

# Expressionism, Dada, and Graffiti: German Artistic Rebels

Grade 9-12, Adv  
Level:

Subject: World & European History

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## Overview & Purpose

One of my favorite poets, Kahlil Gibran, sums up the purpose of this lesson quite well,

*“They have exiled me now from their society and I am pleased, because humanity does not exile except the one whose noble spirit rebels against despotism and oppression. He who does not prefer exile to slavery is not free by any measure of freedom...”*

My students don't often think of art as an act of rebellion. When I ask in class what rebellion is I get sullen stares of anger (as they usually think I am making fun of teenagers), but they soon learn that teenagers have changed the world more than once during the course of world history and have inspired rebellions against despotism and oppression.

In this lesson students will learn that art has been, and still is, used as a subversive form of rebellion against oppressive, despotic, and modern governments through the study of two artistic movements in German history.

## Education Standards Addressed

- **NSS-WH.5-12.8 ERA 8: A HALF-CENTURY OF CRISIS AND ACHIEVEMENT, 1900-1945**
- **The student understands the interplay of new artistic and literary movements with changes in social and cultural life in various parts of the world in the post-war decades.**
  - Evaluate the impact of World War I and its aftermath on literature, art, and intellectual life in Europe and the United States. [**Draw upon visual and literary sources**]
  - Evaluate the meaning and social impact of innovative movements in literature, architecture and the fine arts, such as Cubism, Surrealism, Expressionism, Socialist Realism, and jazz. [**Draw upon visual, literary, and musical sources**]
  - Analyze how new media—newspapers, magazines, commercial advertising, film, and radio—contributed to the rise of mass culture around the world. [**Obtain historical data from a variety of sources**]

## **NSS-WH.5-12.9 ERA 9: THE 20TH CENTURY SINCE 1945: PROMISES AND PARADOXES**

### **The student in grades 5-12 should understand**

- **how post-World War II reconstruction occurred, new international power relations took shape, and colonial empires broke up.**
- **the search for community, stability, and peace in an interdependent world.**
- **major global trends since World War II.**
  - Evaluate the impact of World War II and its aftermath on literature, art, and intellectual life in Europe and other parts of the world. [**Analyze cause-and-effect relationships**]
  - Analyze connections among electronic communications, international marketing, and the emergence of popular “global culture” in the late 20th century. [**Obtain historical data from a variety of sources**]
  - Assess the influence of television, the Internet, and other forms of electronic communication on the creation and diffusion of cultural and political information worldwide. [**Formulate historical questions**]
  - Evaluate the meaning and social impact of innovative movements in literature and the arts such as Existentialism, Abstract Expressionism, or Pop Art. [**Draw upon visual and literary sources**]

**Teacher Guide** (2-3 40 minute periods)

<b>Objectives</b>	<p>Students will analyze two unstable periods in German history and discuss how art can be an outlet of discontentment and an act of rebellion.</p> <p>Students will research and create their own artistic work that represents how they feel about a current issue our government faces.</p>	<b>Materials Needed</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper</li> <li>• Pencil</li> <li>• PowerPoint</li> <li>• LCD projector</li> <li>• Poster Paper</li> <li>• Internet access</li> <li>• Newspapers/Current Events</li> </ul>
<b>Information</b>	<p>Notes/PowerPoint on Expressionism in Great War Germany compared to Graffiti in Cold War and Modern Germany</p> <p>“Arts of Rebellion” Analysis Worksheets</p> <p>“Rebel with Art” Assignment</p>	
<b>Activity</b>	<p>Students will research current local, national, and world events and movements that have created or are creating discontent in Germany and create an artistic work that expresses the emotion of the masses. Each artistic work will be coupled with an analysis of the event/person/movement that inspired the piece.</p>	

