

Janice Mason Art Museum
LESSON PLANS FOR WIER EXHIBIT
Background Information

ARTIST NAME: Horace Clifford (“Cliff”) Westermann
ART PIECE(S) ON DISPLAY: “Popeye”

About the Artist

Horace Clifford (“Cliff”) Westermann was born December 11, 1922, in Los Angeles, California. Because Westermann wasn’t particularly strong as a child, his mother built him a trapeze and climbing set in the backyard. Thus began his fascination with acrobatics, which continued throughout his adult years with his development of a two-man hand-balancing act and walking on his hands. As a young boy, he also was exposed to beautifully handcrafted wooden boxes created by his grandfather and uncle. He often designed and built toys such as carts, scooters and airplanes. During his teenage years, when he felt the need for a bedroom of his own, Westermann built an addition onto his family’s home with scavenged lumber. He also submitted drawings of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs to the Disney Studios. Disney offered Westermann a job, only to rescind the offer once they discovered his young age.

After attending college and working an assortment of logging, railroad, and sawmill jobs, Westermann enlisted in the Marines in 1942. During World War II he served as a gunner on an aircraft carrier in a combat zone, where he witnessed firsthand numerous kamikaze attacks, the sinking of several ships and the deaths of hundreds of military personnel. Following his discharge from the Marines, he moved to Chicago in 1947 and enrolled in The School of The Art Institute of Chicago. After re-enlisting in the Marine Corps in 1950 and serving a tour of duty in Korea, he returned to Chicago and began to pursue his interest in [painting](#). He also picked up some carpentry jobs and recalled and learned more about the woodworking techniques of his grandfather and uncle. These experiences caused him to turn his attention to [sculpture](#), an artistic [medium](#) that would allow him the perfect means to create his own unique style. He received his B.A.F. in 1954, and his first solo-exhibit was in 1956. He continued to create and exhibit his art, and in 1969 was offered a teaching job at the University of California, Berkley. He declined and began his most elaborate creation – a house and studio designed, crafted and built almost entirely by hand in rural Connecticut. This twenty-year project reflects the same qualities and artistic philosophies in his works of art. Westermann said, “ One thing I know [is] that I love quality in lots of things. I don’t like shodiness, I like quality. Maybe it’s just an idiosyncrasy with me, you know.”

Westermann first became ill with heart disease in 1974 and suffered a heart attack in 1978. He completed his last sculpture in 1981, and on October 31 of that year he suffered another heart attack. He died three days later at age 58.

About the Art

H.C. Westermann was a lot of things in life. He was an acrobat, a carpenter, a Marine, a [craftsman](#), an artist, husband and father. He also showed great diversity in his artistic work. Though primarily known as a [sculptor](#), he also was a [craftsman](#) and [printmaker](#), creating

[lithographs](#) and [woodcuts](#). Most of Westermann's works are individualistic and do not follow the trends or movements of the period. Early in his career he was one of a group of artists living in Chicago who were called [The Who](#) or the [Chicago Imagists](#). Their work is based on [surrealism](#) and uses of [repetition](#) of characters, many times, comic book characters. His unique artwork is a visual kaleidoscope of his life. Between 1955 and 1961, Westermann used an assortment of [found objects](#) and commercial materials in his artwork. Bicycle pedals, pile carpet, galvanized sheet metal and linoleum were just as predominantly used in his sculptures as bronze and exotic wood. He is best known for his deftly crafted [sculptural](#) works that addressed recurring themes – death, love and the American dream. Much of his work reflects his wartime experiences. A recurrent [motif](#) in his work was the Death Ship. Conversely, much of Westermann's work also displayed humor through [puns](#), [paradoxes](#) and [irony](#).

The Westermann piece in this exhibit shows his humorous side. "Popeye" is a [woodcut](#); plate #5 from the series "The Connecticut Ballroom"; numbered 5 of 39 in the series. This piece depicts a [surreal](#) scene with Popeye on a beach, hitting a cactus, while a snake watches. It is typical of the [Chicago Imagists'](#) work with its bright colors and [surreal](#) subject matter and situation. Perhaps it harkens back to his days aboard ship as a Marine. This piece was completed in 1976 and measures h 22" X w 28".

