

The Art of Writing

Fourth Grade + ELA and Visual Arts

Adapted by K. Powell and updated by Cristi Clark

CORE SUBJECT AREA

ELA

ART FORM + ELEMENTS

Visual Arts

Drawing

Painting

Line

Shapes

Color

MSCCR STANDARDS

RL.4.1, RL.4.2, RL.4.3, RL.4.10, RF.4.4, RF.4.4a, RF.4.4c, W.a.6, W.4.9, W.4.9a, SL.4.1, SL.4.1a, SL.4.1b, SL.4.1c, SL.4.6, L.4.1, L.4.1d, L.4.3, L.4.3c, L.4.4, L.4.4a, L.4.6

MSCCR CREATIVE ARTS STANDARDS

VA: Cr3.1.4a: Revise artwork in progress on the basis of insights gained through peer discussion

VA: Re7.1.4: Perceive and analyze artistic work

DURATION

Two 40-minute sessions

OBJECTIVES

Art and literature go hand-in-hand in this integrated lesson designed to develop descriptive writing skills. Student artwork serves as the basis for a guided discussion on the elements of artistic expression—color, shape, line, and mood—and how these can be conveyed in written language. A read-aloud of *Anna's Art Adventure* applies these ideas to the work of well-known artists, focusing on

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Anna's Art Adventure by Bjorn Sortland; illustrated by Lars Elling (Carolrhoda Books, 1999): Engage students in the story of a young girl who, while searching for the bathroom in an art museum, discovers the work of many influential artists. Suggested literature:

Raboff, E. (1988). *Art for children series*. Garden City, NY: Harper & Row.

Venezia, M. (1990). *Getting to know the world's greatest artists series*. Chicago: Children's Press. Suggested Web

Jackson Pollock. Students each choose a work of art from an online or print source (recommended sources are included) and work individually to write a vivid description of that picture. They exchange their finished descriptions with a partner and use classroom art materials to try to reproduce the picture their partner described. The lesson is easily adaptable for students with special needs or who are English-language learners.

Students will...

Develop descriptive writing skills by using adjectives and descriptive phrases.

Identify and describe the artistic elements (i.e., lines, colors, shapes, mood) that are present in a piece of art.

Create an artistic rendition that adheres to the specific artistic elements of an artist's work.

MATERIALS NEEDED

MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGY

- *Anna's Art Adventure* by Bjorn Sortland; illustrated by Lars Elling (Carolrhoda Books, 1999)
- Projector
- Drawing/writing paper
- Easel with chart paper and markers
- Projecting surface (e.g., screen, chalkboard, white board, wall)
- Writing and coloring tools (e.g., pencils, crayons, colored pencils, markers)

VOCABULARY

Color, shape, line, mood, descriptive, writing, adjectives

resources: (Please note that when searching sites containing catalogs of art, nudes may be part of the collections.)

The Art Institute of Chicago

Education at the Getty

National Gallery of Art for Kids

The Metropolitan Museum of Art: "MuseumKids"

Online activities: The Art Institute of Chicago: "Families". The link for Art Access includes additional lesson plans and family activities that may be of interest.

National Gallery for Kids: "The Art Zone". Students can use the interactive art tools on this site and then write about their own creations.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art: "MuseumKids". Numerous activities are suggested under the heading "For Kids to Try Right Now."

Haring Kids. This site offers lesson plans for teachers, and numerous online activities for kids, such as coloring books, e-cards, stories, and so on.

Museum of Modern Art: "Art Safari". On this site, kids go on an art safari and write a story about what they see.

Doodle Splash. In this online activity, students create artwork to complement a book they art.

LESSON SEQUENCE

PREREQUISITES:

This lesson is based upon the premise that students have had an introduction to basic descriptive writing and to the use of adjectives.

PREPARATION:

1. Set up the projector so, students will be able to see the projected pieces of art while working at the same time.
2. Test the computer's Internet connection, and visit each of the websites listed above to make sure they work.
3. Gather the materials needed for this lesson, and place them in a central location in the classroom. The main text for this lesson, *Anna's Art Adventure*, recounts the story of a young girl who, while searching for the bathroom in an art museum, discovers the work of many influential artists, including artist Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain," which is one of his "readymade" objects—a urinal. Other materials for this lesson include markers, an easel with chart paper, and art/writing supplies for your students. It's also a good idea to have extra paper, pencils, and coloring supplies in an easily accessible area of the room.
4. Select pieces of artwork to use for modeling of the lesson activities.

For Session 1, "Before Reading", select a few teacher-made or student drawings, or artwork from the Global Children's Art Gallery or The Worldwide Kids' Art Gallery.

For Session 1, "After Reading", choose artwork from Jackson Pollock's collection. Pollock's action paintings, such as "Lavender Mist," "Shimmering Substance," or "Full Fathom Five," are recommended for this lesson.

SESSION 1

Before Reading: Modeling and Guided Practice

1. Pose the following questions to students to begin the lesson:

What is a description?

When do we describe things?

What are some of the reasons we describe things?

What kinds of words might you use to describe this room? Use these questions to initiate a student-driven review and discussion of description, describing words, and descriptive writing. The level and series of questions should be aimed at having students access their prior knowledge of this topic

2. Provide students with an overview of the goals or objectives of the lesson. For example, "Today we will be using what we know about describing words to describe some pieces of art. This will help us to see the importance of using precise descriptive language when we write."

