

Illinois State Museum – MuseumLink Art

Cast of Characters: Three Chicago Painters: Visual Thinking Skills Activity

Here are some additional ideas for conversations to have with your students about the paintings in this Web module.

Objective: Students will be able to identify and discuss several sensory elements, organizational principles, and expressive qualities artists used in the images on the Web (remembering that they are seeing reproductions, not originals) and these qualities in other artworks they may see.

Grade Levels: 1-8

Suggestions:

1. Gertrude Abercrombie and Julia Thecla lived and worked in Chicago at the same time. Look at their three works to see if you can find any similarities in subject matter, style, or method of painting. Give possible explanations. Consider subject matter, color palette, use of line, use of shape, and use of shading for each artist.
2. Emil Armin painted landscapes out in the open air. He may have changed things around to compose his picture, but the subject matter is natural. On the other hand, the landscapes of Julia Thecla and Gertrude Abercrombie are imaginary. Do you think they ever painted in the open air? Why or why not? Do you think there is any reason to draw out-of-doors from life if you are a fantasy painter?
3. The women in the paintings of Julia Thecla and Gertrude Abercrombie almost never looked straight at the viewer. Why do you think they were painted that way? What is the meaning of the figures looking away or gazing inward?
4. Each of the three artists had a different palette of colors they often used. Make a list of each artist's major colors from the three paintings shown. Compare the lists. Then think of several descriptive words for the mood or feeling you get when you look at their paintings. Is there a correlation between their choice of colors and the mood they project? Why or why not? Consider colors used, mood of the paintings and possible causes for the mood for each artist.
5. Gertrude Abercrombie placed objects carefully in her landscapes, such as *Reverie* and *Queen and Owl*. *Queen and Owl* can be described as symmetrical, since the tree and the queen are placed on either side of center. In *Reverie*, Abercrombie places the objects in the landscape asymmetrically and carefully balances them. Make a line drawing of the landforms in *Reverie* on white paper. Draw and cut out the brick box, a tree, a grove, a kerchief, and a moon in the same proportion. Experiment by placing these objects in different places to create a balanced effect. What happens to the mood and meaning of the painting when the placement of the objects changes?

6. Emil Armin's Open Bridge is about the hustle and bustle of Chicago. The one spot of forward movement is the little speedboat at the bottom. Cover it with a fingertip and tell what happens to the composition. What is thrown off? Why? What purposes does the boat serve in the composition?
7. Compare each of the artist's photographs in the biographies with their self-portrait paintings. What did you learn from photographs that you did not learn from the paintings? What did you learn from the paintings that was not apparent in the photographs? Why?

Illinois State Board of Education Goals and Standards addressed:

Goal 25A: Know the language of the arts; understand the sensory elements, organizational principles, and expressive qualities of the arts.
(Early Elem.-25.A.1d, Late Elem.-25.A.2d, Middle- 25.A.3e)

Activities: Ideas for Talking about Artworks with Your Students

A. Questions to prompt looking at an artwork: answers should point back to something seen in the work. (How do you know? Or What do you see that makes you think this?)

1. What do you see in this (painting, sculpture, etc.)?
2. What else do you see in this painting?
3. Where do you think this is? What kind of place?
4. What are the people in this painting doing?
5. What kind of mood or feeling does this painting convey?
6. What colors are used? How does the color express a feeling or meaning?
7. Are there lines? What kind? How is line expressive in this painting?
8. What shapes are there? How is shape expressive in this painting?
9. How do the values of the colors express meaning?
10. Is there repetition of line or shape or color? What effect does this have?
11. How and where does your eye move around in this painting? What path does it follow? Why? What is the effect?
12. What feeling do you have after looking carefully at this painting? What gives you that feeling?
13. Have you ever seen anything similar to this painting? What was it? How was it similar?
14. Have you experienced anything like what is going on in this painting? What? Where? When? How did you feel about it? Does this painting have the same feeling?
15. What else do you see in this painting?

B. Activities to spin off from the conversation about an artwork.

1. Narrate the story that this artwork tells.
2. Write an advocacy statement (or design a poster with words) about the subject for social change that appears in the artwork (if applicable).
3. Write a fictional biography of one of the people (figures) that appear in the painting.
4. Write down the fictional conversation that the people in the artwork are having.
5. Act out the scene with dialogue.

6. List the sounds and smells that you would experience in the setting of the painting.
7. Choose and play a piece of music that would be in harmony with this artwork.
8. Tell what you would experience if you walked through this painting.
9. Use historical resources to research things (food, homes, clothes, work, play, transport, education) depicted in a painting. Does it accurately portray life in the era of the painting? Why or why not? What does this mean? What is the artist trying to say?
10. Write a fictional short story about the artwork (starting from the place, the objects, the figures, the style, etc.)