you have not taught your students a critical model for discussing art, see the two included in the packet--"An Elementary Way to Talk About Art" and "Art Criticism, A Way to Talk About Art."

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. Visual Arts-contextualizing

**Objective:** The students will discuss art as a portrayal of the artists' personal worlds. Students will then demonstrate their understanding by discussing, producing art, or researching and making presentations. (Instead of researching or producing a piece of visual art, you may allow students to choose to explore their own or another's world through music, dance, drama, or literature.)

Background: The French 20th-century writer Marcel Proust wrote:

*Only through art can we get outside ourselves and know another view of the universe which is not the same as ours and see landscapes which would otherwise have remained unknown to us like the landscapes of the moon. Thanks to art, instead of seeing a single world, our own, we see it multiply until we have before us as many worlds as there are original artists. . . . And many centuries after their core, whether we call it Rembrandt or Vermeer, is extinguished, they continue to send us their special rays.*

O'Brien, Justin. Editor and translator. The Maxims of Marcel Proust. 1948

Explore Proust's idea at your class' level by using one of the activity versions explained below.

Show the students a variety of artworks, including *Appeal to the Great Spirit*. You will want to choose pieces that cover a broad spectrum of styles and movements. Share the quote from Proust with the children, discussing and explaining as needed. Ask the students to talk about the artists' worlds as portrayed by their artworks. The students should be encouraged to look at various aspects of the works and give specific reasons for their answers. You may want to include the following questions in your discussion:

Which piece(s) creates a world that seems familiar? Which foreign or strange? Which world would you like most to visit? How do you feel when you think of being part of your favorite piece's world? What would you do there? What kind of world would you create?

After the students have discussed the examples you've shown, have them complete one of the following activities.

1. Give students a choice of media and provide class time over at least two or three days so the students can create a piece of art that portrays their own world. Display the

finished pieces and either discuss and compare the variety of works, or allow interested students to share their ideas and the feelings that helped create their world.

Students in an art class may want to create several different pieces in a more comprehensive exploration of what their own personal worlds (style or vision) may be.

2. Have the students choose the artwork they think best creates a personal world and then defend that choice in writing.
3. Have students choose an artist whose work interests them and do research to find other pieces by the same artist and compare the various pieces and see if the group of pieces portrays the same world.
4. Gather art works by several different artists, having at least two works by each artist. Show the pieces to the students and discuss as suggested above, also asking the students whether the two or three pieces by an artist portray the same or different worlds.

If possible, include at least one artist who has produced works in more than one media. (Dennis Smith's *Aeroplane Contraption* [metal, cloth and found object sculpture] and *Keeper of the Gate* [oil painting]; Gary Smith's bronze sculpture of *Farmer With Grain Sack* and his painting *Youthful Games*; Lee Bennion's two paintings, *Full Bloom: Nicole and Daniel Ben Yehuda* and *Self-Portrait*; Many pieces by Cyrus Dallin; Avarad Fairbank's *Buffalo* and *Mother and Child*; Trevor Southey's etchings *Johnny's Apron* and *Full Bloom*; Mahonri Young's *Frontier Scout* [sculpture] and *Portrait of John Hafen* [oil painting]; and Minerva Teichert's paintings *Spinning Wheel* and *Indian Captives at Night*.

Some other artists you are likely to find multiple art works from are Picasso, Edward Hopper, Renoir, Georgia O'Keefe, Mary Cassatt, Gauguin, Degas, Henry Moore, the various Wyeths, Helen Frankenthaler, Mark Rothko, Louise Nevelson, Alexander Calder, George Segal, and any other well-known artist.

Some of these artists have works that can easily be viewed as portraying the same world and some, like Picasso, may seem to have portrayed one world and then moved to another world, and another. Make your choice of artworks cover a broad range of styles and demonstrate whatever complexity you think your students can understand; be sure to include some abstract works. Try to stretch their understanding by avoiding too obvious solutions.

You may choose to limit the activity to a class discussion, or assign students to research various pieces by one artist and compare them. In addition, students can research the artists' lives to see what, if any, ties exist between the chosen artist's life and the world he or she created. Students should consider the artist's personality, private and public life, the art world, country, culture, etc.

