

## ***Lesson II - Symbolism and Otpor's Use of the Clenched Fist***

### **Learning objectives:**

Students will have the opportunity to:

- Analyze the impact that Otpor generated through the image of a clenched fist and the use of black and white colors;
- Explore the use and meaning of symbols in social and political contexts;
- Create original symbols as a personal statement about a particular cause or issue.

### **Relevant NCSS Strands and Standards:**

The following themes and criteria are each applicable to the lesson plan but may or may not be emphasized in individual implementation:

- I. "Culture" a,b,c,d,g;
- II. "Time, Continuity & Change" e,f;
- III. "People, Places & Environment" h,i;
- IV. "Individuals, Groups & Institutions" e,g;
- V. "Power, Authority & Governance" a,c,e,f,g;
- VI. "Global Connections" a,b,c,e,f,g,h; and,
- VII. "Civic Ideals & Practices" a,b,e,g.

Regarding definitions of Standards, reference *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*, National Council for the Social Studies, Washington, D.C., 1994; or see [Ten Thematic Strands in Social Studies](#).

### **Essential Skills:**

- Students will need an open mind in order to examine and create a variety of political, cultural and religious images.
- Students will use this instructional unit to think freely and without restrictions placed on them, i.e., "to think outside the box."
- Students will need to put pen/pencil/marker to paper to make manifest the power of a conceptual icon/symbol/slogan.

### **Essential Content:**

- To understand the role of symbols and images in promoting a cause;
- To investigate the potentiality and universality of iconography;
- To understand images in their historical context;
- To make the connection between "the sacred and the profane," i.e., to consider the impact of slogans and graphic imaging on commercial marketing;
- To apply this new knowledge and insight to contemporary concerns, both personal and societal.

### **Essential Strategies/Methodologies:**

- Two 90-minute class periods or four 45-minute class periods are required.
- Students will work individually and in small groups.
- Students will be expected to discuss, reflect, write and draw conceptually.

### **Resources:**

- The film, **Bringing Down a Dictator**.
- Copies of the images and slogans for all the students.
- Colored paper, pencils, markers, crayons, and other art supplies.

### **First 45-minute Block or First 90-minute block:**

- For twenty minutes prior to the viewing of the film, and without prior reference to any icons, symbols or slogans, students should break up into small groups and discuss and define symbolism and iconography as they have experienced it in their own lives. Students should discuss what symbols have affected them and the reasons for those effects.
- For the remaining twenty-five minutes, have students view the film, **Bringing Down a Dictator** (total length is approximately 60 minutes). Ask students to pay particular attention to the symbols, slogans and "labels" used by either side in the conflict.
- For homework, students should jot down the symbols and slogans they saw in the film and how they were used.

### **Second 45-minute Block:**

- Complete the viewing of the film, again paying attention to the use of symbols as well as other imagery.
- Have the students make a list of Otpor's uses of symbols, slogans and imagery.

### **Third 45-minute Block or Second 90-minute Block:**

#### **Phase I:**

- Distribute a copy of Addendum A, the clenched fist used in Otpor's nonviolent campaign, and Addendum B, a list of slogans. Students should write down any comments or questions they have about slogans and symbols, or about the film itself.
- Separate students into small groups (3-4) where they can discuss their comments and questions about the film. In addition, the groups should discuss and identify what messages Otpor's slogans and symbols convey.
- Using the colored paper and other art materials, the groups should then create graphics that represent the slogans on the handout.

- Assign each group a number with which to identify their graphics; then have students post them about the room. All the students should view the graphics exhibit and try to identify the slogan each graphic represents.
- When the viewing is finished, ask the groups to identify their graphics. Have a question and answer period when the students can comment and question each other about the choices they made in representing the slogans.

