

## Hispanic Heritage Through Art Grades 6-12

### Benchmarks:

- LAFS.68.RH.1.2/  
LAFS.910.1.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- LAFS.910.RH.3.9 Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.
- LAFS.68.WHST.2.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**Objectives:** At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through inquiry.
2. Interpret artworks that tells a story about the experiences of Hispanic Americans.

### Key Terms:

Chicano	Culture	Heritage	Hispanic
Latino	Mestizo	Tradition	

### Materials:

Teacher Background Information, “Making a New Life in the United States” (provided)  
Various art works (provided)  
Primary Source analysis handout (provided)  
Artist Information Sheets (provided)  
Computers/Devices with Internet access

### Activities:

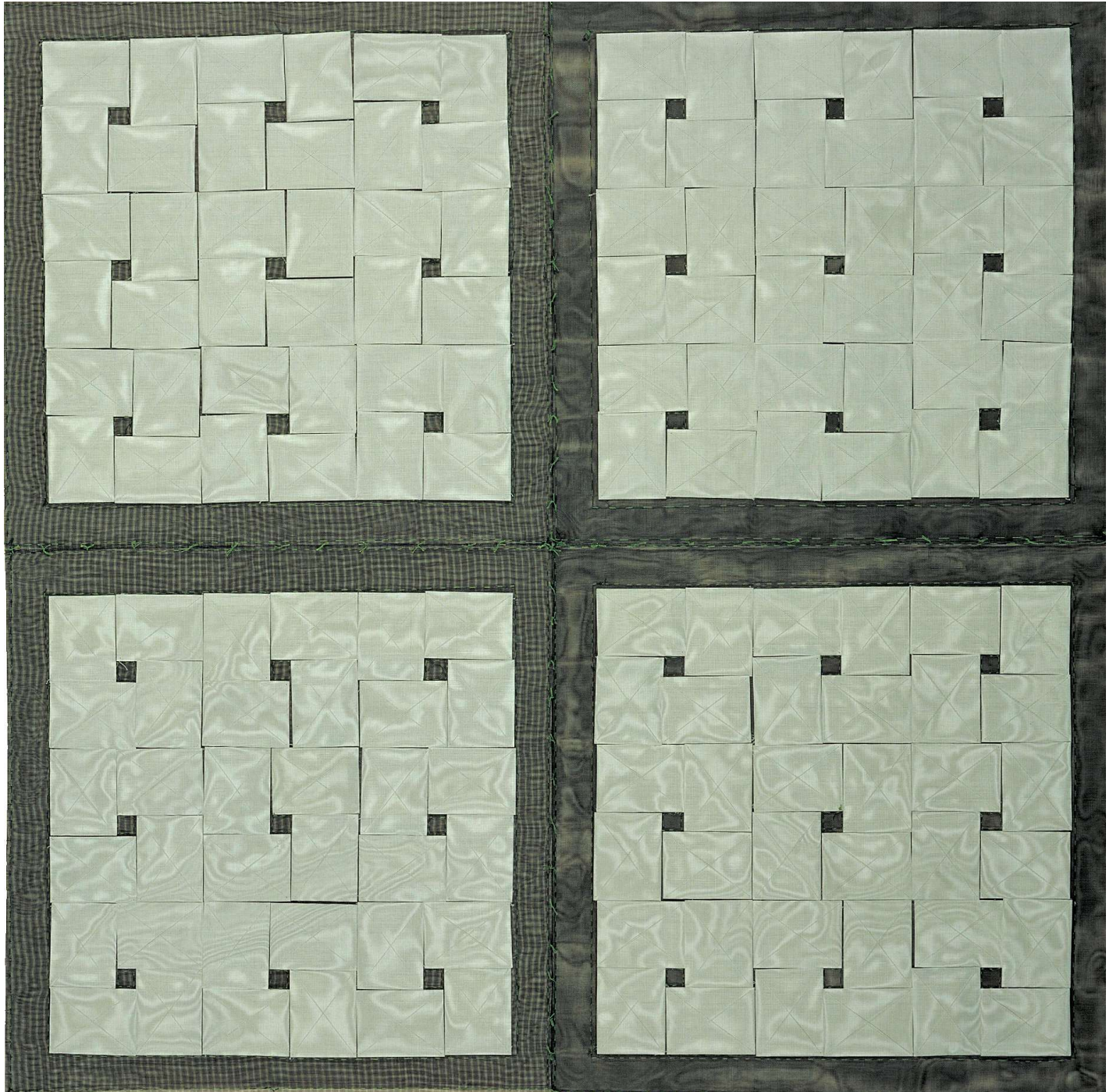
1. Tell students that they will be studying the works of very different Hispanic American artists whose stated intention is to preserve their Hispanic culture through their artworks.  
Students will be *interpreting* the art pieces (primary source) to reveal the stories they tell.
2. Divide the class into small groups that will work on the Primary Source analysis handout. Assign one of the works of art to each group.
3. Depending on time and internet access, groups can research their artist and artwork or the teacher can release the Artist Information Sheets.
  - One site to use is from the Smithsonian American Art Museum:  
<http://americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/index.cfm>

4. Have students answer the following questions:
  - Does the information from the artists change the students' interpretations of the paintings? How?
  - Does anything in the paintings or the artists' statements relate to the students' own experiences?
5. Have the groups present their artwork with their analysis and subsequent research findings.
6. After all groups present, lead a discussion with the class to answer the following questions:
  - Are any of the artworks similar? In what ways?
  - Can connections be made between the pieces? In what ways?
  - What values do the students think is especially important in the Hispanic community after analyzing their art piece?
  - Do the students think these values are unique to Hispanic culture or are they universal values?
7. Have students, individually, write an exit ticket or short answer response to summarize their understanding.

**Evidence of Understanding:**

The artwork analysis, discussion, and writing will highlight students' understanding of Hispanic American artwork and their possible, common themes.

~ Adapted from *Latino Art & Culture*, a bilingual study guide produced by the education department of the Smithsonian American Art Museum: [http://americanart.si.edu/education/pdf/new\\_life\\_in\\_america.pdf](http://americanart.si.edu/education/pdf/new_life_in_america.pdf).



***A Matter of Trust*, 1994, Maria Castagliola**





**María Castagliola** was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1946. She came to the United States in 1961 under Operation Peter Pan, after Fidel Castro took over Cuba. At fourteen, she was sent to stay with relatives in Florida, and after a few months, her parents followed her to the United States. She had never been separated from her home and extended family, and she found the move traumatic.

María had been allowed to bring only sixty pounds of belongings in her suitcases. Because Cuban history had always been turbulent, her family expected to return. María's family, however, settled in Miami, and many other people from Cuba settled there as well. She describes the time as like a fantasy, with people from the same neighborhoods in Cuba now living together in a small area of Miami. Since they had brought few personal items with them, María remembers her mother buying garments from Goodwill and sewing "new old clothes" by hand.

As a girl, she remembers wanting to be an artist, but she was unsure how to become one. She was so uncertain about this career choice that she kept it a secret. In high school, she felt lost and without direction. She even took a year off from school. In college, however, she discovered an interest in sociology and completed a master's degree. Her accomplishments and success as a sociologist gave her the confidence to reconsider becoming an artist.

### **ABOUT the FEATURED ARTWORK**

Her mother's creative sewing as well as her work in sociology inspired María to create works such as *A Matter of Trust*, a quilt made of fabric, envelopes, and fiberglass screens. She focuses on social issues by involving the community in the process of creating the artwork. In *A Matter of Trust* she collected secrets from friends and family in sealed envelopes and sewed them into a quilt between layers of fiberglass window screens. She considered gathering the secrets a test of her own integrity. "The piece is not so much about secrets as about intimacy and trust," she said. She chose the form of a quilt in part to represent this ideal of feminine bonding. For the community, the trust involves her promise never to open and reveal the secrets and never to sell the piece. In order to gain access to the secrets, she would have to tear the silk and the envelopes and would thus destroy the artwork and consequently the trust.

María also sees this piece as providing a mechanism of needed support. She believes that art can improve people's lives. When she exhibits her work, she also creates a place where people can donate money to benefit local charities. As an activist artist she brings important social issues to the forefront.

~ [http://americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/artistas\\_03.cfm](http://americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/artistas_03.cfm)





***Camas para Sueños*, 1985, Carmen Lomas Garza**



**Carmen Lomas Garza** knew she wanted to be an artist when she was thirteen years old. She did not have access to art lessons, so she resolved to teach herself. She went to the library and checked out and read every book she could about art. She also practiced drawing every day--she drew pictures of people she saw at school, at home, and in her neighborhood, even drew her pets. By the time she reached high school, she had developed an impressive portfolio of work.

