

Lesson 5.

# The Art of Zapatismo: Tying identity to land and liberty



## Driving Question:

How do people use different forms of art to protect and maintain their identities in the face of globalization and political conflict?

- Case study: How do indigenous people in southern Mexico associated with the Zapatista movement use art to express and protect their cultural and political identities?

## Enduring Understandings:

- People all over the world use different forms of art to reclaim, clarify, and express different identities in the face of stereotyping, racism, and other forms of discrimination that can be associated with conflict and globalization. They often use symbolism and imagery to project positive images of strength. The Zapatistas, for example, use art forms like murals to express their connection to their land, pride in their indigenous culture, and their resistance to colonialism and oppression.

## Overview:

In this lesson, students develop background knowledge about the Zapatista movement by watching a short video and reading an article. They will then learn to describe, analyze, and evaluate art using a mural by Diego Rivera. In the main activity, students take this same framework and apply it to a Zapatista mural to reach conclusions about Zapatista identities and values.

## Learning Objectives:

- Students will complete a reading guide for an article about the Zapatistas in order to develop background knowledge for analyzing Zapatista art.
- Students will write a reflection on a Zapatista mural in which they describe, analyze, and evaluate the art and connect it to Zapatista identities.

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## Content Expectations / Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1](#)  
Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2](#)  
Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7](#)  
Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4](#)  
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience

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## Key Concepts

- Indigenous
- Autonomy / autonomous community
- Cultural and political identities

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## Teacher Preparation and Instructional Resources

- This lesson requires access to the internet and a projector so that you can show a video and so that students can access a blog. Students will also need copies of the reading handouts. If copies are limited, you can project the artwork images instead of using the handouts. Some group work is required as it is a good idea to organize groups ahead of time.
- If students need more geographical background, the following website has useful maps that include general geography, maps of the caracoles, and different Mayan languages spoken by the groups that make up the Zapatistas.  
<https://schoolsforchiapas.org/teach-chiapas/putting-chiapas-map/>

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## Lesson Handouts

1. *A history of Zapatismo*
2. *Diego Rivera mural featuring Emiliano Zapata*
3. *Zapatista Mural Art*

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## Lesson Sequence

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### Opening:

- 1) Tell the students they are now going to follow up on the past lessons by learning about a community of people who are fighting to preserve their cultural and political identity in the face of globalization and political conflict. Explain to them that they are going to learn about the Zapatistas, a movement and community of indigenous Mayan people in southern Mexico who rebelled against their government and are struggling to create independent communities where they control their own resources. In particular, they are going to think and learn about how communities of people like the Zapatistas use different art forms to protect and maintain their identities in the face of globalization and political conflict.

Tell students they are going to watch an animated short film that tells the story of the Zapatistas as an introductory activity. Remind them that this unit is about identity formation in the face of globalization and political conflict. Have students create a three column note chart with the following headings for their three columns: Globalization; Political Conflict; and Identity. Direct them to look for examples of these concepts in the short film and then jot down basic notes about how each idea connects to the film. Explain that in each column, they will jot down ideas that help them answer the following questions (you might project these or have them written on your board):

- *How were the people of Chiapas affected by globalization, especially with respect to economics and trade?*
- *What were the causes of political conflict between the government of Mexico and the people of Chiapas?*
- *How did the people of Chiapas see themselves? What were important aspects of their identities?*

*Link to the video:*

<http://woocomerce-180730-527864.cloudwaysapps.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/The-History-of-Zapatismo-in-Stop-motion-Animation-HD-Mobile.mp4>

After showing the video (it is short enough to watch twice!), and giving students time to add to their notes, ask different students to share ideas from each column. Ask other students to support, add to, or respectfully challenge ideas being shared.

### Guided Inquiry:

- 2) Next pass out Handout 1, *A History of Zapatismo*, and explain to the students that they are going to read the article and complete a reading guide in order to continue to build background knowledge. You can choose to have students read silently and independently, or out loud with the whole class or in small groups. Encourage students to read the article, then review the questions in the guide, and then read the article again while underlining or highlighting ideas that help them answer the
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questions. If your students struggle with this, model how you would do it with a section of text.

Have students next work in small groups of 3 to 4 to formulate and record answers to the reading questions. When most groups have answered most questions, have different groups share their thinking. Again, encourage students to respond to each others' ideas by agreeing with them, adding to them, or suggesting an alternative interpretation (support, extend, or challenge).

**Note:** At the end of the article, you might regroup to explain more about the present day Zapatistas and what makes them unique, their political stances, and the Zapatista Women's Revolutionary Laws that are fundamental to the movement. Subcomandante Marcos is also a topic of endless fascination. Students may also have questions about the Zapatista's use of arms, and it may be valuable to solicit ideas from them about meanings of violence, oppression, and social change. You may also explain recent Zapatista support for Mexico's first indigenous woman Presidential candidate, 'Marichuy.' Resources to discuss more about the Zapatistas can be found on Schools for Chiapas's website.

- 3) Next, you will quickly take students through an activity to introduce and/or clarify the meaning of the terms: *Describe, Analyze, and Evaluate*. Tell the students they are going to do some analysis of artwork, and also develop their understanding of important words they will see a lot in academic contexts: describe, analyze, and evaluate. Pass out Handout 2, Diego Rivera mural featuring Emiliano Zapata. Remind students that they just read about Emiliano Zapata and his pledge to fight for land and liberty, tierra y libertad. Explain that Zapata is an important figure in Mexico, and that the artist of this mural, Diego Rivera, was from Mexico and is one of the most famous muralists in the world.

Ask students to volunteer to share their own definitions of a mural... what do they think makes a mural? You can then share this definition:

- *Today, we can define murals as any piece of artwork painted or applied directly onto a wall, ceiling or other larger permanent surfaces, flat, concave or convex, to be precise. <https://www.widewalls.ch/what-is-a-mural-the-history-and-meaning/>*

Then ask students to think about how murals are different from other artwork and why they are an important cultural and political form. Have them make and share inferences about why many political movements use murals as well (note: this is all connected to the public nature of mural art and the act of claiming public space with a message or image).

Then have students work in their small groups to answer the Describe, Analyze, and Evaluate questions on the handout. When they have had enough time, bring the class back together. First, ask different groups to summarize in their own words what is means to describe, analyze, and evaluate something and how each task is different.

Then ask different groups to share their descriptions, analyses, and evaluations.

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Don't spend too long on this exercise as this is meant to introduce the tasks and help students differentiate between describing, analyzing, and evaluating.

### Independent Practice:

- 4) Tell the students they are now going to turn to the main question of the lesson... how do the Zapatistas use art to express their identity in the face of political conflict and globalization? In particular, tell students they are going to try to understand how the Zapatistas see and represent themselves to the world through art, how they express their values, and how they present a vision of how they want their communities to be.

Pass out Handout 3, *Zapatista Mural Art* (or project the images on your screen). Have students study the image in their groups and describe what they see to each other. In their groups, have them next generate lists of things they see, as well as adjectives that can be used describe the art.

Direct each group to next produce a short descriptive paragraph (or you can have them do this individually) in their own words and also using several of the adjectives they listed to add depth and detail to the descriptions.

- 5) Now, have the students read the article about this mural from the following blog (you can either print this out, have students access it electronically, or project it and have students read it out loud):

**Chronicle of a Zapatista Mural** <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/mother-earth-mural/>

Once they have read the short article about the mural, tell students they are going to ANALYZE it using the information from the article. Project or otherwise share the following analytical questions with the class (they are also on the handout):

- What does this work of art tell us about the traditions and customs of the Zapatistas? What does it tell us about both the history and future of the Zapatistas? In other words, how does this mural connect the Zapatistas to the past and also show a vision for the future?
- Based on the content of this mural, what do the Zapatistas want others to understand about their values and their communities?
- Based on what is in the mural, and on what you read in the article, who are the different audiences for this mural, and what are the different purposes?

Ask each group to select one of these questions to discuss. When they have had time to talk, engage the whole class in a brief discussion of each analytical question.

