

The Aquatic Park Bathhouse Building and the New Deal: A Palace for the People?

Teacher Guided Lesson Plan for Grades 9-12

60-90 minutes on-site at the Maritime Museum (formerly known as the Aquatic Park Bathhouse), 900 Beach Street, San Francisco, 2-3 class periods pre- and post-visit.

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Essential Question: How is the Aquatic Park Bathhouse Building a reflection of the New Deal and was it successful in meeting its goal?

Themes: Federal work programs, reflection and interpretation of public art, government funding and the arts, use of government resources, access to public art, diversity in employment, preservation and stewardship of cultural resources, role of public spaces within a community, interpretation of historical sites.

California Curriculum Standards:

California History Social Science Framework (2016):

- CA HSS 11.6.5

Common Core State Standards ELA: Research to Build and Present Knowledge:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.8
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.9

Basic Overview

Students work in groups to gather information about the WPA artists and the artwork from the Aquatic Park Bathhouse building. Using evidence collected from the building, NPS guides, and park resources, students will begin to understand the significance of the WPA project. With the help of primary and secondary sources and internet research, groups will dive deep into the stories behind the artists and artwork; the community's relationship to the project; and the longer-term impact of the building. Finally, students will present their findings in a presentation that answers the questions *How is the Aquatic Park Bathhouse a reflection of the New Deal? Was it successful in meeting the goals of the New Deal and does it have an impact that reaches beyond its initial purpose?*

Objectives

Students will engage in the following activities:

- Student-centered inquiry
- Place-based evidence collection
- Analysis of primary and secondary sources
- Internet research
- Visual thinking strategies
- Evaluation of historical outcomes

- Development and presentation of research and argument
- Group presentation
- Structured group discussion and dialogue
- Civic engagement and opportunities

Materials Needed

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- Evidence Collection Forms
- Resource Pages
- Internet Access

Procedure

Anticipatory Set

Small group or partners discuss the following questions:

1. What is public art? List some examples that come to mind or find examples/images on your phone. (Partners or groups can Google: “Public art” and discuss what they find. Some examples might be murals, sculptures, parks, etc.)
2. What is the difference between public and private art? (Public art is paid for by government funds through either grants, direct funding sources, or tax exemption. Public art must be made accessible to the public and cannot be held for private use. Example: art in museums are made available to the public and are owned by (or on loan to) the institution, not in a private home or office building. Private art is owned by an individual or organization for their own benefit and does not need to be shared with the public.)
3. How does public art benefit a community? Share out answers.
4. Respond to comment: “[Republican Congressman Dewey] Short told Congress that good art was the product of suffering artists while “subsidized art is not art at all.”

Background Information

In an effort to combat the problems of the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt put in place a series of government funded programs called the New Deal. The New Deal had three main goals: relief, reform, and recovery. To provide relief for the unemployed, the New Deal created several job programs aimed at getting Americans back to work with the largest being the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The WPA was responsible for employing millions of workers in building and constructing infrastructure, parks and recreation facilities, and public buildings across the country. The WPA also employed artists, writers, actors, and musicians under the Federal Art Project (FAP) to provide the public access to the arts and humanities. While the WPA provided much needed jobs to Americans out of work, it also provided numerous communities with state and local projects designed to benefit the public for generations to come.

Students will need a basic understanding of the following:

- The primary goals of the New Deal were relief, reform, and recovery.
- The role of the WPA and the FAP in funding public buildings and art during the Great Depression.

- Many of the WPA artworks and projects still remain today and can be seen all over the US.
- San Francisco is fortunate to have many examples of WPA art projects that are still available and utilized by the public such as Coit Tower and the Bay Bridge.
- One of the most impressive example in San Francisco is the Aquatic Park Bathhouse (known today as the Maritime Museum) at San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park.
- As a National Historic Landmark, the Aquatic Park Bathhouse is preserved and maintained by the National Park Service for this and future generations as a place to experience, learn, and explore a shared history.

Additional readings and resources:

- Works Progress Administration (WPA) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Works-Progress-Administration>
- Living New Deal <https://livingnewdeal.org/what-was-the-new-deal>
- WPA Murals www.wpamurals.com
- Thackara, Tess. "What We Can Learn from the Brief Period When the Government Employed Artists." *Artsy*. N.p., 31 Jan. 2017. Web. 8 Aug. 2017. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-government-paid-working-class-artists>
- Semuels, Alana . "The Case for a New WPA." *The Atlantic*. N.p., 14 Apr. 2016. Web. 8 Aug. 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/04/subsidized-work-programs/478302>
- Google Arts & Culture "Art as Activism" <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/exhibit/sAKiXQYsmgtalw>
- Blakemore, Erin. "You Can Thank These Depression Era Workers for Your National Parks." *Smithsonian.com*. 30 Aug 2016. http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/you-can-thank-these-depression-era-workers-your-national-parks-180960284/?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=socialmedia

