Draw Like a “Special Artist” of the US Civil War”

Description:
Middle school students use copies of “Atlas of American History” to locate origin of sixteen US Civil War sketches published by National Geographic. Students choose a sketch to reproduce using materials available to “special artists” of the time period. Students display work in a time line or with string connecting to a large US map.

Geography National Standards:
• #4 - The physical and human characteristics of places
• #18 - How to use maps and other geographic representations, geospatial technologies, and spatial thinking to understand and communicate information

Oregon Content Standards Middle School
Geography Standard:
• 6.11 Distinguish among different types of maps and use them to analyze an issue in the Western Hemisphere

Art Standards:
Art #1: Create, Present and Perform
• Apply ideas, techniques, and processes in the arts
Art #3: Understand the relationship of works of art to their social, historical and cultural contexts, and the influence of the arts on individuals, communities and cultures.

English and Language Arts Standards:
Speaking and Listening Grade 6 Comprehension and Collaboration:
• CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.1
  Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led)
with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Objectives:
In completing this lesson, students should be able:

- Locate the origin of a battle sketch using a map depicting Civil War Battle sites
- Locate topographic features such as rivers, mountains, valleys and mountain ranges that can be seen in artist sketches
- Understand and demonstrate use of materials available to Civil War field artists
- Create a copy of a Civil War field sketch
- Place that sketch in a time line of the Civil War or attach by string to a large US map to show location
- Discuss in a group the work of Civil War field artists

Materials needed:
- Brown construction paper 9x12
- Charcoal, pencils, China White paint or white chalk, fixative or hairspray
- Tissues for each student and newsprint cover sheets
- Copies of 16 field “special artists” sketches from http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/05/civil-war-sketches/art-gallery

Time needed:
Approximately 5 class periods of 45 minutes

Background information:
Theodore Davis described what it took to be a Civil War artist out in the field: “Total disregard for personal safety and comfort; an owl-like propensity to sit up all night and a hawk style of vigilance during the day; capacity for going on short food; willingness to ride any number of miles horseback for just one sketch, which might have to be finished at night by no better light than that of a fire.” The war reporter field artists were known as “artist specials” or just “specials”. The shutter speeds of Civil War era cameras were too slow to capture the action of battle. Photographer’s processing wagons were too cumbersome take into action. The photos we see of the war were often taken after a battle or are of camp life where the scenes were static. To capture the real action, specials were embedded with the troops. Using simple artists materials they became reporters, scouts, and even at times spies. The sketches “specials” made were sent back to newspaper offices to be edited and engraved, printed sometimes months after the event.

China White paint was reformatted near the beginning of the Civil War. It is a very bright white made from zinc oxide and was used to denote fire, explosions and the glint of bayonets. It would have been added to a special’s sketch after a battle when he had returned to camp. Today zinc oxide is commonly used in medical ointments and sunscreen. As a paint, it dries slowly so for this lesson white chalk may be substituted.

Additional Information:
With younger students teachers may not wish to emphasize the gore of battle. There are several sketches in the collection that show landscapes from a distance or people not directly involved in a battle that could be selected for students viewing.

When the original sketches left the specials hands they were subject to editing by the publisher. Sometimes they were changed to make the horses and men for example look brave and tireless instead of battle weary or nearing death. Both sides wanted to print pictures that would show their cause winning and thereby encourage the support of the general readership.
The collection of sketches can be viewed in the “photo gallery” of this site: [http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/05/civil-war-sketches/](http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/05/civil-war-sketches/). The featured article, “A Sketch in Time”, will provide the teacher with needed background information or could be used as a reading assignment for students.

**Directions:**
- Make copies of the sketches from the National Geographic site.
- Using information from the National Geographic article “A Sketch in Time” explain who “specials” were.
- Show the set of 16 sketches using either a document camera or copies you have printed.
- Use the sketch captions to locate the scene in the “Atlas of American History” or other Civil War maps.
- Students in groups of two, will identify land features shown in a sketch. They may also locate rivers or mountains nearby to the scene in the sketch on maps of the region.
- With the class discuss points of interest specials featured in each sketch. Stress how important accuracy was for families back home waiting for news of loved ones.
- Demonstrate use of charcoal, pencil and white chalk to make a sketch on brown paper
- Demonstrate how to smudge with a tissue and how to use a cover sheet to protect work.
- Students select a print to copy and begin sketch in pencil, continuing with charcoal and finally white chalk.
- After sketches are complete (3 or 4 days) spray them with fixative or hairspray.
- Arrange the body of work for critique by teacher and class.

**Follow up activities:**
- Teacher and students take turns leading artistic discussions for several of the student copies.
- Questions to ask while viewing a work of art are taken from “The Civil War and American Art Teachers Guide” from the Smithsonian American Art Museum. It can be downloaded here: [http://americanart.si.edu/education/resources/documents/civilwar_teachersguide_final.pdf](http://americanart.si.edu/education/resources/documents/civilwar_teachersguide_final.pdf)

  From the source above, an example of questions the teacher could ask may include:
  - Where are the characters?
  - Who are the characters?
  - How are the people feeling?
  - Where is the light in this work?
  - Why do you think the artist is putting the light where he does?
  - Look at the tree: Why does the artist put the tree where he does? What is behind the tree?

- Students form a timeline of their copies, dating them.
- Students make a display of class artwork, each with a string connecting to its origin on a map

**Formative Assessment**
- Teacher circulates the room while students are sketching evaluating use of materials for artistic effect reminding students the important work specials had to show the true picture of each event.
- Teacher gives individual mini lessons as needed and checks back with student for follow through.
- Teacher asks individuals the location of their scene on a US map.

**Summative Assessment**
- All student works are displayed together. Students and teacher evaluate the students ability to faithfully represent the original.
- Students are asked to correctly place their artwork within a time line or indicate its origin on a map.

**Extensions and/or Adaptations**
- Students draw a landscape of their choice using the special’s simple equipment.
• Special needs students use charcoal and chalk to sketch in an outlined copy of one special’s prints
• Students research other forms of art including paintings of the US Civil War. The following site has a timeline of art work and literature of the period:
  http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/civilwar_timeline/#!prettyPhoto
• Students research how post Civil War attitudes of a new beginning affected landscape painting. This painting is a good place for students to start: Albert Bierstadt, Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California, 1865. It is part of the Smithsonian collection.

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