

EXPLORING FOLK ART THROUGH POETRY

2-3

GRADE LEVEL: 2-3

NEW YORK STATE LEARNING STANDARDS: THE ARTS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

ESTIMATED TIME: TWO 45-MINUTE PERIODS

OBJECTIVES

- Students will closely observe, analyze, and interpret an object of folk art. Students will differentiate facts from opinions in their responses.
- Students will acknowledge and be respectful of the diversity of opinions and interpretations that art can elicit.
- Students will use drawing as an observational tool.
- Students will write poetry inspired by their observation and reflection on the discussed artworks.

MATERIALS

- Images of a selection of folk art objects (at least one reproduction for every two students)
- Copies of the Observation Worksheet (one for each student)
- Writing paper and pencils or pens
- Drawing paper and colored pencils

LESSON ACTIVITIES AND PROCESSES

Day One

Introduction

- Introduce the idea that people have different interpretations and opinions about art. Begin with a discussion of fact versus opinion. A fact is an objective, indisputable truth; you cannot disagree with a fact. An opinion is personal and subject to interpretation; it concerns an individual's feelings, beliefs, thoughts, or ideas about a given topic. Different people have different opinions.
- Make a statement and ask the students to decide if it is a fact or an opinion.
- Have the students briefly observe and describe an ordinary everyday object in the classroom.
- Record the descriptive words and phrases that the students offer.
- Once a relatively accurate and complete description has been formed, review each of the words or phrases, categorizing them as either fact or opinion.

Discussion

- Follow the same procedure of observing and describing a work of art. Encourage the students to closely and carefully observe, looking long and hard at the work, before and during the discussion.

- Ask the students to offer their observations and responses, both facts and opinions, and to identify their responses as one or the other. While their responses should be rooted in the observation of the object, the students may also share their associations about what the object reminds them of, what it makes them think about or imagine.
- Record these responses in two separate lists headed “Facts” and “Opinions.” Encourage the students to continue observing and discussing the work until they have developed an exhaustive list of responses.

Activity

- Each student or pairs of students will select a reproduction of one of the artworks included in this curriculum.
- Working individually, the students should observe the illustrated object and create detailed and descriptive drawings. Remind the students that drawing can be used as a tool to improve our viewing skills and help us see details we might not have noticed just looking at the objects. If the students are uncomfortable with drawing, urge them to consider sketching as an exercise rather than as artmaking. Pencils and colored pencils may be used to execute sketches.
- After the students have completed their drawings, they should write their verbal responses to the objects on the Observation Worksheets (while looking at both their drawings and the reproductions of the presented artwork).

Day Two

- Using their drawings and their Observation Worksheets as resources, the students should compose poems inspired by their responses to their objects.
- The students may begin by editing their Observation Worksheets, deciding which of their observations and ideas they would like to develop into poems. Are any of their words or phrases repetitive? Are some ideas and observations more interesting than others? Students may cross off the words and phrases that will not be used in their poems. You may model the process of using the Observation Worksheets as a starting point for writing poetry.
- If the students are not familiar with writing poetry, additional preparation may be required.
- Assist the students as they compose their poems.
- Share the finished poems with the class. While the poems are read aloud, the associated folk art reproductions should be hanging where they are visible to the class, so that the students can guess which object inspired each poem.

PRE- AND POST-LESSON ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

- Complete the same activities with personal objects the students have brought from home—objects that are of importance and have significance to the students.

- Write a collaborative poem as a response to a work of art. Ask each student to contribute two words that come to mind when looking at the artwork. In small groups, have the students compose their various words into short poems. Each group should share their poem and discuss the similarities and differences between the poems.
- Visit the American Folk Art Museum for a guided tour. Conduct this lesson before or after your museum visit.
- The “Stories from My Life” lesson designed for pre-K–grade 1, in which artmaking and writing are inspired by personal experiences, may be adapted for use with older students and taught in conjunction with this lesson.

ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION METHODS

- Students were able to differentiate between fact and opinion in discussion and in their completed Observation Worksheets.
- Students’ drawings and Observation Worksheets accurately represent at least the basic appearances of the presented artworks.
- Students selected ideas and words from their Observation Worksheets and developed them into poems.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Recommended Books for Students

Ely, Robert, and Mose Tolliver. *Mose T’s Slapout Family Album*. Montgomery, Ala.: Black Belt Press, 1996.

Paintings by American folk painter Mose Tolliver, playfully and perceptively interpreted in the poems of his friend, poet Robert Ely.

Hoberman, Mary Ann. *A Fine Fat Pig, and Other Animal Poems*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991.

Poems accompanied by illustrations of Malcah Zeldis paintings, some of which were exhibited at the American Folk Art Museum.

Rowden, Justine. *Paint Me a Poem: Poems Inspired by Masterpieces of Art*. Honesdale, Pa.: Wordsong/Boyd’s Mills Press, 2005.

A simple, whimsical poetic response to works from the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., including paintings by two American folk artists.

Recommended Books for Students and Teachers

Greenberg, Jan, ed. *Heart to Heart: New Poems Inspired by Twentieth-Century American Art*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

Forty-three poetic responses to forty-three works of art.

Janeczko, Paul B. *How to Write Poetry*. New York: Scholastic Reference, 1999.

An introduction to different forms of poetry, writing techniques, warm-up exercises, and resources that encourages young poets to express themselves. Though written for young adults, it makes a valuable classroom resource for upper-elementary-school students and teachers alike.

OBSERVATION WORKSHEET

Name:

FACTS

Describe the characteristics of this object. Think about the colors, materials, and other details you can see.

OPINIONS

What do you think about when you look at this object? How does it make you feel? Does it remind you of anything?

Title:

Artist:

Materials:

Year made: