Lesson Plan

American Art – Migrant Mother

General Information

Teacher Name: Eric Runyan, Chase Elementary  
Subject: Language Arts, 5th - 8th grade

Topic: The Struggles of People in the Depression Era  
Time Frame: Three to four, 45 minute class periods

Guiding Questions: How do we connect to the feelings of people in the past?

Goals, Standards and Vocabulary

Overview (How and where this art-integrated unit fits into the curriculum):

This is a 3-part lesson used in the midst of a novel study of Esperanza Rising by Pam Muñoz Ryan. Themes of the photograph and novel correlate with each other, describing the struggle and work environments of people in pre-Depression/Depression eras. These lessons are not intended to stand alone but to be used either as an introduction to or to solidify concepts in the middle of the novel. Please refer to the lesson attachments for corresponding handouts connected to these lessons.

Goals (What students will realize by using the art form to activate content area):

After completing this lesson, students will have a better ability to closely look at art as a primary source document, be able to make clear connections between characters from the novel and characters from the photograph, and be able to visually portray conditions/events from the novel.

Academic Standards and Benchmarks: Illinois State Standards in the content area that this unit addresses.

1B. Students who meet this standard apply reading skills to improve understanding and fluency.
   1.B.2a. Establish purposes for reading; survey materials; ask questions; make predictions; connect, clarify and extend ideas.
   1.C. Students who meet this standard understand a broad range of reading materials.
   1.C.2b. Make and support inferences and form interpretations about main themes and topics.
   1.C.2d. Summarize and make generalizations from content and relate to purpose of material.

2B. Students who meet this standard read and interpret a variety of literary works.
   2.B.2a. Respond to literary material by making inferences, drawing conclusions and comparing it to their own experience, prior knowledge and other texts.
   2.B.2b. Identify and explain themes that have been explored in literature from different societies and eras.
   2.B.2c. Relate literary works and their characters, settings and plots to current and historical events, people and perspectives.

Fine Arts Standards and Benchmarks: Identify and list Illinois State Standards in the fine arts that this unit addresses.

25B. Students who meet this standard understand the similarities, distinctions and connections in and among the arts.
   25.B.2. Understand how elements and principles combine within an art form to express ideas.

26B. Students who meet this standard apply skills and knowledge necessary to create and perform in one or more of the arts.
   26.B.3d. Demonstrate knowledge and skills to create 2 and 3 dimensional work.
   26.B.6. Perform a scripted ensemble, solo, or duet scene using research, collaboration and appropriate staging.

27B. Students who meet this standard understand how the arts shape and reflect history, society and everyday life.
   27.B.2. Identify and describe how the arts communicate the similarities and differences among various people, places and times.
Day 1

Focus:
To introduce the students to Migrant Mother, a 1936 photograph by Dorothea Lange, and the time period of the Great Depression. This image of a mother and her three children was taken at a pea picking camp, similar to a labor camp in which the characters in Esperanza Rising find themselves when Esperanza and her mother are forced to leave their life of wealth and privilege in Mexico to go work in the labor camps of Southern California.

Materials Needed:
High quality reproduction of Migrant Mother (poster included in the Picturing America poster set, http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/), Close Read handout (Appendix A), Esperanza Rising, student response journals, EAEC Close Read and Tableau Strategies

Dorothea Lange (American, 1895-1965)
Migrant Mother (Destitute pea pickers in California. Mother of seven children. Age thirty-two. Nipomo, California)
February 1936
Black and white photograph
Farm Security Administration, Office of War Information, Photograph Collection
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.
http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/
http://memory.loc.gov/service/pnp/ppmsca/12800/12883r.jpg

Warm-Up and Pre-Assessment Activities:
Close Read of the Migrant Mother photograph using Close Read Strategy.
This will be done in a 3-column chart in the student response journals (see Close Read Extension Handout). Depending on familiarity with this strategy, the teacher can decide to conduct a Close Read with the entire class, in small groups or individually. If the Close Read is conducted individually, time needs to be set aside to share with the whole class.
During this activity, push students to think about the conditions of the mother as well as the children in the photograph. Ask the students to share their observations. You can assist them by asking for “I see…” statements.
• What is the focal point of the image?
• What do you notice about their clothes?
• What colors, lines, and shapes do you see?
UNIT LAYOUT
Content and Art Making Activities
American Art – Migrant Mother

Next, ask the students to make inferences, intelligent guesses based upon visual clues and evidence. Students should respond with “It looks like…”

- What do you think Dorothea Lange was trying to communicate? Why?
- What do you think the mother was thinking when the photograph was taken? Why?
- How did the photographer make us feel close to the mother and her children?
- What might be missing in the photograph?

