

Speaking of Art: Language Development Through Art Interpretation

Explore new ways of teaching expository writing and oral speaking skills using art as a starting point. Language development, writer's workshop techniques, and writing for different audiences are addressed.

Selected Works from NOMA's Permanent Collection

1. *Brown Pelican* from *Birds of America*, John James Audubon, 1828 – 1838
2. *Portrait of Louis XIV*, Claude LeFebvre, 1670
3. *Milk Vendor*, Abraham Willemsens, 17th century
4. *Battle of New Orleans*, Jean Hyacinthe de Laclotte, 1815
5. *Portrait of a Young Woman*, Amedeo Modigliani, 1918
6. *Paul Léautaud in a Caned Chair*, Jean Dubuffet, 1946
7. *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, Umberto Boccioni, 1913 (cast 1970)
8. *Suit of Armor in Dōmaru Style*, Edo period Japan, 18th century
9. *Kómó Association Helmet Mask (Warakun or Komokun)*, Bamana Peoples
10. *Commemoratory Stele Portraying a Warrior King and Captive*, Maya Culture, 780 C.E.
11. *Restrained*, Deborah Butterfield, 1999
12. *We Stand Together*, George Rodrigue, 2005

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KEYS TO DEVELOPING GOOD QUESTIONS

Our goal in providing materials for bringing artwork into the classroom is to offer educators new ways to engage students by teaching observation skills, triggering prior knowledge, and encouraging the development of language arts skills which incorporate viewing and visually representing as well as listening, speaking, reading and writing. In preparing lessons which incorporate art, an educator must make every effort to help students make connections between what they can observe in the work of art and new information that is being taught about the art or artist or about other skills being addressed in the lesson. The lessons included in this packet, when used together with representations of objects from the collection of the New Orleans Museum of Art, encourage students to look carefully at the artwork and to use observation skills to develop an understanding of the piece. The suggested writing activities encourage students to practice expository writing skills by writing about their experience. As an educator, you can help students develop their observation skills by asking questions which encourage looking. The following suggestions will encourage conversation in your classroom. Make sure students look carefully throughout the picture and ground their answers in observations.

General questions that motivate observation:

- What is going on in this picture
- What do you see here?
- What more can you say?
- Can you or anyone add to that?
- Does anyone see other things?

What do you see that makes you say that?

- Why do you think that?
- Where do you see that?
- What do you mean by that?
- Can you say more about that?

Leading questions that extend the process of observing and interpreting art:

- Who do we see here?
- What can or cannot be surmised about the characters depicted?
- How old do you think they are?
- What can you guess about their personalities?
- What do you think they do?
- Do they seem to be posing?
- Where do they seem to be looking?
- How can we tell this?
- Where is this taking place?
- What can we learn from the setting?
- When is this happening? (time of day, season or era) Clues include dress, furniture, architecture or decor. Time and season may be indicated by color and light. These issues are not concrete.

Follow up with “What about...?”

Point out specific details not yet discussed including objects, clothes, activities, body language, gestures, expressions, colors and so forth.

***Brown Pelican* from *Birds of America*, 1828 - 1838 John James Audubon, French-American, 1785-1851 Engraving and aquatint on paper, 37 7/8 x 24 7/8 in.**

Gift of the Gheens Foundation, 87.60

John James Audubon was born in Saint Domingue (now Haiti), the illegitimate son of a French sea captain and plantation owner and his French mistress. He was raised in Nantes, France by his stepmother. From an early age he expressed an interest in birds, nature, drawing, and music. In 1803, at the age of 18, he was sent to America, in part to escape conscription into the Emperor Napoleon's army. He lived on a family-owned estate at Mill Grove, near Philadelphia, where he hunted, studied and drew birds, and met his wife, Lucy Bakewell. While there, he conducted the first known bird-banding experiment in North America. By tying colored strings around the legs of Eastern Phoebes, he learned that the birds returned to the very same nesting sites each year. Audubon moved with his wife and two sons into the Kentucky frontier where he ran a trading post, but after unsuccessful forays into business, he decided to follow his artistic pursuits and set a goal for himself of recording every bird in America. Audubon remade himself as a frontiersman and naturalist and worked tirelessly to create and promote his new project that he would call *Birds of America*.