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## Reflection:

- 6) Close the lesson out by having students write an individual reflection on the mural with two paragraphs. The first paragraph should be an analysis of the mural that summarizes their thinking about the analysis question selected by their group.

The second paragraph should be a personal evaluation of the mural. Provide students the following prompt:

- Evaluate the art presented in this article. Write a short evaluative paragraph about it that responds to the following questions:
  - Do you like the mural? Why?
  - What do you find interesting about it, or why does it not interest you?
  - What criteria or standards do you use to judge art? In your view, what makes good art? How do these standards apply in this case?
  - Does this mural make you rethink art or its value in any way?

## Assessment:

Student's understanding of the main points of the lesson can be assessed through evaluation of the final writing task. These can be assessed with a rubric using the following basic criteria (or additional teacher selected criteria):

- Is there a response to an analytical question that uses information from both the article and the mural to support clear conclusions?
- Is there an evaluative statement that is supported by evidence?
- Are all sections of the evaluation prompt addressed?
- Are the responses clear and coherent?

## Extension

For more advanced groups (high school, college), the Zapatista's invitation to their annual *CompArte* and *ConCiencia* event, a gathering of Zapatistas, other indigenous communities, activists, intellectuals, and artists, provides a good base to branch out into several topics concerning globalization and identity. *Comparte* is the Spanish command form of 'share,' and *ConCiencia* is a play on 'Conscience/Conscious' and literally 'with Science.' The text can be accessed at the link below:

<http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2017/01/16/the-flower-is-to-blame/>

(available in both English and Spanish)

Written by Sup Galeano (formerly known as Sup Marcos), "The Flower is to Blame," invitation opens with an entertaining anecdote about the prevalence and dangers of fake

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news and social media. He then talks about the structure that the event is to take, which provides an interesting view into how Zapatista education works. Finally, he finishes with the vignette from which the title takes its name. It concerns a young Zapatista woman who wants to learn more about science, ultimately pushing back against the stereotype of indigenous peoples as less interested in rational science and more prone to mythic superstition or an essentialist communalism with nature.

The sections could be used in isolation or together. Each section is an example of the Zapatista's rich literary tradition, putting on full display an array of techniques that students can identify.

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## Handout #1

### **A History of Zapatismo**

Before Christopher Columbus, an Italian explorer working on behalf of the Spanish crown, “discovered” the “New World,” in 1492, there were many advanced and vibrant indigenous (or native) civilizations already here in the Americas. Hernán Cortés, the first Spanish conquistador (conquerer) to reach what is today Mexico, encountered a diverse range of societies when he arrived there. Columbus, Cortés, and other conquistadores began a long process of colonial development that was devastating to these peoples. Over the roughly 300 years of Spanish colonization, the indigenous were victim to a massive genocide, caused by disease, war, and often violent Spanish domination. The indigenous, along with African slaves, were treated as inferior to Europeans, instilling a lasting racism that would leave them vulnerable to poverty and exploitation.

In 1821, Mexico, its name taken from the Mexica peoples of Central Mexico, finally won its independence from Spain after over ten years of war. Over the next century, Mexico would lose nearly half its territory to the United States in the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), and also suffer through its own internal conflicts, European invasions, and finally, the 30 year dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, known as the Porfiriato. During the Porfiriato, the United States and other foreign imperial interests began to invest in Mexico for its land and natural resources, displacing many peasant and indigenous peoples from the land where they lived and farmed for sustenance. In sum, independence from Spain failed to improve the lives of Mexico’s poorest people. This tumultuous period gave way to the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920 as the marginalized peoples of Mexico fought for land and better lives.

While the Mexican Revolution was made up of many factions, one of the most important movements was led by Emiliano Zapata, and their guiding principles came to be known as *Zapatismo*. Zapata and his army’s rallying cry was ‘*tierra y libertad*’ (land and liberty). They wanted two things: 1) access to land and natural resources, like water to irrigate their fields, and 2) they also wanted liberty, or the right to political self-determination. Although they didn’t get nearly all they wanted after the revolution, they managed to get Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution, which called for land redistribution to peasants. Although it wasn’t perfect, many peasants obtained access to community lands and were able to survive through small scale farming. After the 1960s, however, the dream of the revolution’s promises fizzled, and many poor peasant and indigenous peoples continued to live in poverty and be exploited by large landowners.

