



Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes

ARTEFFECT

Artmaking & Design for Social Impact
Visual Arts Lesson Plan

Artmaking & Design for Social Impact

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. There are so many aspects to any one person's story that it can be easy to get lost in the details. This lesson supports students in approaching their Unsung Heroes stories through words and images to create powerful concepts for their ARTEFFECT projects.

In this lesson, teachers guide students in searching for impact and meaning early in the artmaking process. “Designing for Social Impact” requires a deep connection with the concept in order to make relevant and authentic artwork that communicates and empowers communities. Students first focus on the contributions and character of a chosen Unsung Hero through word art activities, then students will utilize the knowledge gained in the activities by creating a visual work of art and writing an Impact Statement.

Learning Objectives

1. Explore the meaning of social impact and its application to the visual arts.
2. Understand the outcomes for artworks that are designed to make a social impact upon an intended audience.
3. Explore tools to effectively design for social impact, from creating an original concept to a completed artwork.
4. Connect with the LMC Unsung Heroes as role models, and the positive and profound impact on the course of history made by their chosen Unsung Hero.
5. Investigate creative interpretation of an Unsung Hero's story through powerful words and word art activities.
6. Build on foundational social impact concepts and exploratory words to write an Impact Statement that reflects a deeper understanding and connection with the Unsung Hero's journey.
7. Strengthen connections between visual art, English language arts, and social studies.

Time Frame

The initial introduction of the ARTEFFECT project and the word art activities will be broken down over the course of three 50-minute class periods. After that, students should devote considerable time to the design and production of their projects.

- **Day 1:** Complete Step 1; begin Step 2
- **Day 2:** Complete Step 2; begin Step 3
- **Day 3:** Complete Step 3; begin Step 4
- **Day 4+:** Steps 4–10*

*Creating artworks is a multi-day process...

Materials

Pencils, Paper, Mixed media, online research tools.

Resources

- Step 3: [Unsung Hero's Journey Worksheet](#)
[Unsung Hero's Journey Graphic](#)
- Step 4: [Word Art Activity Worksheet](#)
- Step 4: [Word Art Slideshow](#)
- Step 5: [Thumbnail Sketches Worksheet](#)
- Step 9: [Impact Statement Worksheet](#)

Lesson Plan Activities

Step 1: What is Social Impact?

Begin the lesson by engaging students in a conversation that defines “social impact.” Ask students to reflect on the following questions in a class discussion.

- Is social impact always positive?
- Who creates social impact?
- Who is impacted upon?
- How do we measure social impact?

Social impact is the change that results from an action or policy that affects people and communities. It can be caused by individuals, organizations, or businesses. Positive social impact can be measured by the number of people whose lives are improved and how much they are improved over time.

Step 2: Explore the Concept of “Design for Social Impact”

Begin a discussion with students about how the visual arts can have a social impact, showing some examples (see References). Designing for social impact **ENGAGES, ENLIGHTENS, AND EMPOWERS VIEWERS**. Introduce the ten elements to consider when designing artworks for social impact:

DESIGNING ARTWORK FOR SOCIAL IMPACT

- 1. Understand Your Audience**
Identify the target group for your message with cultural sensitivity.
- 2. Clear Message and Intent**
Define the purpose of your artwork. Focus on clarity of your message.
- 3. Authenticity**
Artwork reflects genuine experiences. Work with community members for insight.
- 4. Emotional Engagement**
Explore how empathy and storytelling can be part of the process of creating the artwork.
- 5. Accessibility**
Aim for simplicity in design; consider multimedia approaches.
- 6. Symbolism and Visual Impact**
Explore high contrast and bold designs, and symbols.
- 7. Call to Action**
Artwork should encourage engagement and inspire change.
- 8. Ethical Considerations**
Avoid exploitation. Respect privacy.
- 9. Longevity and Relevance**
Timeless appeal and adaptability.
- 10. Sustainability**
Use environmentally friendly materials.