Within the close-knit Mexican American community of Kingsville, Texas, Carmen received love and encouragement from her family and from a broad range of friends and neighbors. But when she ventured outside the comfort of her community, she experienced prejudice. The Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s helped give her new pride in her mixed Native American and Spanish ancestry. In college she decided to dedicate her art to the Mexican American community to show her gratitude and celebrate her rich *mestizo* heritage.

Carmen hoped that by painting positive Mexican American activities, her art might help eliminate the racism she experienced as a child. Her paintings focus on joyful childhood memories of her everyday life with her family, as well as on community festivals and events. Some of her earliest paintings depict her grandfather and her in the garden. Others depict dinner at her house and couples dancing at a party. All of Carmen's artwork incorporates *monitos* (little figures), a term she learned from her grandmother. Her *monitos* include her brother and sister, parents, grandparents, and others. She also depicts the family cat and even the lizard she would sometimes see crawling on the porch.

When Carmen was in college she decided to paint a modern version of the Lotería game she often played with her family and neighbors. Her mother insisted she follow tradition. New players must make their own cards by imitating the images on pre-existing cards.

Carmen now lives in San Francisco, but continues to paint images of growing up as a Mexican American in Texas.

## **ABOUT the FEATURED ARTWORK**

In *Camas para Sueños* (Beds for Dreams), the artist and her sister sit on the roof and dream of becoming artists. In their bedroom below, their mother, too, reflects on their future. Carmen describes the inspiration for the painting:

I have a very vivid memory of what people were doing, where they were, what they were wearing, the time of day, the colors of the atmosphere, and so when I recall something, I have the whole picture in my mind. So when I'm getting ready to do a certain painting, I rely on what I already have in my mind, and then I do move some things around. I do have poetic license to make the picture be able to tell the whole story with all its details... That actually is me and my sister Margie up on the roof. We could get up on the roof by climbing up on the front porch....That's ...my bedroom, actually it's the girls' bedroom... My sister and I would hide there [on the roof] and ...we also talked a lot about what it would be like to be an artist in the future because both of us wanted to be [artists]. And I dedicated this painting to my mother because she also wanted to be an artist. And she is an artist, she's a florist now, so her medium is flowers... She gave us that vision of being an artist... That's her making up the bed for us. Although the painting documents a specific Mexican American childhood experience, it also honors families of all cultures that nurture their children's dreams.

Note: The quote is taken from interviews with Carmen Lomas Garza conducted by Andrew Connors in June and July 1995.

~[http://americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/artistas\\_01.cfm](http://americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/artistas_01.cfm)





***Anima (Alma/Soul)*, 1976/printed 1977, Ana Mendieta**



Cuban-born **Ana Mendieta** came to the United States as a child in the early 1960s and later studied at the Center for the New Performing Arts at the University of Iowa, in Iowa City. Her sculpture and performance pieces reflect the influences of the international body art and performance art movements of the 1970s. She used her own body or other forms to create ephemeral sculptures that turned into performances.

## **ABOUT the FEATURED ARTWORK**

*Anima (Alma/Soul)*, a performance artwork documented by a series of five photographs, also reflects elements of her Cuban heritage. She creates a sense of drama with fire, a symbol of regeneration that is integral to Santería. This Latin American religion is a synthesis of Roman Catholicism and the Yoruban religion of West African slaves who were brought to Latin America beginning in the early sixteenth century. Many of the practices associated with Santería, such as sacred dances and the designation of deities by colorful necklaces, reflect the Yoruban religion more than Catholicism.

In *Anima (Alma/Soul)* the artist has constructed a female form from an armature of bamboo and fireworks. As the fireworks are lighted, the form can be seen fully illuminated. The series of photographs capture its diminishment as the fireworks are gradually extinguished. Regeneration is the central theme in this work. The use of fireworks and dancing flames reflect the regenerative nature of fire associated with the practices of Santería. The placement of the figure on a cross suggests a strong identification with Christ's crucifixion. The *sagrado corazón*, or Sacred Heart of Jesus, an important Catholic symbol representing Christ's compassion, is the last light to be extinguished in this dramatic performance piece.

~[http://americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/galeria\\_02.cfm](http://americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/galeria_02.cfm)





*El Chandelier*, 1988, Pepón Osorio



**Pepón Osorio** was born in 1955 in the Santurce section of San Juan, Puerto Rico. Of African Caribbean descent, he came from a close-knit community that he remembers fondly. People's doors were always open and everyone's successes and disappointments were shared.