In 1820, Audubon began travels along the Mississippi River in search of ornithological specimens. He was hired by the family of Eliza Pirrie at Oakley Plantation in Louisiana (located north of New Orleans between Jackson and St. Francisville) to teach drawing lessons to the young girl. This proved to be an ideal job as it afforded Audubon much time to roam and paint in the woods. In 1826 Audubon set sail from New Orleans to Liverpool, England taking with him a portfolio of over 300 drawings. He was met with great acceptance in England and was able to raise enough money to begin publishing *Birds of America*. This monumental work was published serially between 1827 and 1838 and consists of 435 hand-colored, life-size prints of 497 bird species, made from engraved copper plates of various sizes depending on the size of the image. They were printed on sheets measuring about 39 by 26 inches, referred to as an elephant folio because of its great size.



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Portrait of Louis XIV, 1670 Claude LeFebvre, French, 1633-1675
Oil on canvas, 46 x 35 1/4 in.

Gift of Hirschl and Adler Gallery, 56.67

Louis XIV ruled France from 1661 until his death in 1715. He was a great patron of the arts, embarking on several grand building campaigns including turning the hunting lodge at Versailles into a spectacular palace. After moving his government to Versailles from Paris, he became known as The Sun King. Many paintings, sculptures, dance and music pieces were commissioned to celebrate the accomplishments of Louis XIV and to perpetuate the royal image. His reign was marked by aggressive attempts to make territorial gains for France and the country was often at war with the Netherlands to the north and Spain to the south.

This portrait by Claude LeFebvre depicts the king at the age of 32 just as construction for Versailles had begun. Louis XIV is shown wearing full military garb including symbols of royalty such as the fleur de lis. His commanding presence expresses his power as absolute monarch and his assured expression displays his strength in his role as ruler.



The Milk Vendor, 17th century Abraham Willemsens, Flemish, active 1627-1672
Oil on canvas, 34 x 45 1/2 in.

Bequest of Bert Piso, 81.267

During the seventeenth century, artists in northern Europe continued the traditions established during the Northern Renaissance of creating highly polished works full of detail. This period is remembered as the Golden Age of Dutch art and culture. The Dutch East India Company cornered the market in Indian products such as spices, silks and metals and the Dutch shipping industry thrived. As a result, the merchant class grew in wealth and supported the growing art market. For the first time artists were able to support themselves by painting for the larger audience of the open market. Art dealers sold works to middle class citizens who were often just as interested in art as an investment as they were in its aesthetic value. Protestant churches were not decorated with paintings and sculptures, but works were bought to decorate the homes of the middle class. Four distinct categories of were popular during this period: portraiture, still lifes, landscapes and genre scenes, or scenes of everyday life. By specializing in a specific subject matter, artists could establish their own niche in the market.

Abraham Willemsens, who worked in Antwerp in the mid-seventeenth century, often painted pleasant outdoor scenes of peasants. In this painting a milk man is shown delivering milk to a maiden in the garden of a country home. They are surrounded by children and animals and the viewer can sense a friendly exchange. A second woman waits patiently at the gate with her urn and a child .



***Battle of New Orleans, 1815* Jean Hyacinthe de Laclotte, American, 1766-1829 Oil on canvas, 33 3/4 x 40 3/4 x 2 in.**

Gift of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, 65.7

Jean Hyacinthe de Laclotte moved to New Orleans from Bordeaux, France in 1804 and worked as an architect, theatrical scene painter and art teacher. In 1810 Laclotte and a partner opened an architectural firm and an art school based on the instruction offered at the Paris Academy of Fine Art. He served as assistant engineer in the First Louisiana Militia during the War of 1812 and recorded the Battle of New Orleans with sketches made on the battlefield. He developed the sketches into the formal composition *Battle of New Orleans* which is believed to be the most accurate depiction of the conflict.

