

Connecting Cultures and Time Periods

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

Many connections exist between art history and different cultures and time periods. Visual arts often provide another way for people to learn from and connect to the past. In this lesson, you will learn that:

1. Works of Art Are Visual Records of the Past

Works of art provide a visual record of the past. Whereas documents tell us about what happened in the past, works of art may illustrate it.



Washington Crossing the Delaware by Emanuel Leutze

➔ **EXAMPLE** Take a look at the image above. It's one thing to read about George Washington

crossing the Delaware River to confront the British during the Revolutionary War, but quite another to view a snapshot of history.

Written documents tell a much different story than what you see here. Many of the soldiers were freezing or near starving. They were demoralized and in need of a victory that could swing some wavering support for the Continental Army their way. The artist that painted this took liberties to project an idealized crossing of the Delaware River as a way of commemorating the event and also recognizing George Washington's image as a national hero.



It's important to be mindful about interpreting works of art too literally. Quite often works of art are representing an ideal, how things could be or should be, rather than simply reflecting the way things are.

On the other hand, works of art provide or can provide a more meaningful link to history than just written documents alone. Many times these works of art can complement written documentation.

2. Works of Art Create Emotional Connections

One of the most important aspects of a work of art, at least in a historical context, is how it allows people to make those emotional connections with the past. An aesthetic experience is engaging and can be very influential, in some ways more influential than written communication. You might not think critically about what you are taking in. Instead, you just let it happen. Studying the visual arts can also help you appreciate the values, aspirations, and aspects of other **cultures** that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to find accessible with written documents alone.



The Third of May 1808 by Francisco Goya

➔ **EXAMPLE** Works of art can foster emotional connections to events in history, such as the painting above by Francisco Goya, a Spanish painter. The scene takes place during the French occupation of Spain under Napoleon and shows French soldiers executing some Spanish men. Notice how Goya depicts the soldiers as rigid, almost mechanized figures, versus the chaotic mess of the bodies on the left entwined with those people that are about to be executed.

When viewing this painting, you might focus on the figure in white holding his hands up with the kind of pained expression on his face. This might create an emotional connection between the viewer and the painting.



TERMS TO KNOW

Culture

The arts and other manifestations of human intellectual production



SUMMARY

You can learn about and connect to the past through visual arts. Often there is a great deal of information about history embedded in certain works. **Works of art are visual records of the past** Sometimes these works interpret the past, and other times they complement written documents. Additionally, **works of art can create emotional connections** between that piece of work and the

viewer. In this lesson, you looked at works of art that might evoke an emotional connection.

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