Line in Art and Literature

Overview: Students will discover the expressive potential of line in art and literature.

Goals: This lesson will
Support concepts & skills: expressive writing, comprehension.
Fulfill: Visual Art 5; ELA 1-4, 15, 17, 21.
Practice: recognizing and using more vivid and precise descriptive language.
Familiarize students with: adjectives (their meaning and use); use of line to express meaning and mood.

Objectives for Students: Students will
Be able to: comprehend the mood and/or meaning of a painting or text, and identify the techniques the author or artist used to create that mood/meaning.
Understand: that choices about line / language can affect the mood and meaning of a work of art or text.

Key Questions (to be answered by students):
1. What choices is this artist (or author) making to express what they want to say?
2. How can I make choices that will express what I want to say in art or language?
3. What is it that makes language expressive and vivid?

Materials Needed: Plain paper, Charcoal or Soft pencils, Line Inquiry worksheet.

Museum Objects:
- Object shown is Full Moon, Barbados by Joseph Stella, oil on canvas, 1940, Acquired through the Margaret Simonds Sinon Fund (1998.4)
- Blue Lake by Charles Burchfield, watercolor on paper, 1938 (1974.2)
- Still Life, Fruit by E. C. Leavitt, oil on canvas, 1888 (1973.7)

Pre-Museum Visit – Line Activity and Reflection (see Line Activity Instructions Sheet) to allow students to discover that there are many different kinds of line, and that line can be expressive of meaning and mood.

At the Museum – Work in two groups, with a facilitator (teacher, docent, parent) in each group. Two good works of art to focus on are Stella’s Full Moon, Barbados and Burchfield’s Blue Lake (or Leavitt’s Still Life with Fruit). Follow the Line Inquiry worksheet to explore the painting and the artist’s use of line. Ask each group of students to be prepared to report to the other group about how they think line is used to express meaning and/or mood in their painting.

When the groups have finished, bring them together in front of one of the paintings and ask the group to present their summary. Discuss their conclusions, and hear other opinions. Then go to the other painting and hear the second presentation.
Post-Museum Visit – Ask students to return to the sheets they filled in at the Museum, and to make a list of adjectives that describe the lines they saw in the paintings. You can use the CD in the classroom to refresh their memories. On a large paper have the adjectives that you used in the original line activity. Ask the students to suggest other adjectives to add to their collection, and ask them to describe the meaning of each one they add. This list can be added to throughout the year as the students pay attention to and discover more adjectives (and adverbs also).

Option: Work with the Art teacher to enhance the students’ understanding of the elements and principles of design, both by looking at other works of art, and by creating works of their own.

Literature Activity: In conjunction with the Visual Arts activity about line, you can conduct an ELA activity. Give students the word “Choppy” and ask them to make a line that goes with that word. Ask: “What kind of sentence would match this word and line?” Get examples, and discuss. “What is a “choppy” sentence? What is the opposite of choppy? What kind of sentence would that be?”

Help the students create sentences that match the words. Return to the adjective list. For each adjective, ask them to look at the matching line they have drawn, and create one sentence that echoes this. They can compare with their neighbor’s sentences to see how they are the same or different.

Reflection: “What has been manipulated? How have you created these drawing lines as sentences? What choices did you make to make your sentences like the line or the adjective?” (length of line, number of words, balance of consonants to vowels, word choice, images, what else?) Look at works of literature (fiction, poetry, dialogue) to see what kinds of sentences there are. Discuss what kinds of sentences make a work interesting. Keep a list of kinds of sentences for them to use in their own compositions. (There are other suggestions about text activities below.)

Supportive Material: Line Activity Instructions, Line Inquiry Worksheet, Text Activities Instructions. If you can find books of Saul Steinberg’s drawings the students will enjoy seeing his very expressive use of line. (“The Catalogue – a selection of drawings reprinted from The Art of Living, The Passport, and The Labyrinth.” Meridian Books, 1945)

Documentation and Assessment Options: Pre- and post-test: What is a line? What can it do? Have the students brainstorm all the adjectives they can think of before you do the initial line activity, as a baseline. Then compare the way that list grows through the year, not just in length, but in variety and complexity/subtlety. You should also be able to see their progress in variety and expressiveness of the adjectives they use in their writing.

Other Works of Art in the Museum that can connect to this lesson:
You might want to ask a Museum Educator to meet with your class to discuss the following works of art:
Norcross’s My Studio for powerful horizontal and vertical lines; Kollwitz’s Ploughman and Wife; Cox’s Silver Coffee Pot, Leavitt’s Still Life with Fruit; Tobey’s White Writing; Greek fragmentary jar of Herakles slaying the Hydra; and Huntington’s Colts in a Storm.
On this CD-ROM you might also look at *A Journey to Waterfalls All Provinces* by Katsushika Hokusai, woodcut, about 1777-1849 (1988.1), *Palm and Sun* by Joseph Stella, watercolor and gouache on paper, around 1940 (1998.3), or *Untitled (Woman Holding a Sword)*, Chinese, ink on paper, date unknown (TVI 2F7).