Laclotte's considerable artistic ability enhances the work without diminishing our sense of the accuracy of the portrayal of the event seen through the eyes of a man who was an artist and soldier. The artist presents a birds-eye view of the battlefield where Andrew Jackson and his militia are seen entrenched behind the Rodriguez Canal in Chalmette. The red-coated British army led by General Pakenham is depicted executing a direct frontal attack on the Americans. The action occurred on the grounds of the Chalmette Plantation east of the city of New Orleans on the 8th of January, 1815.



***Paul Léautaud in a Caned Chair, 1946* Jean Dubuffet, French, 1901-1985 Oil with sand on canvas, 51 1/4 x 38 1/8 in.**

Bequest of Victor K. Kiam, 77.287

Jean Dubuffet was fascinated by what he called "Art Brut," raw art or outsider art created not by professional artists but by children, psychiatric patients or prisoners and he emulated such crude energy in his own work. Although Dubuffet began to study art at the Académie Julian in Paris in 1918, he left after only six months and took over his father's wine selling business. Only in 1942 after encountering Dr. Hans Prinzhorn's book *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill* did he return to artistic pursuits. Dubuffet painted portraits of his friends in Paris by creating unusual combinations of materials such as ashes, dust, sand and cinders mixed with paint and varnish. Into such mixtures he inscribed child-like representations of the human figure. Accessories such as hats, neckties, watches and buttons often take on aggrandized roles much as they do in the drawings of children. Paul Léautaud was a writer and critic in Paris. His exact likeness is not sought in the portrait, instead Dubuffet represents him in a caricature exaggerating his wrinkles, necktie and the caning of the chair on which he sits.



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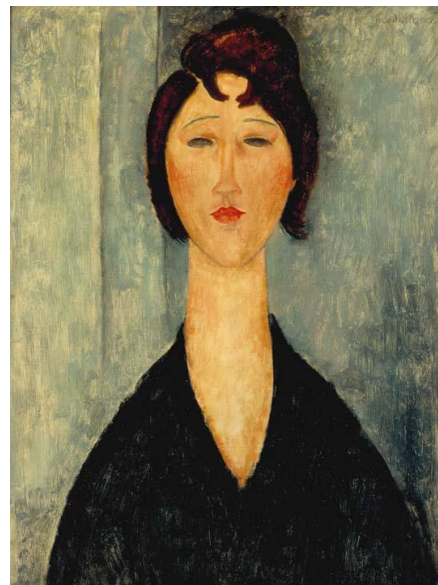
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Portrait of a Young Woman, 1918
Amedeo Modigliani, Italian, 1884-1920
Oil on canvas, 24 x 18 in.

Gift of Marjorie Fry Davis and Walter Davis, Jr. through the Davis Family Fund, 92.68

This portrait of an unknown young woman displays the distinctive style of Italian modernist Amedeo Modigliani, who developed a range of psychological expressions through elongation of form. Modigliani was born to a Jewish family in the Italian port town of Livorno. He was the youngest of four children and often suffered with bouts of illnesses which would continue to plague him throughout his life. Modigliani began to study painting at the age of thirteen and was encouraged by his mother who took him to Naples, Rome, Florence and Venice where he encountered great works of art in the museums of these cities. He moved to Paris in 1906 and settled in Montmartre, then the focal point of the avant garde. Suffering from tuberculosis which he had developed as a child, Modigliani chose to hide his disease and embraced a life of drinking and drugs. His health problems caused him to return to Italy, however he returned to Paris in 1908 where he studied sculpture under Constantin Brancusi. He returned to painting when materials for sculpture became scarce during World War I. Influenced by Brancusi's simplicity of form and African art which he saw in Paris' Musée de l'Homme, Modigliani developed a personal style in portraiture distinctive from the modern "isms" of the early 20th century including cubism, futurism, Dadaism and surrealism. Modigliani painted portraits of his artist friends living in the bohemian Montparnasse section of Paris in the early 20th century including Pablo Picasso, Chaim Soutine, and Jacques Lipchitz.



