

## **Elizabeth Catlett, Charles White and the *Taller de Grafica Popular* of Mexico**

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“The artist was once the servant of society rather than its critic.” —Elizabeth Wilson

“Waiting on the World to Change”

Me and all my friends  
We're all misunderstood  
They say we stand for nothing and  
There's no way we ever could  
Now we see everything is going wrong  
With the world and those who lead it  
We just feel like we don't have the means  
To rise above and beat it  
—John Mayer

### **Overview**

In October 2006, I attended a teacher workshop entitled *Mexico and Modern Printmaking* that explored several printmaking processes, and toured the exhibit of the same name at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The printmaking exhibit included the traditional processes of woodcuts, lithography and linoleum. Some of the prints had themes relating to the culture of Mexico; some called for activism by the various leaders of the indigenous people of the countryside who were under-represented by the government; and others depicted the everyday life of the impoverished Indians. I had always thought of organized protest by the Indians of Mexico as a sporadic phenomenon of modern times. There are records of organized protests throughout history and from every continent, but I never gave it much thought until I saw this exhibit. After research, I learned that much of the work shown in the museum exhibition was created by artists who held strong beliefs about social injustice. These artists formed the *Taller de Grafica*

*Popular* (The Peoples' Graphic Workshop) in 1937 with the notion that art should be created to "speak to the needs of the people." (Herzog 81). The various ideas that were illustrated by the artists were the product of collaborative effort of grass roots organizations whose members were indigenous Indians of Mexico.

The unit that is planned will join the theme of social awareness in Mexico with a study of the backgrounds of Elizabeth Catlett and John White, two of the African American artists who traveled to work at the *Taller*. The students will create prints in the studio and learn about the background history of the artists, their personal struggles and artistic accomplishments. The students will be able to see the artists as real people and not just names of famous people in art history books. They will understand the conditions in both the U.S. and Mexico that led to the creation of this work. They will learn that art is not created in a vacuum and that it is influenced by "space and time." Finally, the students will be able to transfer and incorporate some themes they have encountered through this unit into their own work using the process of printmaking.

## **Rationale**

When I visited *Mexico and Modern Printmaking* I was mildly surprised to see several African American artists represented in the exhibit. Elizabeth Catlett's famous linoleum print "Sharecropper" and Charles White's lithograph "Black Sorrow" were on display. How did these artists arrive at the threshold of the *Taller* in Mexico City? What was the motivation for the subject matter of the prints?

That same year I viewed the *Tesoros : The Arts in Latin America: 1492-1820* exhibit at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (September - December 2006), which was one of the largest exhibits assembled on Latin American art, artifacts, paintings textiles, and furniture. There was a plethora of examples from at least thirteen Latin American countries. It renewed my interest in the culture and crafts of Mexico and South America, where I traveled and visited three times in the years 1971 to 1993.

The research that I have done explores the early backgrounds of Elizabeth Catlett and Charles White, and the theme of social protest at the *Taller de Grafica Popular*. This research also involved some of the Mexican printmaking artists of the *Taller* and includes several African American artists (e.g. Elizabeth Catlett and Charles White) who traveled to Mexico to work. All of these artists produced socially aware prints for various organized grassroots organizations while in Mexico.

What was the United States like during the time that these two African American artists lived? What were their early lives like? Who were their mentors and colleagues? What obstacles did African American artists face in the 1930's and 1940's while living in the United States? Why were they attracted to the *Taller de Grafica Popular* in the first place? What was the political climate of Mexico like during the time the African

American artists visited? What were the origins of the *Taller* and what were the artists hoping to accomplish by working at the *Taller* in Mexico City? What was the specific subject matter these artists used? What effect if any, did this experience of living and working in Mexico have on the lives and future careers of these artists?

I would like to connect the answers to these questions to my students' own lives. What can each student do to become an active part of the world at large? How can each person connect to the world in a positive and productive way that will help society? At what point in a person's life would it be appropriate to become actively involved? How can students increase critical thinking? We must all become critics of the society in which we live in order to improve it. Each of us in our own small way must contribute. Social justice is the underlying theme for this unit.

The unit that is planned will be directed at a target audience of 11th and 12th grade students at the John Bartram High School located in the Southwestern section of the city. The school originally opened in 1939 with an enrollment of 1,700 students in a newly built Art Deco style building. The Bartram High School is listed on the National Registry of Historical Places The enrollment stands presently somewhere near 2,000. The population includes students from many ethnic groups, with the majority being African American, and with a few Asians and Caucasians. Recently, there has been an influx of new immigrants from Senegal and Liberia who speak French as a first language. Famous alumni include WNBA coach Joe Bryant, former Mayor of Philadelphia Wilson Goode, and Philadelphia icon Patti La Belle.

