



Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes

ARTEFFECT

Storytelling Through Art
Visual Arts Lesson Plan

Storytelling Through Art

The [Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes \(LMC\)](#) spotlights the stories of individuals from history who took extraordinary actions in service to others and society. The art of storytelling can feel overwhelming to students—but when broken down into a process, it becomes more manageable. This lesson plan guides students through a creative process in developing novel and effective approaches to visual storytelling with a focus on exploring and creatively interpreting the inspiring stories of the LMC Unsung Heroes.

In this lesson, teachers guide students through different approaches for developing a storyline to a completed artwork. Students learn to deconstruct six key components to storytelling about the Unsung Heroes. After exploring different approaches to storytelling, students reflect on their selected Unsung Hero's journey and use various visual analyzing tools to support them in organize their storylines before beginning their artworks.

Learning Objectives

1. Practice careful looking and visual analysis of artworks.
2. Familiarize students with 6 key elements to storytelling about the LMC Unsung Heroes: Character, Problem, Heroic Action(s), Sacrifice, Impact and Heroic Traits.
3. Investigate different approaches to storytelling by examining examples from contemporary art and ARTEFFECT award-winning artworks.
4. Support students in creating a series of thumbnails (rough drafts) to inform the composition of their final projects.
5. Strengthen connections between visual art, English language arts, and social studies.

Time Frame

The initial introduction of the ARTEFFECT project will be broken down over the course of **four 50-minute class periods**. It can be beneficial to pause after Step 4 and give students a few days to discover the Unsung Hero topic about which they feel most passionate.

- **Day 1:** Complete Steps 1-2
- **Day 2:** Complete Steps 3-4
- **Day 3:** Complete Step 5
- **Day 4:** Complete Step 6

Creating 2D or 3D artworks is a multi-day process.

Materials

Pencils, Paper, Mixed media.

Resources:

- [Step 2: Scanning and Describing Activity Slideshow](#)
- [Step 3: D.A.T.E. Model Slideshow](#) and [D.A.T.E. Model Worksheet](#)
- [Step 5: The Unsung Hero's Journey Worksheet](#)
- [The Unsung Hero Journey Graphic](#)
- [Step 6: Thumbnail Sketch Worksheet](#)
- [Step 9: T.A.G. Critique Method Slideshow](#)
- [Step 10: Impact Statement Worksheet](#)
- Modifications/Extensions Resource: [Visual Brain Dump Worksheet](#)
- Modifications/Extensions Resource: [Written Critique Worksheet](#)

Lesson Plan Activities

Step 1: Explore the Art of Storytelling

Begin the lesson by engaging students in a conversation about what storytelling is. Ask students to reflect on the following questions in their sketchbooks followed by a class discussion:

- Do **all works** of art tell stories?
- What are the **components** necessary to tell a story?
- How do **writers and artists alike** tell their stories?

Storytellers have an innate ability to “see” what is going on around them and then translate what they see and feel to others. In today’s lesson, you will become a storyteller and will practice seeing, sharing, and interpreting.

Step 2: Scan/Describe Activity

In this activity, students will practice their observation, listening and direction following skills. Use the **Step 2 Resource:** [Scanning and Describing Activity Slideshow](#).

Have students partner into pairs with one person facing the projector/monitor while the other faces away. Each pair will take turns drawing and describing two works of art. Project an image from the slideshow and give the first student viewing the work **8 minutes** to describe orally what they see to their partner who will draw the image (without seeing it) using the verbal description. At the end of the 8 minutes, students who are drawing can turn around and view the artwork and compare it to their interpretations to the actual work. They have just modeled the art of seeing and describing, the first step in the D.A.T.E. model (Step 3 below). This activity can be followed up with a brief introduction to the artist of the work and the following questions:



- What visual elements in the image help to communicate a story?
- Did the artist use symbols that may represent a time, place, or event?
- What is your favorite part of the artwork? Why?

Have students trade positions and repeat using another artwork of your choice from your slideshow.

