

Latino Art and Culture

Social Justice Posters

Overview: After completing this activity, students will have gained knowledge about the Latino civil rights movement of the 1970s and the power of symbolic language.

Subject Area: Social Studies

Age Group/Grade Level: 13-17 years, grades 8-12

Duration: approximately 60 min.

Background

Ester Hernandez grew up in the San Joaquin Valley of California, where she unknowingly drank and bathed in polluted water and worked in an environment contaminated by pesticides. She recounts how *Sun Mad* began when she went “home to visit my mother in 1979, reading the articles she saved about water contamination in the barrio.” After thinking about it for two years and remembering her work as a farmhand, she focused her anger on the dangers of growing grapes for the raisin industry. “I focused on something personal, the Sun Maid box,” she said. “Slowly I began to realize,” she continued, “how to transform the Sun Maid and unmask the truth behind the wholesome figures of agribusiness. *Sun Mad* evolved out of my anger and my fear of what would happen to my family, my community, and to myself.”

Quoted in Therese Thau Heyman, *Posters American Style* (New York and Washington, DC: Harry N. Abrams, in association with the National Museum of American Art, 1998.)

Discussion

Share Ester Hernandez's *Sun Mad* with students. Begin your conversation about this artwork with the “Claim/Support/Question” Artful Thinking routine (<http://tinyurl.com/ClaimSupport>) to encourage students to make inferences and support them with evidence from the artwork.

Consider explaining how Hernandez's childhood in California led her to create *Sun Mad*. Encourage further discussion with the following questions:

- What is Hernandez's message? Cite your evidence.
- Why might the artist have modeled her work on a commercial product?
- How has the artist combined words and an image to get her point across?
- Why do you think the artist created a poster rather than a painting?
- Do you think the poster effectively communicates Hernandez's message? Why or why not?



Ester Hernandez, *Sun Mad*, 1982, screenprint on paper, image: 20 x 15 in. sheet, 22 x 17 in., Gift of Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, 1995.50.32. © 1982, Ester Hernandez

Activity

Have students brainstorm a list of issues or problems that they care about. Of these, choose one that affects the community. Have students reflect on why this issue is important to them and how it affects their lives.

Encourage students to dig deeper by researching the issue with the following questions in mind:

- What factors contributed to the creation of this problem?
- How does it impact the community, country, or world?
- What is already being done to resolve this problem?
- What do people need to know in order to improve this issue?

Have students identify everyday items that could symbolize this issue for them. Using Hernandez's artwork as inspiration, have students create a poster that raises awareness about the issue.

For a full-size image of Ester Hernandez's *Sun Mad*, visit: http://americanart.si.edu/images/1995/1995.50.32_1a.jpg