The majority of students who are targeted for the unit will have had the experience of researching a subject through the use of the internet, as well as reading and researching newspaper articles, magazines and books. The students at these grade levels will have had some experience in working in outside jobs after school, and will have the confidence and awareness of what they feel is important to them at this point in their young lives.

Even though they will be able to relate to the themes presented, the students completing the unit may have not made the transition to understanding their place in the wider world. Whereas a student may have strong feelings about police brutality, he or she may not feel a need to join an organization that protects citizens' rights. Most students who are involved in a discussion about social issues are still deciding about where they will be in the future. This unit will ask students to think more carefully about and take positions on issues of social justice.

Historical Background

Elizabeth Catlett was born in Washington, DC in 1915 of parents John Catlett and Mary Carson Catlett. Her father died three months before her birth, leaving her mother, Mary, to struggle on her own to raise three children by working as a social worker in the slums of the city. Mary's stories and experiences about the poor people she served probably influenced Elizabeth's feelings and interests about the oppressed. She could trace her family's origins back as far as her great grandparents, one of whom was plucked from the beaches of Madagascar and brought to the shores of America to live as an enslaved African (Herzog 13).

Elizabeth Catlett grew up surrounded by her family's educational accomplishments. Her father, John Catlett was a math professor at Tuskegee Institute. His hobbies included woodcarving, and he was known to be a skilled musician. Her mother, Mary Carson Catlett was educated as a teacher even though she worked as a social worker.

Catlett's background was not the norm for most African-Americans born in the early part of the twentieth century. As she states, "I was able to study and become a sculptor – a field generally reserved for white men-only because my ex-slave grandparents could educate my mother, and she in turn, as a widow would dedicate herself to the education of her children..."(Herzog 15) Elizabeth was very aware of the fact that she had been given the privilege of being educated at a time when racial hatred and rampant segregation was in full force in all parts of the United States.

After graduating from Paul Dunbar High School in 1931, she applied to Howard University and was admitted into the design department. Her original interests were in painting and drawing. By the time that she had graduated (cum laude) in 1935, she had decided to seek a graduate degree in sculpture at the University of Iowa. Some of Catlett's teachers at the undergraduate level were at the forefront of the modernist art movement. The art historian James Herring, philosopher Alain Locke and founding scholar James Porter were members of the faculty at Howard.

Her first exposure to the Mexican muralists was through the Howard Library, where she encountered the work of the three great muralists of Mexico: Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Jose Clemente Orozco. She briefly worked for the WPA (Public Works of Art Program) before she was fired for her lack of discipline in completing her commissions. Catlett was encouraged by her teachers to study African and European art, sculpture and modern design (Herzog 141).

Catlett's attraction to organizations that fought for the rights of the unprivileged was taking hold. She actively sought membership in the National Student League and the Liberal Club. These organizations held strikes against Fascism. When Catlett arrived at the University of Iowa, African American students were forced to seek housing off campus because of segregation. Nevertheless, she took it in stride and found a room-mate

and friend in Margaret Goss, who would later become the poet and writer Margaret Goss Burroughs.

One of her most influential teachers at Iowa was Grant Wood, who encouraged her “to take as her subject what she knows best.” (Herzog 19) Upon graduation in 1940, she acquired one of the first Master of Fine Arts degrees in Sculpture from the University of Iowa. Her thesis included a limestone sculpture, “Negro Mother and Child”, which won first prize at the American Negro Exposition in 1940 in Chicago. The use of maternal imagery and the African American woman would be recurring themes throughout her artistic career. As Catlett states in *African American Art*, “Art must be realistic for me, whether sculpture or print-making. I have always wanted my art to service Black people- to reflect us, to relate to us, to stimulate us, to make us aware of our potential...” (Britton 68)

Since art was not something that Catlett felt that she could make a living at, she turned her attention to teaching and secured a position at Dillard University in New Orleans. She later became chair of Dillard’s art department. She is remembered there as a person who would often stand up for what she believed in whether it was a fight against segregated housing, unequal pay, police brutality or segregated busing.

Segregated transportation was the norm in New Orleans. Catlett was on her way to work one morning when she saw a colleague sitting at the front of the bus. She was about to be seated next to him when she realized her situation and went to the back of the bus instead. “This fueled her anger.” (Herzog 24)

During the summer of 1941, Elizabeth went to visit her friend, Margaret Burroughs, who lived in Chicago. Burroughs was one of the founders of the South Side Community Center (Becker 86). This Center evolved from the earlier Chicago Arts and Crafts Guild which paralleled the activities of the Harlem Community Art Center. These Centers flourished as hot spots for up-and-coming and activist artists and writers who needed an outlet for their socially aware work in the African American communities. A tribute to the center’s success is the fact that it remains in existence as one of only a handful of centers that survived out of an original 102 across the nation (Becker 86).

