Past, Present, and Future Perfect

Project Overview
Students used their knowledge of Native American culture and the Brooklyn landscape 400 years ago to envision a specific location in the past, present, and future. They worked individually and in groups to create a landscape/cityscape triptych that included a photo-collage and two paintings.

Essential Question:
How do people use and change their environment to meet their needs?

Artistic Goals:
1. Students will learn how to take their own photographs and use them to create a photo-collage or photomontage.
2. Students will learn how to use acrylic painting techniques and will be able to use color-mixing and brushwork to create a painting.
3. Students will understand that artists create work from observation as well as from their imaginations, and that they often perform research to help them generate ideas.

Curricular Goals:
1. Students will understand how their local environment has been changed by people over the past 400 years.
2. Students will be able to identify the impact of people’s needs on the environment.
3. Students will understand how people can shape the future by learning from the past.
4. Students will understand the ways in which people today plan for the environmental needs of the present and the future.
5. Students will identify a need or a problem related to their local environment, perform research on their chosen issue, and plan a solution.

National Content Standards Addressed:
Visual Arts K-4.1: Understanding and Applying Media, Techniques, and Processes
- Students describe how different materials, techniques, and processes cause different responses.
- Students use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories.

Visual Arts K-4.6: Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines
- Students understand and use similarities and differences between characteristics of the visual arts and other arts disciplines.

Social Studies: Geography: NSS-G.K-12.5: Environment and Society
As a result of activities in grades K-12, all students should:
- Understand how human actions modify the physical environment.
- Understand how physical systems affect human systems.
- Understand the changes that occur in the meaning, use, distribution, and importance of resources.

Social Studies: Geography: NSS-G.K-12.6: The Uses of Geography
As a result of activities in grades K-12, all students should:
- Understand how to apply geography to interpret the past.
- Understand how to apply geography to interpret the present and plan for the future.

Social Studies: U.S. History: NSS-USH.K-4.2: The History of Students’ Own State or Region
- Students will understand the people, events, problems, and ideas that were significant in creating the history of their own state.
Part 1: Representing the Present

How do artists gather material for their art?

Activity 1: Introduction to Place
Students looked at Paul Citroen’s Metropolis to consider how artists convey a sense of place in collage. Working in groups, they made small sketches of things they see everyday on their way to school and then collaboratively thought about how their sketches could be arranged into a composition that revealed something about their community. Each group then cut out their images and used them to create a collage.

Recommended Time: one 45-minute session
Inquiry Artwork: Paul Citroen, Metropolis
Materials: sketchbooks, pencils, scissors, glue

Activity 2: Site Visits
Students observed the present condition of four sites in New York City near their school. They visited the Brooklyn Bridge, the Promenade in Brooklyn Heights, Lower Manhattan, and the NY Harbor and Islands. Students learned how artists use first-hand observations to plan their artworks by sketching and photographing their surroundings.

Recommended Time: Two 45-minute sessions
Materials: sketchbooks, pencils, cameras

Activity 3: Collage Exploration
Students used the photographs from their favorite site to create a collage representing this site in the present. They referred to their sketches and learned collage techniques to plan the layout of their collages. Students cut their photographs in a variety of ways to express their own choices about subject matter, materials and composition, and to create a sense of place the way that Paul Citroen did in Metropolis. They self-evaluated their photo-montages using a reflection worksheet (see Resources section) and shared their finished pieces with the class.

Recommended Time: Two 45-minute sessions
Materials: photographs, scissors, glue, sheets of heavy 18x24” drawing paper for background

Part 2: Interpreting the Past

What was here 400 years ago?

Activity 4: Painting Techniques
What about: Students looked at Marc Chagall’s Paris Through the Window to explore color and brushstroke. Then they explored color mixing and a variety of painting techniques to learn how to represent a place in a painting. As part of this exploration, students experimented with creating different effects using different size brushes.

Recommended Time: Two 45-minute sessions
Inquiry Artwork: Marc Chagall, Paris Through the Window
Materials: acrylic paint, brushes (in a variety of sizes and shapes), heavy paper for painting

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Activity 5: Research
Using books and Web sites (see resources section), students learned about what the New York landscape was like 400 years ago, before the Dutch settled the area. In addition, they learned about the Native American populations that lived here at the time and their relationship with the land. Students recorded their findings in their sketchbooks and on worksheets.
Recommended Time: two 45-minute sessions
Materials:

Activity 6: Painting the Past
After completing their research, students gathered their ideas and represented their selected spot again, this time as it would have looked 400 years earlier. In their sketchbooks, students drew several ideas for the composition of their painting, before choosing one idea to use. While creating their works of art, they utilized the painting techniques they learned in Activity 4.

Recommended Time: Three 45-minute sessions
Materials: acrylic paint, brushes, pencils, heavy 18x24 paper for painting

Part 3: Envisioning the Future

What do we want our location to be like in the future?

Activity 7: Researching Sustainability
Students compared their scenes of New York in the past and in the present, and considered the ways in which their local environment has changed because of people’s interactions with the land. They shifted their focus to the future, and thought about how this pattern might continue, and what environmental problems New Yorkers of the future might encounter. Each student chose one issue that they felt was especially relevant to their selected area within the city, and did research on possible solutions to their problems. Finally, they wrote mission statements explaining their solution to their chosen problem, and outlined the ways in which they could visually portray this solution in a painting.
Recommended Time: Two 45-minute sessions

Activity 8: Future Painting
Having completed their research, students created another painting, which was the final panel in their triptych. This image was to be their vision of their selected area as it will look 400 years in the future. In deciding what details to incorporate into this painting, they included elements that they believe could help guarantee that this place will continue to be a safe and healthy place to live. Students documented their research on environmental problems and solutions and found that some sustainable solutions are windmills, solar power, bikes, and recycling. Students integrated their research and compositional knowledge into a practical and imaginative vision for their future painting.

Recommended Time: Three 45-minute sessions
Materials: acrylic paint, sketchbooks, pencils, worksheets, brushes, canvas
Activity 9: Past, Present, and Future Triptychs

Students combined their photo-montages with their past and future paintings. These three artworks together created triptychs that revealed their site in three moments in time. The photo-montage in the center represented the place in the present, the left painting showed the same location 400 years ago, and the right painting represented the same location 400 years in the future. Students discussed how their pieces worked together to communicate a story about their chosen area. They each wrote short paragraphs describing their site in the three artworks and how it has changed over time.

Recommended Time: one 45-minute session
Inquiry Artwork: Alexander Deineka, Collective Farm Worker on a Bicycle, 1935
Materials: photo-montage, paintings, tape
Resources

**New York in the Past**


**The Manhattan Project**


**New York in the Future**

**Teaching about Sustainability**


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Activity 2: Collage Exploration
Reflection Worksheet

1. Our location is: __________________________________________________________

2. Make a list of the elements you included in your collage.

   __________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________

3. What do these elements tell you about what this place is like today and how people use the land there?

   __________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________

4. Describe one choice you made about where to put your images, or how to combine them.

   __________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________

5. Are you satisfied with that choice? Why or why not?

   __________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________
Inquiry Script:

- What do you notice?
- What can we guess about this place?
- The title of this artwork is *Metropolis*, which means a large, busy city. New York City is an example of a metropolis. Look carefully at the different images the artist used in this artwork and the different ways he combined the images. What do you think the artist might be trying to tell us about cities?
- If you were going to create a collage to represent New York City, or a big city near you, in a collage, what kinds of images would you use?
Marc Chagall

*Paris Through the Window*, 1913.

Oil on canvas, 53 1/2 x 55 3/4 inches

**Inquiry Script:**
- What do you see?
- What kinds of brushes do you think the artist used? Where might he have used a big brush? Where might he have used a small brush?
- What colors do you see?
- Why do you think the artist might have chosen to use these colors in his painting?
Inquiry Script:

- What do you notice?
- How would it feel to be in this place?
- This painting was created by a Russian artist more than 70 years ago, and in this painting he was creating a scene of what he hoped Russia would be like in the future.
- What kinds of things do you think were important to the artist? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Would you like to live here? What would you add or take away to make it your own perfect place?