

The Narrative Arts

Objectives: Students will make connections between the visual arts and literature by writing a narrative that is sparked by looking at a painting. Students may be asked to focus on a specific writing skill or a series of skills that match your curriculum.

Materials

- Narrative artworks from the packet: *Jacob and Leah*, *Flight Practice with Instructor*, and *Hereford Roundup*. Any appropriate artworks from Springville Museum's posters, or UMFA's or BYU's MOA poster sets.
- Paper, pencils or pens, or computers
- If making books, see individual book instructions for materials list

Many artworks are narrative in nature. Some artworks tell part of a story that's written down. We often term this kind of artwork an illustration because its most important function may be to illustrate or show, part of the story. Some artworks make a reference to a known story but also contain ideas that go beyond that story. Still other artworks set up a story that viewers' can interpret or create themselves, based on the elements in the artwork.

For example, *Jacob and Leah* by Bruce Smith makes a clear reference to the story of Jacob, in the Bible. Jacob works seven years to earn the hand of a woman he's fallen in love with, Rachel. However, Rachel's father tricks Jacob and marries him to Rachel's older sister, Leah. Although by working seven more years Jacob is also able to marry Rachel, he's still married to Leah as well. The painting by Smith took that awkward

relationship as a starting point, but also comments on the difficulties of marriage relationships in general, of how hard it can be to establish a close relationship with someone who is very different from you. On the other hand, *Flight Practice with Instructor*, by Brian Kershnik, is more open ended. The dream of being able to fly is fairly universal, but other relationships or meaning can be found as well. Minerva Teichert's piece *Hereford Roundup* fits somewhere in between: it's about a specific kind of experience, but the story line can be the viewer's own.

Show students some examples of narrative artwork and ask them "What is happening here?" Allow students to respond. You may want to tell the students that Minerva Teichert wanted to create paintings that would let busy people "read" a story quickly. Then have students write a story based on what they think might be happening in one of the artworks.



Bruce Smith, *Jacob and Leah*

1. For very young students, have a class discussion about what is happening in the artwork. Then have the class, as a group, make up a story that is based on that reading. The teacher can write the story on the board. The story can then be written up and placed in your reading center so students can read the story again. If possible, make a color copy of the artwork you read and put it with the story.
2. Spend 5-10 minutes as a class “reading” an artwork. (You will need a poster of an appropriate work. Then divide the class into small groups and pass out postcard reproductions of artworks. Allow each group to choose one artwork. The group should read the artwork, and write a story based on that reading. One student should be the scribe and write down the story. When the students are satisfied with their story, the group should make a clean copy of the story. Have the students share their stories with the class. One good approach is to have the students read the story, each student in the group taking a turn to read. Sometimes, a narrative lends itself to readers’ theatre and can be presented to other classes. Some students can be the sound people who make appropriate sounds to liven the production. Use rhythm instruments, purchased or home made as well as “found instruments.”

3. Make a variety of postcard or small poster-sized images available to the students. Each student will choose an artwork and will write several sentences about what is “going on” in the artwork. Then the students will write a story based on the artwork. If more than one student wants to use the same artwork, that’s okay. In fact, the variety of stories written based on one artwork can provide an interesting jumping off point for a discussion on the artist’s intent or personal interpretation of artworks.

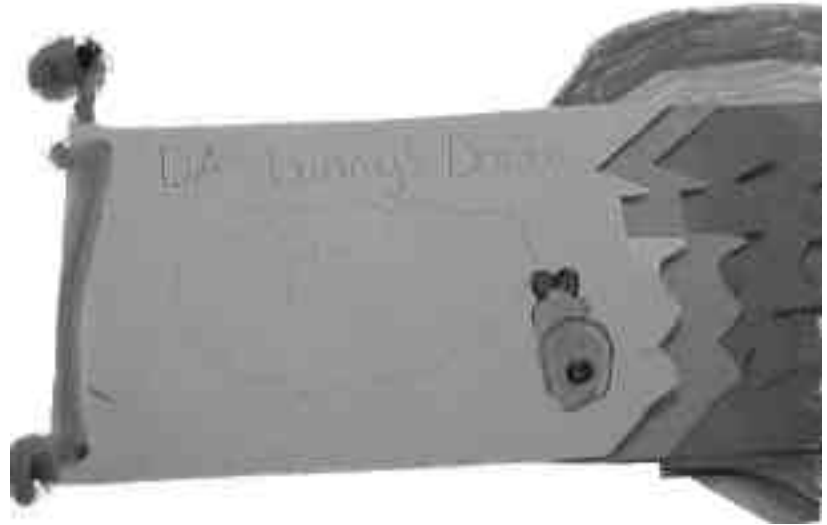


4. Divide the student into small groups or complete the following lesson as a class. After introducing the approach by allowing students to read an artwork, have the students make up a story with each student contributing one line or one phrase. Make a copy of the story for the students to reread. (see the lessons on Calvin Fletcher and Georgia O’Keefe)

