Paintings, Proclamations, and Political Positions

Grade Level: 6–12

Illinois Learning Standards:
1C, Stage F; 4B, Stage F; 5A, Stage F; 5B, Stage F; 5C, Stage F; 5C, Stage G; 4B, Stage H, I, & J; 5A, Stage H, I, & J; 5B, Stage H, I, & J; 5C, Stage H, I, & J

Objectives:
- Examine the Emancipation Proclamation through painting and lithography
- Understand how art is used to convey subliminal (hidden, subtle) messages
- Prepare written and oral report

Materials Needed:
Computer with Internet access
Supplemental history books/periodicals
Black board
Paper, pens, pencils

Background:
In Abraham Lincoln's Inaugural Address delivered on March 4, 1861, he stated that he had a duty to preserve the Union, would not repeal the Fugitive Slave Law, and would allow slavery to exist in places where it was already established. But by the summer of 1862, the war was not progressing to Lincoln's satisfaction and he realized he needed to change tactics and broaden his war goals. Calling an impromptu meeting of his cabinet, Lincoln asked them to listen and offer suggestions to a draft of the Emancipation Proclamation. When Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, it transformed the North's Civil War goal from restoring the Union to freedom for millions of slaves and was arguably the central act of his administration.

Wanting to capture what he believed was "an act unparalleled for moral grandeur in the history of mankind," Francis Carpenter, an artist of some renown, arranged an introduction to the President and was invited to the White House for six months in 1864. Carpenter began sketching people, places and things while listening to some of the President's conversations.

Writing in his memoir, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln: The Story of a Picture*, Carpenter relays how he positioned cabinet members who long supported emancipation in the foreground of the composition. Those who displayed reservations, including the Secretary of the Interior, Postmaster General, and the Attorney General were relegated to the back where their less than enthusiastic attitudes of "discussion or silent deliberation," would be inconspicuous. Lincoln, while positioned between the radical and conservative factions of his cabinet, is positioned closer to the radical element. On Lincoln's right are the two most powerful cabinet departments, war and finance. Directly opposite the Secretary of War is the Secretary of the Navy.

Entitled to a prominent place at the table was the Secretary of State.

Measuring 108 inches in height by 180 inches in width, Carpenter's painting entitled, *First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation* is an invaluable pictorial representation of a definitive moment in our nation's history that Lincoln was eager to publicize. The painting, completed in 1864, was displayed in the White House and later toured the country. It hangs in the U.S. Capitol building.

But it wasn't until Carpenter asked Alexander Ritchie to create a steel engraving of the painting that the majority of Americans were able to obtain smaller-sized copies of their own. Widely distributed and measuring 21 inches by 32 inches, the lithograph was extremely popular when it began to circulate before the election in 1864.

Francis Bicknell Carpenter's painting of the first reading of the Emancipation Proclamation currently hangs in the west staircase in the Senate wing of the U.S. Capitol. It can be accessed at:

http://www.gpoaccess.gov/serialset/cdocuments/sd107-11/pdf/116-121.pdf

Alexander Ritchie's lithograph can be found at the Library of Congress:

http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/96521764/?sid=e4cce9a41eada91a38f64ef153a24260

A later edition of Francis Carpenter's memoir, retitled *The Inner Life of Abraham Lincoln: Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln,* can be found at:

http://books.google.com/books?id=FTsl3N7hDpAC&lpg=PP1&ots=bUlu8j0QbK&dq=six%20months%20at%20the%20white%20house&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=true

Activity Procedure:

- Examine and discuss the Francis Carpenter and Alexander Ritchie *First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation* using the links provided in the background information.
- Challenge students to identify the differences between the two.
- What accessories/objects are present in the painting? A key to the painting can be found at: http://www.gpoaccess.gov/serialset/cdocuments/sd107-11/pdf/116-121.pdf
- What is the significance of accessories?
- What emotions are displayed, if any?
- Does Carpenter's work evoke the significance of the event?
- Based upon the placement of cabinet members in Carpenter's painting, who supported/had reservations about Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation?
- What does the portrait say about the social construction of government in the 19th century? (All cabinet members are older, white men.)
- How has our government changed in terms of its make-up?

Extension:

- Teacher will select ten pivotal moments in the history of our country and discuss why they are historically significant. (See suggested events below.)
    - Washington Crossing the Delaware
    - 1969 Apollo Moon Landing
    - Martin Luther King, "I Have a Dream" speech
    - Pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock
    - Great Depression
    - Gettysburg
    - 19th Amendment
    - Surrender of Lee at Appomattox Court House
    - Signing of Declaration of Independence
    - Signing of the Constitution
    - D-Day or Surrender of the Japanese on the Battleship Missouri
    - Completion of the transcontinental railroad

- Students will select an event to depict, locate an image of the event, write a one-page narrative of why the event is pivotal in America's history, and share their work with the class.
- Class will assemble a time line of America's history using images.

Additional Resources:

Abraham Lincoln's handwritten copy of the Emancipation Proclamation and the transcript can be found at the National Archives:

http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/emancipation_proclamation/index.html

The Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery has prepared a Reading Portraiture Guide for Educators. It can be found at:

http://www.npg.si.edu/docs/reading.pdf