

What's the Story?

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Classroom Lesson

A.

Overview

In the span of one class period, students will work collaboratively to “read” works of art by identifying the settings, characters, and key events that they depict. Through this process, students will consider visual art as a form of narrative while learning the fundamentals of art interpretation.

If you are coming to the Walker for a field trip, we recommend facilitating this lesson within a week or two of your visit.

B.

Objectives

Students will...

- Approach artwork as narrative, identifying the characters, setting, and events depicted in an artwork.
- Create an original dialogue between two individuals depicted in an artwork.
- Work collaboratively to interpret works of art.

Introduction



HOW TO USE THIS LESSON

This is a lesson plan for the classroom. If you are bringing your students to the Walker, we highly recommend the Walker Art Center Field Trip Preparation Lesson as well.

The accompanying PowerPoint presentation includes simple instructions for this lesson in the presenter notes.

Teachers know their own classrooms best, so please adapt the activities to fit your students' ages, needs, and interests.

LESSON MATERIALS

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| ○ Projector or Smart Board | ○ Regular pencils for writing |
| ○ PowerPoint presentation that accompanies this lesson | ○ Colored pencils and sheets of paper for students' drawings (<i>optional</i>) |
| ○ Paper for each student | |

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Standards Connected to this Lesson

Grade Level

3

Reading

3.1.3.3 Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

3.1.6.6 Distinguish their own point of view from that of the narrator or those of the characters.

3.1.7.7 Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).

Writing

3.6.3.3 Write narratives and other creative texts to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

- Establish a situation and introduce a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.
- Use dialogue and descriptions of actions, thoughts, and feelings to develop experiences and events or show the response of characters to situations.
- Use temporal words and phrases to signal event order.
- Provide a sense of closure.

Speaking, Viewing, Listening, and Media Literacy

3.8.1.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

3.8.2.2 Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

4

4.1.3.3 Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

4.6.3.3 Write narratives and other creative texts to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

- Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.
- Use dialogue and description to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.
- Use a variety of transitional words and phrases to manage the sequence of events.
- Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.
- Provide a conclusion (when appropriate to the genre) that follows from the narrated experiences or events.

4.8.1.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

4.8.2.2 Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

5

5.1.3.3 Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

5.6.3.3 Write narratives and other creative texts to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

- Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.
- Use literary and narrative techniques, such as dialogue, description, and pacing, to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.
- Use a variety of transitional words, phrases, and clauses to manage the sequence of events.
- Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.
- Provide a conclusion (when appropriate to the genre) that follows from the narrated experiences or events.

5.8.1.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

5.8.2.2 Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

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1

Reading an Artwork (15 minutes)

Starting on [Slide 2](#), ask students, what are some different ways that people tell stories? Discuss their answers.

Explain to students that they'll now get a chance to practice "reading" a work of art to determine what story (or stories!) it is telling.

Move to [Slide 3](#) showing Carrie Mae Weems's photographs from "The Kitchen Table Series," from 1990. As a class, discuss the answers to the following questions. When students provide answers, make sure to ask them what evidence they can find in the artwork to support their claims:

Characters

- Who are the characters in this artwork?
- What are they doing?
- What do we know about them?

Setting

- What is the setting of these photographs?
- What clues in the artwork tell you where this is taking place?
- What are some other events/actions that typically take place in a setting like this?

Mood

- What is the mood of this artwork (i.e., how does it make you feel?)?
- What parts of the artwork create this mood?

After discussing the characters, setting, and mood, ask them:

- What is this story about?
- How does the artist tell a story without using any words?

After some discussion, share information about this artwork with students.

Now that students know a bit more about this artwork, ask some follow-up questions:

- How would the story change if the artist used color photos instead of black and white?
- What are some things that stay the same in all three photos? What are some things that change?

Wrap up by thanking students for doing such a great job finding the story in this artwork.