Unique Forms of Continuity in Space, 1913 (cast 1970)
Umberto Boccioni, Italian, 1882-1916 Polished bronze, 46 1/2 x 34 1/2 x 14 1/2 in.

Gift of Sydney and Walda Besthoff, 2008.134

This iconic sculpture by futurist Umberto Boccioni depicts a human-like figure moving forcefully through space. Boccioni was associated with the Italian futurist movement which rejected conventions of the past and valued themes associated with contemporary concepts of the future including speed, technology, youth, and violence. The Futurist Manifesto issued in 1909 proclaimed "We want no part of the past." Boccioni translated Futurism into three-dimensions with the creation of this sculpture that, as its title implies, embodies the concept of movement through space. The figure possesses human-like qualities but remains ambiguously industrial. Acute, clinging drapery whips around the legs and body of the figure suggesting that it is moving at great speed. Action is further implied by the artist's choice of material. The highly polished bronze ironically amplifies the appearance of fluid movement through space.



Suit of Armor in Dōmaru Style, 18th C. Edo period Japan
Iron, leather, lacquer, silk and brass.

Gift of J. Aron Charitable Foundation, Inc., 92.940.a,.b

The Edo period of Japan lasted from 1615-1868 and was ruled by the Tokugawa Shogunate from the city of Edo. For centuries, Japan was ruled by a military leader called a Shogun, who led a class of samurai warriors who were loyal to him and could be called upon at any time for battle. Armor such as this was derived from Japanese armor created as early as the 1st century BCE from wood and held together by leather thongs. By the 4th century, iron was used in the construction of armor. These suits consist of a one-piece body armor which is close-fitting, light weight and flexible. Originally worn by common foot soldiers, higher ranking military officials came to prefer this style by the 14th century and added the helmet and arm guards. Dōmaru armor serves both functional and decorative purposes as the beauty and craftsmanship of the armor reflect the glory of the samurai house. The two gold crests of a prominent family appear on the helmet (*wakidate*) while in the center is Daikoku, the deity of good fortune, who represents the strength and power of warriors and the ability to destroy any obstacle. The horn-like protrusions display the Japanese word for “possibility,” referring to the potential for victory.

The Edo period witnessed an unprecedented flourishing of the arts and a period of peace and relative stability. Although designed for protection during battle, a suit such as this would have been primarily ceremonial during this peaceful time. It would have been displayed in households on the eleventh day of the first month of the year to wish good military fortune to the Emperor.



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Kómo' Association Helmet Mask (Warakun or Komokun) Bamana Peoples, Mali, Africa
Porcupine quills, antelope horns, iron, sacrificial organic material, 14 x 28 x 8 3/4 in.

Anonymous gift, 87.205

The Bamana People are members of the Mande culture of western Africa. Initiation societies within the larger patrilineal culture influence the political and religious structures within each community contributing to the continuation of moral and educational mores. Bamana communities adapted many different art forms for utilitarian purposes including pottery, carved wooden sculpture and a variety of masks.

This horizontal helmet mask from the Kómo' Association would have been worn in private meetings of the Kómo' society, a group of men who act on behalf of the community especially in times of crisis or illness. Kómo' masks are created by blacksmith-sculptors who combine representations of various animals with herbal substances from the bush and mineral components in specialized recipes designed to channel spiritual energy. Horns may refer to aggression while quills represent wisdom and the capacity for violence. Bird feathers generally refer to divination – the ability to choose the right path for the future. During a performance, the wearer of such a mask would charge out of the bush in an aggressive manor meant to frighten away ill spirits. Throughout its continued use, the mask is nourished with sacrificial offerings which add to its encrusted look.



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Commemoratory Stele Portraying a Warrior King and Captive, 780 C.E. Maya Culture, Guatemala, El Peten, El Caribe site Limestone, 58 1/2 x 38 in.