In 1975, Pepón moved to the Bronx, New York, to continue his education. After he finished a master's degree in sociology, his job as a social worker exposed him to new people, new environments, and a different way of living as a Puerto Rican within a larger society. He also met other people of African descent who shared his values and experiences. He paid homage to his cultural heritage by creating fantastic assemblages, such as *El Chandelier*. Pepón is knowledgeable about the issues of the Puerto Rican community. He is also acutely aware of people's attachments to objects. His work is laden with *chucherrias*, (knick-knacks) that reflect cultural connections as well as a contemporary pop culture aesthetic.

His childhood is also a source of inspiration. His mother was a baker who made elaborate cakes for special celebrations. His whole family helped create the cakes with intricate layers of frosting and decoration. The *chucherrias* that he buys for his work from neighborhood stores are meant for specific purposes, such as favors for parties or weddings and items for religious devotion or decoration. By layering them with other objects, he changes their meaning and challenges notions of art.

## **ABOUT the FEATURED ARTWORK**

Pepón's artwork is often about transformation. He considers chandeliers, which can be found in even the poorest apartments of Spanish Harlem and the South Bronx, to be symbols of the dreams, hopes, humor, and hardships of Puerto Ricans living in the New York barrio. For him the swags of pearls, plastic babies, palm trees, monkeys, and other mass-produced items embody immigrant popular culture of the 1950s and 1960s, when the majority of New York Puerto Ricans emigrated from the island. The chandelier's encrusted surface also recalls the elaborately decorated cakes his mother made during his childhood.



~[http://americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/artistas\\_04.cfm](http://americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/artistas_04.cfm)





***Mis Hermanos*, 1976, Jesse Treviño**





The Chicano artist **Jesse Treviño** came from Monterrey, Mexico, to the United States as a child with his family. Later, while a student at the Art Students League in New York City, he was drafted into the U.S. Armed Forces and sent to Vietnam. There he was seriously injured, losing his right arm when his platoon was hit by sniper fire. He spent two years in hospitals recovering from his injuries and learning to paint with his left hand. He enrolled in a drawing course at San Antonio College and continued to learn to paint and draw with his left hand. Eventually, he earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from Our Lady of the Lake University and a Master of Fine Arts in painting from the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Subjects for the artist's striking paintings usually include contemporary street scenes, buildings, and people from the Mexican American *barrios*(neighborhoods) of San Antonio, as in *Mis Hermanos*. In essence, his paintings, rendered in a style described as both realistic and photorealistic, are snapshots that capture the experience of community life for Mexican Americans today. He describes his work:

The Chicano community is an integral part of the family structure and a social organization providing a point of reference for my work. The images are a natural outgrowth of interrelating my environment with the family structure. These very personal portraits are also visual representations of the diverse aspects of the Chicano culture.

Note: For quote, see *Canadian Club Hispanic Tour*, exhibition catalogue, El Museo del Barrio, 1984, n.p.

~[http://americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/galeria\\_07.cfm](http://americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/galeria_07.cfm)



***The Protagonist of an Endless Story, 1993, Angel Rodríguez-Díaz***



In this dramatic portrait, **Angel Rodríguez-Díaz**, born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 1955, has captured the dynamism of Chicana author Sandra Cisneros, one of this country's premier Latina writers. The artist, who moved from Puerto Rico to San Antonio via New York, has chosen a large canvas and low viewpoint to give his subject heroic stature. He frequently paints portraits that depict his sitters in this unflinching, almost confrontational manner.

His work deals with issues in the Latin American community, specifically the complexity of balancing and participating simultaneously in two cultures. His work has been compared to that of Frida Kahlo and El Greco, because of its dark, yet magical essence. In regard to his explorations of identity through portraiture, the artist claims, "I am faced with the basic principle of who the person is. The contexts in which I place my subjects foreground their manner of being in the world."

He places Cisneros in front of a fiery orange and red sunset whose horizon line is low enough to dominate almost the entire background. Green plants surround the author. This background suggests imagination and a passionate force. Dressed in a sequined black Mexican skirt, Cisneros defiantly stands with her arms crossed and legs apart. Her low-cut dress and bejeweled hands, arms, and ears suggest a boldly feminine persona.