That summer, Elizabeth met artist Charles White, who shared similar political beliefs and by December, 1941, they had married. Elizabeth had been encouraged to join the Communist Party but would not even though she remained friends with the artists who had. Her goals were the same as theirs: to rid society of racial and class oppression through her activism and art work.

In later years, both artists would be suspected of being Communists because of their work in the *Taller*, an organization which was accused of being a front for the Communist Party (Herzog 78).

Elizabeth Catlett was denied entry to the United States for ten years after having lived in Mexico. Tiring of the harassment by the U. S. embassy and fearful of being deported by the Mexican government because of her affiliations with the *Taller*, she became a Mexican citizen in 1960. As for Charles White, “There is no evidence that he had joined the Communist Party.” (Barnwell 41) Charles White was actually summoned by the House Un- American Activities Committee (HUAC). His friends were questioned and his everyday activities were scrutinized according to a report that was released under the Freedom of Information Act (Barnwell 51).

But why did some of the other young Black artists become card carrying members of the Communist Party? Because the Party focused its attention on acquiring justice and racial equality for the common man, it became a magnet for those who felt they were oppressed. World War II was occurring and many African-Americans felt that it did not make sense for them to get involved in a war for America. Even as African American men and women enlisted in the war, they were asking if it made sense to fight for the freedom of people overseas while they faced racial hatred, discrimination, sub-standard housing, lynching and poverty at home in the United States.

Charles White had his own personal struggles as an African- American born in poverty. His father was not often around and his mother was among the swelling numbers of Blacks who came up from the South during the Great Migration to settle in the larger cities to seek a better life. Born in Chicago in 1918 at a time when segregation and racial strife were in full bloom, he had lost two of his uncles to lynching in the South. Just one year after his birth, Chicago witnessed one of the worst racial incidents in its history. A young, African American teenager was brutally beaten and drowned because he had crossed over to the ‘whites only’ section of the public beach. Blacks were outraged about his murder and felt angrier by the lack of interest in the case by the local police. Racial strife continued that summer throughout the major cities where Blacks lived in large numbers. “Total deaths were 38, more than 500 were injured, property loss amounted to \$250,000, and more than 1,000 were left homeless.” (Barnwell 31)

White had had first hand experience with the status quo in the southern states when as a young adult; he took a trip through several states to visit relatives. “In New Orleans, he was severely beaten for entering a restaurant.” (Barnwell 31) And while in Hampton, Virginia, a street car conductor pointed a loaded gun at him when he showed reluctance to move to the back of the vehicle (Barnwell 31).

White’s interest in art began with his mother’s encouragement for her son’s education through reading. So that his mother could continue on to work, he was dropped off at the local library every day. There he would explore the numerous books with historical illustrations, read about all types of subject matter that interested him and have a wealth of visual imagery to draw upon for his constant preoccupation with drawing. But

as a teenager, he was denied entrance into two art academies after having been notified that he had won scholarships. The message was clear. Blacks were not welcome in educational institutions no matter how talented they were. Despite this, he would be awarded the position of Professor of Art by Howard University one day.

Eventually, White would go on to work at art as a professional and achieve many prestigious awards. He was recognized as an accomplished draftsman, printmaker and painter. He won first prizes for the mural *A History of the Negro Press*, 1940, the graphite drawing “There Were No Crops This Year” (1940), and honorable mention for his watercolor “There Were No Crops This Year” (1940) in the American Negro Exposition.

Along with his profound interest in the depiction of the American Black’s struggles in his various art works, White was quoted as saying, “Paint is the only weapon I have with which to fight what I resent. If I could write, I would write about it. If I could talk, I would talk about it. Since I paint, I must paint about it.” (Herzog 23)

He met Elizabeth Catlett at a time when both were accomplished and award winning artists who had an interest in using art as a vehicle for achieving social justice. They shared many friends who had the same goals about eradicating political and social oppression. In the early years, they were brought together by older mentors like George E. Neal, who taught at the Arts and Crafts Guild that Burroughs, Carter, Davis, Goss and others frequented. They would exhibit in local clubs and family centers. The basis of the group’s cohesion centered on the theories found in Alain Locke’s book, *The New Negro*: that art created by African American artists should be a reflection of their heritage.

### *The Taller de Grafica Popular*

The *Taller de Grafica Popular* (The Peoples Graphic Workshop) was formed in 1937 by a group of political activists who were artists in Mexico City. The original tenets of the *Taller* grew from the League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists (LEAR). The *Taller* would come into existence after LEAR dissolved over internal disputes between factions in 1937. Two of the *Taller’s* strongest beliefs were the notions that “art and politics were inseparable” and that the group’s goal should be to “further the democratic progress of the Mexican people.” (Ittmann 16)

An enormous amount of work was produced by the artists associated with the Graphic Workshop. Prints, pamphlets, posters, and illustrations were being created on a daily basis in some cases. Subject matter covered current world-wide events like the Allied victory against fascism in World War II. The striking poster “Victoria” by Angel Brach (1911-2005), for example, used a bright red type face with beige and black colors to emphasize its anti-fascist message. In another famous poster, Ignacio Aguirre’s linocut of Emilio Zapata, the great leader of the Revolutionary Peasant movement of 1948 is depicted as a peasant farmer in a field sowing corn while holding a rifle in his other hand.

