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Lesson Plan: Grant Wood and Remembered Landscapes

Grades

Elementary and Middle grades

Subject Areas

Visual Arts

Language Arts

Estimated Time

Varies: estimated times listed
for each lesson

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Student Learning Objectives

Students will encounter three different landscape paintings by American artists and compare and contrast these works in the same painting genre. Students will learn more about artist Grant Wood and explore a landscape that was personally significant to him, which he painted from memory. Students will think about spaces in the natural world personally significant to them and explore one memory through writing and visual arts. In the visual art exercise, they will practice collage techniques and visual texture.

Essential Question

What role can memory play in art-making?

Resources

Grant Wood (1891 – 1942), *Spring Turning*, 1936. Oil on Masonite. Gift of Barbara B. Millhouse, Reynolda House Museum of American Art, 1991.2.2

reynoldahouse.org/collections/object/spring-turning

Georgia O'Keeffe (1881 – 1986). *Pool in the Woods, Lake George*, 1922. Pastel on paper. Gift of Barbara B. Millhouse in memory of E. Carter, Nancy Susan Reynolds, and Winifred Babcock, Reynolda House Museum of American Art, 1984.2.9

reynoldahouse.org/collections/object/pool-in-the-woods-lake-george

Asher B. Durand (1796 – 1886). *Rocky Cliff*, circa 1860. Oil on canvas. Museum purchase, Reynolda House Museum of American Art, 1977.2.6

reynoldahouse.org/collections/object/rocky-cliff

Grant Wood Biography from Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, crma.org/Grant-Wood

Growing a Nation: The Story of American Agriculture, agclassroom.org/gan, especially the agricultural timeline.

National Agriculture in the Classroom, agclassroom.org, including state agriculture facts for NC: agclassroom.org/teacher/stats/northcarolina.pdf

North Carolina Agriculture in the Classroom, ncagintheclassroom.com

“The Dust Bowl,” a primary source set from the Library of Congress, loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/dust-bowl-migration

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Vocabulary

Regionalism
visual texture
personal narrative
collage

Materials

- Computer and projector, for comparison exercise prepared with three works from Reynolda House collection: Grant Wood's *Spring Turning* (1936), Asher B. Durand's *Rocky Cliff*, and Georgia O'Keeffe's *Pool in the Woods, Lake George* (1922)
- Notebook paper and pencil, for writing exercise
- Sketchbook or plain paper for drawing
- Medium-heavy weight drawing paper or bristol board
- Pencils
- Magazine pages, cut into sections of colored areas and sorted by general color categories (greens, blues, yellows, browns, red, whites/creams)
- Scissors
- Glue sticks

Exercise 1: Close Looking + Compare/Contrast

Students will view two or three landscape paintings and articulate how they compare and contrast.

Estimated Time

10-15 minutes; longer with some adaptations and ages

Instructions

In turn, display side-by-side the images of Grant Wood's *Spring Turning* (1936) with Asher B. Durand's *Rocky Cliff* (ca. 1860) and Georgia O'Keeffe's *Pool in the Woods, Lake George* (1922). Ask students to compare and contrast these works.

Suggested prompt questions:

- What is going on in this artwork? What do you see?
- In what ways are these two artworks similar?
 - ◆ What is the artist portraying?
 - ◆ What materials does the artist use?

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- In what ways are these two artworks different?
- ◆ How would you describe each artist's style? Is this representational? Is this artwork abstract?
 - ◆ If you were in this place, where would you be standing?
 - ◆ Describe the level of detail you can observe.

Adaptations

For greater challenge, ask students to write a paragraph describing each artwork, focusing on descriptive words and considering the elements of art.

To simplify, show *Spring Turning* and *Rocky Cliff* individually. For each, ask students to name one thing they see. Work around the concept that each is painting of a landscape, an outdoor scene. For *Spring Turning*, work with students to observe what is being shown (farmers plowing) and identify the colors and try to describe the textures. For *Rocky Cliff*, work with students to observe what is being shown (the side of a mountain cliff and the rocks and vegetation there) and whether the artist is showing us a scene close to us or far away.

For early elementary, Pre-K and younger exceptional children's classes, focus on Grant Wood's *Spring Turning*. Discuss farms and consider the animals shown in the painting. Show a picture of a plow and talk about what a plow does. Return to the painting and consider what might be happening in the image, given that the people are using plows. Talk about how the landscape could look like a quilt. Consider how you would see this scene—are you in an airplane?

Exercise 2: Memory of Place, Reflective Writing

Students will recall a place in the natural world that is or was significant to them and then write about their memory of this place.