3. Show students a teacher-made drawing or a student's drawing. Introduce the piece with the artist's name and the title of the drawing. [If classroom artwork is not available, drawings from the Web can be shown using the computer cart or as printouts. There are many sites that include collections of children's artwork, such as the Global Children's Art Gallery and The Worldwide Art Gallery.]

4. Begin by modeling a description of what you see in the selected piece of artwork. For example, you may comment on the shapes, size of objects, coloring, and lines.

5. After modeling, ask students to describe what they see in the art.

6. After a few responses, use the following questions to focus students' descriptions on the four artistic elements: color, shape, line, and mood.

What kinds of colors do you see? Are they dark, light, bright?

Can you see any shapes in what the artist has drawn? Are they tall shapes? short shapes? large shapes? small shapes?

What are the lines like? Did the artist make squiggly lines? straight lines? thick lines? thin lines

How does this painting make you feel when you look at it? Do you think the artist was sad when he or she drew this? Why or why not?

During Reading:

7. Introduce the book *Anna's Art Adventure*. Provide students with a short picture walk through a few pages, asking them to focus on the artwork that they see.

8. Read the story aloud, pausing ever so often to check student's comprehension of the text and to ask them to

make predictions. While reading, you might also draw students' attention again to the artwork in the book and ask them to comment on what they see.

After Reading: Guided Practice

9. Review the story with students. Give an overview statement about the artwork in the text and introduce students to the follow-up activity. ("There are many different pieces of artwork in the story, *Anna's Art Adventure*. Now we're going to look at one painting in the story more carefully.")
10. Show students the illustration of Jackson Pollock's work in the text, explaining that the illustrator of the book used this example to show readers the kinds of paintings Pollock does.
11. Use the computer to project an image of one of Pollock's other paintings for students to view. Recommended pieces are mentioned in the Preparation Section of this lesson.
12. Ask students to describe what they see in the painting. After a few responses, focus their descriptions with questions based on the four artistic elements (i.e., color, shape, line, and mood), using questions similar to those used during the "Before Reading" section of the lesson.
13. Record their responses on chart paper, the chalkboard, or an overhead projector. (Use whatever medium best suits students' learning in your classroom as well as the set-up of your room.)

SESSION 2 Independent Practice:

This portion of the lesson can be tailored to fit the needs of individual students in your classroom.

1. Explain to students that they are now going to describe a piece of art on their own.
2. Model the writing portion of the activity, while giving directions at the same time. Directions are as follows:
 - a. Students are to write descriptions of a piece of artwork using descriptive language and paying attention to the artistic elements in the piece.
 - b. Once finished, students exchange their descriptions with a partner.
 - c. The partner reads the description carefully two or three times.
 - d. The partner then draws a picture that matches the written description that he or she was given.
 - e. Students then compare the illustrations that they drew to the original artwork described in writing.

Depending on the needs of your students, you can tailor the writing portion as follows:

Grade 3: Ask students to write paragraphs focusing on one particular element of the art, such as color.

Grades 4–5: Ask students to write multiple paragraphs or an essay on the various artistic elements.

Second language learners: Depending on their proficiency level, students may benefit from using their second language or from combining English and their first language in their descriptions.

Students with special needs: Have students work with a computer-processing program or dictate their thoughts

to an adult or peer.

3. Provide students with writing/art materials, and have them select a piece of artwork to use for the activity. Students can go online to one of the recommended art websites listed in the “Preparation” section of this lesson or use art texts found in the classroom or school library.

4. Have students independently create the written description of the art, and then exchange their written description with a partner to work independently on the artistic portion of the exploration.

Closure:

5. Gather students with their partners and have them share their written descriptions and matching artistic renditions.

6. Use the following series of questions to address and review the importance of precise descriptive language as it pertains to the activity completed:

- Did your illustrations match the original artwork? With approximately what percentage of accuracy do they match?
- Why do you think some of the illustrations do not match the original with 100% accuracy?
- What could have been written differently in the description to help the illustrator make their recreation more accurate?

7. Lead students into a broad discussion about descriptive language and its relation to students' everyday writing and reading of literature.

- Is descriptive language important when describing something, like a painting, a character's appearance, or a room? Why
- Is it important that the descriptive language be precise? Why?
- How will using precise descriptive language help you in school and in your everyday life?

EXTENDED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Compare and contrast two pieces of art by the same artist or two pieces by different artists using a graphic organizer, such as a Venn diagram.

Write a comparison and contrast essay on two pieces of art by the same artist or two pieces by different artists. The comparison and contrast guide might be helpful for students to preview before beginning this writing assignment.

Have students use literature or the Internet to research and read about other artists and view their work. Include an art center focused around the work of a certain artist or style (e.g., pop art). Have students further explore this center by creating their own renditions of the art.

Have students explore some online interactive art activities (see recommended resources).

SOURCES

Lesson written by K. Powell; readwritethink.org; Lesson edited and updated by Cris Clark

TIPS + FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

STUDENT ASSESSMENT/REFLECTIONS:

Observes students' use of precise descriptive language and their descriptions of the artistic elements, and record anecdotal notes based on these observations.

Assess students' written descriptions using a district or state writing standards rubric.

Assess the students' artistic recreations using district, state, or national art education standards.