For further consideration, share the additional images that were part of this shoot:
http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/128_migm.html

Main Activity:
Have students create a tableau of the photograph to extract more of the emotions that are present. Start with one student as the mother. Coach the student in using his/her body and facial expressions to show emotion. Select additional students to join the tableau as the children in the photograph. Discuss empathy with the class. Extend the final tableau by asking each tableau participant to verbalize how they are feeling (students will know when to share their emotions when the teacher taps their shoulder).

Wrap-Up and Post Assessment Activities:
The response journal is a place for the students to respond to what they were experiencing during a reading, scene or, in this case, the tableau. Give the students two minutes to describe/write what they are thinking about following the tableau activity. Then, have the students share out loud what they thought to stimulate more thinking about how they felt. You might ask these questions to help stimulate thinking about the tableau activity:

1. How did you use facial expression and body gesture to communicate the emotions of the mother and children in the photograph?
2. What were we able to understand and/or feel from the tableau activity that we could not understand and/or feel before?
3. How can we improve our tableau to communicate our understanding of the photograph? Explain.

Give the students a specified amount of time to continue to write down thoughts they have regarding the discussion of the photograph or how they felt as they observed the tableau.

Day 2
Focus:
To introduce the students to the time period surrounding the photograph as well as leading into the novel (building background knowledge).

Materials Needed:

Warm-Up and Pre-Assessment Activities:
The teacher reviews discussion from yesterday to reacquaint students with the Dorothea Lange image, empathy, and new vocabulary.

Main Activity:
Read from “Migrant Mother, 1936” and the Our United States text on the “Dust Bowl” for background information (lesson attachments). As the students read the text, have them highlight descriptive words or phrases that help them understand how the characters feel and what living in those times was like. (e.g. “weather-beaten mother” or “brink of starvation”). In groups, follow up with critical reviews of the phrases and what
they mean to the students to establish meaning and context. One way to do this is through a Sense Web—the process of asking students to further break down their selected phrases by asking them to associate senses to the words (e.g. what does “weather-beaten” smell like, what does “starvation” sound like, etc.). Refer to the discussion yesterday around Migrant Mother to help cement ideas from the reading.

As part of the non-fiction lesson, have the students create vocabulary circles. These circles can be as small or as large as the teacher wants. Use a bowl to trace a circle in the middle of a piece of construction paper. Fold the paper into four quarters and write the unknown word in the circle. The unknown word should come from the vocabulary list created for this unit. Each quarter represents something different about the word. This is used to further understanding of unknown words (i.e. root words, use it in a sentence, word opposite, synonyms, draw a picture, etc.).

Wrap-Up and Post Assessment Activities:
Revisit the discussion of empathy and its definition: showing an understanding of another’s emotions and/or circumstances. Have the students describe specific details in the Lange photograph that lead you to feel for another person (students may want to refer back to the list of observations they made in the Close Read activity). Give 2-3 minutes to write ‘empathy statements’ in their response journals about what they saw. Students should also draw on what they learned from their reading about the photograph and the time period. These statements will increase students’ ability to think and write independently. The following prompts can help to structure students’ work:

1. Explain the emotions you had when you read the account of the Dorothea Lange image.
2. Write a script of a conversation that might have taken place between Dorothea Lange and the mother or between the mother and her children.
3. Explain a situation where you did not like the circumstances that surrounded you, and how you felt as you were in the situation.
4. What things stuck out to you as unfair from the reading?

Connections to Esperanza Rising: Throughout the novel, assign each student a character from the novel. Students will have to respond to questions that the class has for their character. This exercise will help the students internalize what the characters are feeling as well as help them to center their thoughts for the journaling process.

Day: 3 and 4

Focus:
To apply the information of the primary source text and the photograph to create an accordion fold book (application of information). Students will be reading Esperanza Rising, so connections should be made between the story and photograph.