Eventually, the *Taller* would expand its subject matter to include the land disputes of farmers, unemployment and the rights of workers—for example, Orozco’s “Unemployed.” (Ittmann 66) The artists and their collaborators used the medium to urge the populace to take action and seize the moment. “We Win Peace by Uniting for It” (Ittmann 77 ) is basically a poster in black and white on a light tan paper which depicts three figures (a man, and a woman holding an infant dressed in peasant clothing) walking in darkened country surroundings. The man’s profile is partially obscured by a lit pole which is held in one hand while his right hand is raised to ward off several rifles pointed in his direction. The poster announces the date of the American Continental Congress for Peace meeting on September, 1949 in Mexico City. “The Industrialization of the Country,” c. 1947, (Ittmann 76) depicts a linocut of a crowd of people whose outstretched arms appear to be pointed to a silhouetted industrial site at the top of the print. Only the profiles and backs of the people can be seen. One figure in the foreground is holding a machete-type weapon.

The medium of printmaking was the ideal way to reach a population that was largely illiterate. Prints could be produced effectively and efficiently. Distribution of the powerful imagery with limited text would send powerful messages to the targeted audience.

With the publicity that was generated by the awarding of commissions to muralist Diego Rivera in 1932 by the Rockefeller Foundation, a growing interest in the culture and political struggles of Mexico attracted artists from around the world. When the African American artists Catlett, White and Wilson arrived at the *Taller* in 1946, it was their intention to collaborate with the Mexican artists to create graphic images that would further the cause of social uplift for oppressed people. The two cultures, African American and Mexican, shared common experiences.

The indigenous people along with the disenfranchised workers had been in a long struggle with the indifferent and brutal governments. As a result, liberators and dictators had come and gone during a span of more than thirty-five years. Similarly, Blacks in the United States were subjected to lynching, discrimination, and humiliations related to segregated housing and substandard education on a daily basis. It was no wonder that the artists from Mexico and the African American artists from the United States reached out and joined forces in the fight against oppression. This is evidenced by the work of David Siqueiros’ lithographic print titled “Black Woman” (Ittmann 170) and Jose Orozco’s lithograph titled “Negroes.” (Ittmann 133)

Catlett has stated that “the job... [of the Black artist] was to look into the ...Black communities for inspiration--to work for...Black people—and to show the link between our struggles and that of similarly warped and oppressed people. We have to create an art for liberation and for life.” (Britton 70)

Catlett eventually returned to Mexico on a Rosenwald Fellowship and after her divorce from Charles White in 1947, married fellow artist and printmaker Francisco Mora whom she had met at the *Taller* the year before. Under threat of deportation from the United States because of her so-called leftist affiliations, she surrendered her American citizenship in 1962 and became a permanent resident of Mexico. At the time, The United States government was at the peak of its investigations of American citizens who fraternized with its perceived enemies. It was because of her association with political art that she came to the attention of U.S. investigators. (Britton 70)

At the *Taller*, Catlett began a series of linoleum prints entitled *The Negro Woman*, which illustrated the Black woman's life in the United States. Some of the titles include "I am the Negro woman," "I have always worked hard in America," "In the fields," "I have given the world my songs," "In Harriet Tubman I helped hundreds to freedom," "My role has been important in the struggle to organize the unorganized," "I have special reservations" "And a special fear for my loved ones," and the most recognized of the series, "Sharecropper."

Charles White, on the other hand, returned to New York to continue his art career and eventually married a social worker who he admired. In spite of their personal dramas, the Catlett and White remained friends and even created a series of works on parallel themes in different media. For example, White's painting "Sharecropper" in 1948 followed Catlett's famous print of the same title. White acknowledged the effect that his visit to Mexico had on his career by stating, "Mexico was a milestone. I saw artists working to create an art about and for the people. That had the strongest influence on my whole approach. It clarified the direction in which I wanted to move." (Barnwell 39) By the early 1950's the style of his figurative work had changed. His figures appeared to be influenced by the monumental styles of the muralists. The cubist angles were replaced by softer appearance of his subject matter. Some of the most notable work portrayed musicians: "Folk Singer" and "Guitarist." Another series included ordinary people, "Ye Shall Inherit the Earth," "Harvest Talk" and "I've Been 'Buked and I've Been Scorned." (Barnwell 59)

## **Objectives**

This course will be structured around activism, with art as its final product. Students will select a social issue, research and write a two page paper linking it to Elizabeth Catlett, Charles White or some other *Taller* artist. Some examples of issues might include police intimidation, inadequate or substandard wages, and personal safety issues. About thirty-three students took part in a teacher generated survey on personal safety, and whether they would consider joining an activist organization to fight for this cause. Of those students responding, only nineteen answered that they would really join such an

organization for this or any other issue that was important for them. Most students of high school age will freely discuss political and social issues. But from the conversations that followed the survey, it seems that they are not sure how this relates to their own lives.

