



A Write at the Museum

Ekphrastic Poetry



Jane Baber

Published by K20 Center

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Grade Level	9th Grade	Duration	2-3
Subject	English/Language Arts		
Course	Composition, Creative Writing		

Essential Question

How can poetry engage with visual art?

Summary

Sometimes, we know a great deal about the meaning and inspiration behind a work of art. In many cases, the artist has left information about their art in an artist's statement. Sometimes though, it is up to the viewer to construct their own meaning of a work of art, regardless of what information about a piece is available. In this lesson, students will construct their own meaning of a work of art through ekphrastic poetry (poetry in response to the form and content of visual art). In this lesson, students will explore a virtual art gallery, analyze works of art, and compose an ekphrastic poem.

Snapshot

Engage

Students use a painting to inspire writing a short poem.

Explore

Students compare their original poem to another poet's poem inspired by the same poem and are introduced to ekphrasis through touring a virtual art gallery.

Explain

Students do a deep tour of The Met's virtual art gallery to gather information about a chosen work of art.

Extend

Students compose an original ekphrastic poem based on the art chosen from their tour of The Met's virtual gallery.

Evaluate

Students reflect on their ekphrastic poem by imagining the reaction of their chosen work of art's creator.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Fine Arts: Visual Art (High School: Proficient (I)))

I.VA.P.3. : Use multiple approaches to begin creative endeavors.

Oklahoma Academic Standards: English Language Arts (Grade 9)

9.4.W.2: Select language to create a specific effect in writing according to purpose and audience.

9.7.W: Create engaging multimodal content that intentionally addresses an audience and accomplishes a purpose.

Attachments

- [Art Critic Activity—A Write at the Museum - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Art Critic Activity—A Write at the Museum - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Art Critic Activity—A Write at the Museum.docx](#)
- [Art Critic Activity—A Write at the Museum.pdf](#)
- [Ekphrasis Example—A Write at the Museum.docx](#)
- [Ekphrasis Reflection—A Write at the Museum - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Ekphrasis Reflection—A Write at the Museum - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Ekphrasis Reflection—A Write at the Museum.docx](#)
- [Ekphrasis Reflection—A Write at the Museum.pdf](#)
- [Lesson Slides—A Write at the Museum.pptx](#)
- [The Dance by William Carlos Williams—A Write at the Museum - Spanish.docx](#)
- [The Dance by William Carlos Williams—A Write at the Museum - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [The Dance by William Carlos Williams—A Write at the Museum.docx](#)
- [The Dance by William Carlos Williams—A Write at the Museum.pdf](#)

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- "The Dance" by William Carlos Williams (attached; 1 per student)
- Art Critic Activity (attached; 1 per student)
- Ekphrasis Example (attached; 1 per student)
- Ekphrasis Research and Reflection (attached; 1 per student)
- Devices that can access the websites noted in the Lesson Resources

Engage

Display **slide 3** to introduce the lesson objectives: (1) Use specific language to achieve the aim of ekphrasis; (2) Create a multimodal artifact in response to visual art.

Display **slide 4** to introduce the painting, "The Peasant Dance," by Pieter Bruegel.

With the painting displayed, give students time to examine the image closely. Ask the following questions to aid students in making inferences and forming reactions to the painting before giving them any information about the work:

1. What do you see in this painting?
2. Who do you think was the artist?
3. What was their inspiration?

Describe the painting to students: "Kermesse" or "The Peasant Dance" by Pieter Bruegel, a prolific Dutch painter from the Netherlands, painted in 1567.

Have students look at the painting for a several moments. Ask them to focus on the following questions:

1. What do you notice?
2. What is happening in the painting?
3. Who are the subjects?

Show **slide 5**: After reflecting, ask students to compose a short poem using the template below. The three-line poem should describe what is happening in the painting.

In ___

The___

Around___

Teacher's Note

For students who ask, explain that a poem does not have to rhyme. Alternatively, it can be up to you to impose a certain poetic structure, i.e. a certain rhyme scheme or a haiku structure. In this lesson though, it is the content, not the format, that is the focus.