## Phase II:

- Distribute Addendum C, the symbols handout:
  - Snake - United States, American Revolution
  - Sickle and Hammer - USSR, union of farmers and industrial workers
  - Swastika - Germany, Nazis and Hitler, World War II
  - American flag - United States, Contemporary
  - Eagle used in various countries as national bird
  - The spiritual cross(es), which symbolize historical mythologies and religious traditions within Christianity
  - The wheel, e.g. the wheel in the center of the Indian flag, a symbol of Hinduism itself
  - The absence of a symbol, e.g., in Judaism and Islam there exists no anthropomorphic deity and in the Taoist, artistic tradition — "empty space"
- For the balance of the period, pose the following questions to the groups regarding the above icons (or, the lack thereof):
  - What does each symbol "say"?
  - What feelings or personal connections do you have to these images?
  - What does each image connote?
  - Based upon your prior studies and experience, relate as many symbols as you can to their historical times and events by comparing and contrasting the message(s) of the icons' creators with the reactions of those who were initially 1) indifferent, and 2) opposed to the perspective/worldview behind the same images. How have the various symbols affected other countries or other groups of people?
  - In the film, what were the effects of spray painting "Gotov Je!" and stenciling the clenched fist everywhere? How did it affect the people of Serbia, especially those who had been neutral or hesitant?
  - How did the use of black and white, rather than color, promote the idea or theme that Otpor wanted to present?
  - After September 11, 2001, many cars and buildings in the United States displayed an American flag. What do you think such a display signifies? Who is the display aimed at?
- Group responses should be recorded on newsprint and posted about the room.

#### **Fourth 45-minute Block:**

- In this block, working individually, students are going to utilize their imaginative skills to create either a symbol that could be used successfully by one side in a nonviolent conflict, or create a symbol describing their feelings about an issue. The students need to keep in mind that while they are creating a symbol, they are also creating or reinforcing the image of that group.
- Suggested topics or issues:
  - The environmental movement, nationally and internationally
  - Launching a new, commercial product
  - The emergence of a new religious/ethical system, globally
  - Promoting ethnic identity and pride in the U.S.
  - Raising public awareness of women's issues, worldwide
  - Other topics: gun control, capital punishment, rape/violence, abortion rights, affirmative action
- Students are not restricted to the above issues. The intention is that they feel very strongly about the issue they choose so that their symbol will be meaningful for them.
- Before creating the symbol, students must decide what the purpose of their symbol is, viewpoint they want to pose, and what reaction they want to receive from other people that view their symbol.
- The students should not only create the symbol, but also discuss what methods could be used to promote the symbol and what effect the symbol could have on the opposition.
- To conclude the class session, students can present and post their symbol/slogan around the classroom so that the class can question, consider and discuss the range and power of everyone's symbols.

#### **Suggested Assessments:**

- Use an assessment whereby each student receives two grades. The first should consider the effectiveness of each student's symbol and/or slogan in terms of the responses that resulted from other students. It should also reflect how effectively the student was able to listen and respond constructively to others' views. For this grade, the conceptual thinking behind the symbol and the communication of the symbolism to fellow classmates should be more important than the actual finished drawing and/or slogan. Thus, the focus is on the conceptual thinking skills of the student rather than his/her artistic ability.
- A second grade of co-equal value should be based solely on the participation of the student throughout the periods whether working individually or in the small group setting, e.g., how enthusiastically the student reacted to and participated in different aspects of the lesson. For a model of such a rubric, see Addendum D, the Evaluation Form.
- Evaluate the homework paragraph for relevance and specificity.

### **Suggested Enrichment and Extension Activity:**

1. Students can create a symbol on a current issue facing either their school or the nation. They can then distribute/publicize their symbol, in a similar fashion to the way that Otpor publicized the clenched fist. To determine the impact of this iconography, the students can create a survey for the tested population and submit a report to the class for extra credit.
2. Students can create a system for identifying, monitoring, and recording the use of symbols and slogans in advertising and in the speech of public officials. After a specified length of time (e.g., two weeks) the students should present a report on their findings.