

The Sun

'Great Art of Our Nation' Arriving at Public Schools

**By ROSS GOLDBERG, Special to the Sun
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Portraits of George Washington and photos of the [Brooklyn Bridge](#) will be arriving at every [New York City](#) public school this summer, courtesy of a new initiative that aims to expose students to great American art.

Each school will receive a package containing copies of 40 famous paintings and photographs, as well as suggestions on how to incorporate them into lesson plans. Educators said the National Endowment for the Humanities program, called Picturing America, will help teachers struggling with ways to connect art with history.

In August, the materials will be sent to more than 26,000 schools and libraries across the country — including every public school in the city — and additional applications will be accepted later this year.

"We think that the great art of our nation, and art in general, is the most direct entry point into understanding the people, places, and events that form our history," the chairman of the NEH, Bruce Cole, said.

The announcement of the recipients coincides with the start of P.S. Arts Week in the city. Both events come amid a rising chorus of concern that art is being cut out of the public schools.

The executive director of the city-based Center for Arts Education, Richard Kessler, said the city may not be prepared to reap the new program's benefits. A focus on standardized test preparation, both in New York and nationwide, has sidelined education in the arts, he said.

"You have to ask, is there room for this? Does this fit into something we're already doing? Is there time in the school day to do this?" Mr. Kessler said. "All of these things make it a complicated question as to whether a principal or a teacher can embrace Picturing America."

New York teachers who have already received the materials through a pilot program gave them good reviews. A librarian at the William McKinley School in Manhattan, Cheryl Wolf, said she uses James Karales's famed photo of the 1965 march on Montgomery to add to a discussion on civil rights. A librarian at American Sign Language and English Lower School, Sarah Paulson, said she posted the images on the walls along with pieces of paper the students could use to respond to them. One of her favorites is a depiction of the midnight ride of Paul Revere.

"It's good to have artwork in the building that's of the size that kids can walk through the hallways and take look at it and ponder," she said. "I try to get across the fact that they're part of this culture."