

## DEVINE, CHARITY

This is a really simple lesson for the beginning of the school year when students are first learning about the elements of visual art. I have purposefully chosen all the artworks that include images of water in order to demonstrate how use of art elements can drastically alter pieces with similar subject matter.

### LESSON OBJECTIVE(S):

- Students will learn to use clues from a work of art to interpret the meaning, mood, and story conveyed in a painting.
- Students will analyze and evaluate the use of elements of art (e.g., line, shape, color properties, color schemes/groups, form, texture, space, value) and principles of design (e.g., repetition, emphasis, pattern, balance, contrast, rhythm, proportion, movement) in a variety of two- and three-dimensional artworks.

### MATERIALS:

1. Emanuel Leutze, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, 1851 (4A)
2. Thomas Eakins, *John Biglin in a Single Scull*, 1873 (11A)
3. Mary Cassatt, *The Boating Party*, 1893-1894 (14A)
4. Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration of the Negro Panel no. 57*, 1940-1941 (17A)
5. N.C. Wyeth, *Cover Illustration for The Last of the Mohicans*, 1919 (5B)
6. Thomas Cole, *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow*, 1836 (5A) (optional)
7. Albert Bierstadt, *Looking Down Yosemite Valley, California*, 1865 (8A) (optional)
8. Charles Sheeler, *American Landscape*, 1930 (15A) (optional)
9. “Analyzing & Interpreting Artworks” worksheet

### PROCEDURES:

1. Introduce students to the idea of using the elements of art to interpret a painting. I like to lead in with a discussion of *The Migration...* by Jacob Lawrence (17A), but you can use any painting in the “Picturing America” collection.
2. I lead in with the open-ended questions such as, “What do you notice about this picture?” “What do you think is going on here?” When students answer, be sure to ask them, “What makes you say that?” or “What evidence do you see to support that?”

3. As students begin to run out of things to say, I begin asking convergent questions such as, “Where do you think this was painted?” “When do you think it was painted?” “What is the emphasis of the painting?” Make sure to ask them what they see that makes them draw each conclusion.
4. Finally ask them the Hook Question: “Who do you think this woman is?” “Where is she?” My students came to the conclusion that this was Harriet Tubman on a raft helping slaves escape from the South. When I told them it was painted in 1940-41, they were confused. This enabled me to present the real story behind the painting from the “Picturing America” text. We talked briefly about it.
5. Ask students to explain how each of the following elements adds to the painting and what it could mean/symbolize: Form, Texture, Color, Space, Shapes, Lines, and Color Gradation/Value. Discuss each element in order collectively hypothesize why the artist used each element in the way he/she did. In total this class discussion lasts for about 20 minutes.
6. Have students get into groups of three or four. (This allows kinesthetic learners an opportunity to move around a little bit after sitting through class discussion.) Give each group one of the paintings listed above in the “Materials” section of the lesson. Ask each group to answer the same types of questions that were answered as a class. (See Attachment.) Students have about 15 minutes to talk with their group members and complete their worksheet.
7. Groups present their painting and discussion answers to the class.
8. As a closing activity, review the Elements of Visual Art and ask students to explain why each element is important to the artist and how it can help convey the artist’s message.

**Assessment:**

- For this assignment, students got 50 points for completion of the group assignment and lost points from their assignment if they were not participating in their group.
- All the students were required to speak during the presentations at the end of class in order to get their full points.

**Accommodations:**

- For more advanced students, I have them answer the questions about the painting they are given and then swap paintings with another group and answer again. When we share our answers, they enjoyed hearing how their group’s interpretation was different from the second group’s interpretation. Other students may require extended time, individualized attention, prompting and cueing, etc.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Class Period: \_\_\_\_\_

### Analyzing & Interpreting Artworks

1. What do you notice first about this picture? What stands out to you the most here?

2. If there are people in your picture, what are they doing? Who do you think they are? (Support your answer with evidence from the painting.)

3. Where do you think this was painted? Why?

4. When do you think this was painted? What do you think the painter might have been like?

5. Where is the emphasis of the painting? Why do you suppose the painter chose to emphasize this part of the painting?

6. What mood do you think is portrayed here? What evidence can you identify to support your answer?

7. Was there any question on which you and your group thought differently from one another? If so, what was it? Why did they feel differently?

8. Who do you think is the intended audience for this painting? Why?