Also, it would be interesting to look at Vuillard’s *The Artist’s Mother Pouring Water* and Webster’s *Cactus* for a contrast, since these two do not primarily use line as a way to express, but rather they use color, texture, and shape.

**Links to Other Curriculum:**

**ELA** - Wonderful potential connection with ELA, in which students can discover the expressive potential of a line in writing, especially poetry. See “Text Activities Instructions.”

**Music** - Look at the lines we have drawn. What kind of melody would it be? Examine melody as line in music. Match the melodies you hear to the lines we have drawn, or draw a line that reflects the feeling of the melody you hear. What has been used musically to create these lines? (Introduce terms Legato and Staccato. Listen to rhythm, volume, pitch, interval.)

**Dance and Theater:** Extend to dance, and then to theater; identify ways of crossing the room, ways of moving, and hand and arm gestures that create “lines.” Discuss character creation, and the arc or shape of the movement of a dancer or an actor.

**Math:** Explore how coordinate points can create a line on a graph. What kinds of data create choppy or zigzag lines, and what kinds of data create smooth rising or falling lines? What are the lines expressing?

**Biology:** Identify the path or line that migrating animals take in their annual movements and create these lines on a map. Trace the line of invasion of disease-carrying insects (such as West Nile virus), or of invasive plant, animal, or insect species.

**History:** Identify the paths that settlers took, that explorers took, that Native Americans were forced to take, that Jews or Gypsies and others took as they were forced out or chose to leave the places in which they were born. Draw a diagram of all the lines created as immigrants came from all over the world to live in this country. Have students draw lines on a map between where their ancestors were from to where their families live now.

Author of the lesson: Anne Rhodes
LINE ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Essential Question: What can LINE communicate?

Materials: Paper, charcoal or soft pencil

Instructions: Define a line as a connection between two separate points. How is a line different from a shape? (A shape is enclosed, like a line meeting itself. A shape has an inside and an outside.) Students will make lines on their paper that they think represent a word that you give them. See word list below, or make up your own. Focus on extending their understanding and correct use of adjectives. When you have finished all the words, ask students to compare their lines with their neighbor’s, and see if they can tell which line goes with which word. Can you tell which line goes with which word? Are your lines and your neighbor’s the same for the same word?

Large Group Discussion: In what ways can lines be different from each other? (straight, curvy, horizontal, vertical, diagonal, swirly, zigzag, broken, jumpy, and many more). Were some easier than others? Which ones? Why? Which ones were most difficult? Do we all have similar ideas about what line would go with certain words? Why do you think this is? Were some more diverse? Why do you think that is? Share out some of their lines on large paper for discussion. List the kinds of things that line can communicate.

Adjectives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>adjective</th>
<th>adjective</th>
<th>adjective</th>
<th>adjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>angry</td>
<td>bouncy</td>
<td>hesitant</td>
<td>worried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confused</td>
<td>surprised</td>
<td>watery</td>
<td>calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>serene</td>
<td>airy</td>
<td>wild</td>
<td>bragging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rigid</td>
<td>sad</td>
<td>forceful</td>
<td>antagonistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fierce</td>
<td>energetic</td>
<td>scared</td>
<td>shy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Line Inquiry Worksheet

Look at the painting. What lines do you notice? Discuss with the others in your group. Answer the questions together. Write your answers down so that you can share with the other group when you come back together.

Make a list of all the major lines that you think are important.

What kinds of line do you see? Lines can be straight, curvy, horizontal, vertical, swirly, broken, diagonal, zigzag, jumpy, fat, thin, and many other ways. What kinds of lines do you see in this painting?

What do you think the lines are expressing? Focus on particular lines, or on the lines all together.

What is it in the painting that a line emphasizes or points to?

What do you think the lines are communicating?

What mood or feeling do the lines together create?

When you have answered these questions, make a summary that you can share with the other group about how line is used in this painting to express something.
TEXT ACTIVITIES INSTRUCTIONS

Demonstration: Give students the word “Choppy” and ask them to make a line that goes with that word. Ask: What kind of sentence would match this word and line? Get examples, and discuss. What is a “choppy” sentence? What is the opposite of choppy? What kind of sentence would that be?

Activity: Create sentences that match the words. Return to the adjective list. For each adjective, look at a matching line you have drawn, and create one sentence that echoes this. Compare with neighbor.

Reflection: What has been manipulated? How have you created these drawing lines as sentences? What choices did you make to make your sentences like the line or the adjective? (length of line, number of words, balance of consonants to vowels, word choice, images, what else?)

Activity: Discuss character speech in fiction and/or theater, and how the personality of the character is created by her/his style of speech (include pauses, any contrasts in speed, volume, etc. as well as the elements mentioned above.)

Activity: Look at examples of poetry and prose. How would you characterize these “lines”? What adjective would describe the line? What line would you draw that would reflect this line of text? (Again, Steinberg’s drawings are perfect examples if this.) Discuss: What mood or meaning is created by the choice of line in a poem or text?

Activity: Think about what you did on your last birthday. Pick one adjective or kind of line. Write a short account of what happened on your birthday, using only sentences that match this line.