Step 3: Introduce the D.A.T.E Model & Examine Visual Narratives

Begin by using the **Step 3 Resource:** to introduce students to [D.A.T.E. Model Slideshow](#) the D.A.T.E. model and examining visual narratives. Students will examine a variety of [ARTEFFECT student artworks](#) and practice how to interpret works of arts. Begin by discussing how there is an *art to seeing* while visiting museums. Students can practice this skill of careful looking—and learn **how to impress a D.A.T.E. at the art museum!** Have students fill out the [D.A.T.E Model Worksheet](#) while viewing a variety of artworks in your slideshow.

D.A.T.E. is an acronym that stands for:

- D.** Describe what you see objectively.
- A.** Analyze how the artist used the [elements of art](#) and [principles of design](#) in the artwork.
- T.** Translate the meaning and/or narrative components of the work.
- E.** Evaluate the artwork. Is it successful or not? Why?



Step 4: Choose Your LMC Unsung Hero

Students choose an individual from the approved list from the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes. Students can choose an individual who stands out as a role model for them and where they can make a relevant connection to the story or cause.



Find your [LMC Unsung Hero on the approved list](#).

Unsung Hero

An individual who has created positive change in history by improving the lives of others and is largely unrecognized by society for their contribution. The individual's impact must have stood the test of time.

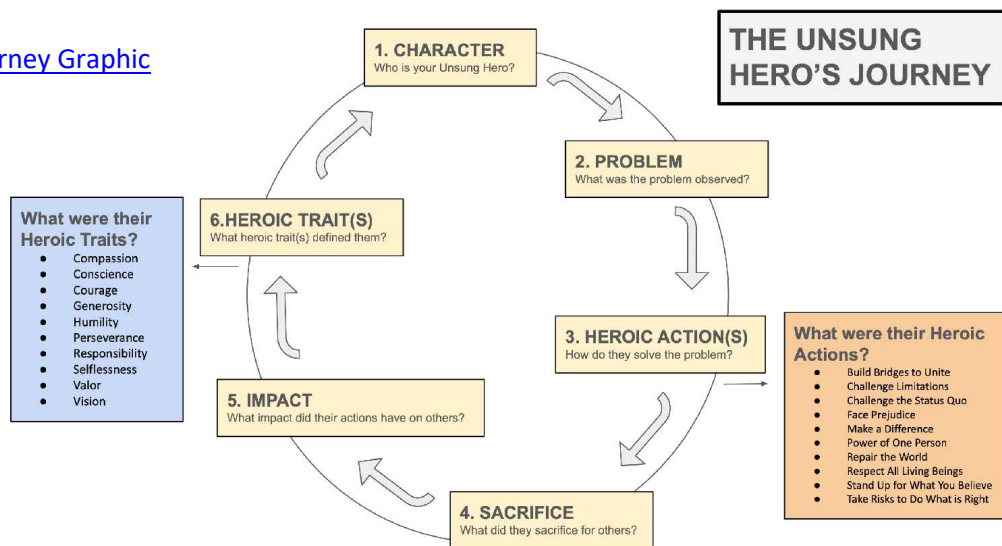
Next, students create a concept for their work of art that demonstrates thoughtful, original, and creative ideas. The concept is personally relevant to the student in exploring visually (e.g., through narrative, storytelling, abstraction, portraiture) how the Unsung Hero created profound and positive change in history by improving the lives of others through his or her actions.

Step 5: Introduction to the Unsung Hero's Journey

After selecting their LMC Unsung Hero, students can acclimate themselves to the story by working with **Step 5 Resource: [The Unsung Hero's Journey Worksheet](#)**. Discuss the six key elements for creatively interpreting their LMC Unsung Hero's story: **Character, Problem, Heroic Action(s), Sacrifice, Impact and Heroic Traits**. Students use the worksheet to begin deconstructing their LMC Unsung Hero's story in search of an entry point to inspire the visual components needed to create their work of art.