Related terms

art forms
career
Chicago Imagists
craftsman
drawing
found objects
irony
lithograph
medium
motif
painting
paradoxes
printmaker
puns
repetition
sculpture
surreal
surrealism
The Who
woodcut

Specific Lesson Plans

Grades K-5

Kentucky Core Content

AH-E4.1.34 Describe a variety of media and processes used to produce two-dimensional (2-D) and three-dimensional (3-D) artwork.

AH-E-4.2.35 Recognize that artists choose to express themselves in different styles and subject matters.

AH-E-4.1.42 Use a variety of media and art processes to produce two-dimensional (2-D) and three-dimensional (3-D) artwork.

AH-E-4.2.31 Identify various purposes for creating works of art.

AH-E-4.2.32 Purposes of Art- expressive (express emotions and ideas), narrative (describe and illustrate experiences), functional (decorate objects).

AH-E-4.2.35 Recognize that artists choose to express themselves in different styles and subject matters.

AH-E-4.2.36 Styles: realistic, abstract, non-objective

Objectives

- To learn that Horace Clifford (“Cliff”) Westermann’s art was greatly influenced by his childhood, teen years, and military experiences.
- To know that he turned down a college teaching job to begin his most elaborate creation, which took twenty years to complete.
- To realize that Cliff Westermann liked to do things right.
- To realize the Cliff Westermann had many **careers**.
- To realize that besides the Death Ship and other themes based on his war experiences he also produced work that showed humor.
- To know that his work displayed in the Janice Mason Art Museum is “Popeye” a **woodcut** that has a **surreal** scene with Popeye on a beach, hitting a cactus, while a snake watches. It has bright colors and a **surreal** subject matter and situation.

Suggested Questions

1. What were some of the things that happened to Cliff Westermann when he was a child, that later influenced his art?
2. What did Cliff Westermann do during his teen years that was unusual?
3. What experiences did Cliff Westermann have in the military that was often reflected in his art?
4. What was Cliff Westermann’s biggest project that took twenty years to complete?
5. How do we know that Cliff Westermann liked to do things right?
6. What were some of the careers that Cliff Westermann had?
7. How do we know Westermann had a humorous side in his art?
8. “Popeye” is a **woodcut** that has a **surreal** scene. What does this mean? Describe the woodcut

Related Activities

1. Have the students select a cartoon character and draw/paint that character in a [surreal](#) situation and scene.
2. Westermann liked to use everyday objects in his sculptures. Have the students design and make a sculpture using some every day objects they bring from home. Have students write about their sculpture explaining its meaning to the reader.
3. Have students tell important things that have happened to them during their lifetime. Discuss ways this might impact their art/careers when they are adults.

Grades 6-8

Kentucky Core Content

AH-M-4.1.34 Identify and describe a variety of art media, art processes, and subject matter to communicate ideas, feelings, experiences, and stories.

AH-M-4.1.35 Media: two dimensional-crayon, pencil, fabric, yarn, paint (tempera, watercolor), ink and pastels.

AH-M-4.1.36 Media: three-dimensional-clay, paper-mache', found objects (used to produce artwork), wood, glass, metal, and stone (Properties of media need to be known in order to respond to artworks).

AH-M-4.1.39 Subject Matter: landscape, portrait, still life, abstract, and non-objective.

AH-M-4.1.42 Effectively use a variety of art media, processes, and subject matter to communicate ideas, feelings, and experiences.

AH-M-4.1.37 Art Processes: two-dimensional-painting, fabric design, printmaking, and mosaics.

AH-M-4.2.31 Describe and compare the characteristics and purposes of works of art representing various cultures, historical periods, artists, and/or styles.

Objectives

- To learn that Horace Clifford (“Cliff”) Westermann’s art was greatly influenced by his childhood, teen years, and military experiences.
- To understand why Cliff Westermann turned from **painting** to **sculpture** as an artistic **medium**.
- To realize that Cliff Westermann liked to do things right.
- To realize the Cliff Westermann had many careers.
- To learn that Cliff Westermann enjoyed working with several different art forms.
- To know that Westermann is best known for his carefully crafted sculptural works with certain recurring themes.
- To realize that besides the Death Ship and other themes based on his war experiences he also produced work that showed humor.
- To know that his work displayed in the Janice Mason Art Museum is “Popeye” a **woodcut** that has a **surreal** scene with Popeye on a beach, hitting a cactus, while a snake watches. It has bright colors and a **surreal** subject matter and situation.