## Student Notes

- Opening question: How can art be a form of political expression?
  - Think of contemporary art (songs, movies, poems, paintings, cartoons) that you have recently seen or heard that carry a political message. Why might music, poetry, or paintings be more persuasive than an article in a newspaper?
  - Why do you think people use art to communicate a political message?
- Art throughout time has been used as a political expression of who has power and those who are powerless.
- There is the idea of “proper” art and what is “not” art; but who really decides what is art? How do we really determine whether or not something is a work of “art”?
- Germany throughout its history has been known for its distinguished arts
  - German art goes back to prehistory...look at the Venus of Hohle Fels from Bronze Age Germany
  - During the reign of Charlemagne (Carolingian Empire) Germany became known for its illuminated manuscripts
  - During the High Middle Ages, Romanesque art became all the rage and used in churches, tombs, and homes
  - Printmaking, woodcut and engraving have been long held art forms in Germany
  - The Northern Renaissance brought in new artistic elements from Italy and influenced the works of artists like Albrecht Durer
  - There were German art schools established; such as the Danube School
  - Germany artists produced art in the Baroque, Rococo, neo-classical and most other periods
- But what this lesson focuses on is how art can be used to express discontent; to be a subversive form of rebellion against oppressive, despotic, and modern governments.
- Today we will focus on two periods of discontent and political upheaval in German History and the art that was created from this milieu
  - Around the Great War
    - Expressionism (focusing on the Die Brücke group)
    - Dada
  - And Cold War to Post-Modern Germany
- Expressionism
  - Expressionism originated in Germany at the beginning of the 1900's as an “avant-garde movement” and is known to present the world in an utterly subjective perspective, that violently distorts to evoke emotional angst...they might be considered the “emo” of that time.
    - Max Beckman - The Night, 1919
    - Otto Dix – Stromtroops Advancing Under Gas, 1924
    - Emil Nolde – The Prophet, 1912
    - Erich Heckel – Madchen am Meer, 1918
    - Ernst Ludwig Kirchner – Marzella, 1909
    - Ernst Ludwig Kirchner – Erna, 1930.
- Dada
  - Dadaists believed that logic and reason of the capitalistic society had led people into war and thus expressed their rejection of capitalistic ideology by embracing irrationality and chaos
    - Hannah Hoch – Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany, 1919
    - Georg Grosz – Republican Automaton, 1920
    - Max Ernst - Europe After the Rain, 1940-42
- How did these two groups express dissatisfaction with the political, economic, and cultural aspects of the Germany during the era around WWI and WWII?
- Graffiti (means to scratch a public marking) has existed since ancient times – I am not promoting Graffiti, Graffiti without the owner's consent is considered defacement and vandalism which is a punishable crime – but sometimes graffiti is used to express political and social messages of discontent.
  - Graffiti from Pompeii
  - Graffiti from the Hagia Sophia (Viking)
  - Berlin Wall graffiti (examples of)
  - Graffiti in Berlin (current)
- How did these graffiti artists express their dissatisfaction? What were they protesting?
- Closing: Explain how art can be an outlet for discontentment? Have you ever expressed your discontentment through art? Give examples.

## Sources

### **Berlin Wall**

1968, By. "Art Crimes: The Culture and Politics of Graffiti Art." *Art Crimes - The Writing on the Wall - Graffiti Art Worldwide*. Web. 05 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.graffiti.org/faq/werwath/werwath.html>>.

"Art Crimes: Berlin 1." *Art Crimes - The Writing on the Wall - Graffiti Art Worldwide*. Web. 05 Oct. 2010. <[http://www.graffiti.org/berlin/berlin\\_1.html](http://www.graffiti.org/berlin/berlin_1.html)>.

"Curtain." *Brian Rose Homepage*. Web. 04 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.brianrose.com/lostborder/wall.htm>>.

### **Analysis Worksheets**

"Photograph Analysis Worksheet." *National Archives and Records Administration*. Web. 04 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/photo.html>>.

### **Additional Readings**

"A Photographer Remembers: Forbidden Photos of Everyday Life in East Germany - SPIEGEL ONLINE - News - International." *SPIEGEL ONLINE - Nachrichten*. Web. 05 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,707570,00.html>>.

### **Other sites of interest:**

"Baghdad Graffiti : NPR." *NPR : National Public Radio : News & Analysis, World, US, Music & Arts : NPR*. Web. 05 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1778622&ps=rs>>.

"Outdoors." *Banksy*. Web. 05 Oct. 2010. <[http://www.banksy.co.uk/outdoors/horizontal\\_1.htm](http://www.banksy.co.uk/outdoors/horizontal_1.htm)>.



"Art Crimes: Berlin 1." *Art Crimes - The Writing on the Wall - Graffiti Art Worldwide*. Web. 05 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.graffiti.org/berlin>>.

Study the picture. Form an overall impression of the picture and then examine individual items. What clues can you find about the location and date of the picture?

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Use the table below to list people, objects, and activities in the picture.

<u>People</u>	<u>Objects</u>	<u>Activities</u>

What is/are the main message(s) of the picture?

What are the secondary messages of the picture?

What three things might you infer from this picture?

What questions does this picture raise in your mind?

How does the picture reflect one of the themes of the resistance or rebellion?

Art Rebel Analysis Sheet 2: Jakob Steinhardt, 1923



Study the picture. Form an overall impression of the picture and then examine individual items. What clues can you find about the location and date of the picture?