Materials Needed:
Migrant Mother image/poster, Esperanza Rising, student response journals, EAEC Step-by-Step Guides for Accordion Fold Book, Storyboarding and Collage, paper, mat board or card stock, ruler/straight edge, glue, a variety of magazines, newspapers, Xeroxes, etc., x-acto knives, scissors, paintbrush, paper towels and water

Warm-Up and Pre-Assessment Activities:
Connect Migrant Mother image to the students’ empathy statements and to Esperanza Rising.
Main Activity:
Using the accordion book folds, create an “extended definition” based on the story and the conditions that the characters have encountered (create perspective using a horizon line that runs throughout the accordion fold book). When folded, every other panel of a completed accordion book will show images of the “extended definition,” whereas the inside panels will give written insight into what the image panels display.

Lead the students through the creation of an Accordion Fold Book by modeling the process. Once each student has created a blank Accordion Fold Book, the students should refer to their response journals to help develop their storyboard—a panel or series of panels of sketches or visual representation outlining a scene sequence and changes of action or plot in a story. Adequate time should be devoted to this process as students will need to synthesize all the information presented on the Great Depression, Migrant Mother, Esperanza Rising, and empathy. To create the storyboard, students should choose one subject/character to explore through the accordion fold book. The teacher should remind the students to think about how they can show progression over time in their “extended definitions” or how they can depict different viewpoints of one character or idea? This may take an entire 45 minute period.

On the next day of this unit, students will complete their storyboards and move on to filling in their accordion fold books with collage. The teacher will bring in various materials for the students to use in their collage creations as well as a completed accordion fold book to be shared and discussed. In this discussion, the teacher highlights how the selection of the collage materials is deliberate and related to the theme of the extended definition.

Wrap-Up and Post Assessment Activities:
Students will use their response journal entries (as well as others they create throughout the process) on the inside panels to explain what they were thinking as they created the outside panels and how it relates to the story. This writing should reflect students’ understanding of both the visible emotions of the mother and children in the photograph as well as the written descriptions of the conditions in which the characters of the novel or the primary source text lived/worked/existed.

Unit Assessments – Formative and Summative:
Three column Close Read handout
The students are able to place observations, inferences, background knowledge in correct columns. On a 1 to 5 scale rubric:
5 = Has all three columns filled; correctly places observations, inferences, background knowledge in correct column
1 = Understanding of columns is not clear; can complete only one column

Response Journal
The student’s response shows empathy toward the character and relates the conditions to the emotion. On a 1 to 5 scale rubric:
5 = Student has empathy for the characters and identifies specific parts of the image which relate to the emotions they think the characters might be experiencing
1 = Student is unable to go beyond a summary of the image; they show no connection to the characters or the conditions presented in the mural

Accordion Books, on a 1 to 5 scale rubric:
5 = The images present in the accordion book accurately depict the conditions referred to in the novel. In addition, the insights that are given explaining the images have specific connections to the conditions of Migrant Mother
1 = The student creates a set of images that may loosely relate to the conditions of the story
The insight is present but lacks any connection to the images created or ideas of the novel
Unit Support and Resources:
Texts, websites, primary and secondary sources, supplies, materials, outside resources, etc.

Close Read handout, the excerpt from “Migrant Mother, 1936” and the Social Studies Text excerpt on the “Dust Bowl”, EAEC Step-by-Step Guides for the Close Read Strategy, Tableau, Accordion Fold Book, Storyboarding and Collage, Copy of Migrant Mother, 1936.

_Migrant Mother and Children (Destitute pickers in California, a 32 year old Mother of seven children)_
February 1936
Black and white photograph
Farm Security Administration, Office of War Information Photograph Collection
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Documentation (photos, student work, student interviews, etc.):
Photographs of the process of students creating Accordion Fold Books will be collected, as well as their Response Journals throughout the lessons, the completed Accordion Books, the Close Read Extension filled out by each student and a completed rubric for each student. The photographs will be used to generate responses from the students and further reflection.
**Appendix A**

**Close Read handout**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Inferences</th>
<th>Contextual Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write about what you see in front of you. (i.e. shapes, colors, physical representations.)</td>
<td>Write about what you “think you are seeing” in the image. You should have justification of your inferences.</td>
<td>Are there any other pieces of information that would help you to understand the image? Do you have other connections that create understandings?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The image of a worn, weather-beaten woman, a look of desperation on her face, two children leaning on her shoulders, an infant in her lap; has become a photographic icon of the Great Depression in America. The photo was taken in March 1936 at a camp for seasonal agricultural workers 175 miles north of Los Angeles by Dorothea Lange. Lange was working for the Farm Security Administration as part of a team of photographers documenting the impact of federal programs in improving rural conditions.

