

## THE POWER OF WOMEN: ART WITH A SOCIAL AGENDA

The power of women is a common theme in art, and this is illustrated using images from the National Endowment for the Humanities Picturing America image set as well as from the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Each of the works in this lesson also promotes the social agenda of the artist. Students will see connections to social issues, and will see how the artist/photographer uses details to reveal inner strengths.



*Woman of Tehuantepec*, c. 1929  
Tina Modotti, Italian  
Gelatin silver print  
Image and sheet: 8 3/8 x 7 3/8 inches (21.3 x 18.7 cm)  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Carl Zigrosser, 1968  
1968-162-40

### Curricular Areas

English – Language Arts

### Grade Level

For grades 9–12

### Common Core Academic Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.2](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.7](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.10](#)

### Art Images Required

Click on the titles below to view high-resolution photographs on the Philadelphia Museum of Art or the NEH website. Images that are available in the ARTstor Digital Library are indicated by an ID number or search phrase. Entering that number or phrase into the ARTstor search bar will direct you to the corresponding image in that database.

#### RELATED PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART OBJECTS:

- [Mother and Child](#), 1954, by Elizabeth Catlett  
ARTstor search: 2000-36-1
- [Woman of Tehuantepec](#), 1929 by Tina Modotti  
ARTstor search: Woman of Tehuantepec, Modotti

For more information, please contact Division of Education and Public Programs: School and Teacher Programs by phone at 215-684-7580, by fax at 215-236-4063, or by e-mail at [educate@philamuseum.org](mailto:educate@philamuseum.org).

# PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

## RELATED PICTURING AMERICA OBJECTS:

- *Migrant Mother*, 1936 by Dorothea Lange  
ARTstor search: Lange, Migrant, Eastman
- *The Migration Series No. 57*, 1940–41 by Jacob Lawrence  
ARTstor search: Lawrence, Migration, 57

## Lesson Process

1. Take some time, either as a class or in small groups, to look closely at each work, reading the background information provided online. (Be sure to review the Teacher Resources on the Museum website.) Discuss what you have discovered, including any questions you may still have about the paintings.
2. Where do your eyes go first when looking at Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother*? What details come to mind? How would you describe her face? Her clothing? What do you know about the backstory of this photograph? Why do you think the faces of her children are turned away?
3. Consider this woman and her situation. On a piece of paper, list a few adjectives that describe her physical state and her character. Write a paragraph in the form of a personal narrative, in which you describe her thoughts as you imagine them.
4. Re-examine Elizabeth Catlett's *Mother and Child*. Where do your eyes go first? How would you describe her clothing? Her posture? Her attitude? Make a list of adjectives that describe this woman's appearance and her character. Write a paragraph in the form of a personal narrative, in which you describe her thoughts as you imagine them.
5. How do these two works of art compare? In a small group, use a Venn diagram to list both similarities and differences. At first, there seems to be so much that is different about these two women. However, notice what you have in the center of the diagram. Write a summary of these similarities for your group and share with other groups in the class.
6. Going back to the photograph and the sculpture, how does each artist reveal strength of character? Look for such details as expression, posture, composition, and geometric shapes.
7. What do these works say about women in America, and how does this message fit each artist's purpose (as noted in the text that accompanies each)?

## Assessment

1. Review the details you have listed in the outer spheres of your Venn diagram (the differences). Add additional details, from closer examination and previous class discussions. Write a brief persuasive essay on the following topic: These are two depictions of the power of a woman's character. Which artist do you feel has offered the most interesting view of this theme? Discuss the differences between the two works from which you formed your opinion.
2. How do artists use details to show such elusive concepts as character? Create a presentation focusing on details from these two works as examples.

# PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

## Enrichment

1. Research the time period in which each work of art was created. What was going on in America—politically, socially, economically, and culturally? How do the works of art reflect the time in which they were produced? Both *Migrant Mother* (1936) and *Mother and Child* (1954) were made by women. What challenges might these women artists have been facing in their careers when they created their artworks?
2. Examine the other two works listed above: *Woman of Tehuantepec* by Tina Modotti and *The Migration Series No. 57*, by Jacob Lawrence. In small groups, read the background material provided on the Museum and NEH websites and discuss how the artists created images showing the power of women.