Step 3: Choose Your LMC Unsung Hero

In this next step, students will choose an Unsung Hero as the focus for their projects. Students select 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. Take time with students to explore how their selected Unsung Hero made a social impact.

DEFINING AND SELECTING AN UNSUNG HERO

- 1) Lead the class in a brief discussion of what defines an “Unsung Hero.” Why would some individuals who changed the course of history be “unsung?” Review the [LMC Heroic Traits and Actions](#) and have students discuss their meanings in small groups.
- 2) Provide students with the [ARTEFFECT Unsung Heroes Directory](#) and have them begin reviewing the list.
- 3) Using their journals, students can begin selecting and recording a word, words, phrases, character traits, or actions from the Unsung Hero’s biography.
- 4) Have students complete the **Step 3 Resource:** [Unsung Hero’s Journey Worksheet](#) to outline their thoughts and connections to their chosen Unsung Hero. The **Step 3 Resource:** [Unsung Hero’s Journey Graphic](#) can help students explore the Unsung Hero’s story from multiple angles.

UNSUNG HERO

An individual, largely unrecognized by society, who took extraordinary actions that improved the lives of others and had a positive and profound impact on the course of history.



[Find your LMC Unsung Hero on the ARTEFFECT Unsung Heroes Directory](#)

Step 4: Word Art – Mini Project Activity

Students begin the process of creating their artworks by designing around a word. Have students select a word(s) that resonates the most from their reading about the Unsung Hero’s story. Taking this ‘deep dive’ into the Unsung Hero’s story helps all students focus on the core elements of the Unsung Hero’s contributions, rather than their ‘face.’ This word will drive the project.



Using the **Step 4 Resource:** [Word Art Activity Worksheet](#), students begin by writing/drawing the word(s) in a way that conveys its meaning. Encourage students to use color; choices of hue and even typographical elements will inform their word art. Concentrating on the word(s) and their meaning will be a foundation for writing the Impact Statement, as students have already defined what the Unsung Hero’s story means to them with their Word Art project. Refer to the **Step 4 Resource:** [Word Art Slideshow](#) for examples of Word Art to show students.



See Modifications/**Extensions** section **WORD CLOUDS ACTIVITY** generate additional and related words for this step.

Step 5: Composition Sketches

Students will plan out their artworks using information from their Unsung Hero Journey Worksheet (Step 3) and their Word Art Activity Worksheet (Step 4) in the form of **thumbnail sketches**. Visit with students to discuss the examples provided and how each student will begin designing their composition. Use the Step 5 Resource: [Thumbnail Sketches Worksheet](#) to generate ideas.

Step 6: Select Process & Materials

Students take their best **thumbnail sketch** and create a rough draft of their project. In this rough draft, students identify the art materials they will need.

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: Introduce Project Criteria, Competition Rules & Evaluation

Visit the LMC website to view ARTEFFECT [student award-winners](#) and [finalists](#) from previous years of the competition. 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 in 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 9). Revisions should be considered and made when necessary while creating the work of art and reference made to their Thumbnail Sketches Worksheet (Step 5). ***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 and the social change they hope to make through their artwork.

Step 9: Write Impact Statement

Be sure to have students reference their Word Art Mini Project Activity while writing, for inspiration. As a class, review the [ARTEFFECT Impact Statement Outline](#) for full prompts. Students write an Impact Statement (500-1,000 words) that covers these four areas:

1. Introduce your LMC Unsung Hero and why you chose this individual.
2. Discuss your Unsung Hero's impact. How did your Unsung Hero contribute to a positive change in the course of history?
3. Describe your artistic vision and process.
4. Share the impact on yourself and others. How will your Unsung Hero's story influence your actions or outlook on life? What plans do you have to share your project with your community?



Students are encouraged to create rough drafts using the [Impact Statement Worksheet](#) and to share their essays with their peers.

