

## Inside Art 2013 — SubRosa — Ai Weiwei Lesson 1

**Title**

Ai Weiwei, Chinese Artist and Dissident

**Concept/Main Idea of Lesson**

The purpose of this lesson is to familiarize students with the work and life of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei as well as provide an overview of Chinese history and government.

**Intended Grade Levels**

Grades 9-12

**Infusion/Subject Areas**

Visual Arts

Social Studies

**Curriculum Standards**

Visual Art:

VA.5.C.3.3: Critique works of art to understand the content and make connections with other content areas.

VA.5.H.1.1: Examine historical and cultural influences that inspire artists and their work.

VA.68.C.3.1: Incorporate accurate art vocabulary during the analysis process to describe the structural elements of art and organizational principles of design.

VA.912.H.3.1: Synthesize knowledge and skills learned from non-art content areas to support the processes of creation, interpretation, and analysis.

Social Studies:

S.912.H.1.2: Describe how historical events, social context, and culture impact forms, techniques, and purposes of works in the arts, including the relationship between a government and its citizens.

SS.912.H.1.5: Examine artistic response to social issues and new ideas in various cultures.

SS.912.H.2.1: Identify specific characteristics of works within various art forms (architecture, dance, film, literature, music, theatre, and visual arts).

SS.912.H.2.3: Apply various types of critical analysis (contextual, formal, and intuitive criticism) to works in the arts, including the types and use of symbolism within art forms and their philosophical implications.

SS.912.H.2.4: Examine the effects that works in the arts have on groups, individuals, and cultures.

SS.912.H.2.5: Describe how historical, social, cultural, and physical settings influence an audience's aesthetic response.

Common Core:

LACC.1112.L.3.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

LACC.1112.L.3.6: Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level.

National Council for the Social Studies Curriculum Themes

Culture: Human beings create, learn, and adapt culture. Cultures are dynamic systems of beliefs, values, and traditions that exhibit both commonalities and differences. Understanding culture helps us understand ourselves and others.

Time, Continuity, & Change: Human beings seek to understand their historic roots and to locate themselves in time. Knowing what things were like in the past and how things change and develop helps us answer important questions about our current condition.

People, Places, & Environment: Today's students are aware of the world beyond their personal locations. As students study this content, they create their spatial views and geographic perspectives. Social, cultural, economic, and civic demands require such knowledge to make informed and critical decisions about relationships between people and their environment.

Power, Authority, & Governance: Understanding the development of structures of power, authority, and governance and their evolving functions is essential for the emergence of civic competence.

Global Connections: The realities of global interdependence require understanding of the increasingly important and diverse global connections among societies. Persisting and emerging global issues require solutions.

Civic Ideals and Practices: All people have a stake in examining civic ideals and practices across time and in diverse societies, as well as in determining how to close the gap between present practices and the ideals on which our democratic republic is based. An understanding of civic ideals and the practice of citizenship is critical to full participation in society.

**Instructional Objectives**

The student will:

- have a basic understanding of the government and economic system in contemporary China;
- identify Mao Zedong;
- describe the artistic training of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei;
- be able to define "conceptual art";
- identify selected works by Chinese artist Ai Weiwei.

**Teacher Background Information on Ai Weiwei**

Ai Weiwei, one of China’s most vocal human rights activists, is also one of the world’s most powerful contemporary artists. Born into a family of artist-activists in Beijing, China in 1957, Ai has long been interested in the role of art in influencing social and political justice. Ai spent much the 1980s and early 1990s in New York, creating art and studying at Parsons School of Design and the Art Students League of New York. He returned to China in 1993 and has worked as an artist, architect, filmmaker, and activist in China ever since.

Ai has gained much acclaim as an artist, both within China (he was selected as part of a team that designed the 2008 Olympic stadium in Beijing) as well as internationally. However, Ai’s criticism of the Chinese’s governmental complicity with social injustices and human rights violations have led to his being imprisoned in China for his activism as well as put under harsh surveillance by the Chinese government.

Ai’s work challenges the Chinese government for their responsibility in various tragedies. For example, in *Remembering* (2009), Ai designed a large installation of 9,000 children’s backpacks, with an accompanying audio track that named all of the children killed due to poor school construction in the 2008 Chinese earthquake. In *Baby Formula 2013*, Ai depicts cans of infant formula, arranged in the shape of a map of China, drawing attention to thousands of cases of tainted infant formula in China.

In recent years, Ai has become an active presence within online social media, an opportunity for his voice to heard worldwide in spite of Chinese governmental efforts to silence him.

### Learning Activities Sequence

Set Induction/Hook: Project the 5-column KWLQH Chart provided for this lesson (alternately, you can simply recreate it on the board):

KWLQH Chart:  
Ai Weiwei, Chinese Artist and Dissident

What do you already <u>know</u> ?	What do you <u>want</u> to know?	What did you <u>learn</u> ?	What <u>questions</u> do you still have?	<u>How</u> can you learn more?

Have students to recreate the chart in their notebooks and fill in the first two columns (“What do you already know?” and “What do you want to know?”). Ask for volunteers to share some of their responses with the whole class. Tell students that as the lesson progresses, they are to make note of things learned in the third column, “What did you learn?”

Teacher Explanation and Presentation: Using the presentation entitled, *Ai Weiwei & China*, share with students images of Ai's life, work, and his homeland of China. Teacher Background Notes and discussion questions are provided in the "Notes View;" review those before you share the presentation with students.

[Note: The purpose of this presentation is just to acquaint students with Ai's work. In the next lesson, more detailed information about individual artwork will be presented.]

Video: Conclude the presentation with the short (8-minute) PBS News Hour video, *Art, China and Censorship According to Ai Weiwei* (imbedded at the end of the presentation; alternately, you can access the video by going to the web site: (<http://video.pbs.org/video/2315029393/>)). The video includes interviews with the artist as well as an overview of his artistic and activist-oriented works.

Closure: Allow students a few minutes to complete the last two columns of their KWLQH charts ("What questions do you still have?" and "How can you learn more?").

### **Evaluation**

Collect students' KWLQH charts and review, clarifying and answering any questions in subsequent lessons.

### **Materials and Resources**

Ai Weiwei KWLQH Chart  
PowerPoint presentation: *Ai Weiwei & China*  
Computer, Projector, and Screen  
Audio Speakers for Video  
Student Notebooks

### **Optional Extension Activities**

Have students visit Khan Academy's "Smart History" web site: <http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/ai-weiwei-and-the-politics-of-dissent.html>. Ai "Weiwei's 'Remembering' and the Politics of Dissent" is a student-friendly instructional resource that has an accessible feature article, images of his work, and a short video.

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