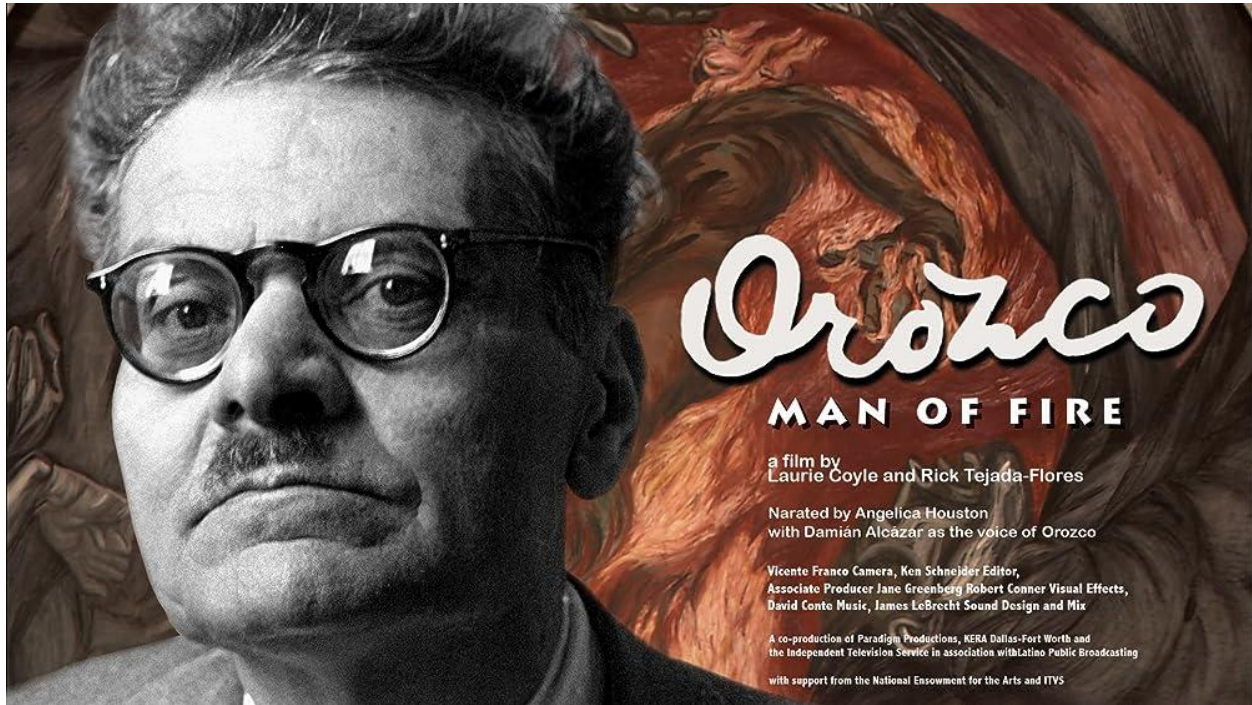


OROZCO: Man of Fire

Educator Guide: 90-120 minutes + Assignments



OVERVIEW

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Areas:

Social Studies, Latina/o Studies, Civics, World History, Art History

Class Time: 90 to 120 minutes + Assignments

[Latino Public Broadcasting Website](#)

Summary:

José Clemente Orozco was one of the primary artistic innovators of the twentieth century. Along with his fellow Mexican muralists, he revived the fresco tradition. Unlike Italian Renaissance frescos, which celebrated a unified vision of the world and humanity's place within it, Orozco's frescos express a modernist sensibility that questions and deconstructs. He forged an original and remarkable synthesis in monumental murals that are imbued with beauty, irony and a critical spirit.

Orozco had great tenacity and an unshakeable faith in his mission. He was a master painter yet he faced tremendous obstacles in his long journey of becoming an artist. His work was an expression of his experience, and it bore witness to the seismic changes and volatile social and political landscape of his era.

OROZCO: *Man of Fire* depicts the life story of an artist who saw his role as a public witness to violence, injustice, and hypocrisy. What does it mean to bear witness? Why is it important, and how can students bear witness to the challenging and changing times we live in today?

