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The wall by the stairway to South High School's second-floor library has come alive with a still-unfinished mural. This photograph was produced by combining several pictures into an equirectangular projection panorama — a 360-degree sweep. For an interactive version of this photo in which you can pan all the way around, go to [www.startribune.com/a1566](http://www.startribune.com/a1566).



Artist Gustavo Lira worked on a part of the South High mural on a staircase landing. Lira, raised in Mexico, is guiding students in creating the big painting.

# Window on the world

## South High's new mural displays many cultures

By AISHA EADY • aeady@startribune.com

**T**he wall at the top of the stairs leading from the first floor to the second-floor South High School library was like all the others: a no-frills, non-threatening beige.

That's changed.

Now, the likenesses of Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, feminist Gloria Steinem, Indian nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi and others are splashed across

the wall in vivid acrylic reds, greens and blues.

Students in Denny Sponsler's ceramics class at South are painting a mural, hoping to make the school more attractive and raise social awareness.

Sponsler wanted the mural for its high visibility. Public art, he said, "makes visual people's response to their physical world." He invited Gustavo Lira, a muralist raised in Mexico, to share his vision and expertise with the students. Li-

ra agreed. After the district granted the go-ahead in May, the students started painting.

A core group of about 10 current and former South High students remained after the school year ended to keep painting the mural, which has yet to be completed. Students hope to have it finished by the beginning of the upcoming school year.

**Mural continues:** Artist says murals help communication among cultures. **B5** ▶



# A new window on the world

## ◀ MURAL FROM B1

Lira is a member of the Minnesota State Arts Board, and he helps schools and communities paint murals. He says he believes that murals build better communication among cultures.

“We’re talking about important things that show the reality of what’s going on,” he said.

The South High student muralists say the images painted in the mural symbolize failures in the criminal justice system, racism, inaccessible health care and genocide. Josette Croud said one mural feature, a face that is half-skull and half-painted for war, represents “the attempted genocide for Native Americans and how their culture is still very strong and they lived through that.”

The students studied historical figures they considered to be active in human rights, then decided which would go on the wall. “There was a lot of debate about that,” said Nora Erickson, who graduated from South last year. “We tried to represent lots of different people who worked for different facets of human rights.”

Figures such as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and United Farm Workers leader Cesar Chavez initially didn’t make the cut because some of the students thought they had been over-recognized, Lira said. However, Lira said, they changed their minds. King and Chavez will have their place on another section of the mural.

Lauren Walker, one of the muralists, said the mural is her way to give something back to her school.

“Being able to know that I’m leaving at least some impression on the school that I grew up in ... is a good thing to feel,” she said.



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South High students Olivia Rogers, foreground, and Laura Vaughn worked on a section of the mural at their school. Included in the painting are images of figures prominent in the history of human rights activism, such as Mahatma Gandhi, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and feminist Gloria Steinem.