Summer Institute 2025: Mongolia - Past and Present

Mongolian History's Impact on the Arts (Film)

Name, School, Grade Level

Peter Rodrigues, Berkeley High School. This lesson would be most appropriate (and is designed for) a 10th Grade Global History course that serves as a precursor course for our International Baccalaureate program.

Title of Unit/Lesson

This lesson serves as part of our *The World Post World War II* unit and serves as a book end to a similar lesson (with a very different culminating project) in the *Interwar Period* unit. The lesson itself is about the impact of Mongolia's history on its art (generally) and film (specifically), and connections are made to the impact of history on the arts in other nations/regions (which was also addressed directly in our *Interwar Art Project*).

Organizing/Essential/Guiding Questions

The primary Essential Question is "How does our history and culture influence the types of stories we're telling in film?"

Introduction/ Overview

One of the things that struck me about Mongolia is how the various periods through its history have had such an impact not just on film but on all aspects of life. For the purposes of this lesson, I'll be dividing Mongolian history into roughly three periods:

- Pre-Soviet Influence
- Soviet
- Post 1990 Democracy

To use Buddhism as an example, the period of purges introduced by the Soviet Union had obvious, unfortunate, and long-lasting impact on the practice of Buddhism in Mongolia which has since seen a restoration after 1990. These same types of influences can be seen in their film history.

To explore these concepts, students will look at examples (primarily trailers) for films from various periods of Mongolian History as well as a modern promotional video for the National Library, all of which provide insight and examples to the changing landscape of Mongolian culture as it influences art and communicates to viewers what was considered important by artists, or, in some cases, by repressive regimes.

Content Standards

Since this lesson is designed primarily for use in a 10th grade history class that serves as a feeder to Berkeley High School's International Baccalaureate (IB) program, the standards and skills of IB History (outlined below) are more relevant than state content standards. That said,

this lesson would be relevant to the following California Content Standards for 10th Grade Modern History:

- HSS 10.10.9 Students analyze the international developments in the post–World War II world.
- HSS 10.10.11 Students analyze the integration of countries into the world economy and the information, technological, and communications revolutions (e.g., television, satellites, computers).

The IB History program at Berkeley High School is composed of three semesters of instruction that include topics related to social movements in the 20th century, the rise of single-party states, and the development of democratic traditions. The exam, should students choose to take it, includes three "papers", and our 10th grade history course is tasked with preparing students for some of the skills necessary to be successful, especially on the first paper which emphasizes source evaluations and critical thinking on timed Document Based Questions (DBQs). Similarly, papers 2 and 3 require students to select from specific questions and write responses in an essay format. By the time this unit takes place, students will have practiced the skills of source evaluation and have written numerous timed essays variously selecting from either a series of prompts or having a prompt supplied to them at the start of the exercise.

Objectives

At the end of the lesson, students should be able to:

- Discuss the role history plays in both developing as well as stifling artistic expression.
- Understand the relationship between power and opportunity in determining who can produce art, and in what context.
- Consider how artistic expression signifies, in a historical context, what a culture values.
- Apply these ideas to their own lives and modern (American[1]) culture.

Materials/Resources

This lesson does not require any specific resources beyond internet access with which to show the various trailers/films referenced. It is helpful, but not necessary that students have access to computers in class for the writing assignment. As designed, the lesson refers to journals which are an important processing tool in my classroom, but teachers should certainly feel encouraged to modify these procedures for what their students are already used to. Similarly, a slide deck is provided which guides the lecture/conversation and teachers should feel encouraged to edit/modify the slides as needed for their own contexts/interests.

Special Equipment

No special equipment is required for this lesson.

[1] Berkeley High School has small but not insignificant populations of newcomer and immigrant students who may want to explore these concepts as they relate to their own countries. This should be encouraged where possible.

Teacher Preparation

This lesson is designed to take two 55-minute periods. The first is discussion/lecture, the second is time to complete the assessment in class. Additionally, this lesson assumes students are passingly familiar with the Interwar art movements of the early 20th Century Surrealism, Dada, Neoclassicalism, and Soviet Realism). While these artistic movements are not specifically referenced in this material, having some understanding on how history influenced the development of any or all of these movements would be invaluable for students. Additionally, students will have completed the Interwar Art Project. Details about these various artistic styles can be found here.

Time/Timeline

As noted above, this lesson is designed for two 55-minute periods and would likely come near the end of the second semester (assuming the course is taught chronologically).

Procedures

Day 1:

- 15 min – In their journals students respond to the following prompts:
  - How do history and culture influence the types of stories a society tells?
  - How do your own experiences, history, and culture influence the types of stories they want to tell?

  Students should take 5-7 minutes to write, a few minutes to discuss in small groups and then 5-7 minutes to discuss in class discussion.
- 35 min – Use this slide deck to lecture/discuss the impact of the various periods of modern Monglia's history on their art.
- 5 min – Introduce writing assignment for Day 2. As an option, you might consider giving the students the prompts ahead of time and allow them to outline at home before coming in, in any case, this assignment will likely need to be scaffolded and modified for your students' familiarity with writing and to accommodate IEP/504/English Language Learners.

Day 2:

- Students will have the full period to work on their assessment, outlined below.

Assessment

For the assessment, students will have 55 minutes to write a short (4-5 paragraph) essay in response to one of three prompts of their choosing. Sample prompts:

- To what extent does The Cave of the Yellow Dog highlight aspects of Mongolian culture in ways that might be seen as politically motivated against Russia/Sovietism?
- How does Son of Mongolia reflect the Soviet Union's ideals and influence on Mongolia? What does the Soviet Union hope to achieve with a film like this?

- What makes art such a powerful tool in the communication of values? How does the values of the US play out in American films today? (Your answer should specifically reference at least one American film from the last 10 years[2]).

Here is a sample rubric that I've used to grade students on similar assignments in my class. Primarily it grades students on three criteria: organization, completeness (including being on time), and historical knowledge/depth. It's a simple three-point scale in each of these criteria for a total of 9 points.

[2] The International Baccalaureate Organization uses 10 years as the determination between history and modern social sciences.