Suggested Questions

1. What were some of the experiences Cliff Westermann had in the military that are often portrayed in his art works?
2. What were some of the careers that Cliff Westermann had?
3. What were some of the recurring themes reflected in Westermann’s artwork?
4. What kind of humor was reflected in Westermann’s art?
5. Explain using correct art terminology about “Popeye” the **woodcut** in the Janice Mason Art Museum.

6. What kinds of different art forms did Cliff Westermann produce?
7. Westermann always wanted to do things right, how do we know this?

Related Activities

1. Have students divide into groups and have each group develop a short play depicting the different experiences that impacted Cliff Westermann's art. Let each group present their play. Develop a master list on the board so that after all of the plays have been presented, there will be a long list showing how our experiences impact our art and our whole lives. Discuss how important things that happen in the lives of the students will impact them all of their lives.
2. Have students select a cartoon character and write a happy story and a sad story about this character. Do a [drawing](#) portraying each story.
3. Have students discuss ways their lives would be different if they always wanted to "do things right".

Grades 9-12

Kentucky Core Content

AH-H-4.1.31 Describe works of art using appropriate terminology.

AH-H-4.1.32 Art Elements: color and color theory: primary and secondary hues, values (tints and shades), intensity (brightness and dullness); color relationship: triadic, complementary, and analogous.

AH-H-4.1.33 Principles of Design: Balance (symmetry/asymmetry), emphasis (focal pattern), pattern, repetition, contrast, variety, movement, rhythm, proportion, transition/gradation, and unity.

AH-H-4.1.34 Defend personal interpretations of works of art and architecture by using arguments.

AH-H-4.2.39 Purposes of Art: persuasive (advertising, marketing, propaganda); formalist (abstract, non-objective, arrangement of elements and principles as subject matter).

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- To understand why Cliff Westermann turned from painting to **sculpture** as an artistic **medium**.
- To know that he turned down a college teaching job to begin his most elaborate creation which took twenty years to complete.
- To realize that Cliff Westermann liked to do things right.
- To realize the Cliff Westermann had many careers.
- To learn that Cliff Westermann enjoyed working with several different **art forms**.
- To understand that Cliff Westermann was part of a group of artists called “**The Who**” or the “**Chicago Imagists**” and that this group displayed certain characteristics in their artworks.
- To know that Westermann is best known for his carefully crafted sculptural works with certain recurring themes.
- To realize that besides the Death Ship and other themes based on his war experiences he also produced work that showed humor.
- To know that his work displayed in the Janice Mason Art Museum is “Popeye” a **woodcut** that has a **surreal** scene with Popeye on a beach, hitting a cactus, while a snake watches. It has bright colors and a **surreal** subject matter and situation.

Suggested Questions

1. Explain some of the influences in Westermann’s life that were reflected in his art.
2. Explain some of Westermann’s careers and how his prior experiences contributed to each.
3. Discuss the different art forms Westermann enjoyed making.
4. Describe the characteristics of the art work done by the group from Chicago called “**The Who**”.
5. What art work is Westermann best known for during his career?

6. Explain some of the materials he used to develop his [sculptures](#)?
7. What were some of the recurring themes in his art work?
8. What indicators do you find that suggest that Westermann liked “to do things right.”

Related Activities

1. Using correct terminology and the [Four Step Method of Art Criticism](#) have students discuss on paper, “Popeye”, that was done by Westerman and is currently housed at the Janice Mason Art Museum.
2. Have students make a [sculpture](#) from objects found at school. Have the sculpture portray a comic character. Have students make up a [surreal](#) story about the sculpture and tell it to students in their own small group.
3. Have students develop a poster/or demonstration, depicting the method of making a [woodcut](#) print. Considerable research will be required to gather information before the project begins.
4. Have students discuss the impact that always trying “to do things right” would have on your lives. How would it make their lives easier? Different?