

## **Title**

- “The Mural Of Our People”—a *MinecraftEdu* group project.

## **Target audience**

- Language arts & literacy and/or history/social studies, grades 4 to 8.
- The classroom teacher (plus any in-class assistants and/or school media/technology instructors/facilitators).

## **Learning goals**

### Curricular

- Art, history, art history (e.g. cave paintings, hieroglyphs, friezes of the Parthenon,, the Bayeux Tapestry, etc.).
- Visual/sequential narrative.
- Writing (creative and interpretive)—individual and group.
- Reading (close reading, extrapolation)—textual and pictorial.

### Non-curricular

- Small-group work.
- Large-group work (or multiple small groups working together).
- Understanding of class/community continuity/history (i.e. studying what previous years’ classes constructed).

## **Theoretical bases**

- Constructivism—students are constructing knowledge from the art/history/art history they study and representing aspects of their experience(s) in a related visual form.
- Constructionism—*MinecraftEdu* is used as an “object to think with.” Students are creating—in-game/virtual—objects that they then interpret the meaning(s) of with and for one another.
- Collective Intelligence Theory—The core activities in this lesson are collaborative and involve consensus decision making.

## **Lesson “recipe”**

### Resources required

A networked computer classroom in which all students (each at their own terminals) can simultaneously run/play *MinecraftEdu*. These resources are required only for class Session 3 onwards, however. The first two class sessions can take place in students' usual classroom, the second of which will require some resources beyond those which students normally have—namely materials for making colored sketches of various sizes.

Duration: 5+ (40-minute) class sessions

### *Session 1*

The lesson begins with some art historical instruction. Students learn about various kinds of pictorial sequential narrative in human cultural history—cave paintings, hieroglyphs, the Parthenon friezes, the Bayeaux Tapestry, etc.

### *Session 2*

The class is divided into four groups of roughly equal size. Each group will represent a “tribe” in a fictional land created (by the teacher) in *MinecraftEdu* for this lesson. The mythology of this land is (or could be something like): “Every generation, members from each of the tribes of The People are chosen to represent their tribe in the Mural Of Our People. Once that generation’s mural is complete, its story written, the wisdom of their forebears will be revealed to them.”

Each group—or “tribe”—is assigned a name, or identity. Members of each of these tribes must create 5 (or more or less, per teacher preference) symbols, images or icons that are representative of, or together convey a basic narrative about, an aspect of their tribe’s name/identity. The individual images will be constructed (in class session 3) as large, mosaic-like tiles (the exact size determined by the teacher) in *MinecraftEdu* and assembled in each of the tribes’ respective villages (all of which surround a central hill, on which the grand Mural Of Our People will be assembled).

An example of tribe names/identities, and what these groups would be tasked with depicting, could look like the following:

- The Ones Who Move: Students create depictions of—representative images of and/or simple narratives about—sports or dance.
- Those Who Sustain: ... food and health.
- The Creators: ... education and invention.
- Celebrants: ... play and leisure.

Session 1 ends with students having sketched out their individual images and drafted a basic narrative (even if it’s just describing of the symbols’/images’/icons’ meanings).

### *Session 3*

In *MinecraftEdu*, tribes go about constructing their respective tiles, assembling them in order, and finalizing their narrative text—to be put into a “written book” object in-game.

At the teacher’s discretion, tiles could be created by using materials unique to each village. Also at the teacher’s discretion is the manner by which the tribes’ individual

murals are brought to the top of the hill—be it by simple (perhaps previously constructed) machines that groups must learn how to operate, by some *deus ex machina* (written into the lesson/land mythology) enacted by the teacher outside of class, etc.

#### *Session 4*

The four tribes' murals are now at the top of the central hill, and the class must decide whether they want a) to keep each of the tribes' murals as they are and simply decide what the order of the four sections will be or b) to "mix-and-match" the tiles from individual tribal sections into an entirely new, thoroughly amalgamated narrative. Regardless of which option is chosen, students will (during Session 5) produce—either as a class (in class), in small groups (in class), or as individuals (in class or for homework)—a "grand narrative" that tells the story of The People.

If the class chooses option "a," they need to decide/agree on the rationale (or narrative justification) for the section order they have chosen and on an element common to all four tribe's mural sections, one that provides a narrative frame for their collective story. (For example, using the tribes listed in Session 2, above, perhaps a/the bicycle is something that unites all four tribes' depictions of themselves.)

If the class chooses option "b," then they must come up with a tile order that makes narrative sense, that tells a story (even if not the cleanest or tightest of tales) of The People as a whole. The written text that will accompany the final mural may be in draft form for Session 4, but the tile order for the grand mural should be finalized (especially if the teacher elects to have students compose this narrative individually for homework).

Lastly, the teacher can decide what method will be used (e.g. simple machines to be figured out and used in-game or some *deus ex machina* that arrives outside of class/ game time) to shuffle the mural sections or individual tiles.

#### *Session 5*

Their grand narrative of The People completed, the class will enter the text into another in-game "written book." Once they do, the Mural Of Our People will magically/ mysteriously begin to fold in on itself, ultimately forming the equivalent of a roofless building. On one of the walls of this roofless building, a door will magically/ mysteriously open. When students/players enter this doorway, they will find a hole in the ground with stairs leading down into the darkness. Beneath the ground, students/ players will find the mural created by the previous year's class (or, in the case of the this lesson's first year or two of use, a mural created by the teacher).

Students then spend the remainder of this session formulating a potential interpretation of the "wisdom of their forebears," as conveyed by the mural they've discovered underground. Composition of this interpretation, taking the form of a narrative similar to the one they created for their own "generation," can be conducted in the same manner the current class's narrative was composed. Once this narrative interpretation is completed, the students/players enter this text into a written book placed near the site of this underground mural, the actual/original text of the

discovered mural (i.e. what the previous year's class or the teacher wrote) will be revealed to them (which teachers may want to do some compare-and-contrast work with) and the discovery-and-interpretation process (of the mural squaring itself, revealing a door and stairs that lead to yet another—previous year's—mural) repeats itself, for as many iterations as the teacher desires.