Lesson: Reading Stories in Art

http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/trippack/activity\_pre\_storiesinart.html

[](http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=1069&handle=li)

Grades/Level: Lower Elementary (K–2), Upper Elementary (3–5), Middle School (6–8), High School (9–12)

Subjects: Visual Arts

Time Required: Short Activity

20 minutes

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Activity Overview

This activity prepares students for the Guided Lesson at the Getty Center, Artists as Storytellers. Students learn how artists tell stories using visual images by identifying and comparing elements of narrative (setting, characters, and plot) in a painting. They will discuss their ideas together.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

• identify setting, characters, and actions (plot) in a painting.

• speculate about the story represented in a work of art and discuss their own ideas.

Materials

• Reproduction of Rembrandt's The Abduction of Europa, seen below and included with the pre-visit materials you received from the Museum's Education department.

Abduction of Europa / Rembrandt van Rijn

The Abduction of Europa,

Rembrandt, 1632

Activity Steps

Overview: Explain to your students that their gallery lesson in the Museum at the Getty Center will be Artists as Storytellers. This activity will help them to start thinking about how artists are often inspired to create works of art that tell a story. During the lesson, it will be important for the students to slow down, look carefully, and describe what they see.

Step 1: Before displaying the reproduction, ask students how writers influence artists. When students read a story, do they create a picture of it in their minds? Talk about a story they have all read recently and have them share their impressions of what the characters, action, or setting would look like if they were to create a drawing or painting. Alternatively, students could discuss how the story would look if they were responsible for translating the written word into a movie.

Step 2: Display reproduction of Rembrandt's The Abduction of Europa for your students. Ask your students to spend a quiet minute just looking closely at the image. Before you begin the activity, you may want to explain to your students that they are looking at a reproduction of a painting (i.e., a reproduction of a works of art in the Getty Museum collection). After a long minute, tell your students that this work of art tells a story and that you are going to discuss it together to see if you can figure out what is going on.

Step 3: Depending on the grade level of your students, ask and discuss some or all of the following questions:

First, ask your students to describe the setting. What clues does the artist use to give you a feel for where the action takes place? Can you tell what time of day it is or what the weather is like? If you could step inside the work, what would you hear, smell, or see? Second, ask your students to describe the characters. How many people are there? Are they women or men? How can you tell? Describe their clothes. Are they young or old? Describe their facial expressions and body language. Third, ask your students to describe the action. What is going on in the picture? What are the characters doing? How does the artist show the characters in motion? How do you think each character is feeling? If each character could speak, what would he or she say?

Step 4: Discuss with your students how they unraveled many of the details of the story just by looking closely at and thinking about the visual clues the artist used to represent the setting, characters, and action. Tell them that this story is over 2,000 years old. Depending on the grade level of your students, either

1. Recite the story briefly summarized below.

2. Read an excerpt from a book about ancient myths.

3. Read an excerpt from Ovid's Metamorphoses (Book II, sections 852–875).

The Abduction of Europa

A princess named Europa and her friends were playing on the seashore one day. A god named Zeus (also known as Jupiter) saw the princess and fell in love with her. He turned himself into a white bull so he could meet her. The bull approached the women on the shore. At first they were frightened, but gradually they lost their fear and began to play with the bull. Europa patted the bull and eventually climbed on his back when suddenly he started to whisk her away through the water. She was frightened, grasped his horn, and took a final look back at her companions on the shore. Zeus took Europa to a land that would eventually bear her name.

Step 5: Ask your students to look at the reproduction a second time. Is looking at the work of art this time different than before, when they didn't know the story? How? Why? How does knowing the story enhance their understanding of the work of art? Discuss as a class.

Wrap up by telling your students that for centuries artists have been inspired to create works of art inspired by stories. Usually, artists choose to represent an important or dramatic moment from a story in order to capture our attention and imagination.

Abduction of Europa / Rembrandt van Rijn

The Abduction of Europa, Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, 1632

Standards Addressed

The following content standards will be covered in your Guided Lesson at the Getty Center.

Visual Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools

Artistic Perception

1.0 Processing, Analyzing, and Responding to Sensory Information through the Language and Skills Unique to the Visual Arts

Students perceive and respond to works of art, objects in nature, events, and the environment. They also use the vocabulary of the visual arts to express their observations.

Historical and Cultural Context

3.0 Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions to the Visuals Arts

Students analyze the role and development of the visuals arts in past and present cultures throughout the world, noting human diversity as it relates to the visual arts and artists.

Aesthetic Valuing

4.0 Responding to, Analyzing, and Making Judgments about Works in the Visual Arts

Students analyze, assess, and derive meaning from works of art, including their own, according to the elements of art, the principles of design, and aesthetic qualities.