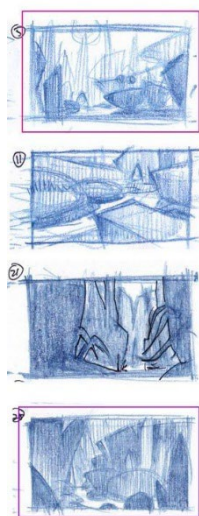
Step 5 Resource:

[The Unsung Hero's Journey Graphic](#)



Step 6: Thumbnail Sketches

Students will next plan out their artworks using information from the Unsung Hero Journey Worksheet (Step 5) in the form of thumbnail sketches. Hand out copies of the **Step 6 Resource: [Thumbnail Sketch Worksheet](#)**. Visit with students about the examples provided and how they will begin designing their composition with written/visual brainstorming, thumbnail sketches and compositional experimentation with the goal of problem-solving the best way to tell their LMC Unsung Hero's story.



Determine the Point-of-View (Perspective)

What perspective will students use to tell the story of their LMC Unsung Hero?

- Through the lens of the Unsung Hero? (First Person POV)
- Through the lens of those who benefited from their actions? (Third Person POV)
- Through an abstract viewpoint that challenges viewers' perceptions. (Using conceptual qualities of materials, processes and/or ideas.)

Step 7: Select Process & Materials

Two-dimensional

Dry Media

graphite, charcoal, colored pencil, pastel, etc.

Wet Media

acrylic, oil, watercolor, gouache, ink wash, printmaking, etc.

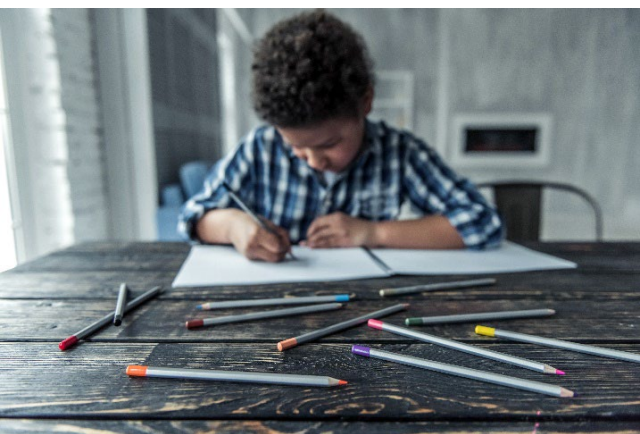
Mixed Media

photography, graphic design, textile, collage, paper.

Digital Media (must be printed)

Three-dimensional

sculpture, assemblage, ceramic, etc.



Step 7.5: Introduce Project Criteria & Evaluation

Visit the LMC website to view ARTEFFECT [student award-winners](#) and [finalists](#) from previous years. Using the [ARTEFFECT Judging Criteria Rubric](#), have students work in teams to assess the example artworks. When finished, have each group share their totals and discuss how they arrived at their scores with their peers. Scoring is weighted as follows:

- 🌟 Creative Interpretation (40%)
- 🌟 Aesthetic Value (40%)
- 🌟 Impact Paper (20%)

Step 8: Produce Artwork

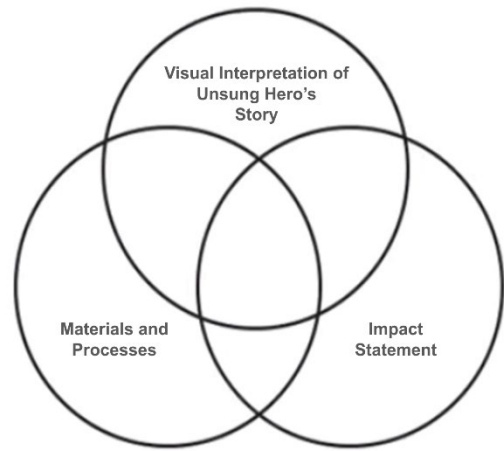
Students will need to invest a significant amount of time creating their artwork. They should be intentional about creating synthesis between the materials and processes used to physically create their work, interpretation of their LMC Unsung Hero's story and the information provided in their Impact Statement (see Step 10). Revisions should be considered and made when necessary while creating the work of art and reference made to their Thumbnail Sketches Worksheet (Step 6). *How can the materials and processes used inform the LMC Unsung Hero's story?* Always keep in mind that student work should have a direct correlation to their Unsung Hero's story.