Lange had just completed a month-long photographic assignment and was driving back home in a wind-driven rain when she came upon a sign for the camp. Something beckoned her to postpone her journey home and enter the camp. She was immediately drawn to the woman and took a series of six shots - the only photos she took that day. The woman was the mother of seven children and on the brink of starvation.

After returning home, Lange alerted the editor of a San Francisco newspaper to the plight of the workers at the camp, presenting him with two of her photos. The editor informed federal authorities and published an article that included Lange's images. As a result, the government rushed a shipment of 20,000 lbs. of food to the camp. The photos' wider impact included influencing John Steinbeck in the writing of his novel The Grapes of Wrath.

"I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother, as if drawn by a magnet."

In 1960, Lange described her experience in an interview with the magazine Popular Photography. The photos that accompany the following account are captioned with Lange's field notes:

"It was raining, the camera bags were packed, and I had on the seat beside me in the car the results of my long trip, the box containing all those rolls and packs of exposed film ready to mail back to Washington. It was a time of relief. Sixty-five miles an hour for seven hours would get me home to my family that night, and my eyes were glued to the wet and gleaming highway that stretched out ahead. I felt freed, for I could lift my mind off my job and think of home.

I was on my way and barely saw a crude sign with pointing arrow which flashed by at the side of the road, saying PEA-PICKERS CAMP. But out of the corner of my eye I did see it I didn't want to stop, and didn't. I didn't want to remember that I had seen it, so I drove on and ignored the summons. Then, accompanied by the rhythmic hum of the windshield wipers, arose an inner argument:

Dorothea, how about that camp back there? What is the situation back there?
**LESSON PLAN**  
*American Art – Migrant Mother*

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**Appendix B (continued)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are you going back?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nobody could ask this of you, now could they?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To turn back certainly is not necessary. Haven't you plenty if negatives already on this subject? Isn't this just one more if the same? Besides, if you take a camera out in this rain, you're just asking for trouble. Now be reasonable, etc. etc., etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having well convinced myself for 20 miles that I could continue on, I did the opposite. Almost without realizing what I was doing I made a U-turn on the empty highway. I went back those 20 miles and turned off the highway at that sign, PEA-PICKERS CAMP.

I was following instinct, not reason; I drove into that wet and soggy camp and parked my car like a homing pigeon.

I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother, as if drawn by a magnet. I do not remember how I explained my presence or my camera to her but I do remember she asked me no questions. I made five exposures, working closer and closer from the same direction. I did not ask her name or her history. She told me her age, that she was 32. She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food. There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it.

The pea crop at Nipomo had frozen and there was no work for anybody. But I did not approach the tents and shelters of other stranded pea-pickers. It was not necessary; I knew I had recorded the essence of my assignment."

**References:**
LESSON PLAN
American Art – Migrant Mother

Appendix C

The Dust Bowl

Meanwhile, nature made the depression even worse for farmers. In the early 1930s there was a drought (drought) on the Great Plains. The hot sun baked the topsoil into a dry powder. Then gusty winds began sweeping across the plains, kicking up dust. Huge clouds reaching as high as 8,000 feet blackened the afternoon sky. By the mid-1930s the Great Plains became one great Dust Bowl.

Many farm families couldn’t take it anymore. Thousands of these farmers left the Dust Bowl and looked for work elsewhere. Many became migrant workers in California.

The Depression Affects Everyone

The depression affected minorities in different ways than it affected white Americans. During these hard times some white Americans blamed Mexican migrant workers for taking their jobs and accepting lower wages. Sometimes employers laid off Mexican workers so that they could hire unemployed white workers. In addition, many Mexicans were forced to go back to Mexico.

Native Americans suffered from poverty and unemployment to the same extent that they had before the depression. But some things did change. FDR named John Collier as commissioner of Indian affairs. Collier got Congress to return some tribal lands to Native Americans. He also