Museum purchase through Ella West Freeman Foundation Matching Fund and Edith Stern Birthday Fund, 69.9

The Maya culture lived in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica on what is today the Yucatan Peninsula including parts of Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and Belize. Their artwork often commemorated important persons on monumental stone stele that were incorporated into civic planning. The stele are usually sculpted in low-relief with figures portrayed in a distinctive combination of profile and frontal representations. In this example the warrior is shown with his torso turned toward the front and his head and legs in profile. He wears a loincloth, decorated waistband and high wristlets. On his head is a huge skeletal headdress, possibly a representation of the Death God, Ah Puch. His headpiece is wrapped by a turban and decorated with a long, feathered, sweeping tassel. The feathers are from a quetzal, a bird found in Central America known for its brilliant plumage of green and blue. Only Mayan kings were allowed to wear quetzal feathers and they were highly valued for trading purposes. The king carries a tasseled spear in his right hand and a shield embellished with a representation of the sun in his left hand. The captive, seen completely in profile, kneels in submission by the feet of the warrior. His hair is tied in a top-knot, a frequently used symbol of a captive. The bottom part of the stele is missing. The Mayans developed a writing system using glyphs and a sophisticated calendar based on their knowledge of astronomy. Twelve glyphs are inscribed on the left and right sides of this stone stele and some have been identified as long-count date glyphs which can be computed to correspond to the year 780 CE.



***Restrained*, 1999 Deborah Butterfield, American,
b. 1949 Cast iron, 86 x 99 x 46 in.**

Gift of the Sydney and Walda Besthoff Foundation, 2000.202

Deborah Butterfield was born and raised in California. After she studied art at the University of California in Davis, she and her family moved to a ranch in Montana where she continued her art career. Butterfield's sculptures are limited to a single subject: the horse. The sculptures stand quietly or are lying down, with a suggestion of little or no action.

Butterfield's horses are always either larger-than-life size, or on a miniature level, three to four feet in length. She forms her horses out of cast wood pieces and recycled materials, constructing the found pieces to an exact fit. Butterfield limits her range of subjects, materials, and size, to envelop herself in the subject matter and as she says, "to try to communicate with another species, which happens to be the horse, and perhaps to gain more and different information."

Butterfield's process for creating wood-based horses is to construct a horse from weathered and well-worn found wood pieces and then to photograph the wooden sculpture from all angles. Next the sculpture is disassembled and each wood piece is individually cast in bronze. Butterfield reconstructs the horse with the bronzed "wood" using the photographs of the original wooden horse to put each bronze piece in its exact place. Finally, the bronze horse is painted with patina to make it look like the original weathered wood.



***We Stand Together*, 2005 George Rodrigue, American, b. 1944 Steel, aluminum, chrome, polychrome, acrylic paint, 96 in.**

Gift in memory of Mignon McClanahan Wolfe, 2007.23

George Rodrigue was born in New Iberia, Louisiana surrounded by the culture and legends of his Cajun heritage. At the age of nine, he became ill with polio and his mother encouraged him to paint to pass the time. Rodrigue's family and teachers recognized his talent and supported his artistic development. After attending the Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles and then living in New York for a short period, the artist returned to Louisiana where he felt a strong connection to his heritage. He began to paint reflections of Cajun culture as a way to record the history of his people often drawing inspiration from the landscape and folklore. The oak tree became a symbol of Acadian steadfastness and strength.

In 1984 George Rodrigue painted a series of Cajun ghost stories, depicting the mysterious werewolf known as the loup-garou with a matted blue coat and red eyes. After that, he couldn't stop painting Blue Dogs and the ubiquitous canine has made appearances all over the world. The friendlier Blue Dog is based on a former pet of the artist and has been rendered in paint, print and aluminum. In *Together We Stand* the dog stands boldly in a three dimensional depiction of bright red, yellow, and blue. Blue Dog's connection to his Cajun heritage can still be felt in the placement of the sculpture amongst the oak trees of the Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden.



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