Give students 5-10 minutes to compose their 3-line poems. Ask them to share their responses using the [Think-Pair-Share](#) strategy. After students have had time to write, ask them to share their poems with a neighbor, either reading aloud to each other or switching papers, each reading the other's poem silently. Ask student volunteers to read their poems aloud to the whole class.

Technology Integration

This Think-Pair-Share can be completed in an alternate way with [Canva](#) or [Google Slides](#) if this lesson is being taught virtually. To do so, create a digital workspace with the tech tool of your choice and share the link with students. Students can share their poems virtually. They can also screenshot their poems and upload them to an LMS like [Google Classroom](#).

Explore

After students have shared their poems, tell them that the famous American poet, William Carlos Williams, wrote a poem about this painting. His poem was not three lines long, but it was about the subject of this painting.

Pass out the attached "**The Dance**" by **William Carlos Williams** to each student.

Display **slide 6**, and read the poem aloud as a class. Consider which strategies for reading the poem will work best: popcorning the reading, reading the poem to students, or assigning one student to read out loud.

Teacher's Note

Depending on when this lesson is taught in the school year, you may consider having students annotate or point out specific poetic devices.

After reading the poem by William Carlos Williams, display **slide 7** and ask students the following questions:

1. What similarities did you notice between this poem and yours?
2. What was it like to write about what was happening in the painting?

After students have described their experiences, focus on the second question. The focus, writing about the painting, is the theme of this lesson - *ekphrasis*.

Display **slide 8**. Introduce the term *ekphrasis* to students:

The word ekphrasis, which comes from Greek, is a vivid, often dramatic, verbal description of, or commentary on, a visual work of art.

Elaborate for students on *ekphrasis*. Explain that writing a poem about the subject of or composition of a work of art is an example of *ekphrastic* writing, which is what they've just done by writing their poems. Point out that William Carlos Williams's poem is an example of an *ekphrastic* poem.

Ask students to imagine writing a response (like a poem) to a painting while in front of that painting in real life. Ask if any students have had either of the following experiences:

- Visited an art museum and looked at works of visual art
- Written a response about a piece of art while in a museum

Display **slide 9**. Open the link to the Breugel Virtual Gallery. Explain to students that many large, and some small, museums have virtual tours available for free, which are the next-best-things to an actual in-person visit.

To explore virtual museum examples, show students the virtual tour of the [Bruegel Gallery in Vienna](#) where the painting "The Peasant Dance" (or Kermesse) is housed. Either guide on your own device or direct students to explore on their devices. Encourage students to visit local museums that offer virtual tours as well.

Give students enough time to navigate the virtual gallery tools. Use the [I Notice, I Wonder](#) strategy to encourage critical thinking about the art in the virtual galleries they visit.

Explain

Teacher's Note

Navigating the [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) virtual gallery is simple, requiring a click and drag approach to look around the virtual space. Clicking "across the room" will take the viewer further into the gallery. In this gallery, soft music is playing. To have students experience the full atmosphere, they can use headphones or keep their volume on low.

Don't spend too much time in this gallery. Inform students that they can go back to this site later if they choose. For now, tell students they are going to New York City to visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Display **slide 10**, and pass out the **Art Critic Activity handout**. Read through the following directions with your students:

- Go to metmuseum.org
- Click "Hop in the Time Machine"
- Use the filters to specify the art you would like to see (then push the red button lower right)

Display **slide 11**. Give students time to scroll through the gallery they have created based on the filters selected. As they tour the virtual gallery, tell students to ask themselves the following questions:

- What immediately grabs my attention? Why?
- What am I drawn to because I like the way it looks? What positive feelings arise?
- What am I drawn to because I don't like the way it looks? What negative feelings arise?

The goal of these questions is to empower students to act as art critics - to look for the good and the bad based on their preferences.

After students have had time to look through the gallery options, assign them to choose one piece of art. When each student has selected their preference, they will answer the questions on the handout.

Display **slide 12**. Ask students to examine their art preferences and ferret out answers to the following questions:

1. Who made this?
2. What stands out in this piece?
3. Who/what is the subject matter?
4. What is happening in this piece?
5. What do you think the artist had in mind when creating this piece?
6. How do you feel when you look at this piece?
7. What does this piece remind you of?
8. What sensory details can you observe in this piece?
9. What sensory details can you infer from this piece?

