

Narrative Art

How do artists tell stories with art?

How do writers tell effective stories?

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will explore narrative art to see how stories are expressed visually and to learn how artists provide clues (setting, symbols, etc.) that help us understand the stories. Students will learn that by looking carefully and analyzing what they see in a work of art, they can “read” a painting and find meaning in narrative art. Students will discover that people tell stories about themselves and their culture through the visual arts. They will create their own narrative art in an accordion book form.

LENGTH OF LESSON: Two or three 45-minute periods

KEY IDEAS THAT CONNECT VISUAL ARTS AND WRITING

Visual Arts

- Art is a visual means of conveying information.
- Artists use symbols and details to help tell a story.
- An artist’s vocabulary includes setting, subject, symbol, point of view, and perspective.
- Narrative art can describe myths, historical or current events, fantasy, or personal stories.
- Narrative art does not have to present conclusions; it is open to interpretation.

Writing

- Writing is a way to convey information.
- Writers use literary elements, such as symbols, similes, metaphors, and details, to help tell a story.
- A narrative text includes story elements such as setting, problems, characters, events, and solutions.
- Narrative genres include myths, fiction, historical or current events, fantasy, poetry, and personal stories.
- Writing does not have to include conclusions; it is open to interpretation.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

Students will:

Visual Arts

- Identify aspects of narrative art and use art terms to describe them
- Interpret a narrative work of art through observation and discussion
- Create art that tells a story

Writing (optional activities)

- Write about narrative artwork using art vocabulary
- Identify perspective and point of view in student writing and the writing of others



FOR THE TEACHER**Looking and Seeing**

Some things to notice and think about when looking at Jennie Augusta Brownscombe's [Love's Young Dream](#):

- Color: Low intensity browns and oranges suggest season and time of day.
- Pose: What is the importance of the young woman standing on the edge of the porch? What direction is each character looking?
- Symbols: What might the flowers symbolize? What about the kitten?
- Who is coming up the road?
- What is each person doing and how does it relate to the story?

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Read about [Jennie Augusta Brownscombe](#) on the ABC website.

SUPPLIES

- Student journals
- 12" x 18" drawing paper (cut into 4" x 18" strips), one strip per student
- 4½" x 5" mat board, poster board, or cover stock for book covers, two sheets per student
- Pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers
- Glue sticks

VOCABULARY

A **narrative** is a work of art that tells a story.

Setting is the time and place where the story happens.

Subject is what the artwork is about. It can be a story, an idea, a person, or an emotion or feeling.

Symbol is an object or thing that has a meaning more than the object itself; a visual sign for an idea or concept.

Foreground is the part of the picture that seems closest to the viewer.

Background is the part of the picture that seems farthest away from the viewer.

INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN: OBSERVE, CREATE, AND REFLECT**Observe: Quick Write**

Before beginning the lesson, show Brownscombe's *Love's Young Dream* to students. Give them a few minutes to respond to the image. Use any of the following prompts:

- What is happening in this picture?
- Imagine that each character has a thought bubble floating above his or her head. What are they thinking?
- If I could walk into this picture, I would _____.



Introduction

Tell students that narrative art is artwork that tells a story (*narrative* means story or tale). The stories in narrative art can come from history, mythology, literature, religion, or current events; they can represent an idea, such as freedom; or they can be a personal story from the artist's life. Ask students if they have seen any examples of narrative art (religious art, neighborhood murals, war memorials, etc.). Have they ever told stories with just images before? Narrative art is meant to teach, inspire, inform, and even to preserve memories and culture, and it can be a way to understand the experiences of people from other places and times. Artists today often use narrative art to express their ideas about politics and society.

Observe: Look and Discuss

Ask students to look at *Love's Young Dream* and begin describing what they see. Introduce and define the vocabulary words as you use some of the following questions to focus your discussion:

- What is happening in this picture?
- How many people do you see? Are there any animals? What are they doing?
- Is there a main character? How can you tell?
- What are the relationships among the characters?
- Where is the story taking place? Describe the **setting** and the time period.
- What does the clothing tell you about the time and place?
- What facial expressions do the characters have? Where is each person looking? How does this help you understand what is happening? What do you think each character is thinking?
- What is happening in the **background**? How does it relate to the **foreground**?
- Are there any objects? Are they symbols? What do they stand for? Why is the girl holding flowers?

Ask students what they think the **subject** is—what the story is about. Have them talk about the setting, people, and action taking place, and how these aspects help tell the story.

Look again and ask students to think about the moment of the story the artist chose to show.

- What might have happened just before this scene?
- What do you think is about to happen?
- Do you think the artist shows the most exciting part of this story? Why or why not?
- What would you have shown?
- How could the title, *Love's Young Dream*, be interpreted by each character in the painting (what is each character's personal voice)?

Create: Accordion Book Narrative

1. Accordion Book

Download instructions for the [Accordion Book](#) and lead students through the process of creating the book form. **Note: For this activity, you will make a four-page book, completing only the first four steps shown in the instructions.**



2. Tell a Story with Art

Ask students to choose an important event or moment from their own lives to tell a story about. It could be an actual event or one that they hope will happen in the future. The story should have four parts: a beginning, middle, climax, and conclusion. It can be a problem that needs to be solved or a description of a daily activity. Have student think about:

- What is the story? What has happened?
- Who is the main character? Who are the other characters?
- What are the characters thinking and doing?
- What is the setting? What is in the background?
- How will facial expressions, clothing, and symbols help tell the story?
- What is the action of the story? What happens first? Then what? How does the story end?

Have students make a quick pencil sketch of the first part of the story in the first square. Then have them sketch the second, third, and fourth parts of the story in the following squares. The sketch should show just the basic shapes and outlines of the characters and the setting. Students should spend only a few minutes per sketch. Next have students use crayons, markers, or colored pencils to add details such as symbols, background, and objects around the characters. Have them fill in some areas of the drawing with color.

Reflect

When students have finished, have them exchange books with a partner and interpret what each other's story is about. Discuss as a class what was hardest and easiest about telling a story without words. Have students respond to one of the following prompts in their journals:

- Telling a story without using words is like _____.
- If I could do this project again I would _____.
- When I read my partner's book I noticed _____.

LESSON EXTENSION: IDEAS FOR STUDENTS WHO WANT TO WRITE OR DRAW MORE

- Write the story of your narrative artwork in your journal.
- Explain how you used the setting, characters, and symbols to tell your story through art.
- Make another accordion book, using very small paper. Illustrate it with very small images.