- Students' two page paper will be on the chosen social issue and include one of the two artists mentioned, based on research about the *Taller de Grafica Popular*. Why these two artists? By researching the artists' personal and professional backgrounds, the student will see Elizabeth Catlett and Charles White as real people coping with situations in which any African –American might find him or herself in today's culture. Since the majority of the students at Bartram are African-American, it would not be difficult to make this connection. Some of the pressing issues from the times in which the two artists lived are still relevant today whether it be racial relations, economic hardship, or political unrest at home or abroad. Social protest is a universal theme. The students' research will help them to understand the conditions in the United States and Mexico that created the political upheavals of that time.
- Students will learn about the process of printmaking by completing assignments that introduce the basic techniques of the medium. Printmaking is an easy process to master and, in its simplest forms, gives instant results. Of course students using this unit will be exposed to more complicated lessons which will require them to use the elements and principles of design
- Students will create pamphlets, a poster, or a newspaper front page mock-up that illustrates a social issue. The issue they select will be a running theme in their assignments and, it is hoped, will show them how art influences their own lives.
- The completed prints can be framed and exhibited in the main corridor of the Bartram High School with the permission of the current principal. By having their prints on display, the student will gain an understanding of how art can be used to influence others.

## **Strategies**

Since this unit deals with visual imagery, slide reproductions from Mexican and modern printmaking will be shown in order to clarify the themes of social protest. The instructor will lead several discussions about how and why social protest is important in a free society. It is important for the students to understand how social protest is a universal experience that has been repeatedly used by many cultures. Through the use of visual displays, historical time-lines, maps, and teacher-led studio demonstrations, the students will gain a good understanding of the material needed to complete the lesson objectives. Students will be encouraged to keep written and visual journals of their ideas. This unit deals with studio work as well, and a lesson about the process of printmaking is included.

All studio work will begin with a teacher-led demonstration of how to use printmaking tools safely--better-equipping students technically and emotionally to deal with materials and tools.

### **Classroom Activities**

Having access to electronic technology for research is important for this unit. Students can spend one or two days using search engines, visiting the media center at their school, researching books at the public library and reading related periodicals. Students will interview a local activist from an organization that works on neighborhood issues. The teacher will set up visits from several community volunteers who have the available time to speak to the students at the school or in the classroom. Students will be able to ask questions about the social issue they have chosen to focus on, take notes, and use this information for their research papers and studio work. Classroom discussions are important for the students who may need motivation to select the theme that is of interest to them. To facilitate such discussions, students can be organized into small groups to discuss and reflect about common themes and make entries in their journals.

#### Lesson 1- Social protest

Grade Level: 11 and 12

State Standards Addressed:

9.1 Production, Performance, Exhibition (A, B, C, D, E, F, H)

9.2 Historical, Cultural Contexts (A, B,C, D, E, F, G, L)

9.3 Critical Response (A, B)

#### *Goals:*

Students will be able to translate their feelings about a social issue of their choice to a linoleum print using cutting tools, a linoleum block, brayer and printing ink. Students will display knowledge of safety precautions when using the tools.

#### *Materials/ Resources*

*The Instant Printmaker. Peterson and Gale. 2003*

Images from:

*Mexico and Modern Printmaking. Ittmann. Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2006.*

1. Leopoldo Mendez, Deportation to Death, 1942. linocut; Philadelphia Museum of Art (p 73)

2. Arturo Garcia Bustos and Mariana Yampolsky, *We Win Peace by Uniting for It*, Mexico city, 1949, linocut (poster); Philadelphia Museum of Art. (p 77 )
3. Arturo Garcia Bustos, *The Industrialization of the Country*, c.1947. Linocut; Mexico City: Taller de Grafica Popular, 1947. (p 76)

Linoleum blocks, sheets

Cutting tools

Water based printing inks in assorted colors

Printing paper suitable for printing

Acrylic plates 15x15

An example of a linoleum print

### *Background Information*

Students will view reproductions from Mexico and Modern Printmaking in order to understand the theme of social protest. The following slides will be shown:

Leopoldo Mendez's "Deportation to Death" depicts an opened door of a railcar displaying some of the people who were being transported to the Nazi death camps. At the lower right area of the print, two uniformed soldiers appear to be in the process of shutting the railcar door on the pathetic-eyed captives who stare helplessly.