Objectives:

Students will:

- Explore what it means to “bear witness” and develop a working definition for the phrase
- Learn about José Clemente Orozco and how his art work bears witness to the social and political events that unfolded during his lifetime
- Understand the role of muralism in promoting social and political ideas that reflect society and its immediate concerns
- Design an individual or group mural that bears witness to an important issue in your community and write an artist’s statement about the work

Skills

- Analytical viewing
- Interpreting information and drawing informed conclusions
- Thinking critically about commonly-presented historical narratives
- Stating and supporting opinions in class discussions and in writing
- Working collaboratively while also expressing yourself creatively
- Stating and supporting opinions in class discussions and in writing

Resources/Materials

- *OROZCO: Man of Fire* Film Module (available on the PBS Learning Media website: www.pbslearningmedia.org)
- *OROZCO: Man of Fire* Discussion Guide
- Computers with Internet access
- LCD projector
- Student Handout A
- Teacher Handout A
- Whiteboard or blackboard
- Pen and writing paper
- Art supplies

ACTIVITIES AND PROCEDURES

ACTIVITY 1: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BEAR WITNESS?

Time: 30 minutes

You will need: Teacher Handout A: Bearing Witness, paper, pens/pencils, white/blackboard

Summary: Students will engage in an exercise and discussion about what it means to “bear witness”. They will use this discussion as a jumping-off point, to create a working

definition for the phrase, “to bear witness”, which they will revisit and refine throughout the lesson.

- Write the phrase “To Bear Witness” on the board and ask the class if this is an expression that they have heard before. Can they give an example of a context in which they heard it used?
- Randomly distribute the following quotations (see Teacher Handout A: Bearing Witness) to the class, giving one to each student and ask them to read the quotation, think about what it means to them, then rewrite the quotation in their own words.
- Organize the class into small groups of 3-4 students who share the same quote and have them share their revisions then discuss how each group member interpreted the quote. The group should collaborate to create a group interpretation of the quote.
- **(Think-Pair-Share Variation:** Ask the students to turn to a neighbor and share their quotes and interpretations. Students with different quotes may share and discuss.)
- Ask for a volunteer from each group to share their quote and their interpretation, and encourage the class to provide constructive feedback and/or ask clarifying questions.
- Ask the class to describe what all of these quotations have in common and record the responses on the board. Discuss using the following prompts:
 - Based on our understanding of the quotations, what does it mean “to bear witness”?
 - What do you think the speakers in these quotations are bearing witness to?
 - Why do these speakers think it is important to bear witness? Do you agree? Why or why not?
 - Can you think of an example when you or someone you know needed to bear witness to an injustice? What was the outcome?
 - What is the risk? Doesn’t it make situations worse when you focus on difficult or uncomfortable truths? Isn’t it better to focus on the positive?
 - What issue or event would you bear witness to?
- Follow-up by asking the class to think of all of the ways that individuals and communities can publicly bear witness. What forms can bearing witness take? Record the responses on the board. (For example: signing a petition, contacting an elected official, making a speech, joining a protest, writing a song, making a mural, performing a poem, writing to a newspaper, making a video, taking a photo, telling your story, telling someone else’s story if they are unable to speak, etc.)
 - What media do people use today to bear witness?
 - What role can art play in bearing witness?
- Based on the discussion, create a working definition for the phrase “to bear witness”. Record the definition on the board and revisit throughout the lesson.

ACTIVITY 2: MAN OF FIRE

Time: 20 minutes

Film Module: *OROZCO: Man of Fire – Bearing Witness* (09:50 Minutes)

You will need: Computers with Internet access, multimedia projector, writing paper, pens

Summary: Students will view the film module and make note of quotes and moments that resonate with the group discussion from Activity 1.

- Ask them to consider the following question while watching the Module: How does Orozco bear witness to the social and political events of his time?
- Discuss their notes and feedback after the film and ask them for specific instances from the film that speak to the theme of bearing witness.

Note to Teachers: The film module consists of four separate sections, each exploring a different aspect of the theme “bearing witness”. Below are brief introductions to each section:

The Mexican Revolution as Crucible

Orozco lived through the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and experienced first-hand the terrible toll that war and revolution inflict on ordinary people. The black and white ink drawings here capture the Revolution’s violence, chaos and suffering with the immediacy of a photograph. But they are more than a documentary record of the events: they convey Orozco’s distress and shock the viewer out of complacency.

A Personal Testimony

With the murals at the preparatory school, Orozco again tackles the subject of revolution. Here he paints savage satires of the gross inequalities and social injustice that gave rise to the Revolution: dire poverty, political corruption and church hypocrisy. He then moves on to create iconic images of the ordinary people that participated in its struggles. These quiet and nuanced images attain the power of universal tragedy, inspiring us to reflect on the human condition over the ages.