Step 9: Critique Artwork

Set an internal deadline in your classroom and provide an opportunity for your students to discuss their artwork with their peers and receive feedback. This is an important part of the project and allows students to advocate for their Unsung Hero's story while making meaningful connections with others' work. Encourage students to describe, analyze, translate, and evaluate (D.A.T.E. Model) their finished artworks while providing each other with constructive feedback on ways in which the works can be improved.

For more on the "Art of Critiquing Art," follow the **Step 9**

Resource: [T.A.G. Critique Method Slideshow](#) to structure your classroom critique.



Use the [ARTEFFECT Judging Criteria Rubric](#) as a guideline when conversing about the aesthetic value and how well each work connects to the LMC Unsung Hero's life and/or heroic actions.

Step 10: Write Impact Statement

As a class, review the [ARTEFFECT Impact Statement Outline](#). Students write an Impact Statement (500-1000 words) that covers these points:

1. Introduces your LMC Unsung Hero and why you chose this individual.
2. Addresses what is most important about your LMC Unsung Hero. Discuss what you most admire about this individual (e.g., as a role model, character traits, actions, values, their challenge or cause).
3. Explains your creative interpretation of your Unsung Hero's story, character traits and heroic acts in your artwork.
4. Describes the impact that creating your artwork has had on your outlook on life and how you will share your artwork and your Unsung Hero's story with your community.

Students may create a rough draft for their Impact Statement using the **Step 10 Resource:** [Impact Statement Worksheet](#).



Vocabulary

Materials are the physical substances used to make works of art and design.

Processes are the physical and conceptual activities involved with making works of art and design.

Symbolism is the representation of subjects or ideas by use of a visual device or motif to create underlying meaning in a work of art.

Synthesis is the combination of parts or elements to form a whole.

Thumbnails are sketches used for idea development created prior to the production of an artwork used to organize space/composition.

Visual Storytelling involves the use of graphics, imagery, pictures, and videos to engage with viewers in an effort to drive emotions, engage intercommunication, and motivate an audience to action.

Modifications/Extensions Activity

1. Before students begin the [Thumbnail Sketch Worksheet](#) in Step 6, consider getting them warmed up with a **visual brainstorm activity**. Handout the **Modifications/Extensions Resource: [Visual Brain Dump Worksheet](#)** to students and have a fun competition to see who can fill in the most circles with a different design in two minutes.
2. Depending on the size and comfort level of your class to discuss their work in an oral critique, you may consider a **written critique** as an option using the **Modifications/Extensions Resource: [Written Critique Worksheet](#)**. This resource can easily be adapted to any size of class and use as much or as little time as desired.
3. For elementary aged students, consider reading the book, [The Hero Within](#), to introduce the concept of creating a project about Unsung Heroes.

Resources

Pre-reading. White, K. (2021, May 6). [Wake Up to Life with Bo Bartlett](#). Sothebys.

Broad and High. (2013, December 18). [The Last Supper](#) (video about Julie Green's *Last Supper* series. Youtube.

Crowe, A. (2022, January 31). [What are the key elements of a story?](#) Prodigy.

The Bo Bartlett Center. Works from the Bartlett Center's Permanent Collection. [Videos of Bo Bartlett describing his narrative paintings](#).

ARTEFFECT Competition Resources

The ARTEFFECT competition is open to middle and high school students and accepts submissions on artworks about the LMC Unsung Heroes from October 1, 2025-April 21, 2026.

[ARTEFFECT Introduction Video](#)

[ARTEFFECT Competition](#)

[ARTEFFECT Preapproved Unsung Heroes](#)

[ARTEFFECT Judging Rubric](#)

[ARTEFFECT Impact Statement Outline](#)

[Student FAQs](#)

Curriculum Connections / Standards

Common Core Standards for English Language Arts

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.2](#)
Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.B](#)
Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B](#)
Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.