5. You may want to have students create a book to write their stories in. See the lesson on bookmaking for ideas. Have students create drawings or paintings to go with the story.

Art History Lesson

After completing a story based on an artwork, have students learn about the artist(s). If your students don't read well yet, you will need to tell them the information. If possible, have another artwork by the same artist that they can look at. (See the lessons on Georgia O'Keefe, Calvin Fletcher, and Minerva Teichert.)



Older elementary and middle school students can read information from the back of the elementary postcard set. Junior high or senior high age students can read the information from the backs of posters or can read about artists in books or on the web.

Divide the students into groups and let them design and present a story of the artist. Give students a date for the presentation and then allow them to choose how and what they will portray. If students are unable to come up with a solution themselves, you may need to make a few suggestions. Some possibilities include the following:

1. Students can make a painting of people come alive. The characters may speak and/or act out a scene that begins or ends with the one pictured in the artwork.
2. Create an ad for an exhibition of the artist's works. Include a list of some important art works and something interesting about the artist.
3. Try some of the artist's techniques or make art with similar subject matter. Show the art works to the class and tell how they relate to what the artist does/did.
4. Design a game for the class to play about the artist.
5. Have a panel of "experts" talk about the artist and the artist's art.



6. Students can organize an artmaking experience that relates to their artist.
7. Students can find out what was happening in society that affected the artist and focus on that relationship.
8. Students can find out whose art or teaching affected their artist. Or, conversely, whose art was affected by the artist. They should show samples of artworks that demonstrate the connections between the artists.



Self-portrait by Robert Henri, Minerva Teichert's teacher
Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery



Portrait by Minerva Teichert

9. Students can find examples of other arts that have a connection to their artist's works. (i.e. dance, drama, or music.)

Aesthetics Lessons

1. Russell Martin, author of *Picasso's War: The Destruction of Guernica and the Masterpiece that Changed the World*, a book about Picasso's painting *Guernica*, says that art is one of the best ways we have to make meaning of our lives, to come to terms with difficult experiences. Have students choose one of the artworks from the earlier lesson and write an explanation of how that artwork might help someone deal with difficult experiences in their life (or celebrate the good times, since all experience is not difficult.). Young elementary students will need to dictate their ideas to someone. (See the lesson on *Preliterate Literature*)

2. Give the students the following puzzle:

You own the painting Jacob and Leah, but you want to sell the painting. You have been approached by a man who thinks he wants to buy the painting. The amount of money the man will pay you depends on whether he considers the painting an illustration or "Fine Art." Use specific information from the painting to convince the man the painting is "Fine Art."

Have students work with a partner, one being the person who wants to sell the artwork and the other the dubious buyer. Or, you may have students write their responses as individuals or as small groups.

3. Have students discuss when an artwork is illustration and when it is fine art. Or, have students discuss whether there is a difference. Instead of a class discussion, have students choose a side, argue that side with another student. Then students will change sides and argue the other position with a different student.
4. Divide students into six small groups. Give each group one of the postcards from this packet. Each group should decide what the value of that artwork is to them, to their community, and to society as a whole. Allow each group time to share their ideas with another group or with the class.
5. Divide the class into small groups and give each group a postcard from this packet. Each group will decide what part of society that artwork would have the most value for. Students must come up with at least three reasons. (If they have to find three reasons it will help students go beyond the most obvious, simple reason such as that cowboys will value *Hereford Roundup* the most.) Another possible approach is to have students choose three groups that will value the painting and say why.

Art Criticism

Divide the students into small groups. Give each group a postcard from this packet. Ask the students to look at the images of the artworks and go through a simple critical model: What is it made of? What is it about? What does it mean? How do you feel about this artwork? Then have students focus on answering the question "How did you arrive at that judgment?" In addition to improving their ability to talk about and to understand art, they will refine their thinking processes.