During the 1980s, the Mexican government, under pressure from the United States and international governance bodies, began to chip away at Article 27 and its land reform measures. This culminated in the 1994 passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), an agreement among the United States, Canada and Mexico designed to remove tariff barriers between the three countries. NAFTA favored large

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international corporations, allowed them to obtain land in Mexico, and encouraged them to increase agricultural production. This pushed aside many small scale farmers in Mexico and concentrated land ownership by these corporations.

Vowing to reclaim Emiliano Zapata's original mission for land and liberty, communities of indigenous people in Mexico's poorest state, Chiapas, began to organize. They named themselves the *Zapatistas* in honor of Zapata's fight for land and liberty. After trying to negotiate with the Mexican government but later being betrayed, they decided to withdraw from the government altogether and develop their communities independently. This means that they would not (and do not) accept any money from the government or participate in its institutions. Instead, they formed autonomous (self-controlled) communities, known as *caracoles*, a play on the literal dual meaning of the word as a snail or a conch shell. Snails advance slowly, but they advance, always in contact with the soil, and the act of being in dialogue with other social movements represented by the seashell. In the caracoles, the Zapatistas have built their own education, healthcare, and agricultural system. Through the arts and their education system, they are working to protect and enrich their cultural identities as indigenous communities deeply tied to the land while also harnessing technology and social media to connect with the larger world. They are supported by a broad based solidarity movement, created through their inventive use of the internet. They continue to publish online stories, communiques, and other information about their movement, and routinely host many different kinds of solidarity delegations in Chiapas.

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**Reading Guide** (*answer on a separate sheet of paper*):

- 1) In your own words, briefly summarize the history of political conflict in Mexico:
- 2) How did globalization impact small farmers in Mexico? (think about NAFTA)
- 3) What are caracoles, and why did the Zapatistas decide to call them that?
- 4) How are the Zapatistas working to protect their identities?
- 5) What challenges do you think the Zapatistas face with respect to preserving their cultural and political identities?

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## Handout #2

### Diego Rivera mural featuring Emiliano Zapata

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Part of Diego Rivera's "History of Mexico" mural at the National Palace in Mexico City. The cropped portion features the images of Emiliano Zapata (left with sombrero), Felipe Carrillo Puerto (center), and José Guadalupe Rodríguez (right with sombrero) behind banner featuring the Zapatista slogan, Tierra y Libertad (Land and Liberty).

- 1) **Describe:** What do you see in this painting? What is there? Think about people, objects, words, colors, facial expressions. Only note what you see!
- 2) **Analyze:** What does it mean? What do you think the artist wants the viewer to look at and think about? What choices did the artist make, and why? For example, there are people wearing different kinds of clothes. Why? What might they represent?
- 3) **Evaluate:** What do you think about this work of art? What opinions do you have? Why?

### Handout #3

#### Zapatista Mural Art:





**Group Analysis:** (pick one to discuss)

- What does this work of art tell us about the traditions and customs of the Zapatistas? What does it tell us about both the history and future of the Zapatistas? In other words, how does this mural connect the Zapatistas to the past and also show a vision for the future?
- Based on the content of this mural, what do the Zapatistas want others to understand about their values and their communities?
- Based on what is in the mural, and on what you read in the article, who are the different audiences for this mural, and what are the different purposes?

**Individual Reflection:** (two paragraphs)

1. An analysis of the mural that summarizes your thinking about the analysis question selected by your group. Support your thinking with examples from the article and the mural.

The second paragraph should be a personal evaluation of the mural that responds to the following questions:

- Do you like the mural? Why?
- What do you find interesting about it, or why does it not interest you?
- What criteria or standards do you use to judge art? In your view, what makes good art? How do these standards apply in this case?
- Does this mural make you rethink art or its value in any way?