Against Easy Answers

Orozco’s portrait of Padre Hidalgo, the father of Mexican Independence, contrasts with heroic portraits of we’ve seen of George Washington and the American Revolution. His intentions are moral not political, depicting winners and losers, victims and victimizers on all sides of a conflict. Painted in the 1930s, Orozco’s fiery mural condemns all fanaticism and critiques the ideologies of fascism, Nazism and communism that were on the rise at the time. His message is that there are no easy answers. But he’s not a nihilist: he challenges us to grapple with right and wrong.

Why I have Painted a Dive Bomber

The outbreak of World War II coincided with the development of new technologies that could kill efficiently from a distance, including modern bomber planes that devastated densely populated areas. The mechanization and abstraction of these weapons made it easy to ignore the suffering that they caused. Orozco is protesting modern warfare which obliterates the boundary between combatants and civilians. Painting dive bombers in a series of interchangeable panels, Orozco made people look past the shining surfaces of modern weapons to see what they represented in human terms.

ACTIVITY 3: THE WALLS CAN SPEAK

Time: 40-70 minutes

You will need: Student Handout A: Mural Design Proposal, paper, pens/pencils, white/blackboard

Goal: Students will understand the roll of murals as mass media and how this art form provides an accessible platform to engage individuals from all strata of society. They will consider the role of mural making in contemporary life and their own communities and the variety of forms that it takes (political murals, community art, graffiti, digital media).

They will complete the activity by designing their own mural project and writing an artist statement.

- Explain: Murals have been an important art form for the communication and recording of beliefs, ideas, events, and information throughout human history. The paintings at Chauvet Cave in southern France are among the earliest known works of art and date back more than 30,000 years. In the 20th Century, muralism became a vital medium to protest, record, and re-envision the social and political landscape of the time. José Clemente Orozco used murals to bear witness. Why? In the age of the printing press, film and photography, what was the benefit of using the medium of murals to bear witness?
- Discuss why murals were an effective medium for Orozco's message.
 - Why are murals suited to bearing witness?
 - What benefits do murals have over other art forms? (e.g. it's a public medium that can reach many people, it can be understood by people with different languages and levels of literacy, murals do not merely record events they provide the opportunity for individual interpretation and expression, etc.)
 - Do we still see murals today? Are there murals in your community? If so, how would you describe them? What messages do the murals in your community convey? What is their purpose?
 - If Orozco were alive today, what medium would he use to bear witness? Where would he locate his art? Do you think he would make use of the digital walls of the internet? In what way?
- Using the film module and previous activities as a guide, instruct students to design their own mural in the spirit of Orozco's work, which bears witness to an important issue. They will complete the assignment by writing an artist's statement that explains the work and the impact they hope it will have on the audience.

DESIGNING THE MURAL

Working individually or in groups, have students identify an important issue or event in their school, community, or on a global scale that they are inspired to bear witness to. Ask the students to work individually or in small groups to complete Student Handout A: Mural Design Proposal.

MAKING THE MURAL (OPTIONAL)

If additional class time and resources are available, the students can realize their design by creating an actual mural. The mural can be made physically with paint, tiled photographs, or mixed-media collage and hung in the classroom or school hallways. Students can also develop digital murals using photography, graphic design and/or digital video. Completed digital murals can be posted on a class blog or school webpage. The following websites can be used as resources to create and display digital murals:

- o Prezi: online, interactive, animated presentations: www.prezi.com
- o About.me: online “wall” that can be designed with text, images, links and artwork <http://about.me/>
- o Pinterest: An online tool for collecting and organizing ideas, images, and information www.pinterest.com
- o Weebly for Education: Create a private classroom website with individual student or group pages: <http://education.weebly.com/>

DEVELOPING THE ARTIST STATEMENT (Take home assignment)

Once the students have completed their mural, have them write an artist statement about their work. Their essay should answer the following question:

- What issue is this mural addressing?
- Why is it important to you?
- What is your role in the story and whom are you working with to achieve your goals?
- What theme or themes are included in your mural?
- What materials did you choose to make your mural and how do they help illustrate the story?
- Who is the audience for this mural and why?
- What do you want people to learn from your mural?
- What impact would you want it to have?