Cisneros was born in Chicago in 1954. Her poetry, short stories, and novels explore issues of feminism, poverty, religion, and oppression in American society. Her novel *The House on Mango Street* (1984), her book of poems entitled *My Wicked, Wicked Ways* (1987), and her collection of short stories called *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991) have won numerous awards and literary distinctions, among them the Before Columbus Foundation's American Book Award, a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, and two NEA fellowships.

~ [http://americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/galeria\\_03.cfm](http://americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/galeria_03.cfm)





***Tapestry Weave Rag Rug Jerga, 1994, Doña Agueda Martinez***





Born in 1898, **Agueda Martinez** lived in Mendanales, New Mexico, near Santa Fe. When she was twelve years old, she first learned to weave with cotton rags. She married a weaver/schoolteacher when she was eighteen and had ten children. When she was in her early twenties, her uncle Lorenzo Trujillo, a respected weaver and merchant working in her town, taught her to weave wool rugs and blankets with elaborate designs. By selling her weavings, she supported her family throughout her long life.

She attributed her talents to her mixed heritage. She could trace her roots back to the Navajo and also to the early Spanish settlers along the Río Grande in the sixteenth century. Her tapestries reflect both influences, from Mexican *Saltillo serrate* diamonds and the variations introduced by the settlers to modified Navajo stepped motifs and also to Pueblo patterns of solid, alternating stripes.

"Some people call this [pattern] with lines 'Río Grande,' some with more detail are called 'Colonias,' others are 'Chimayó' and others 'Mexican,'" Agueda said. "Mexican or American--call it what you want. . . . I don't call my [weavings] anything. I put my initials on it and it's mine."

A woman of multiple talents, Agueda was an able rancher and horse handler. Over the years she also learned to grow a bountiful garden. She once had a neighbor who owned land but didn't cultivate it, so she struck a deal with him. She planted corn, wheat, chilies, and alfalfa on his land, and then gave him half the harvest. Agueda's family helped her with her gardening. "They follow me like doves, spreading alfalfa seeds, picking the chilies and everything. . . . I'd call them my devils at hand," she said. She made her dyes for her weavings from the colorful plants and flowers in her beloved garden.

For the first seventy-five years of her working career, Agueda created a weaving every day. She passed on her skills and enthusiasm for weaving to her daughters and sons, who work within the family tradition, but are also innovative in their approach. Some members of her family, including Cordelia Coronado, Eppie Archuleta, and granddaughter Delores Medina, are also famous weavers. Eppie Archuleta lives in Colorado and has received many awards.

## **ABOUT the FEATURED ARTWORK**

In her weavings, Agueda Martinez often used cotton cloth instead of wool yarn. She collected pieces of fabric of all sizes. To make materials suitable to weave, she first ripped the fabric into long, thin strips, then twisted the fabric on a spindle, so that the strips became tight and compact. Then Agueda used these materials to make a tapestry. *Tapestry Weave Rag Jerga* is an example of an artwork made from cotton cloth. The weaving is called a "jerga" because it is coarsely woven.

Note: The quotes are taken from interviews conducted with Agueda Martinez by Andrew Connors in June and July 1995.

~[http://americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/artistas\\_02.cfm](http://americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/artistas_02.cfm)





**Cocina Jaiteca, 1988, Larry Yañez**





**Larry Yañez** is known for his juxtaposition of contemporary and traditional Chicano cultural symbols in his artworks. In *Cocina Jaiteca* he delights in parody and word play. In Spanish, *cocina* means "kitchen," and the word *jaiteca* is meaningless. However, when it is pronounced the Spanish way, with the "j" making the sound of an "h," it sounds like English "high-tech-a." Also, the word resembles a word in Nahuátl, the language of the ancient Aztec civilization.

Jaiteca is not a Nahuátl word, and the kitchen is anything but high tech. The work is instead replete with cultural references to the past and present. For example, the artist incorporates the Virgin of Guadalupe as a focal point on the wall above the refrigerator. Other visual references to Mexican and Mexican American culture include the nopal cactus outside the window, the calendar image based on a legend about Aztec lovers, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus and calavera symbols depicted as refrigerator magnets.

The artist's sense of playful juxtaposition extends to music. He and his friends play in a band called the Jackalopes. A jackalope is an imaginary animal that's part jack rabbit and part antelope. Jackalope music, like his art, mixes different instruments and rhythms in exciting new ways. The band features Native American flute by R. Carlos Nakai and modern synthesizer by the artist.

~[http://americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/galeria\\_12.cfm](http://americanart.si.edu/education/corazon/galeria_12.cfm)