

A Write at the Museum

Ekphrastic Poetry

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Published by *K20 Center*

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Grade Level	9th Grade	**Time Frame**	90-120 minutes
Subject	English/Language Arts	**Duration**	2-3 Class Periods
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

ACT College and Career Readiness Standards - English (6-12)

TOD 403: Use a word, phrase, or sentence to accomplish a straightforward purpose (e.g., conveying a feeling or attitude)

ACT College and Career Readiness Standards - Writing (6-12)

L&C 401: A score in this range indicates that the writer is able to: -Make adequate word choices that convey the argument with clarity -Make stylistic choices, including voice, tone, and diction, that are appropriate for the given writing purpose and topic

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.R: Analyze and evaluate the techniques used in a variety of multimodal content and how they contribute to meaning.
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 - Spanish.docx
- Ekphrasis Example—A Write at the Museum - Spanish.pdf
- Ekphrasis Example—A Write at the Museum.docx
- Ekphrasis Example—A Write at the Museum.pdf
- Ekphrasis Research and Reflection—A Write at the Museum - Spanish.docx
- Ekphrasis Research and Reflection—A Write at the Museum - Spanish.pdf
- Ekphrasis Research and Reflection—A Write at the Museum.docx
- Ekphrasis Research and 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 document (attached; one per student)
- Art Critic Activity handout (attached; one per student)
- Ekphrasis Example handout (attached; one per student)
- Ekphrasis Research and Reflection handout (attached; one per student)
- Devices that can access the websites noted in the Lesson Resources

10 minutes

Engage

Display **slide 3** to introduce the lesson objectives:

1. Analyze visual artwork to interpret its meaning using personal insight and observation.
2. Compose an original ekphrastic poem that communicates an interpretation of a selected work of art.

Display **slide 4** to introduce "The Peasant Dance," a painting 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?

Share the following background information about the painting "Kermesse." Also known as "The Peasant Dance," it was made in 1567 by Pieter Bruegel, a prolific Dutch painter from the Netherlands.

Have students look at the painting again. 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 on their own paper using the template below and on the slide. The three-line poem should describe what is happening in the painting.

- In ___
- The ___
- Around ___

Teacher's Note: Rhyme Scheme and Structure

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 that is the focus, not the format.

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 and reading the other's poem silently. Ask student volunteers to read their poems aloud to the whole class.

Optional Technology Integration

This Think-Pair-Share can be completed in an alternate way with Canva or Google Slides. 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.

20 minutes

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** document to each student.

Direct students to follow along on their handout as the poem is read. Depending on your students and preferences, the poem could be read by having students take turns reading a few lines, reading the poem to students, or assigning one student to read out loud.

Teacher's Note: Identifying Poetic Devices

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 6** 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. Writing about the painting is the theme of this lesson: *ekphrasis*.

Display **slide 7**. 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 on *ekphrasis* for students. 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 to a piece of art while in a museum

Display **slide 8**. 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 own devices. 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.

Optional Activity: Career Connections

Extend students' learning about the career field of museums using the *K20 ICAP - Art Museum Assistant Registrar - In the Trenches* video. In the video, Christina Naruszewicz discusses her job as Assistant Registrar at the Oklahoma City Museum of Art. After the video is finished, have students complete the S-I-T strategy, and have each student share out one of their items with the class.

Embedded video

https://youtube.com/watch?v=LDkKfKNimnY

25 minutes

Explain

Teacher's Note: Virtual Gallery Experience

Navigating the Metropolitan Museum of Art virtual gallery is simple. It requires a click and drag approach to look around the virtual space. In this gallery, they play soft music. 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 virtually visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

Display **slide 9**, and pass out the **Art Critic Activity** handout. Read through the following directions with your students:

- Go to k20.ou.edu/be.
- Use the filters to specify the art you would like to see.
- Push the red button in the lower right corner to create a virtual gallery.

Display **slide 10**. 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 and 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 each choose one piece of art. When each student has selected their preference, they will answer the questions on the handout.

Display **slides 11–12**. Ask students to examine their art preferences and record 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.

Optional Resource Extension

Although this has students explore 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. At your discretion, you can 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 that offer 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.

25 minutes

Extend

Teacher's Note: Finding Meaning in Art

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.

Consult the attached **Ekphrasis Example** handout 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 create an ekphrastic poem.

10 minutes

Evaluate

Teacher's Note: Reflection

To close 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 Research and 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