Step 10: Present ARTEFFECT Projects in a Public Forum

Students showcase their projects in a public forum (e.g., art show, assembly, hallway display). Encourage conversation about the projects. Have students educate visitors about their Unsung Hero. If possible, consider displaying the Word Art Mini Projects and the Impact Statements alongside the artworks.

Modifications/Extension Activity

WORD CLOUDS ACTIVITY

As an extension for Step 4, visit the [word cloud app](#) where students can enter a set of words from the Unsung Hero's biographical outline. The app will generate a "wordcloud" in any color or shape they like. This is a great way for students to 'see' the vocabulary. It can be very helpful for those with language limitations, and helps all students focus on the core elements of the Unsung Hero's story. Enter words, keywords, names, etc.; all choices can be changed or made larger or smaller. The overall shape, color, and size of the word cloud can all be adjusted, and the finished graphic is downloadable. Students who struggle with language may find that using an online resource like this will help them to visualize text in an artistic way, and play with words which may be unfamiliar to them.



Vocabulary

Balance is when things are arranged in a way that feels even, fair, or stable, like in a design where no part looks heavier or more important than another.

Contrast is the difference between two things, like light and dark values, that makes each stand out more.

Composition refers to how things are arranged or put together to make a whole.

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.

Synthesis is bringing different ideas or parts together to make something new or complete.

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

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](#)

References

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Curriculum Connections / Standards

National Visual Art Standards

Visual Arts—Connecting

o VA:Cn10.1.1a

Document the process of developing ideas from early stages to fully elaborated ideas.

o VA:Cn10.1.1Ia

Utilize inquiry methods of observation, research, and experimentation to explore unfamiliar subjects through artmaking.

o VA:Cn10.1.1IIa

Synthesize knowledge of social, cultural, historical, and personal life with art-making approaches to create meaningful works of art or design.

Visual Arts—Presenting

o VA:Pr6.1.1Ia

Make, explain, and justify connections between artists or artwork and social, cultural, and political history.

Visual Arts—Creating

o VA:Cr1.1.1IIa

Visualize and hypothesize to generate plans for ideas and directions for creating art and design that can affect social change.

o VA:Cr1.2.1Ia

Choose from a range of materials and methods of traditional and contemporary artistic practices to plan works of art and design.

o VA:Cr2.1.1Ia

Through experimentation, practice, and persistence, demonstrate acquisition of skills and knowledge in a chosen art form.

Common Core Standards for English Language Arts

o 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.

o 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.

Common Core Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies

o 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.

California English Language Development Standards

o Collaborative

ELD.PI.1 Exchanging information and ideas with others through oral collaborative conversations on range of social and academic topics

ELD.PI.2. Interacting with others in written English in various communicative forms (print, communicative technology, and multimedia).

o Interpretive

ELD.PI.6. Reading closely literary and informational texts and viewing multimedia to determine how meaning is conveyed explicitly and implicitly through language.

Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes

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[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 E. Dominic Black. E. Dominic Black, MA Ed., is a professional artist and art teacher with a B.A. in Art and a master's degree in Education. He is the VAPA Department Chair and the painting and drawing instructor at San Dimas High School, where he has taught basic, advanced and AP Studio art for over twenty-two years. Mr. Black has served as a member of the teacher advisory council for the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles and the La Brea Tar Pits at the Page Museum where he created a book of original art curriculum for the museums. Dominic has also taught 2D design at the Career and Technical Education Center at the Pomona Fairplex, where he developed an advanced level painting program, Reed Fine Arts. Dominic is an art teacher and curriculum designer for the visual arts for The Berridge Programs. Mr. Black serves as an educational travel consultant for Worldstrides/Explorica, Inc. and he has led field trips with students through Europe and Asia every summer since 2011. In October 2022, Dominic and his wife were awarded the cruise of a lifetime, as part of the NCL Giving Joy to Teachers Program and the Kelly Clarkson Show. In 2024, Mr. Black was honored with the CAEA Ruth Jansen Distinguished Art Educator Award.

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