

Descriptive Writing

Overview: Students will write a paragraph describing a work of art, giving their personal response to it.

Goals: This lesson will

Support concepts and skills: develop a distinctive writing voice, use more expressive language.

Fulfill: ELA: 1-3, 5, 15, 19; Visual Art: 5.

Practice: descriptive writing, use of adjectives, adverbs, images, metaphors; opinion, response or interpretation, and evidence.

Familiarize students with: works of art, expressive language, imagery in visual art and writing.



Colts in a Storm
Anna Hyatt Huntington

Objectives for Students: Students will

Be able to: identify and use in writing: details, adjectives, adverbs, images, metaphors; state an opinion or personal response, and cite evidence for it.

Understand: that people may have different opinions of a work of art; how adjectives, adverbs, similes and metaphors help written descriptions become more specific and interesting.

Key Questions (to be answered by students):

1. What words can I use to best describe this work of art?
2. What impact does this work of art have on me?
3. How do works of art create their impact?

Materials Needed: Definitions and examples of Adjectives, Adverbs, Images, Metaphors and Similes; Copies of the Descriptive Writing worksheet.

Museum Objects: This lesson can be applied to any work of art, but these would work well:

- Object shown is *Colts In a Storm* by Anna Hyatt Huntington, marble, 1902, Gift of Anna Hyatt Huntington (1941.72)
- *Mrs. Sarah Clayton* by Joseph Wright of Derby, oil on canvas, 1869? (1953.1)
- *Regates á Fecamp*, by Raoul Dufy, oil on canvas, 1906 (1983.73)

Pre-Museum Visit – Review adverbs and adjectives, brainstorm a list of each to keep in the classroom. Review images, similes and metaphors, look at examples, and make up some for objects they can see in the classroom (for example, “the desk sat stoically in the front of the room,” or “the desk was a patient servant holding the chaos of her papers”). State the reason for each choice of image (simile or metaphor), and try to get as close as possible to one that the class can agree on for an object.

At the Museum – Conduct a group discussion, all together, in front of the work of art.

“What do you **notice?**” (Other prompting questions if necessary: “What stands out for you? What does it make you feel? What kind of an impact does it have on you? What details did you not notice at first? What does it make you think of? What do you see in the work that makes you feel this way?”)

Hand out Descriptive Writing Worksheet, ask students to work in individuals or pairs.

Post-Museum Visit – Reflection: talk about the activity in pairs. “Explain to your partner why you made those choices.” “Explain to your partner why those images stuck with you.” Share some out in the large group, and talk about metaphors that might describe this object. Write down things that were confusing or that they didn’t understand, or wanted more information about.

Assignment: “Write a descriptive paragraph describing the work of art, developing the raw material from above, and including your response to the work, and your opinion of it. Back up your ideas with specific details from the work.” (Option for a second Museum visit to work on details.)

Ask a Museum Educator to address the issues that the students identified as confusing or said they didn’t understand, or wanted more information about.

Add to the adjective and adverb lists and keep in classroom for future writing projects.

Supportive Material: Descriptive Writing Worksheet

Documentation and Assessment Options: Keep progressive versions of the adjective and adverb lists, and compare over time; Students create a rubric for descriptive writing, and score each other’s work; Keep writing samples over the year to compare.

Links to Other Curriculum: Remind students of this activity and utilize a similar process when doing a science lab observation, watching an instructional video, or reflecting on a piece of literature.

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