

Fitchburg Art Museum

Still Life Lives!

September 22, 2013 - January 12, 2014



Lesson Ideas

In General

Still lifes can be symbolic, metaphorical. Creating one can be used to:

- Tell a story, parable or moral
- Express an emotion or mood
- Represent a relationship, person, or place
- Represent something important to the still life creator
- Symbolize power and wealth, or the lack of
- Symbolize a conflict or historical event

ELA and Writing

In general: Still lifes can be great prompts for descriptive writing, poetry, and stories.

Discuss and explore what metaphors are (a comparison between two things that are alike in some ways and not in others; in writing, the comparison is made without the use of the word “like” or “as”). Give examples of metaphors in writing/speaking, then explore how this idea can be transferred to objects. Play this game: Think of a famous person the class knows about, then ask: “If this person were a (broad category of objects), s/he would be a (specific type in that category.” Example: “If this person were a writing implement, he would be a worn-down pencil that had been chewed on.” Analyze the similarities between the specific object and the famous personality’s traits so students can see how metaphors work.

Discuss the interpretation of symbols. Have students make still lifes that tell a story, swap their still lifes with another student, and then write a story about someone else’s still life. Discuss how the interpretation of the writer is different from or similar to the intention of the still life creator. Discuss what symbols were common among the students.

Compare common sayings. In a multicultural classroom, pick some sayings common to Americans whose first language is English (Ex.: There’s no use crying over spilt milk.), then ask students from other cultures/countries if there is a saying in their culture/country that means something similar but is expressed differently.

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Explore personal identity. Ask students to think of 5 of their best characteristics, and how they might represent those characteristics using objects. Allow one object to represent a favorite pastime, sport, or subject.

Social Studies

Pick an important historical event that students are studying.

Part 1: Ask them to generate ideas about things/objects that might represent that event. In addition to asking for ideas that represent a place or country, ask them to brainstorm ideas for objects that could represent concepts central to the event, such as compromise, justice, violence, secession, weak vs. strong, or opposing viewpoints. Ask students to vote for their top 5 objects that they think best represent the event.

Part 2: Discuss how the objects might be arranged to express the idea. What object (a symbol of an idea) should be in the forefront (is the most important)? In the background (not as important but still a part of the event)? In the middle? Off to the side? Barely visible? On opposite sides?