Have the students give presentations to the class, presenting an analysis of the artist's world as portrayed in his artworks and showing how his or her life ties into that world.

## **2. Visual Arts-expressing**

**Objective:** The students will demonstrate their understanding of art criticism by forming their own Paris Salon and applying a critical model to student-produced artworks as they jury the Salon's exhibits.

Background: From 1648, when the French Académie des Beaux-Arts was founded under royal patronage, until the end of the 19th century, an artist's survival often depended on acceptance into the biennial Salons (exhibits). Since the Salons were the only public exhibits in Paris, the officially accepted academic art was able to control publicity, and thus, to a large extent, artistic success.

During the nineteenth century, the Salons became even more influential and grew enormously in size. When the government withdrew its sponsorship in 1881, a group of artists formed an organization to continue the exhibits, and the jury was now selected from exhibitors in the previous year's Salon. However, in response to the Salon's continued hostility to new and creative artists, other independent salons were organized, reducing the prestige and power of the original academic Salon and providing venues for nontraditional work.

Although the Paris Salon was no longer the supreme arbiter of French art, acceptance into its yearly exhibits was still seen as an endorsement by the French art world and winning an award at the Salon, a great honor. Therefore, in 1909, when Cyrus Dallin exhibited his Paris-cast sculpture *Appeal to the Great Spirit* in the Salon and won a gold medal, the artist became part of a select group of acknowledged masters.

Present this and other information (if desired), to the students, making sure they understand that for many years, the French Salon exerted considerable control over the kind of art that was successful, choosing to accept and therefore support, only art in a particular style and rejecting new and innovative art.

After presenting the information on the Salon, have the students form their own Salon, with a jury that selects which artworks will be displayed, preferably in a room like the library where the whole school will be able to see the exhibit. The members of the jury must defend their choices to the class using a critical model, and may award gold, silver, and bronze medals.

After the jury has been chosen, allow the members time to discuss and to agree upon a stance they will take. This stance can be anything from "Good art looks like what it's portraying" to "Color is the most important element" to "Anything goes, the wilder the better." If you have studied several art movements in your class, you may want to have the students base their stance on one of the movements. (Although this activity assumes your class has produced quite a number of artworks from which to choose, the activity will also work using reproductions of artworks.)

Give different groups of students the right to be in charge of an exhibit. After all the students in the class have had a turn, lead a discussion about what happened, how the Salon changed when different people were in charge, how the students felt when some of their pieces were accepted and given awards or when their pieces were rejected. Discuss the reasons for changes in styles and art movements using whatever knowledge the students have.

This activity can be spread over a couple of months, or a simplified version over just a week, or it even can be limited to one period, although not all students will be able to have a turn to be part of the jury.

For student evaluation, have the students write or say why they would or why they wouldn't have given *Appeal to the Great Spirit* first place in the Salon. They need to support their decision with specific information, using the critical model. Evaluate their use of support.

### **3. Visual Arts-making**

**Objective:** Students will research bronze casting (or other sculpture media) and demonstrate their understanding by either writing a report or by making a presentation to the class.

Show the class an assortment of plaster and bronze sculptures from the CD. Discuss the art works briefly, and then assign students to research bronze casting and write a short report.

As a culminating event, you may be able to arrange a visit to a nearby foundry so the students can see firsthand how bronzes are made.

**Variation:** Let students choose one medium used for sculpture, do research, and then make a short presentation to the class.

### **4. Science/Health**

**Objective:** Artworks depicting the human body will be used to spark interest in a physiology lesson.

Show the students *Appeal to the Great Spirit* and several other sculptures, paintings, or prints that realistically depict the human body. Ask the students questions: Do the people in these artworks look like real people? How do you think the artist was able to sculpt or draw or paint human bodies? Look closely at the details of the people where the shape of a bone shows or you can see the muscles. How would you learn to draw or sculpt all those bones and muscles?

Then tell the students that in order to be able to draw, paint, or sculpt people, artists study for many years. One of the first assignments an art student may be given is to draw a skeleton that is anatomically correct, from various views. The next step is to draw and learn where and how each muscle group goes. Artists learn these things about the human

skeleton and muscles because they can't draw or sculpt the human figure, even fully clothed, without knowing what the underneath shapes are like. You may be able to find a copy of Gray's Anatomy at a local library. Show the children the book and tell them many artists have used the book, designed for medical students, to help them learn to understand how bodies are put together. Some artists even work with cadavers to learn about what they are drawing, painting, or sculpting.

