

WRITING *through* the MUSEUM



Extend Your Classroom to the Museum

This resource is intended to help teachers make the most of a field trip to the museum. Writing Prompts for a variety of grade levels are included for students to work with during museum tours. Teachers need only choose one or more and print copies to send along on the field trip. To arrange a field trip, contact the Harn Museum Education Department at tours@harn.ufl.edu.

Unique Learning Experience

Museums and cultural institutions offer unique learning experiences, where students can observe and study original objects of art, science, technology and history. These primary sources offer students a personal connection to subject matter while also contributing to their understanding of how to investigate and construct meaning from original objects. In addition, a number of research studies have shown that museum programs help students build important skills such as observation, critical thinking and empathy – key foundational skills for many subject areas as well as lifelong growth and development.

Guided tours at the Harn Museum of Art feature a discussion and inquiry-based learning approach. These interactive tours support close observation and critical analysis of art objects. To further support classroom goals, the *Writing through the Museum* school program combines a guided tour along with dedicated time to write, using art as an inspiration.

Pre-Visit Discussion

To prepare students in advance of a visit to the art museum, teachers may want to show and discuss selected works of art. Images are available on the Harn Museum website – www.harn.ufl.edu/collections - or by requesting them through the educator who scheduled your tour. To help students practice looking closely at art, try this:

Choose an image to feature in a class discussion, and project it so everyone can see it. Dim the lights if necessary to show more details. Ask students to look carefully at the picture and then, one-by-one, name and describe one thing they see in it. When students begin to run out of subject matter items to name and describe, prompt them to describe the formal elements – line, color, shape, texture, etc. Don't forget to activate their senses and ask them to imagine what sounds, smells, feelings and even tastes they might experience in the scene. After all students have participated, choose 1-2 students to incorporate everyone's observations and give a description of the work as a whole.

For more information about the Elements of Art and the Principles of Design, see the great resources available at The Getty Museum's website: http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building_lessons/formal_analysis.html

Share Your Expertise

Teachers are invited to share their student-tested writing assignments inspired by the visual arts. Also, if you try one of the activities included here, let us know how it works. Contact us at tours@harn.ufl.edu.

DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

Descriptive writing uses details about people, places, objects or events to vividly portray a scene and allow readers to create an image in their minds.

Choose an artwork that appeals to you. Spend some time looking at it closely. Write a detailed description of the work for someone who cannot see it, sharing as many details and descriptions as possible so they might picture it in their own mind. To get started, think about and describe the following:

- Objects you see and recognize
- Formal elements such as colors, lines, shapes, and textures
- Sensations inspired by the work such as sounds, smells, feelings and even tastes

Write down the following information about your selected artwork.

Artist's Name: _____

Title of Work: _____

Date of Work: _____

Use this space, and the back if necessary, to write your description for someone who cannot see the work.

Back at School: Share your description with your classmates and see if anyone remembers the artwork you chose to write about.

CREATIVE WRITING - POETRY

Cinquain

Walk through the gallery and choose an artwork that appeals to you. Practice the 4 Steps to “Reading a Work of Art” – Describe, Analyze, Interpret, Judge

- Describe the elements - colors, lines, shapes, objects.
- Analyze how the elements work together – balance, space, repetition, unity.
- Interpret meaning by thinking about context, theme and the “big idea.”
- Judge the work’s significance, worth & value – not only in terms of money but also its impact on viewers, culture, and the art world.

Now you’re ready to write! Let the art inspire you to write a cinquain (pronounced “sin-cane”). Cinquains do not need to rhyme. Use this form:

Line 1:Noun

Line 2: Two adjectives

Line 3: Three gerunds (-ing words)

Line 4: Simile (comparison using “like” or “as”)

Line 5: Synonym (a noun to echo the first line)

Here is an example of a cinquain poem, inspired by George Grosz’s painting, **Manhattan** (1946), from the Harn Museum’s Modern Art collection:

City
Complicated, Congested
Towering, Smoking, Shadowing
Like a Traffic Jam of Buildings
Manhattan

Now, write your poem here:

EXPOSITORY WRITING

Interpretation & Criticism

Suggest Grade Level – 9-12

Choose an artwork on display at the Harn Museum of Art, and write an interpretation of the work. An interpretation requires you to be very aware of what you are seeing and to understand how and why a work elicits a certain response in you, or suggests a particular meaning to you. It includes a description of a work of art, but it goes beyond mere description because it tells how the described artwork functions. That is, it analyzes how the component parts work together, and how the artistic choices (choices of medium, color, subject, etc.) communicate the message of the work to the viewer.

Reproductions from books or internet images are not acceptable for this assignment. You should allow plenty of time for your visit to the museum to 1) choose an image that particularly engages you, and then 2) spend time observing it closely and discovering/developing an interpretation of it. During your observation and analysis, you should take detailed notes and perhaps even make a simple sketch of the work.

Your written interpretation should include the following:

1. A brief, overall description of the work to introduce it to your reader and to provide a framework for understanding your interpretation
2. Specific factual information about the work, such as artist, nationality, title, date the work was created, medium, dimensions (at least approximate), and the name of the exhibition in which the work is displayed.
3. Identify and discuss how the artist used the Elements of Art and Principles of Design to direct the viewer's attention and convey meaning.
4. Identify and discuss the medium the artist used and how the artist employed the unique qualities of this medium.
5. Explain your personal response to the work based on its form as you analyzed it in the previous sections.

Helpful hints:

- Accept the work as it is. Do not "second guess" the artist and make such statements as, "I think the painting would have been better if the artist had . . ."
- Titles of exhibitions are in quotation marks; titles of works of art are underlined or are in italics.
- The Harn Museum houses a diverse collection of art produced by many different cultures throughout history. If you have limited knowledge of the cultural history attached to the image you are writing about, consider doing some very basic research so that you know something of the culture or historical period in which your image was produced.

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