Common Core Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1](#)
Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2](#)
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7](#)
Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

National Visual Art Standards

- [VA:Cr1.1.IIIa](#)
Visualize and hypothesize to generate plans for ideas and directions for creating art and design that can affect social change.
- [VA:Cr1.2.IIa](#)
Choose from a range of materials and methods of traditional and contemporary artistic practices to plan works of art and design.
- [VA:Cr2.1.IIa](#)
Through experimentation, practice, and persistence, demonstrate acquisition of skills and knowledge in a chosen art form.
- [VA:Cr3.1.IIa](#)
Engage in constructive critique with peers, then reflect on, reengage, revise, and refine works of art and design in response to personal artistic vision.
- [VA:Pr6.1.IIa](#)
Make, explain, and justify connections between artists or artwork and social, cultural, and political history.
- [VA:Re8.1.Ia](#)
Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts.
- [VA:Cn10.1.Ia](#)
Document the process of developing ideas from early stages to fully elaborated ideas.
- [VA:Cn10.1.IIa](#)
Utilize inquiry methods of observation, research, and experimentation to explore unfamiliar subjects through artmaking.
- [VA:Cn10.1.IIIa](#)
Synthesize knowledge of social, cultural, historical, and personal life with art-making approaches to create meaningful works of art or design.

LMC Unsung Heroes Heroic Traits and Actions

LMC Heroic Traits

Compassion
Conscience
Courage
Generosity
Humility
Perseverance
Responsibility
Selflessness
Valor
Vision

LMC Heroic Actions

Build Bridges to Unite
Challenge Limitations
Challenge the Status Quo
Face Prejudice
Make a Difference
Power of One Person
Repair the World
Respect All Living Beings
Stand Up for What You Believe
Take Risks to Do What is Right

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Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes

ARTEFFECT



[The Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes \(LMC\)](#) celebrates individuals who created positive change in history by improving the lives of others through their extraordinary actions in service to others and society. By sharing the stories of these individuals who did extraordinary things, LMC seeks to inspire the hero within everyone.

Expanding LMC's mission, [ARTEFFECT](#) invites educators and their students to explore the diverse stories of LMC Unsung Heroes and their invaluable lessons as role-models from history through the visual arts. It includes an annual competition, professional development, and exhibitions. The ARTEFFECT lesson plans support teaching and learning to generate unique, creative interpretations of these stories in an array of artistic mediums. Students are encouraged to showcase their artworks beyond the classroom to explore the potential of their art to create positive community impact and inspire social action.

The ARTEFFECT competition invites U.S. and international middle and high school students to submit exceptional artworks that creatively interpret an LMC Unsung Hero's story in a unique and compelling way accompanied by an Impact Statement. Since 2016, over 2,000 students have participated in the competition. The annual competition accepts submissions from October-April and awards prizes to students and recognition to their teachers. [Learn more](#) about the competition, previous winners, the prize categories, and the full guidelines.

Lesson plan created by Brad LeDuc. Brad LeDuc has over 22 years of experience in the classroom as a K-12 art educator and is currently a high school art teacher at Washburn Rural School in Topeka, KS. As an innovative educator, Brad strives to promote an environment that both challenges and nourishes his students. In 2013, he was named the Milken Educator for the state of Kansas, was the 2013 Distinguished Kansan for Education. In 2014, he was a Fellow at the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes. In 2018, he was named the 2018-2019 Outstanding Secondary Art Educator of the Year in the state of Kansas by the Kansas Art Education Association. Most recently, the Milken Family Foundation documentary film, [Brad LeDuc: Portrait of an Artist](#), received a 2020 Heartland Emmy. In 2022, LeDuc was an Artist-In-Residence at the Alice C. Sabatini Gallery in Topeka, KS. To learn more about Brad, visit: <http://www.bradleduc.com/>.

Stay Connected: [ARTEFFECT Art Educators on Facebook](#)

LowellMilkenCenter.org