Arturo Garcia Bustos and Mariana Yampolsky's "We Win Peace by Uniting for It" is basically a poster in black and white on a light tan paper which depicts three figures (a man, woman and infant) dressed in peasant clothing walking in darkened country surroundings. The man's profile is partially obscured by a lit pole which is held in one hand while his right hand is raised to ward off several rifles pointed in his direction. The poster announces the date of the American Continental Congress for Peace meeting on September, 1949 in Mexico City.

Arturo Garcia Bustos's "The Industrialization of the Country," is a linocut of a crowd of people whose outstretched arms appear to be pointed to a silhouetted industrial site at the top of the print. Only the profiles and backs of the people can be seen. One figure in the foreground is holding a machete type weapon.

A discussion of the slides will involve the following questions: What is the artist trying to accomplish by creating a print of people in a railcar? Where are these people being taken? Do you feel that the people are going somewhere good or bad? Why? What in the print gives you the impression of what is happening? What does the title of the print mean?

After the discussion of the slides, the students will be able to form ideas of what they will be creating for the linoleum prints. Students will have had some experience making letter types for prints. The actual letters will be cut in a reverse fashion in order to be readable after the print is pulled. Students will have ample time to practice this technique of reversing letters.

### *Vocabulary*

1. Printmaking
2. Linoleum print
3. Brayer
4. Acrylic plate
5. Letter type
6. Cross hatched
7. stippled
8. Baren
9. Press
10. Plate
11. v- gouge
12. u-gouge

Next, the teacher will demonstrate the six basic steps of making a linoleum print.

1. Draw the design on the linoleum.
2. Cut away the area of the design that is unwanted.
3. Apply the ink over the cut linoleum block or slab with a brayer.
4. Lay the paper over the inked surface of the linoleum slab.
5. Rub the surface of the paper gently with a hand baren.
6. Starting at the upper left edge, pull the paper away from the inked surface of the inked slab.

### *Procedures*

The following question will be asked by the teacher: “In what position should the hands be when using the cutting tools?” Students will be asked to demonstrate the proper way to hold the tools when cutting the linoleum. They will also demonstrate the safest position to place their free hand when the other is cutting the linoleum. The teacher will actively monitor the students while they are using the tools.

Regarding the technique of relief printing, the teacher will ask, “what area of your slab will be cut away and what effect will this have on your design?” The areas that are cut away will not receive the ink and the areas that are uncut will. The teacher will also ask, “Is the process of printmaking a two or three dimensional process?” Students will be asked to explain their answers to this question. The cut slab is a type of three dimensional

surface. It is not entirely flat therefore it is like a relief or raised area that sits away from a flat background.

The next discussion will involve the use of different types of lines.

1. lines that are crosshatched,
2. diagonal, vertical, horizontal,
3. curved and stippled

The teacher demonstrates by creating various lines onto the linoleum. The students can practice techniques by using different tool tips like the v- gouge and the u-gouge

### *Assessment*

Students' work will be assessed using these questions:

1. What social themes are evident in the print?
2. What kinds of lines are used?
3. If lettering is used in the print, is it readable to the viewer?
4. Is there a focal point in the print?
5. Is craftsmanship evident in the finished print?

### Lesson 2-Posters-Part 1

Grade Level: 11- 12

State Standards Addressed:

9.2 Historical, Cultural Contexts (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, L)

9.3 Critical Response (A, B)

9.4 Aesthetic Response

### *Goals*

- Students will learn about the history of the poster. This lesson will prepare them to create a graphic image using the themes found in the work of Elizabeth Catlett, Charles White or another *Taller* artist (see Lesson 3).
- Students will analyze and discuss the process of poster making.
- Students will be exposed to the aesthetics involved in poster making.

### Materials/Resources

*The Poster Its History and Its Art.* Metzl. Watson-Guptill, 1963

*Mexico and Modern Printmaking.* Ittman. Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2006.

Slides of:

Catlett, Elizabeth. "The Sharecropper." Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2006.

De la Fuente, Julio. "Into the Garbage with the Fascist." Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2006

White, Charles. "Black Sorrow." Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2006.

### *Vocabulary*

1. Printmaking
2. Linoleum print
3. Posters
4. Advertising
5. Letter types
6. Graphic imagery

### *Background Information: The History of the Poster*

Students will be able to become familiar with major facts about the history of the poster through class discussion, viewing examples of early posters from books, discussing time lines for the earliest published poster, color lithography, and photographic additions. (Metzl 106)

1. One of the earliest posters was made of wood and called an "alba". The Romans would strategically place these slabs in places where they would be seen by the largest number of people. There is still evidence in the ruins of Pompeii to suggest this. (Metzl 25)
2. In Roman times, posters were used to advertise services, goods and to announce coming events.
3. Posters were mass produced around 1747. The printing press revolutionized the use of posters. (Metzl 29)
4. In modern times, posters/ advertisements are directly tied to the success or failure of businesses.
5. Posters or reproductions of artists' work are more economical than original work.

