



THEMATIC COURSE TITLE:

20th CENTURY AMERICAN ART (1900-1950): FROM ASHCAN TO ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

STUDENT LEVEL: 8th – 12th Grades (Period 7?)

TEACHER: Ms. Coffin, Art History

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The objective of this course is to take a look at the many art movements and original styles that artists developed in the United States from 1900 to 1950. It will feature a multimedia approach to painting, sculpture, photography, design, and more. The course will include the art of Ashcan School artists like George Bellows, Photo-Secessionist Alfred Stieglitz, Depression Era photojournalist Dorothea Lange, political muralist Diego Rivera, Southwestern paintings of Georgia O’Keeffe, Harlem Renaissance artist Romare Bearden, and conclude with the drip paintings of Jackson Pollock.

In 1913, the modern art movements of Impressionism and Cubism in Europe came to America via exhibitions like the Armory Show in New York City. The Armory Show not only greatly inspired American artists but also led them to embrace controversy. In fact, much of American painting and sculpture since 1900 has been a series of revolts against tradition. New Schools of thought developed like the Ashcan School whose focus was often to reveal the poverty prevalent in America’s cities rather than their prosperity.

However, the aftermath of [World War I](#) and the Depression led many artists in the United States to reject the [modern](#) trends introduced in the [Armory Show](#). Instead, they often illustrated agricultural and industrial themes in American society. [Grant Wood](#)’s *American Gothic* showcased the austere and strict morals of farm life while [Charles Sheeler](#)’s *Classic Landscape* carefully captured the precision of machines in modern cities. [Edward Hopper](#)’s *New York Movie*, on the other hand, revealed a more individual style of realism by concentrating on the loneliness and alienation prevalent in modern society.

The completion of the [Santa Fe Railroad](#) encouraged American settlers to travel across the west, as far as the [California](#) coast. New artists’ colonies started growing up around [Santa Fe](#) and [Taos](#), the artists’ primary subject matter being the native people and landscapes of the [Southwest](#). Images of the Southwest became a popular form of advertising. Artist, Georgia O’Keeffe, was one of the first modern artists to embrace the southwestern subject matter and became famous for her paintings of the flowers, bones, and landscapes of [New Mexico](#).

The [Harlem Renaissance](#) was another significant development in American art following World War I. In the 1920s and 30s, a new generation of educated and politically astute African-Americans sponsored literary societies, art, and industrial exhibitions to combat racial stereotypes. The movement introduced a range of talents within African-American communities. It included artists and Jazz musicians from across America, but was centered in [Harlem](#).

When the [Great Depression](#) hit, president [Roosevelt’s New Deal](#) created several public arts programs. The purpose of these programs was to give work to artists and decorate public buildings, usually with a national theme. The style of much of the public art commissioned by the WPA was influenced by the

work of [Diego Rivera](#) and other artists of the contemporary [Mexican muralist](#) movement. After WWII, the drip paintings of Jackson Pollock took the world by storm. Paris was no longer the heart of the art world. By the 1950s, New York artists' had taken center stage!