STANDARDS

Common Core Standards

Speaking and Listening Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies,

Grades 9-12, Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6

Common Core Writing Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies,

Grades 9-12, Nos. 1, 4, 7, 8, 9

National Standards for Arts Education

Students recognize and use the visual arts as a form of creativity and communication. (VA1)

Students relate the visual arts to various historical and cultural traditions. (VA4)

Students analyze and evaluate the characteristics, merits, and meaning of works of art. (VA5)

National Center for History in the Schools

World History Era 7: An Age of Revolutions, 1750-1914, Standard 4

Historical Thinking Standards

Standard 1: Chronological Thinking (A)

Standard 2: Historical Comprehension (E, F)

Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation (A, B, D, H, J)

Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities (B, C, D)

National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

Time, Continuity and Change

Individuals, Groups and Institutions

Power, Authority and Governance

Global Connections

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- www.pbs.org/americanmasters/orozco_j.html Website of the PBS series American Masters /WNET, the public television broadcaster of OROZCO: Man of Fire.
- www.paradigmproductions.org Official website of OROZCO: Man of Fire provides ordering information about the film, a downloadable PDF version of this viewers guide, and other educational resources.
- <http://lauriecoylefilms.com/bundle.html> to order OROZCO: Man of Fire DVDs.

FILMS

- **The Storm that Swept Mexico**
www.pbs.org/itvs/storm-that-swept-mexico
The official interactive website for the film, which includes additional information on notable figures and artists from the Mexican Revolution, a virtual map of historic locations, an online quiz, and educator resources.
- **Rivera in America**
<http://alturasfilm.com/rivera-in-america.html>
1-hour documentary about fellow Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, which focuses on the celebrity and controversy that surrounded Rivera's murals in the United States.
- **William Kentridge: Anything is Possible**
<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/william-kentridge>
1-hour documentary about contemporary South African artist William Kentridge, whose work like Orozco's bears witness to social injustice and human rights violations, especially during the Apartheid era.

BOOKS

- **Orozco, José Clemente.** *The Artist in New York, Letters to Jean Charlot and Unpublished Writings (1925-1929).* University of Texas Press, Austin, 1974
- **Orozco, José Clemente.** *An Autobiography.* Dover Publications, New York, 2001
- **Rochfort, Desmond.** *Mexican Muralists.* Chronicle Books, San Francisco, 1998
- **Hood Museum of Art, Renato González Mello and Diane Miliotes, editors.** *José Clemente Orozco in the United States, 1927-1934.* WW Norton & Co, New York/London, 2002
- **Jacoby, Annice.** *Street Art San Francisco: Mission Muralismo.* Abrams, New York, 2009
- **Becker, Heather.** *Art for the People: The Rediscovery and Preservation of Progressive and WPA-Era Murals in the Chicago Public Schools, 1904-1943.* Chronicle Books, San Francisco, 2002

WEBSITES

- **The Chicago Public Art Group** creates public artwork, trains artists in mural painting, and teaches children creative skills. Download their comprehensive guide to the mural-making process at <http://www.cpag.net/guide/index.htm>.
- **The Social and Public Art Resource Center** is a Los Angeles community arts organization that creates public art projects, maintains a digital mural lab and archives, and provides educational programs <http://www.sparcmurals.org>
- **Precita Eyes Mural Arts Center** is a San Francisco community arts organization that creates mural projects and offers mural painting and art classes to children, youth and adults <http://www.precitaeyes.org>
- **The Kennedy Center** provides educational materials that meet the National Standards For Arts Education, including the lesson plan, Five Artists of the Mexican Revolution <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org>.

**OROZCO: MAN OF FIRE
TEACHER HANDOUT A:
QUOTATIONS: BEARING WITNESS**

Preparation:

Print and cut out the following quotes and distribute to your students. Each student should receive one quote.

Bearing witness says, "You are not alone. I see you. I witness what you are experiencing. What you are experiencing matters to me."

-Judith Johnson, *author, educator and minister*

Whenever one person stands up and says, "Wait a minute, this is wrong," it helps other people to do the same."

-Gloria Steinem, *feminist, journalist and activist*

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

-James Baldwin, *American essayist and novelist*

"Write what should not be forgotten."

-Isabel Allende, *Chilean exile, novelist and journalist*

"I can't think of a case where poems changed the world, but what they do is change people's understanding of what's going on in the world."

-Seamus Heaney, *poet and Nobel Laureate*

"Every artist seems to have the job of bearing witness to the world we live in. To some extent I think of all of us as artists, because we have voices and we are each of us unique."

- Jane Rule, *novelist and activist*

OROZCO: Man of Fire

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