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Use the table below to list people, objects, and activities in the picture.

<u>People</u>	<u>Objects</u>	<u>Activities</u>

What is/are the main message(s) of the picture?

What are the secondary messages of the picture?

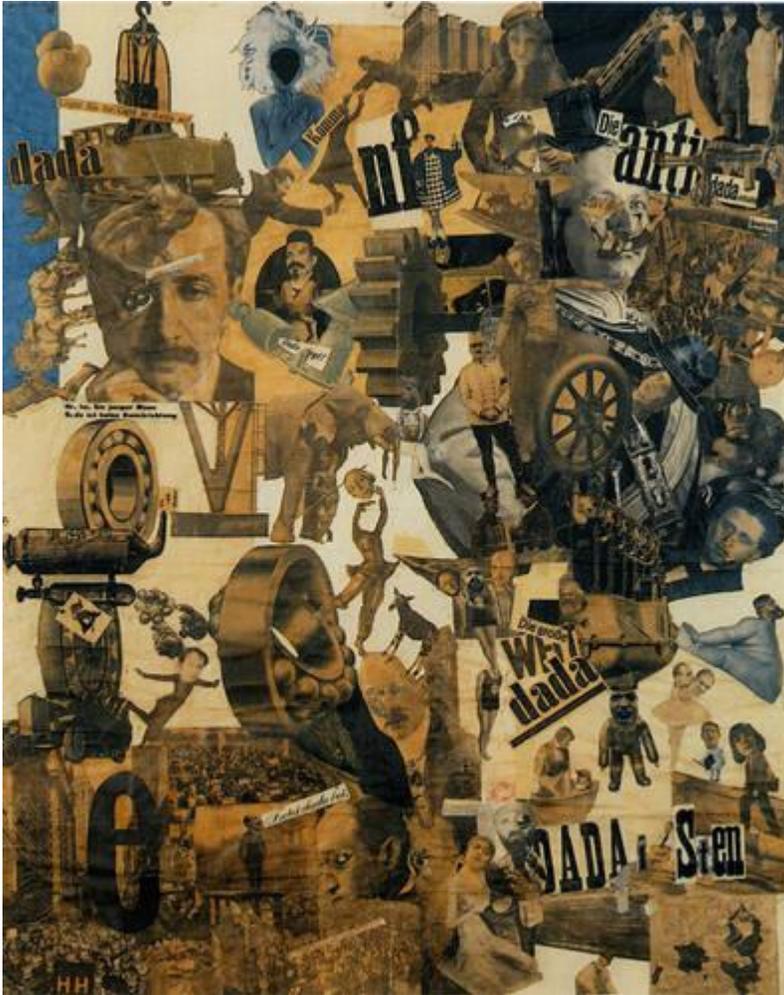
What three things might you infer from this picture?

What questions does this picture raise in your mind?

How does the picture reflect one of the themes of the resistance or rebellion?

**Art Rebel Analysis Sheet 3: Hannah Höch (German, 1889-1978)**

Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany



Study the picture. Form an overall impression of the picture and then examine individual items. What clues can you find about the location and date of the picture?

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Use the table below to list people, objects, and activities in the picture.

<u>People</u>	<u>Objects</u>	<u>Activities</u>

What is/are the main message(s) of the picture?

What are the secondary messages of the picture?

What three things might you infer from this picture?

What questions does this picture raise in your mind?

How does the picture reflect one of the themes of the resistance or rebellion?

## Rebel with Art

Assignment Objective: Students will research current local, national, and world events and movements that have created or are creating discontent in Germany and create an artistic work that expresses the emotion of the masses.

Each artistic work will be coupled with an analysis of the event/person/movement that inspired the piece.

Procedure:

- Research current local, national, and world events and movements that have been or are creating discussion or discontent in Germany today on on-line newspapers like Der Spiegel (<http://www.spiegel.de/international/>)
- Summarize the event or topic
  - What are the issues?
  - What are the respective viewpoints on the topic? Who do they belong to?
  - When and where did this event take place?
  - What is your educated opinion on the topic? Make sure to use examples to support your opinion.
- Create a small work of art that you believe expresses the emotions of the situation
  - A drawing or painting, small sculpture, a photo, etc...
  - Make sure to put thought into what emotions each element of the work stand for and also the emotions it might create

Example: last year a student created his project on the economic crisis and incorporated into the project was a half-shredded US dollar bill...he thought that it was "just a dollar," but many students read more into the shredding and associated it with anger, loss of power, etc. – symbols can be very powerful and have more than one meaning depending on the lens of the viewer.