Estimated Time

10-20 minutes for discussion and instruction; individual activity time variable (minimum 10 minutes)

Instructions

Begin by looking at and discussing *Spring Turning* by Grant Wood. Discuss the biography of the painter. When considering the painting, discuss the time in which the painting was made. See what students know about the time period and note that

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all-purpose tractors with rubber tires were popular for farmers in the 1930s. Consider the tools you see the farmers using. In his unpublished autobiography, Wood wrote, “I liked to stand on a crest of a hill and watch father or [farmhand] Dave Peters plowing in a field below. They guided the plow parallel to the sides of the rectangular field and progressed concentrically inward, cutting great square patterns with light stubble centers.” Help guide the students to understand that Grant Wood was painting a memory, not what farming was like in 1936.

Ask students to think about places in the natural world that have been important to them, perhaps a memory of a place they saw in travels or a place near their home that they have visited often. Have students write a short personal narrative and descriptive writing that describes this place and shares a memory associated with it.

Adaptations

For a greater challenge, ask students to research what was happening in the 1930s as well as agricultural technology of the time. Then, ask them to bring this information to the consideration of the artwork, and help guide them to the conclusion that what Grant Wood painted in 1936 could not have been what he would have seen. Discuss why Grant Wood might have made this choice.

To simplify the written assignment, focus on descriptive writing. Begin by listing adjectives that describe the place. Consider all five senses.

For early elementary, Pre-K and younger exceptional children’s classes, work collectively to describe a landscape at or near your school. Think about the elements of the landscape, the colors, and other descriptive words that capture the five senses.

Exercise 3: Textured Landscape

Students will create an artwork of their remembered landscape, practicing collage methods while considering visual texture.

Estimated Time

10-20 minutes for discussion and instruction; 30 minutes to 2 hours for collage activity, depending on age

Instructions

Discuss how Grant Wood was a Regionalist artist and discuss some of the main characteristics of regionalism (local themes, realistic styles, popular in early 20th

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century America). Looking carefully at Grant Wood's *Spring Turning*, consider how the artist used visual texture and other elements of art.

On scrap paper or in a sketch book, students should make a sketch of the remembered landscape from the lesson above. Then, encourage them to divide the sketch into broad sections, abstracting the forms slightly. (Do this with a marker or heavier pencil marks to delineate sections of material.)

On a separate paper (all media paper or Bristol board), have the students draw the scene again, focusing on these sectioned areas.

Invite students to select pieces cut from magazines that can fit in the sections of their landscape, creating a complete image. Use scissors to cut to size and glue sticks to adhere to the backing paper. Encourage students to start with the background and work their way to the foreground. Students should think about the colors and textures of the collage materials as they select them for their final artwork.

Adaptations

For a greater challenge, ask students to research Regionalism and identify the characteristics of it. They could select one artist and try to sketch their landscape in the style of their selected regionalist artist.

To simplify, have students create a drawing of the remembered or an imagined landscape, focusing on specific sections (a hill, a second hill, a road, etc.) and only mark the outlines of these features. Then, with marker or colored pencil, have the students make repeated marks to create a different texture pattern in each section of their landscape.

For early elementary, Pre-K and younger exceptional children's classes, return to the landscape selected in the previous activity. Have the students name different features of the landscape and identify the color of each section. Lay out collage materials. Ask students to find sections of material that has similar colors to the features of the group landscape. Option A: Create a prepared worksheet with sections for each element of their landscape and have them glue a magazine cut out beside it that best resembles the color of that element, making a kind of swatch book. Option B: Once each child finds sections of magazine cut outs that resemble the colors of their landscape, invite them to make a collage with their selected materials. Encourage them to tear pieces

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and glue them to the paper to create an abstract collage. Option C: Grid a paper into six sections. Have students select 6 pieces of monochromatic colored paper cut from magazine pages. Then, ask students to describe each of their selections, such as the color and texture and write the descriptive word(s) in each section.

Assessments

- Teachers will assess students' written work by noting use of descriptive words and painting compelling images with words.
- Teachers will assess student collages by evaluating neatness of craft and appropriateness of paper selection to the scene.
- Students should be able to describe what a collage is and articulate why they selected which pieces for each element.

NC Standard Course of Study

Essential Standard: V.1, Use the language of visual arts to communicate effectively.
Met for Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th

Essential Standard: V.2, Apply creative and critical thinking skills to artistic expression.
Met for Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th

Essential Standard: V.3, Create art using a variety of tools, media, and processes, safely and appropriately
Met for Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th

Essential Standard: CX.1, Understand the global, historical, societal, and cultural contexts of the visual arts.
Met for Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th

Essential Standard: CX.2, Understand the interdisciplinary connections and life applications of the visual arts.
Met for 2nd, 6th,

Essential Standard: CR.1, Use critical analysis to generate responses to a variety of prompts.
Met for Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, [5th, 6th, and 7th if self-evaluation added to meet standards], 8th