

Learning Empathy Through Art

Length: Two or three 50-minute class periods

Grades: high school U.S. and World History

Overview: The technology of the atomic bomb had a significant and tragic impact on history during and following World War II. In this lesson students learn about the atomic bomb and about some of the victims of this technology through close observation and discussion of Ben Shahn's *From That Day On*. Students develop a sense of empathy towards the survivors of atomic bombings and translate their reactions into poems.

Note: References in this lesson are made to students doing parts of the lesson online. If computers are not available for student use, alternate options are given.

Objectives:

- Students will hear about the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II as well as bomb testing during the 1950s in Japan.
- Students will research and discuss the physical and emotional side effects for the Japanese people and the economic and political results of the atomic bomb.
- Students will carefully observe Ben Shahn's painting *From That Day On*, reflect on the story of the *Lucky Dragon*, and respond to them in poem form.

Connections to high school TEKS for social studies:

- Student identifies reasons for U.S. involvement in World War II, including the growth of dictatorships and the attack on Pearl Harbor. (113.32.C.6A)
- Student analyzes major issues and events of World War II such as fighting the war on multiple fronts, the internment of Japanese Americans . . . and the development of Harry Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb. (113.32.C.6B)
- Student identifies examples of political, economic, and social oppression and violation of human rights throughout history including slavery, the Holocaust, and other examples of genocide. (113.33.C.18C)
- Student gives examples of major technological innovations that occurred at different periods in history and then describe the changes produced by these innovations. (113.33.C.23A)
- Student creates written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information. (113.32.C.25D)

Materials:

Computers with internet access

[Internet sources](#) or books and encyclopedias on WWII and atomic bomb testing and the *Lucky Dragon*

Poster or computer image of Ben Shahn's *From That Day On* ([Click here to order poster.](#))

[Haiku poem template](#)

[Haiku rubric \(optional\)](#)

Procedure:

1. Show students a poster or computer image of Ben Shahn's *From That Day On*. Have them observe and lead them in a discussion of the artwork by asking:

Describe the people in the painting. What are they wearing?
What does this say about the time and place in which they live?
Describe their facial features, gestures, and body language.
What is their relationship? Based on his expression and pose, how do you think the man feels towards the child?
What do you notice about the scale and color of the man's hands?
What else do you see in the background? What do you think is the meaning of this image?
Describe the lines in this painting. How are the lines used decoratively?
What effect do the patterns in the clothing have on the composition?
What are the main colors used? What associations do you make with these colors?
What sort of mood do these colors imply?
What is the effect of the artist using white in certain areas?
Why do you think the artist used a more abstract style instead of a more realistic style of painting?

2. Using the provided summary tell the story of the *Lucky Dragon* and discuss with students the connections between the artwork and the historical event. Have them reflect on how that information has altered their perception of the painting:

How has your impression of the painting changed now that you know about the historical events surrounding it?
How do the symbols, colors, patterns, and the treatment of the figures in the painting fit together to tell the story of the two figures?
Was Shahn successful in encouraging a sense of empathy for human suffering? Why or why not?

3. To connect Shahn's work to the larger historical issues, discuss with students the development and use of the atomic bomb in Japan and the end of and following WWII. Include in this discussion the impact of the atomic bomb, the scale of destruction it caused, Truman's reasoning for dropping the bomb, and the lives lost in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. If possible, share a first-hand account of a survivor <http://www.inicom.com/hibakusha/> to help students understand how damaging the atomic bomb was to the political, economic, and emotional state of Japan and the Japanese people. Explain to students that atomic bomb testing continued near Japan after WWII.

Note: You may wish to assign reading from their textbook on Hiroshima and Nagasaki the night before this lesson.

4. Explain to students that they will conduct a mini-search on the computer for the conditions surrounding atomic bombing and testing during and following WWII by using

internet resources or their textbooks and books. Instruct students log onto the Blanton website search the listed sites for relevant information by going to:

eLearning > Learning Activities > Learning Empathy through Art > The Artwork in Context or URL <<http://wwwtest.utexas.edu/blanton/utopia/elearning/aac/student.html>>

Allow them 30 minutes to find the answers to the following:

- What circumstances led President Truman to make the decision to use the bomb in Japan?
- Why did the U.S. continue testing bombs in Japan?
- How did the U.S. help Japan recover from the devastation of atomic war?
- Describe the physical and emotional impact of the atomic bomb on the Japanese people.

5. Next, have students get into groups of 4 or 5 to discuss their research. Each person in the group should share 3 to 5 minutes of information and then allow other students to voice their personal reactions to the findings.

6. Tell students that they will respond to the painting and their new knowledge of atomic bomb testing. Have them either in groups or independently log onto the Blanton website and have them choose:

eLearning > Learning Activities > Learning Empathy through Art > Respond and Create or URL <<http://wwwtest.utexas.edu/blanton/utopia/elearning/aac/student.html>>

Ask students to brainstorm words and phrases about the artwork and to follow the website's instructions which will result in them writing a haiku. Students may either print or email their poem to themselves, the teacher, or another person when finished.

7. Invite students to read their poems to the class and/or compile the poems into a class book as a memorial to the victims of atomic bomb. Have students discuss their poems in relation to Ben Shahn's work and what they have learned about victims of the atomic bomb.

Related Resources:

<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/08/spotlight/>

The lives of the *Lucky Dragon* crewmembers

<http://www.american.edu/TED/LUCKY.HTM>.

The *Lucky Dragon* Incident

<http://www.inicom.com/hibakusha/>

Eyewitness accounts of the bombing of Hiroshima

<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/teacher/abomb.htm>

President Truman's reasons for dropping the atomic bomb in Japan

http://www.montgomery.k12.il.us/hillsboro/hjhs/dyke/dyke_1.htm

A teacher website that provides links to other sites about atomic war

<http://www.toyomasu.com/haiku>

Explanations, examples, and directions for writing haiku poems

Writing Haiku Poems

A *haiku* is a Japanese form of poetry about a single idea that has three lines. The first and third lines must have 5 syllables, and the second line must be 7 syllables. If you are not sure how many syllables a word has, look it up in a dictionary.

Here is an example:

**A father holding
His innocent child reflects
On his certain fate.**

Now try your hand at writing your own haiku using the words and phrases about Ben Shahn's *From That Day On*.

Line 1: 5 syllables _____

Line 2: 7 syllables _____

Line 3: 5 syllables _____

Haiku Poem Rubric

- _____ Word choice (exceptional, above average, adequate, vague, poor)—up to 20 points
- _____ Fluency with expression (exceptional, above average, adequate, some fluency though lapses are evident, little fluency, many lapses evident)—up to 25 points
- _____ Fits 5, 7, 5 syllable pattern (fits pattern well, pattern accomplished but forced in places, pattern has several lapses, pattern not accomplished)—up to 30 points
- _____ Spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors (no errors, few errors, some errors, many errors, poem difficult to understand due to errors)—up to 25 points