Then move to your lesson on the skeleton, muscles, or our bodies.

## **5. Healthy Lifestyles/Social Studies/Language Arts**

**Objective:** The students will learn "mirroring," so they can become better listeners.

One of the most important analytical and interpersonal skills is the ability to understand another person's point of view that is in conflict with or different from yours.

Show the class *Appeal to the Great Spirit*, and discuss the sculpture using questions such as the following: What is this Native American man appealing to the Great Spirit for? Why do you think he needs help? Why did the Europeans (white men) feel they had a right to the land? How would you feel if people were taking over what you think of as your land? Why were wars fought between the colonists and many of the Native American tribes? Why couldn't they all agree? (These questions assume some knowledge of early American history. If the students do not have that knowledge, you may need to present information to them before or as part of the discussion.)

At this point, the discussion and activity can take several different directions.

**Healthy Lifestyles:** If you want the activity to focus on the development of interpersonal skills, ask the students to think of ways they have conflicts that are similar (with parents, teachers, other students, siblings, neighbors, or friends).

After a brief discussion of the kinds of conflicts students face, tell them one way to help avoid or resolve conflicts (or to be a better friend) is to learn how to "mirror" feelings. Explain that the goal of mirroring is to understand the person talking to you. Write the rules of mirroring on the board:

For the talker--

Use only "I" statements that don't blame anyone else.

Talk about how you feel right now.

For the listener--

Say back to the talker what you understand.

Ask if you got it right.

If you didn't, try again.

Go through a few examples with the students:  
When my sister won't let me come in her room, I feel lonely.  
When my best friend doesn't want to play, I feel sad.

Then go through the listener's part.

After practicing a couple times with the students, have the class divide into pairs. After deciding who will be first, one student in each pair tells the other about something that makes him or her sad, excited, frustrated, lonely, etc. When the listener has been able to "mirror" the talker's feelings correctly, the listener gets a turn to be the talker.

If the students have trouble using "I" statements, you may need to have them practice this skill before going on to the rest of the activity.

If you want, the mirroring can be used often as a short activity to provide a break between other class work or can be used for five minutes at the beginning or end of class. With practice, the students should be able to use the technique for more complex issues and hopefully, will begin to incorporate it into their lives.

You may be able to encourage the use of "I" statements by incorporating their use in the classroom. If you can do this with a bit of lightness in the beginning, without making it only a joke, you can make the learning process a class project. For example, "When lots of you are talking and won't be quiet when I ask, I get very frustrated and unhappy." Try to use "I" statements to convey pleasant feelings too. "All of you did so well on the test; I'm really excited!"

Older classes can use the technique for more complex issues and can practice by role playing.

Keep a jar or box somewhere in the room so it is always accessible, and when students experience conflict, have them describe the situation on a slip of paper, and put it in the jar. Write each student's name on a piece of paper and put the papers in another container.

Once in a while, draw a name from the name jar and have that student draw one from the conflict jar and then a name from the name jar. (Prior to the role play you will probably want to check that the conflicts described are appropriate for the class.) The two students then role play the situation described, with both of the students using mirroring. An additional idea is to send a note home explaining the technique and asking families to join in the learning experience. If you have a school newsletter or calendar that is sent home, the school counselor may be willing to write a short piece encouraging families to use "I" statements and mirroring to resolve and avoid conflict.

**Adaption-Social Studies:** To correlate with Social Studies material, introduce the sculpture, and then assign students to read the appropriate section in their text books. After they have finished the reading assignment, have the students write questions about

the material. Use questions that ask the students to think about the process and implications of colonization rather than questions that only require them to repeat facts.

Another approach is to limit the activity to a class discussion of the process and implications of colonization.

**Adaption-Language Arts:** Persuasive writing. Introduce this art work and others, as indicated above. Then assign students to take a position suggested by one of the art works, and write a persuasive paragraph or two. If your class has not worked on persuasive writing, you will need to incorporate an introduction to persuasion in the activity.