Information for Teachers



Carrie Mae Weems, *Untitled* from "The Kitchen Table Series," 1990

These three photographs are part of a larger group of 20 photographs called "The Kitchen Table Series." The series tells a story about a woman and her relationships with her loved ones told through photographs. The 20 photos in the series are divided into groups of two or three and are like "chapters" in the story. The three photos seen here are one chapter. The woman depicted in these photographs is the artist herself.

Resources for learning more about Carrie Mae Weems

- [Carrie Mae Weems Biography](#), artist's website.
- For an artist bio, video interviews, and images of her artwork, see [Carrie Mae Weems, Art21](#).
- 'The Kitchen Table Series' Carrie Mae Weems, [Art21](#), filmed March 18, 2011, running time 3:08.
- Stephanie Eckardt, "Carrie Mae Weems Reflects on Her Seminal, Enduring Kitchen Table Series," *W* magazine, April 7, 2016.

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2

Become the Artwork!

(15 minutes)

For this activity, students should work in pairs (or groups of 3 if necessary). Each pair will need a piece of paper and pencil.

Many artworks require us to use our imaginations when we look at them. Ask students to put on their imagination hats as they look at this next work of art!

Move to [Slide 4](#) and show students George Segal's sculpture *The Diner*, 1964–1966.

Instructions:

Each pair of students will think about their answers to the following questions. One student will take notes:

- Who are the characters in this artwork? What are they doing?
- What is the setting of this artwork?
- Pretend that you are one of the people in the artwork! What do you see, feel, smell, and hear?

Move to [Slide 5](#) showing *The Diner* with speech bubbles.

Student pairs will act out a conversation between these two characters. Give them a few minutes for the following:

- One student will be the person sitting at the counter and the other student will be the person behind the bar.
- Invite groups to act out their dialogue for the rest of the class! Discuss the similarities and differences between the dialogues.

3

Reflect

(5 minutes)

Reflecting back on the artworks discussed today, ask the class:

- How did these artworks tell stories?
- How is it seeing a story (like in an artwork) different than reading a story?

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Optional

Draw a Story (20 minutes)

Now that they have looked at a couple of different artworks, students will have the chance to be the artists.

Materials needed:

- 1 copy of the storyboard worksheet (provided at the end of this lesson) per student.
- 1 pencil per student (option to include colored pencils, crayons, or markers).

Instructions:

Working individually, each student will make a drawing that tells a story from the beginning to the middle to the end. The story can be one that they've read or heard before, or it can be a new one they make up!

Print copies of the worksheet provided at the end of this lesson for their drawings.

Give them five minutes to plan their story. Then, once they have figured out how it begins, what happens in the middle, and how it ends, they can begin drawing.

Give them 10–15 minutes to complete their drawings. Invite select students to share their drawings and the stories they tell with the rest of the class.

Additional Activity Ideas

Tableau Vivant (5–10 minutes)

In this activity, students bring artwork to life, and the only materials needed are an image of an artwork, an empty space at the front of the classroom, and the students' bodies!

Show any of the artworks listed below (or another artwork of your choice) so that all students can see clearly.

Kerry James Marshall, *Gulf Stream*, 2003 (Slide 6)

John Currin, *Park City Grill*, 2000 (Slide 7)

Dawoud Bey, *Brian and Paul*, 1993 (Slide 8)

Alice Neel, *Charlotte Willard*, 1967 (Slide 9)

Ask for volunteers to come up to the front of the classroom where space has been cleared. Students will then put themselves into the positions of the people (or animals and other objects) in the artwork.

The students still seated in the audience should help direct the posers so that they get their positions as close as possible to what is in the artwork. If needed, ask for more students to come up so that all people and objects in the artwork are accounted for.

Once students are all in the correct poses, have them hold their poses for 10 full seconds. Be sure to give everyone a round of applause afterward!

Suggestions:

- For artworks that only show one or two people, you may want to divide students into small groups and invite each group to re-create the artwork.
- Get creative! Students aren't limited to taking the poses of the people in an artwork. If an artwork depicts a car or a tree or a cat, they can be any of those things too.
- Be sure to engage the nonactors. The audience should actively help to form the tableau vivant by giving instructions to the actors.