Slides will be shown of the following posters made by several *Taller* artists:

The first slide is of the Elizabeth Catlett woodcut, "The Sharecropper," (Ittmann 212), which is basically a portrait of a poor, Black female wearing a large brimmed straw hat. Her jacket is held closed by a single button around her slim, upper torso. Her head is held high as she looks off into the distance. A discussion about what a sharecropper's life is like will follow. Do sharecroppers exist today? What kind of impression does the Catlett print leave you with?

The second slide by Julio de la Fuente is a woodcut flyer depicting a worker in the process of throwing his Fascist enemy into the garbage--hence the title, "Into the Garbage with the Fascist." (Ittmann 64) Is this a social or political comment? What does the symbol on the jacket mean? What is a Fascist?

The third slide is by Charles White titled "Black Sorrow." (Ittmann 209) It depicts two African- American people composed in a doorway of a shack. Tension is etched in the sad features of their faces as the man's protective arms grasp the upper torso of the woman standing with him. What kind of life is portrayed for this couple? What point is the artist trying to portray by this print?

### *Activities*

The students will learn about the history of the poster through class discussion as indicated in the Historical Background. This should cover one class period.

The following questions will be answered by the students and written in their journals:

- In contemporary times, where would examples of posters be found?
- Why would the early Romans use wood as a material for displaying posters?
- Why would there be a need for using posters in ancient times?
- Why is it more economical for businesses to use mass reproduction for posters instead of original art work?

### Lesson 3- Poster production Part 2

Grade Level: 11-12

Standards Addressed:

9.1 Production, Performance, Exhibition (A, B, C, D, E, F, H)

9.2 Historical, Cultural Contexts (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, L)

9.3 Critical Response (A, B)

9.4 Aesthetic Response

*Goals:*

- Students will develop and execute a poster using the printmaking process and incorporate the themes found in the work of Elizabeth Catlett and Charles White.
- Students will be able to see the connection between art and social protest. They will also be able to use art to address contemporary issues.
- Students will show evidence of their understanding of the basic art elements and principles in their posters.

*Materials/ Resources*

*Mexico and Modern Printmaking.* Ittmann. Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2006.  
*The Instant Printmaker.* Peterson and Gale. Watson-Guption Publications, 2003

Woodblocks

Cutting tools

Water based printing inks in assorted colors

Printing paper suitable for printing

Acrylic plates 15x15

Several examples of woodcut prints

### *Vocabulary*

1. Posters
2. Art elements and principles
3. Composition
4. Printmaking
5. Woodcut
6. Brayer
7. Printing inks
8. Baren
9. Acrylic plate
10. Letter type
11. Cross hatched
12. stippled
13. baron
14. Reduction process

### *Activities*

The video, "Elements of Design" by Gerald Bloomer will be shown during the first class session. The students will discuss the elements that will be included in the poster that they will make and work on practice drawings. Students will begin developing the themes visually using paper and pencils. The teacher will help each student individually to iron out decisions about the execution of the prints. Will symbols be included in the poster? What is the focal point? Where is the eye level if figures are being used? What typefaces will be used for the letters? Are multiple colors to be used? Since the students have had prior knowledge of the printmaking process from the previous lesson, most will be ready to cut into the blocks by the second class session.

The actual poster will have a message using letters, which will be cut in a reverse fashion in order to be readable after the print is pulled. Students will have ample time to practice the technique of reversing letters. The teacher will discuss and demonstrate approximately three different letter types for the students to choose. Students will use reference sheets to view the letter types.

## *Assessments*

A critique for the entire class related to art and studio work will be held after the prints are finished. Some of the assessment criteria will be:

1. The level of quality of the work
2. The mastery of the technique and materials
3. The originality of the work
4. Adherence to the themes chosen

Students will be assessed using these questions:

1. When viewing the print is it evident that the student used the various types of lines to demonstrate the art elements and principles?
2. If letter type is used in the print, is it readable to the viewer?
3. Is there a focal point demonstrated in the print?
4. Is the theme present? Is craftsmanship evident?

## **Annotated Bibliography/ Resources**

*Art and Revolution in Mexico*. Films for the Humanities and Sciences. Video recording, 2000. A short, romanticized video of the people who shaped the Mexican Revolution from 1910-20.

Barnwell, Andrea, D. *Charles White*. San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2002.  
The story of Charles White's life, prints, drawings, paintings and achievements.

Becker, Heather. *Art for the People*. San Francisco: Chronicle, 2002.  
An overview and collection of the government sponsored WPA murals and photographs that are found in Chicago public schools.

Britton, Crystal. *African American Art the Long Struggle*. New York: Smithmark Publishers, 1996.  
A collection of notable art created by African- Americans artists from slavery to 1996.

Elements of Design. By Gerald Bloomer. Videocassette. Clearvue/eav, 1996.  
A video of the artist demonstrating each of the elements of design using several examples and materials.

The Principles of Design. By Gerald Bloomer. Videocassette. Clearvue/eau, 1996.

A video of the artist demonstrating each of the principles of design using several examples and materials.

Fax, Elton, C. *17 Black Artists*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1971  
Profiles of 17 African- American artists with photographs and interviews.

Herzog, Melanie Anne. *Elizabeth Catlett An American Artist in Mexico*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2000.  
The story of Elizabeth Catlett's personal background, sculptures, prints, drawings and achievements in the United States and in Mexico.

---. *In the Image of the People*. New Haven and London: The Art Institute of Chicago and Yale University Press, 2005.  
An analysis and collection of Elizabeth Catlett's prints made at the *Taller de Grafica Popular* in Mexico from 1946-47.

Ittmann, John. *Mexico and Modern Printmaking*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art and San Antonio: McNay Art Museum (2006)  
A 289 page catalog of the exhibit: Mexico and Modern Printmaking: A Revolution in the Graphic Arts 1920-1950 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art

Lewis, Samella. *African American Art and Artists*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.  
African-American artists who used art as social protest from colonial times through the Harlem Renaissance to the 1999's written by one of Catlett's former students.

Peterson, Melvyn, and Colin Gale. *The Instant Printmaker*. New York: Watson-Guption Publications (2003).  
A resource book on printmaking techniques with examples.

Wilson, Elizabeth. *Bohemians the Glamorous Outcasts*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000.  
A detailed discussion of who the bohemians were and the cultural forces that created the movement.

Images from the Philadelphia Museum of Art's collection:

Catlett, Elizabeth. "Sharecropper." Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

De la Fuente, Julio. "Into the Garbage with the Fascist." Philadelphia Museum of Art. Philadelphia

White, Charles. “Black Sorrow. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

### **Web Sites/Media Resources for Students**

[www.images.google.com/images?](http://www.images.google.com/images?)

Images of Elizabeth Catlett and Charles White’s work.

[www.artnet.com/artwork/424314372/elizabeth-catlett](http://www.artnet.com/artwork/424314372/elizabeth-catlett)

More visual images of Catlett’s work

[www.artgallery.umd.edu/.../sec3/catt\\_e\\_04.htm](http://www.artgallery.umd.edu/.../sec3/catt_e_04.htm)

Images of Catlett’s works

[www.onlineartmall.com](http://www.onlineartmall.com)

Books and images of Charles White’s paintings, prints & drawings

[www.world-wide-art.com](http://www.world-wide-art.com)

Images of Charles White’s work

[www.liunet.edu/cwis/cwp/library/aavaohp.htm](http://www.liunet.edu/cwis/cwp/library/aavaohp.htm)

Biographical details of African American artists from slavery to 1990’s

[www.lyricscafe.com/m/mayer\\_john.html](http://www.lyricscafe.com/m/mayer_john.html)

John Mayer’s lyrics for “Waiting for the World to Change”

*Art and Revolution in Mexico*. Films for the Humanities and Sciences. Video recording, 2000.

A short, romanticized video of the people who shaped the Mexican Revolution from 1910-20.

*Sculpting the Truth*. Freeman, Linda, L & S Video Inc., Video recording, 1999.

A visit to Elizabeth Catlett’s studio in Cuernavaca, Mexico by Faith Ringgold, artist

### **Appendices- Content Standards**

Pennsylvania Standards addressed in the units include the following:

9.1 Production, Performance, Exhibition.  
Elements and Principles

Elements in the Visual Arts: color, form, line, space, texture

Principles in A the Visual Arts: balance, contrast, focal point, repetition

- B. Recognize, know, use and demonstrate art elements and principles to produce a work of art.
- C. Vocabulary: recognize and use fundamental terminology within an art form.
- E. Demonstrate the ability to define objects, illustrate an action or relate an experience through creation of original art work.
- F. Historical & Cultural Production, Performance (Demonstration) and Exhibition.
- H. Handle materials, equipment and tools safely. Identify materials used.

## 9.2 Historical, Cultural Contexts

- A. Context of Works in the Arts Explain the historical, cultural and social context of an individual work in the arts.
- B. Chronology of Works in the Arts.  
Relate works in the arts chronologically to historical events
- C. Styles and genre in the Arts.  
Relate works in the arts to varying styles and to the periods in which they were created.
- D. Historical & Cultural Perspectives.  
Analyze how historical events and culture impact forms, techniques and purposes of works in the arts.
- F. Vocabulary for Historical and Cultural context

## 9.3 Critical Response

Know how to recognize and identify similar and different characteristics among works in the arts.

## 9.4 Aesthetic Response

Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening