



Teacher Resource: Portraits, Role Play, and Writing

Objectives

- Use nonverbal and verbal means to analyze, describe, and interpret a work of art.
- Describe the setting, characters, and actions depicted in a work of art by writing a narrative.
- Write a story inspired by the details depicted in a work of art.
- Respond to a work of art with empathy.

Instructions

Don't give your students the title of the work, the name of the artist, or any historical information prior to the activities. Facilitate, rather than direct.

Things You'll Need

- Digital image of a work of art
- Digital projector or display
- Enough room for your students to move around and pose
- Paper and pen or pencil for writing

Suggested Works of Art for These Activities

* [Gossip, 2005; Elizabeth Catlett](#)

* [Grandma Moses from the series Grandma Moses, c.1947-1948; W. Eugene Smith](#)

* [Ka Kwong Hui from the installation Faculty Frieze, 1982; Joan Semmel](#)

* [Portrait of an Artist in Her Studio, 1790; Unidentified artist](#)

* [Portrait of My Parents, c. 1880-1918; Ogawa Isshin](#)

* [Simeon de Witt, 1804; Ezra Ames](#)

Where To Find Images

High-resolution images of works in the Zimmerli Art Museum's collection are available on [eMuseum](#).

Activity 1: Physical Empathy

Steps

- 1) Choose one of the suggested works of art, or select another from the Zimmerli Art Museum, and project it in the classroom. Don't give your students any information about it.
- 2) Ask your students to look carefully at the picture and take the same physical position as the people in the picture, and even to make the same facial expressions and gestures.
- 3) Ask them to be very conscious of their physical feelings.
- 4) Facilitate the exploration of their physical feelings by asking questions. What do their bodies tell them about the emotional state of this person? Are they relaxed? Are they under stress? What muscles or parts of their bodies do they feel most vividly in this position?
- 5) Ask your students to write a brief, but specific, description of how the work makes them feel physically.
- 6) Read the various responses aloud and compare the differing, or similar, physical experiences elicited by the work.

Lesson Time: About 60 minutes

Activity 2: Creating a Character

Steps

- 1) Choose one of the suggested works of art, or select another from the Zimmerli Art Museum, and project it in the classroom. Don't give your students any information about it.
- 2) Ask your students to look carefully at the picture, noting the setting, costume, accessories, etc.
- 3) Have them write an imaginary biography of one of the people in the picture.

- 4) Facilitate the exploration by asking questions. Where do they think this person was born, and when? What is his or her name? Did he or she go to school – where? What was his or her life like? What were this person’s successes and failures? Read the biographies aloud and compare the differing life trajectories. Are there any constants and similarities among the biographies?

Lesson Time: About 90 minutes

Activity 3: Creating a Narrative

Steps

- 1) Choose one of the suggested works of art, or select another from the Zimmerli Art Museum website, and project it in the classroom. Don’t give your students any information about it.
- 2) Ask your students to look carefully at the picture, noting the setting, costume, accessories, etc.
- 3) Ask students to describe what specific action they think is taking place.
- 4) Have them write a short story imagining the events leading up to this action, or one imagining what happened after the action depicted in the artwork took place.
- 5) Facilitate the exploration by asking questions. How did this moment in time come to be? What happened in the next moment?

Lesson Time: About 90 minutes

National Learning Standards

Visual Arts

NA-VA.K-12.3 Choosing and Evaluating a Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas
NA-VA.K-12.6 Convey Meaning through the Presentation of Artistic Work
NA-VA.K-12.7 Perceive and Analyze Artistic Work
NA-VA.K-12.8 Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work
NA-VA.K-12.9 Apply Criteria to Evaluate Artistic Work
NA-VA.K-12.11 Relate Artistic Ideas and Works with Societal, Cultural, and Historical Context to Deepen Understanding

English Language Arts

NL-ENG.K-12.3 Evaluation Strategies*
NL-ENG.K-12.4 Communication Skills
NL-ENG.K-12.5 Communication Strategies
NL-ENG.K-12.6 Applying Knowledge*
NL-ENG.K-12.10 Applying Non-English Perspectives
NL-ENG.K-12.12 Applying Language Skills

Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.* CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.*
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

*Art as text

Tips

Works of art are sometimes moved off view. Contact the Zimmerli Art Museum to find out if the works of art you want to see are currently on view.

Resources

zimmerli.rutgers.edu
zimmerli.emuseum.com



[Gossip; Elizabeth Catlett](#)



[Grandma Moses; W. Eugene Smith](#)



[Ka Kwong Hui; Joan Semmel](#)



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[Unidentified artist](#)



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