



Teacher Resource:
Art Tells a Story

Sponsored by the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation

Art Tells a Story

This unit was developed by Mrs. Ashlie Dempsey, a Language Arts teacher at Byrnedale Elementary School, as a part of a collaboration project between the Toledo Museum of Art and area educators. The unit consists of pre- and post- visit lesson plans to accompany a museum field trip. It is intended for 6th–8th grade students.

Standards Being Addressed

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.2

Analyze the main ideas and supporting details presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how the ideas clarify a topic, text, or issue under study.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.3

Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1

Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

Unit Goals

- Students will be able to identify the major elements of a story and how they interact and apply this to both written stories and visual media (e.g., identifying the characters in a painting and how they are interacting in the setting).
- Students will write a well-structured and detailed story that correlates with a piece of art and use evidence from the artwork to support the events of the story.

Museum Visit Type and Goals

Art Tells a Story

- Students will be able to identify the major elements of a story and how they interact and apply this to both written stories and visual media (e.g., identifying the characters in a painting and how they are interacting in the setting).

Key Words

- Plot
- Exposition
- Rising action
- Climax
- Falling action
- Resolution
- Flat and round character
- Setting
- Close looking

	Lesson Title/Goals	Relationship to Unit Goals
<p>Pre-Visit (several lessons)</p>	<p>It's all in the Details</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify elements of plot in a classic myth (Roman/Greek) • Identify elements of plot in a piece of art related to the myth 	<p>Students must be able to identify the major elements of a story and how they interact and apply this to both written stories and visual media (e.g. identifying the characters in a painting and how they are interacting in the setting). They will practice identifying these elements of a story in class after reading a Greek myth. This introduction (and perhaps a review for most) will help them identify the characters and settings in different works of art in the museum. They will select a painting in the museum that they will use as a springboard to create a story. They will share stories with the class in the classroom while the image is projected behind them.</p>
<p>Museum Visit</p>	<p>Art Tells a Story</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View an engaging piece of art to practice close looking and describing skills (something that will attract a typical junior high student's attention, like <i>The Oath of Horatii</i>, <i>Scene from Ossian's "Fingal": Landerg and Gelchossa</i>, <i>The Feast of Herod</i>, etc.) • Write a cinquain poem as a warm-up to help students think about the stories pictures tell • Given a small range of galleries, students are to find and select an artwork that will be the focus of their own story 	<p>During the museum visit, students are going to examine original artwork and use what they know about characters, plot, and setting to identify these elements in that artwork. Ultimately, students are going to self-select a work of art from the TMA's collection and write a detailed, structured story.</p>
<p>Post-Visit</p>	<p>Assess with Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students write a detailed, structured story that correlates with a work of art. They must use evidence from painting to support the events of the story. 	<p>Students will use evidence from the artwork to support the events of their story. The art will be displayed on the projector (using the TMA's LUNA resource) as the students share their story with the class.</p>

Pre-Visit Lesson Plan: Give One, Get One

Step 1:

Display Rembrandt's painting *The Abduction of Proserpina* on the whiteboard using the projector.

(Image: <http://www.rembrandtdatabase.org/Rembrandt/painting/53672/the-abduction-of-proserpina>)

Give students about one minute to observe the characters, setting, and action in the painting. Prompt students to look for these characteristics to help them focus their looking.

Step 2:

Give each student a worksheet and pencil. In front of a work of art, tell the students they will have 5 minutes to list at least 25 descriptive phrases that describe what they see in the work of art in the left-hand column.

Step 3:

After 5 minutes is up, ask the students to compare lists. Have students pair up. Student 1 should share their list until they get to something that is not on both lists. Student 2 should write this down in the right-hand column and then share something from their list that is not on Student 1's list. After both students have written down something new in the right column, the pair should split and each should find another student to share with. Let the students share in this way for 5–10 minutes.

Step 4:

After sharing with other students individually, regroup and as a class discuss what the students saw in the painting.

Step 5:

Read the myth *Demeter and Persephone* by Anne Taylor White as a class using “readers’ theater” (students read the character’s lines of dialogue while the teacher or another strong student reader reads the narrator’s “lines”).

Step 6:

After the reading, in groups of 3–4, ask the students to identify the scene from the myth that is being illustrated in the painting. Ask them to identify the characters illustrated in the painting as well as the setting. Tell them that they must use evidence from the painting and the myth to support their responses. Each group will present their “theory” in small groups; the teacher will stop by each group individually to listen to the responses. At this time, teacher can make sure students use valid evidence to support their responses and help scaffold student understanding as needed.

Optional Extension Activity:

Ask the students to research other works of art that depict the abduction of Persephone (discuss her Roman name, Proserpina). In small groups compare and contrast the images. Let the class debate which depictions follow the written myth best and why.

Post Visit Lesson Plan: Character Development & Creative Writing Activity

Preparation:

During the museum visit, students will have selected a work of art that “speaks” to them. They should return from the field trip with the name of the artist, title of the work of art, and museum accession number. Students will need access to their chosen image at school.

Step 1: DESCRIBE

Students will put themselves in their chosen picture and start to think creatively about it. Pass out the Character Development worksheet. Tell the students to imagine that they are looking through someone else’s eyes to see what is shown in their chosen work of art. Who are they? Have them fill out the worksheet about that character. (This doesn’t necessarily have to be a human character). Give the students 10-15 minutes to work. This pre-writing activity will help students think before they write.

Step 2: ANALYZE

Students will share their Character Development Worksheets with the small group to get feedback. Use computers/tablets or printouts to display artwork. The Character Development Worksheet is the smaller version of the full story they will write. In groups, students help each other identify and list the main character(s), plot elements, and setting of the story they’ve imagined. This will be useful in the next step where they begin to narrate and add details and dialogue to their story.

Step 3: INTERPRET

Students will “flesh out” the smaller story they’ve imagined on the Character Development Worksheet. They will take the ideas from this activity to write a detailed, structured story that correlates with their selected artwork. They must use evidence from the painting to support the events of their original fiction story.

Collection Connections:

Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini, *Sophonisba Receiving the Cup of Poison*, 1708–1713. (1966.128)

Nicolas Poussin, *Mars and Venus*, 1633–1634. (1954.87)

Mattia Preti, *The Feast of Herod*, 1656–61. (1961.30)

Francesco Primaticcio, *Ulysses and Penelope*, 1560. (1964.60)

Jacques-Louis David, *The Oath of the Horatii*, 1786. (1950.308)

Samuel Finley Breese Morse, *Scene from Spenser’s “Faire Queen”: Una and the Dwarf*, 1827. (1951.295)

John Trumbull, *Scene from Ossian’s “Fingal”: Lamderg and Gelchossa*, 1792. (1958.27)

Character Development Worksheet

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Height: _____

Weight: _____

Hairstyle: _____

Clothing: _____

Accessories: _____

Occupation: _____

Hobbies: _____

Character's Name: _____

From your character's perspective:

What did your character see?

A secret:
