**Title of Lesson**

What do white birds and Mount Rushmore have in common? : Art Criticism and Mount Rushmore

**Introduction**

Art criticism is the analysis and evaluation of works of art. It is interpretative, and those engaging in art criticism seek to understand a work of art from a particular theoretical perspective and to establish its significance as a work of art.

In this take-home activity, students will read and analyze an excerpt from the essay “The White Bird,” by art critic and writer John Berger (1926 – 2017). Students will then respond to questions and writing prompts which are designed to help them understand what they have read. Specifically, they learn about the qualities of artwork which help art shape understanding of human perception and experiences.

These questions are designed to allow room for students to present their thoughts and responses in an exploratory, open-ended way. The questions are also designed to introduce students to key concepts of art criticism.

Following their reading and analysis of the excerpt, students will then use what they have learned to reflect on Mount Rushmore National Memorial as a work of art. This process requires students to conduct online research on Mount Rushmore National Memorial to develop written responses that develop their understanding of Mount Rushmore’s figurative representation; symbolic meanings as defined by sculptor Gutzon Borglum; and Mount Rushmore’s connection to key visual arts concepts such as media, technique, conservation, and preservation.

Finally, students will close the activity by offering a written reflection which connects the John Berger excerpt to their understanding of Mount Rushmore National Memorial.

This lesson is designed for high school students enrolled in South Dakota advanced visual arts courses.

**Grade Level or Course**

This lesson is designed to meet the needs of students enrolled in high school (Grades 9 – 12) visual arts courses. It may also be adapted to AP Art History courses.

**Time Allowed**

This lesson is designed as a take-home activity, and estimated time to completion is variable.

**Mount Rushmore Interpretative Theme and South Dakota Learning Standards Addressed**

This lesson directly addresses the following Mount Rushmore National Memorial Interpretative Themes:

* **Mount Rushmore, carved to represent the birth, growth, preservation and development of the nation, is valued as a public work of art intended to evoke freedom, patriotism, and democracy in viewers.**
* **The sculptor Gutzon Borglum and the workers, through vision, struggle, and perseverance, created an inspirational icon on Mount Rushmore that is recognized throughout the world.**

It also addresses the following South Dakota Anchor Standard:

**(7): Perceive and analyze artistic ideas and work.** Specifically, it addresses the following high school level standards:

* **HSp.VA.Re.7.1 Hypothesize ways in which art influences perception and understanding of human experiences.**
* **HSa.VA.Re.7.1 Analyze how responses to art develop over time based on knowledge of and experience with art and life.**
* **6-8.VA.Re.7.2 Analyze and interpret how visual imagery influences the viewer’s ideas, emotions, and actions.**
* **HSp.VA.Re.7.2 Evaluate the effectiveness of imagery to influence ideas, feelings, and behaviors of specific audiences.**

**Materials Needed**

This lesson requires the use of the provided worksheet (See below), which includes the required excerpt from “The White Bird” and contains writing prompts and questions necessary to complete the activity. Students will also need to have access to a computer with internet connection so they can use the Mount Rushmore National Memorial website (<https://www.nps.gov/moru/index.htm>) as a learning resource as they complete the worksheet.

**Vocabulary**

This lesson incorporates the following vocabulary, with definitions adapted from the South Dakota Visual Arts Glossary:

**Art / Artwork / Works of Art:** Artifact, object, or action that has been put forward by an artist or other person as something to be experienced, interpreted, and appreciated. Artwork can include work created for expressive, utilitarian, or other uses, and is inclusive of all forms of design: paintings, drawings, sculpture, jewelry, architecture, photography, design, etc.

**Conservation:** The practice of caring for artworks in terms of preservation and restoration.

**Figurative Representation / Subject:** The persons or things represented, as well as the artist’s experiences that serve as inspiration.

**Technique:** The manner and skill with which artists employ their tools and materials to achieve a predetermined expressive effort.

**Theme:** An idea that recurs or pervades in a work or collection of artworks, conveyed through subject matter and interpreted by both artist and audience. Themes are often developed through symbolic referents.

**Media:** The materials and tools used by the artist to create.

**Lesson Sequence**

This is a take-home activity designed to serve as a standalone lesson and does not need extensive in-class introduction. However, it is best incorporated into units which explore topics and concepts relating to art criticism or sculpture.

Instructors may wish to design their own in-class introduction. The references section of this document are intended to provide sources to develop materials relating to Mount Rushmore or art criticism as developed by John Berger. At a minimum, instructors may wish to introduce students to the National Park Service Mount Rushmore National Memorial webpage (<https://www.nps.gov/moru/index.htm>) or take in-class time to discuss assignment expectations.

**Assessment Methods**

The provided worksheet may be adapted into a formative assessment, depending on the needs of the instructor.

**Selected References and Further Resources**

The references below include the full citation for Berger’s “The White Bird,” as well as provide useful materials for the development of in-class introductory materials related to the carving of Mount Rushmore, with particular focus on the challenges associated with the artistic media.

Berger, John. “The White Bird.” *The Sense of Sight: Writings by John Berger,* edited by Lloyd Spencer, Pantheon Books, 1985, 5 – 9.

Clifford, Don. *Mount Rushmore Q&A,* compiled by Carolyn Clifford, Arizona Lithographers, 2004.

Griffith, T.D. *America’s Shrine of Democracy: A Pictorial History.* Mount Rushmore History Association, 2004.

Presnall, Judith. *Mount Rushmore.* Lucent Books, 2000.