Evidence Collection at the Aquatic Park Bathhouse building

1. Conduct a brief tour showing students the building – be careful not to provide content information
2. Divide into 8 groups and handout evidence collection form.
3. Assign each group an artist and the location of their contribution.
 - a. Hilaire Hiler (main lobby murals) –*more than one group may be assigned*
 - b. Hilaire Hiler (Prismatorium)
 - c. Anna Medalie and Hilaire Hiler (main lobby murals plants and fish)
 - d. Sargent Johnson (green slate reliefs at main entrance)
 - e. Mohammed Zyani and Sargent Johnson (wall tiles on veranda, north façade)
 - f. Richard Ayer (terrazzo floors and 3rd floor murals)
 - g. Beniamino Bufano (animal sculptures on veranda)
 - h. Charles Nunemaker (woman's restroom)

Additional groups can be assigned the architects William Mooser Sr. and William Mooser Jr.

4. Instruct students to complete the form as a group using observation and group discussion.
5. Students should spend anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes gathering evidence and recording their discussions. Teachers, chaperones, and guides circle and eavesdrop group

conversations, interjecting only when necessary. For example, keeping students on track or asking critical thinking questions such as, “What makes you say that? Where do you see evidence that supports your conclusions? Does anyone in the group disagree or have a different opinion?” can be helpful, but it is important for the students to guide the discussions based on their observations.

6. Regroup and reflect on experience in the space.
7. Invite students to take selfies or pictures of the building to document experience or use in presentations.
8. Give students an opportunity to look at some of the collection objects on display and visitor comment book.

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Group Research Assignment

Students will use notes from evidence collection form to guide the group’s research presentations. Groups will design and present a presentation based on their observations and research.

Students can create their own research questions or be assigned the ones below:

- Describe the artists’ background and experience working on the project. What part of the artist’s story is the most interesting to your group? Is the artist successful at getting his/her message across? How might the work have been perceived at the time? How is it perceived today? Does your group like the work? Why or why not? How does this building compare or contrast to other public works of art?
- How did the WPA provide relief for local artists during the Great Depression? What were some of the struggles the WPA artists encountered in this project? Could those struggles still happen today? Explain.
- How did this WPA project meet the needs of the community? How did WPA artists contribute to this community? How do you think the community perceived the work at the time? What does this project tell us about public art in the 1930s?
- How does this building help to tell the story of San Francisco in the 1930s? What makes this WPA project significant? How does this project compare to other WPA projects in the Bay Area?

Presentations conclude with answers to the essential questions: *Does the group think the Aquatic Park Bathhouse building effectively met the goals of the WPA and the New Deal? If so how? Does the building have an impact that reaches beyond its initial purpose?*

Class discussion following presentations may focus on different group’s answers to the essential question and open a possibility for structured debate.

Assessment

Project Completion

Additional Project Extension

Student Reflection

Evaluation Suggestions

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Product: (group grade)

- Presentation content and quality
- Effectively answers essential questions using evidence and a critical thinking process
- Evidence of historical thinking (analysis and evaluation of sources, contextualization)
- Citing of evidence and sources

Process: (individual grade)

- Participation in field trip and discussions
- Group participation and follow through with assigned tasks
- Application of research skills
- Time/product management

Reflection: (individual grade)

- Thoughtful responses to reflection prompts.

Resources for Student Research

- Articles from San Francisco Chronicle 1939 (*download as PDF from park*)
- Delgado, James P. "A Dream of Seven Decades: San Francisco's Aquatic Park." Reprinted from *California History*, 64:4. Web. 25 Aug. 2017.
<https://archive.org/details/ADreamOfSevenDecadesSanFranciscosAquaticPark>
- Kamiya, Gary. "How the WPA saved S.F.'s Aquatic Park." *San Francisco Chronicle*. N.p., 20 Nov. 2015. Web. 8 Aug. 2017. <http://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/How-the-WPA-saved-S-F-s-Aquatic-Park-6647362.php>
- Levin, Sam. "Silicon Valley billionaire loses bid to prevent access to public beach." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 10 Aug. 2017.
http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/aug/10/martins-beach-california-public-vinod-khosla?CMP=fb_gu. Accessed 14 Aug. 2017.
- Oral histories with WPA artists and collaborators who worked on the project (Mary McChesney 1964):
- Smithsonian Archives <https://www.aaa.si.edu>
- National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form
<https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset?assetID=51dbc266-0975-4bf7-901e-0b572a74d377>
- San Francisco New Deal Projects <https://livingnewdeal.org/us/ca/san-francisco>
- "Sea Murals." *Time Magazine*, 6 Feb. 1939, pp. 41–42. (*download as PDF from park*)
- *Sea Letter*. San Francisco, CA, San Francisco Maritime National Park Association, Summer 2016. (*available as PDF from park*)
- Visitor comments record (*available in the park or by email*)

- San Francisco Maritime Research Center online catalog <http://keys.bywatersolutions.com>
- Schedule a visit or send questions: safr_maritime_library@nps.gov or 415-561-7030
- Students are encouraged to email NPS rangers to help answer questions and continue conversations: safr_education@nps.gov