Ask students to respond to the questions in words, phrases, similes, metaphors, colors, and images they can use to construct their ekphrastic poem in response to the art piece.

Teacher's Note

Although this lesson takes students to The Met in New York City, some students may have specific pieces of art in mind that are housed in other museums or may simply want to explore elsewhere. Introduce them to additional resources described in the article "[Stuck at Home? These 12 Famous Museums Offer Virtual Tours You Can Take on Your Couch.](#)"

If time permits, you can provide additional links to other museums offering virtual tours. This article is an excellent resource. If students want to access a specific piece of art they already know about, Wikimedia Commons is an excellent resource of fair use art.

Extend

Teacher's Note

Let students know that sometimes artists leave information about their art in written records, in their "artist's statement." In some cases, however, the viewer must construct their own meaning of a work of art, regardless of what information about a piece is available. Students will do that by writing a poem in response to looking at a piece of visual art.

You will consult the **Ekphrasis Example** attachment to see a sample poem composed about Georges Seurat's painting "Circus Sideshow." The attachment shows the flexibility of the format above and a final draft of a poem. Students may look at this example as needed - consider having a copy or two printed to pass around for students to see.

This structure will help students who need a firm structure; however, they may also compose their own free verse poem of the same or longer length.

Display **slide 13**. Revisit the Essential Question: How can poetry engage with visual art?

Show **slide 14**. Distribute the **Ekphrasis Example** handout. Consider taking a few minutes to analyze the structure of the poem about the Seurat painting with your students. Afterward, invite students to move to the second page of the Art Critic Activity handout. Have students use the line starters to construct their original poem. Once students have had time to reflect on their preferred piece of art from the virtual tour, instruct them to use their notes to shape an ekphrastic poem. They have the option of writing the drafts of their poems in the allotted space at the bottom of the second page of the handout.

Evaluate

Teacher's Note

As a close to this lesson, reiterate to students that *ekphrasis* is a literary description of or commentary on a visual work of art. Writing about art is a reflection on the content and form of a piece.

Show **slide 15**. To complete the process, have students end the lesson by writing a reflection on how their preferred artist might receive their poem. Ask students to use the questions below to generate the reflection.

- What is the tone of my poem? (earnest, romantic, sarcastic, humorous, etc.)
 - Explain by citing specific parts of your poem.
- What inspired the tone of your poem?
 - Explain by citing specific parts of your poem and describing specific elements of the art.
- How does the tone of your poem compare with how the piece of art appears?
 - Does it complement or contrast with the art? Explain.

Have students use the attached **Ekphrasis Reflection** handout, to integrate their reflection on writing about the art into a document that includes a picture of the work they are reflecting on, their original poem, and a reflection that is at least a one-paragraph response.

If technology and skills of the students permit, have them complete their reflection in the handout, attach a digital picture of the piece of art used (sourced using The Met website), and type in their poem. This full document can be printed and turned in or shared via an LMS like Google Classroom. Ask students to include the source of their preferred art piece.

Resources

- Bruegel, Pieter. (1567). *The Peasant Dance*. [Painting]. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Peasant_Dance
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Canva. Tech Tools. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/612>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Google Classroom. Tech Tools. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/628>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Google Slides. Tech Tools. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/2335>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). I Notice, I Wonder. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/180>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Think, Pair, Share. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/139>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ecphrasis>
- Metropolitan Museum of Art. (n.d.). #metkids. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/online-features/metkids/>
- Romano, Andrea. (2020, March 12). Stuck at home? These 12 famous museums offer virtual tours you can take on your couch. Travel & Leisure. <https://www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/museums-galleries/museums-with-virtual-tours>
- Seurat, Georges. (1887). *Circus Sideshow*. [Painting]. The Met Fifth Avenue, Gallery 825, New York. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437654>
- The Bruegel Gallery (n.d.). https://my.3dvirtualexperience.nl/bruegel_begegnen_only_in_vienna/index.html#dh=0&lang=en
- Williams, William Carlos. 1962. The Dance. Poetry.com. <https://www.poetry.com/poem/39703/the-dance>