

Learning About Cycles in Art and in Life on the Web



In all cultures, past and present, people have developed various means of celebrating important life transitions through the arts. Many artists have also invented unique ways of representing cycles in their work. The following sites offer resources to assist teachers and students in studying cycles in art and in life. As always, you should preview all websites before using them in the classroom.

On ArtsEdge (artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2464), there is an interdisciplinary lesson in which high-school students explore the life cycle through rituals, religious and philosophical points of view, and works of art in order to better appreciate different stages in the life cycle, and to better understand human nature. The lesson includes targeted standards, assessment rubrics, plus print and Web resources.

The American Regionalist artist Grant Wood is known for his drawings and paintings representing different times in the growing cycle on farms as reflected in such titles as *Fall Plowing*, *Spring in the Country*, and *Seed Time and Harvest*. You can find these and other works depicting seasonal change on sites like the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco's


ImageBase (www.famsf.org), the Smithsonian American Art Museum (americanart.si.edu/collections/interact/gallery/wood), and Museum Syndicate (www.museumssyndicate.com).

Ojibway artist Norval Morrisseau is widely recognized as one of Canada's greatest indigenous artists. He originated the Woodland Style, which uses symbolism and imagery inspired by aboriginal legends and pictographs. Morrisseau's works often represent cycles in life and nature, a sampling of which can be seen on the Coghlan Art Photo Archive (www.coghlanart.com/norval1.htm).

Another artist that is often studied in the art classroom is Andy Goldsworthy, whose organic sculptures interact with nature in a way that highlights the cycles of creation, destruction, and renewal. You can find background information on Goldsworthy on Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andy_Goldsworthy), videos about the techniques he uses and influences on his work on ArtistanCam (www.artisancam.org.uk), plus an extensive portfolio of his work on the Cass Sculpture Foundation website (www.sculpture.org.uk).

For a broad perspective on the cycle of life in African cultures,

check out the Indianapolis Museum of Art's award-winning, interactive website, *Cycles: African Life through Art* (www.imamuseum.org/interactives/cycles). The site takes visitors through the cycle of life as represented in four stages: youth, adulthood, leadership, and ancestors. Each stage is illustrated with a gallery of African artifacts.

Lastly, the American Memory Project (memory.loc.gov) contains a wealth of historical photographs, short videos, audio files, and other cultural artifacts representing different stages in the lives of Americans. For a possible classroom project, have students brainstorm different words and phrases associated with a person's life cycle (birth, birthday party, coming of age, graduation, marriage, employment, death, funeral, and so on). Next, have students search the American Memory Project's archives for photos and other materials that represent these stages, which they can then use to create multimedia presentations on the American Life Cycle. 

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