

## Expression of the Four Freedoms: Inspiration and Art

Author: Sandra Cordes-Vaughan, The Sage School, Foxboro, Massachusetts

Subject and Grade Level: Grades 7, 8 and above

**Overview:** A series of lessons culminating in a visual art project connecting the history of American people in the Great Depression and World War II to American students in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

**Background:** How can art connect students to another time? In this lesson, students will study the ideals presented by Franklin Roosevelt in his First Inaugural Address and in his January 1941 Address to Congress, Norman Rockwell's *Four Freedoms*, the contemporary work of sculptor Edwina Sandys, and the use of visual art to convey a political message to gain insight into the history of the United States during the Great Depression and World War II.

In his first inaugural address, Franklin Roosevelt spoke to the hearts of Americans with words that still resonate in a post-9/11 world: "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Franklin D. Roosevelt, Inaugural Address of the President, March 4, 1933, <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/fdr-inaugural/images/address-1.gif>. Eight years later, in his State of the Union address to Congress on January 6, 1941, Roosevelt further articulated his ideals upon announcement of his Lend-Lease proposal. His speech "ended with a ringing flourish in which he defined the "four essential human freedoms" that his policies were ultimately aimed at securing: freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from want and fear. These Four Freedoms, promulgated in every then known medium, including a sentimental painting and poster by the popular artist Norman Rockwell, soon became a sort of shorthand for American's war aims. They could be taken, too, especially the concepts of freedom from want and fear, as a charter for the New Deal itself. At this level of basic principle, there was unmistakable continuity between Roosevelt's domestic policies during the Great Depression and his foreign policies in the world war." Kennedy, D.M. *Freedom From Fear*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 469-470.

The concept of the four freedoms was in turn reflected in the Atlantic Charter, signed by Roosevelt and Churchill in August 1941, and then in the founding of the United Nations. These ideals inspired Rockwell and continue to inspire artists today, including the granddaughter of Winston Churchill, Edwina Sandys. Using a section of the Berlin Wall, Sandys created two sculptures, *Breakfree*, the centerpiece of *Freedom Court* at the Franklin Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum in Hyde Park, New York, and *Breakthrough*, located at the Winston Churchill Memorial and Museum in Fulton, Missouri. The Hyde Park sculpture presents the figures of a man and woman cut from the Wall, and the Fulton sculpture presents the section of the Wall from which the figures were cut.

### Lesson Objectives:

- Students will develop an appreciation of the trauma of the Depression through appeal to emotion.

- Students will continue to recognize the importance of primary source documents in the study of history.
- Students will apply their understanding of the era to its influence on an artist of the day and its timeless and continuing influence on contemporary artists.

**Essential Questions:**

- How did the Great Depression and World War II impact the emotional condition of every day Americans?
- How did the President respond to these anxieties?
- What are the key elements of the two speeches?
- How can politics inspire art?
- How do the emotional responses of Americans since September 11, 2001 mirror those of Americans during the Depression?

**Materials Used:**

DVD: *Sights and Sounds of the Farm Security Administration: 1935-1943*. Available from Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum.

<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu>

Letters to Eleanor and/or Franklin regarding the physical and emotional state of Americans, especially children, during the Depression. (See Cohn, R. *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002.)

Newsprint

Archival style boxes

Photographs of people during the Depression (Franklin Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/gdphotos.html>.)

Copies of FDR's First Inaugural Speech <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/fdr-inaugural/>

Copies of FDR's Annual Message to Congress, January 6, 1941  
<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/4free.html>

Copies of the Atlantic Charter, <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/fdr-churchill/images/atlantic-charter.gif>

Copies of Rockwell's *Four Freedoms* paintings

Photographs of Edwina Sandys Sculptures, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, Hyde Park, New York and Winston Churchill Memorial and Library, Fulton, Missouri

Reading, “The Founding of *Breakthrough*” Winston Churchill Memorial Library and Museum, <http://www.churchillmemorial.org/highlights/breakthrough/dedication.html>

“About Norman Rockwell: A Brief Biography” Norman Rockwell Museum, <http://www.nrm.org/page37>.

Reading excerpt from Rockwell biography, attached to this lesson. Claridge, N. *Norman Rockwell: A Life*. New York: Random House, 2001: 302, 303-304, 313-314.

Artwork and class presentation rubric, attached to this lesson.

**References:**

Claridge, N. *Norman Rockwell: A Life*. New York: Random House, 2001: 302, 303-304, 313-314.

Cohn, R. *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum, Hyde Park, NY. <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/>.

Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, Hyde Park, NY. <http://www.feri.org/>.

Hennessey, M.H. and Knutson, A. *Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People*. New York: Henry M. Abrams, 1999.

Kennedy, D.M. *Freedom From Fear*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Murray, S. and McCabe, J. *Norman Rockwell’s Four Freedoms: Images That Inspire a Nation*. Stockbridge, MA: Berkshire House, 1993.

Norman Rockwell Museum, <http://www.nrm.org/>.

DVD: *Sights and Sounds of the Farm Security Administration: 1935-1943*. (Download Curriculum Guide at: <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/CGlist.HTML>)

Winston Churchill Memorial and Library, Fulton, Missouri. <http://www.churchillmemorial.org/>

**Implementation of Unit:**

Students will have had some introduction to the Depression through readings, class work etc. During the unit, students will have to respond in their journals on almost a daily basis for homework.

#### Part One:

Students will view the *Sights and Sounds of the Farm Security Administration* video (13 minutes) and then write about the various emotions generated by the video in their response journals. After the video, there will have a class discussion.

#### Part Two:

Students will receive document and photograph sets containing letters from Americans to the Roosevelts during the Depression and photos of Americans in the Depression in something similar to Hollinger boxes, archival boxes used in museums to hold historic documents. Students will learn about archival boxes and archives. If letters are unavailable, use photographs only. They will then open boxes and answer questions on large sheets of newsprint, working in groups of two or three. They will list answers to guesses as to who, what, when, where, why with respect to the contents; in addition, they will indicate, again, any emotional responses they observe from the contents, both the subject's and their own.

After working in groups, discuss this as a class. Students will generate responses as to how the President might deal with the Depression and the feelings of the people as his first challenge.

Students will read FDR's first Inaugural for homework and write about whether the President did respond in any way to the crisis.

#### Part Three:

Class discussion of the homework. Did the President confront the emotional state of Americans? How might people respond to the speech? Is the speech timeless?

Students will next retrieve from the boxes the draft of the Four Freedoms speech. Students will work in groups of two or three to analyze the speech: What has changed since the First Inaugural? What did FDR do to edit the draft? Did the President respond to the emotional state of the people? How might people respond to the speech? Is the speech timeless? Does it speak to you as an American in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

For homework, students will read a bio of Rockwell from the Norman Rockwell Museum Website and write a short summary of the article using proper citation of the Internet resource. If students do not have home access to a computer, the teacher may print and distribute the article and again have students write a summary in their own words. Alternatively to homework, this exercise may be done in class as a lesson on paraphrasing.

#### Part Four:

Students will then study in small groups the paintings *Four Freedoms*. On large sheets of newsprint, students will again indicate answers to the "Wh" questions. Additionally, students should venture guesses as to which paintings apply to which freedoms and how Americans might have interpreted these paintings. How would people feel when they saw the paintings? Discuss the use of the paintings as propaganda tools for War Bonds

and student feelings about this. For homework, direct students to read the Claridge biography of Rockwell except and respond in writing to summarize the author's conclusions about Rockwell's politics and to note other instances they may have observed where artists have conveyed political messages. Expansion of the response may be encouraged based on grade level.

#### Part Five:

Students will discuss their responses to the homework with further discussion of art as propaganda.

After a short introduction to the fall of the Berlin wall and its significance, if necessary, students will study photos of the Sandys sculptures in class and read the short article, "The Founding of *Breakthrough*." Why are people still inspired by FDR's ideals? How do the sculptures reflect the ideals? Why would Sandys choose to place the four freedoms in the base of the *Breakfree* sculpture? Etc.

Finally, students will be required to create piece of visual art (painting, sculpture, video, etc.) reflecting their own emotional response to the concepts expressed in the First Inaugural Address and the Four Freedoms speeches. The project must connect understanding of the state of the country and the feeling of the American people in the Depression and upon the threat of war to their own sense of the ideals in the speeches. While the work may be abstract, students must be able to explain in writing and in an oral presentation to the class how the work reflects these ideals and an understanding of the past era. A suggested rubric and instructions are attached to this lesson. This type of project appeals to multiple modalities allowing students who are not always comfortable writing to express their knowledge in a different method. Students who are very uncomfortable with the parameters of the project may be allowed to write poetry. Students will be given two weeks to complete the project with interim deadlines for progress updates and demonstration of work completed.

#### **Assessment Methods:**

Class observation of discussion

Review of student journals

Homework compliance

Assessment on final project presentation, interim deadlines, rubric compliance, written and oral presentation

#### **Credits:**

This unit was prepared in connection with a National Endowment for the Humanities, Landmarks in Education Teacher Workshop at the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum in Hyde Park, New York. (Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this lesson do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.)

Photographs of the *Breakfree* sculpture were graciously provided by John Garrity of the education staff at the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute in Hyde Park.

Photographs of the *Breakthrough* sculpture were graciously provided by Mandy Crump, Education Coordinator at the Wilson Churchill Memorial and Library in Fulton, Missouri.

**Curriculum/Standards Connections:**

History/Social Studies:

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in the history of the United States.

New York State Social Studies Standards,

<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/socst/socstands/socstand.html>. Accessed August 4, 2008.

Arts:

Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts and to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.

Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

New York State Arts Standards,

<http://64.233.169.104/search?q=cache:IS5oAI3u8DQJ:www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/arts/public/artlearn.pdf+new+york+state+curriculum+standards,+visual+art&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=us&client=firefox-a>. accessed August 4, 2008.

English/Language Arts:

Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.

Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.

Students will read, write, listen, and speak for social interaction.

New York State English/Language Arts Standards,

<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/ela/elastandards/elamap.html>. Accessed August 4, 2008.

*Freedom Court*

Franklin Roosevelt Library and Museum, Hyde Park, New York

*Breakfree* by Edwina Sandys

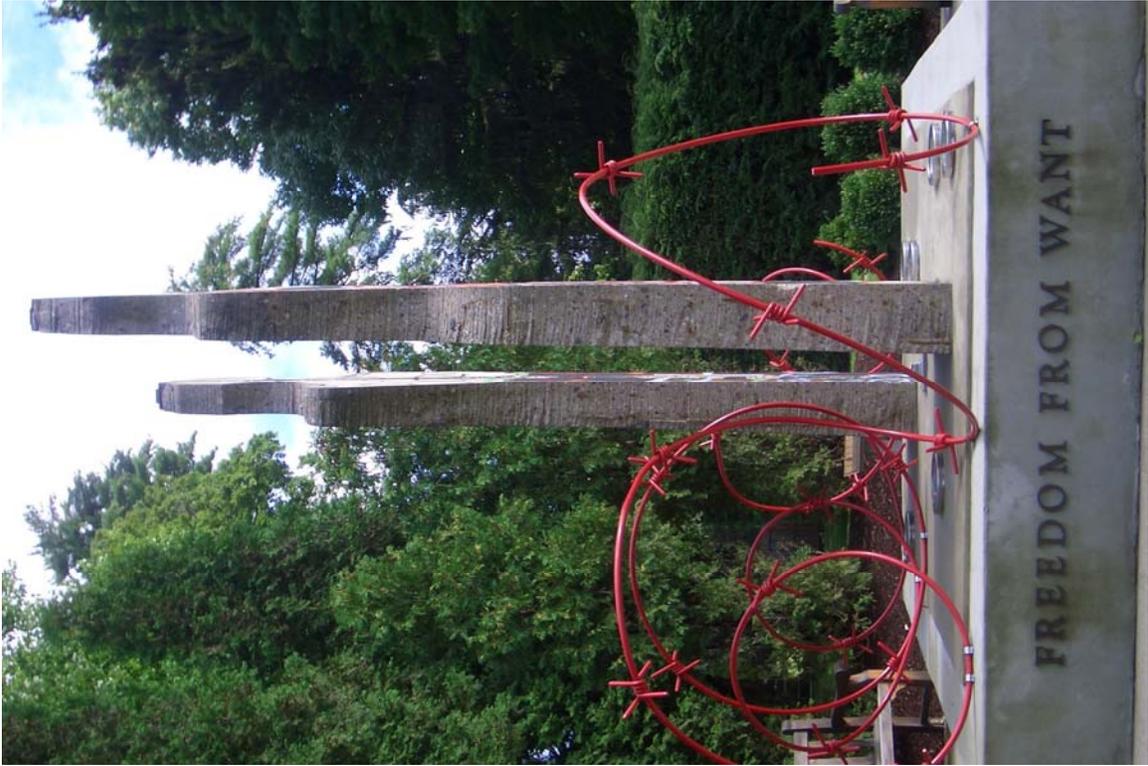
Front Views



*Breakfree Front View*



*Breakfree* Side Views





*Breakfree Side View*



*Breakthrough*

By Edwina Sandys

Winston Churchill Library and Museum in the United States, Fulton, Missouri









*Breakthrough*

Edwina Sandys and Her sculpture.

Winston Churchill Library and Museum, Fulton, Missouri



## Supplemental Lesson Reading

### **Expression of the Four Freedoms: Inspiration and Art**

#### Norman Rockwell and the Four Freedoms

“The Big Ideas” Norma Claridge, *Norman Rockwell, A Life*:

“During the spring of 1942, he [Rockwell] pondered what project might be best [to create a great painting for the war effort] but, as usual, coming up with a good idea proved the hardest part.

What he finally devised relied on a speech President Roosevelt had made to Congress over a year earlier, on January 6, 1941. Roosevelt opened his talk with a somber reference to the danger the country faced: “At no previous time has American security been threatened from without as it is today.” After enumerating the liberal aims of a democracy, Roosevelt catalogued the more abstract principles that, he claimed, needed to be part of all societies. He ended each of these Four Freedoms, as they would be called, with the words “everywhere in the world” or “anywhere in the word.” Seven months later, on August 9, he met with Winston Churchill for the first time, the two sequestered aboard a warship in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland. There they discussed ways the still-neutral United States could support Britain’s mission, and the means of assistance the British could offer to keep Japan from

involving the United States. The outcome of the informal meetings was their joint statement, the Atlantic Charter, whose principles of nonaggression, the right to self-defense, and freedom of the seas echoed in principle the Four Freedoms.

Unwittingly swallowing whole the myth that the artist savvily created for them in the early stages of his career, commentators on Rockwell's art have often avowed that the illustrator was apolitical . . . . Frequently observing, truthfully, that he in fact did not enjoy partisan politics and that he wanted to appeal to all the people, Rockwell made few public gestures that clarified where he stood on the political spectrum. Yet he honestly believed that the Yankee virtues—tolerance for differences, courtesy, kindness, and the freedoms that FDR articulated—were the substance of a political creed that his paintings openly embraced. While the country's remaining isolationists were angry at Roosevelt's signing the Charter, for instance, Rockwell was pleased. Later, when the principles behind the Charter guided the founding of the United Nations, the artist would throw his support behind that organization. Of the beliefs he held most dear, tolerance—and the freedom necessary to ensure its flourishing—were most important to him. His habit of tacking favorite aphorisms on his studio wall prominently included one that read "The Real Test of a Liberal Is the Willingness to Listen Fairly to a Person with Opposite Opinions."

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“To their detractors, the Four Freedoms try to carry too much weight on their shoulders. The idea of illustrating grandiose concepts with humble correlatives is a sound one; but the executions of Rockwell’s scenes announce their own ambition too loudly to work on that premise. Rockwell was forthright about wanting these paintings to be his masterpieces, his “Big Idea” pictures, as he put it. Inevitably, he was unsatisfied, though he believed himself to have articulated in *Freedom of Speech* the nobility of certain abstract principles that he valued deeply . . . .

Still most viewers felt in 1942 like the twenty-first-century *New York Times* critic who admires Rockwell’s master: “I’m not interested in the intentions of artists . . . . I’m interested consequences.” And, while some people thought that Rockwell’s paintings conveyed a slightly patronizing take on his subjects, the majority of his audience saw it otherwise as *The New Yorker* would remark two years after the publication of the Four Freedoms: “They were received by the public with more enthusiasm, perhaps, than any other paintings in the history of American art.”

Viewed in the best light, the paintings prove an example of the sum exceeding its parts, the total effect of the four domestic paintings about such lofty ideals inspirational in their combined heft alone. The

Four Freedoms did, in fact, forward the aims that Roosevelt had set forth and accomplished the work that the best illustrated fairy tales attempt, turning abstractions into forms that exorcise demons . . . .”

Claridge, N. *Norman Rockwell: A Life*. New York: Random House, 2001: 302, 303-304, 313-314.

Four Freedoms Project  
Instructions and Evaluation Rubric

You should complete the project by:

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This project will consist of three parts: visual work, written explanation, and class presentation. Project progress updates will be required as homework.

In class, you have studied the work of two artists who were inspired by the words of Franklin Roosevelt. In this project, you are required to create piece of visual art (painting, sculpture, collage, video, etc.) reflecting your own emotional response to the concepts expressed in the First Inaugural Address and the Four Freedoms speech. The project must connect your understanding of the state of the country and the feelings of the American people in the Depression and upon the threat of war to your own sense of the ideals in the speeches. If you feel that there are current connections to the feelings of the American people today, please incorporate this into your work. Your name must appear somewhere on the project.

In addition to your work of visual art, you must write a summary of how your work reflects your understanding of the speeches, the state of the country in the 1930s and 1940s, and any connections to today. This summary must be no less than four to five well-developed paragraphs, typed, twelve-point font, and double-spaced. Do not forget to spell and grammar check. Please attach your first, hand-edited draft to the bottom of your final copy.

In addition, you will be required to present your work and explanation to the class. While you may read your written explanation if you choose, you must practice your reading as you will be evaluated on proper oral presentation form including eye contact, posture, volume, rate of speaking, and practice.

You will also be required to complete a self-evaluation rubric.

If you are struggling for ideas, please see me.

Four Freedoms Project Evaluation Rubric

Scale 1-5 (1=Unsatisfactory, 3=Satisfactory, 5=Excellent)

Name:

Date:

**Visual Art:**

**Score:**

Creativity

Effort

Knowledge of History

Timeliness

Visual Appeal

**Written Explanation:**

**Score:**

Thesis

Overall organization

Paragraph structure

Grammar and Spelling

Knowledge of History

Timeliness

Edited Draft Attached

Completeness of Explanation

**Oral Presentation:**

**Score:**

Eye contact

Posture

Practice

Volume

**Total:**