



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2001 Volume II: Art as Evidence: The Interpretation of Objects

Look Before You Think: How To Appreciate a Painting

Curriculum Unit 01.02.03
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Introduction

The primary objective of my curriculum unit, entitled Look Before You Think: How To Appreciate a Painting, is to facilitate my third-graders' enjoyment of and response to fine arts specifically, paintings. Every year we make visits to both the Yale Art Gallery and the British Art Center where the docent takes us around and we view samples from each category of artwork (landscape, portrait, still-life and abstract art) and talk about what we see. The students are always so enthusiastic about these museum visits that I see a wonderful opportunity to further stimulate and enhance their art appreciation experiences. To this end I have created a teaching tool that will help my students to become more closely engaged with particular paintings on exhibit at these museums.

I have focused on paintings of four well-known artists from the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries: Vincent Van Gogh's *The Night Café* (1888); Salvador Dali's *The Persistence of Memory* (1931); Pablo Picasso's *First Steps* (1943); and Edward Hopper's *Sunlight in a Cafeteria* (1958). Each painter will offer us the opportunity to more closely 'study' a different aspect of art. With Picasso we will look at his expressive use of lines and shapes. We will consider how Hopper is able to create moods and suggest 'stories' in his scenes of modern life. We will examine Van Gogh's distinctive feeling for color and we will explore Dali's imaginative expression of ideas.

Our study will begin with a brief and simplified presentation of the history of painting. I have used the book, *The Usborne Story of Painting*, to design this component of the unit. This will provide my students with an historical context for the four artists on whom we will be focusing. After that, it is useful to explore the craft of painting to give the students an idea of what painters do and the materials they use, introducing them to such terminology as easel, palette, studio, gallery, hue, canvas, sketch, modeling and composition. I plan to use Laura Conlon's *Painters* in this section of the unit.

I hope to encourage my third-graders to look more closely at paintings as special objects and to come to a more conscious sense of how they are viewing them. Our seminar has provided me with the opportunity to learn and practice the method of object-analysis as taught by Prof. Prown. I have employed this method in my own study of these particular paintings (and others) along with my readings about these works.

I have discovered several especially valuable books that will help me to introduce art to children more effectively: Richardson's *Looking at Pictures* , Knapp and Lehmborg's *Off the Wall Museum Guides for Kids* , Clarkin's *National Gallery of Art Activity Book* , and *Meet The Masterpieces* by Chertok, Hirshfeld and Rosh. These select sources introduce basic concepts and vocabulary of art in a very interesting way through their simple yet entertaining prose, creative layouts, and beautiful color reproductions of famous art works.

The curriculum unit is interdisciplinary with a strong emphasis on literacy, and so I plan to immerse the children in readings about the lives and works of the selected artists whom we are studying. For this purpose I will use biographies by Mike Venezia, who has written (and illustrated) an excellent children's series entitled, *Getting to Know the World's Greatest Artists* . In the final section of the unit I have provided my students with opportunities to explore how artists use color and to experiment with what they learn in creating artworks of their own using various media on paper, such as tempera paint, watercolors, craypas, crayons and colored pencils. Of course, the unit will also include a number of planned visits to the Yale Art Gallery that would go beyond the general focus of the initial visit set up by the Comprehensive Arts Program.

I teach third-grade in a self-contained classroom at Lincoln-Bassett Community School. My students are primarily of African-American descent, a heterogeneous group with varying abilities in the 8-10 age range. Although I have designed this unit with them in mind, I am confident that it could easily be adapted by teachers to suit the K-3 grades, if not older.

This unit will be divided into five sections:

- I. An Introduction to the History of Art
- II. Meet the Artist and His Painting
- III. Art elements of a painting
- IV. Looking at a Painting
- V. Experimenting with Color

Objectives

The unit objectives include:

- to develop an elementary understanding of the history of art.
- to learn about the basic elements of a painting including perspective, composition, color, light and symbolism.
- to look at each selected painting and analyze it, moving from first impressions to a more detailed

examination.

to read about the lives of Picasso, Hopper, Dali and Van Gogh.

to learn about when and why the painters created the specific paintings selected.

to view three of the original paintings used in this unit at the Yale Art Gallery.

to experiment with color using a variety of media.

to write one's reflections on each viewed painting in a journal.

to write descriptive paragraphs about what you experience with your five senses when you imagine yourself inside the painting.

Section I: An Introduction to the History of Art

The following brief introduction to the history of art provides necessary background information for any teacher using this unit. This introduction can also be presented to the students with the teacher determining the degree of detail to present. I plan to use a time-line that displays the time periods cited below. As I introduce each time period or art movement I will mark and label it on this time-line. I also plan to show my students samples of artwork that exemplify the particular period or movement we are looking at and so I will use two primary sources for this purpose: Anthea Peppin's *The Usborne Story of Painting* and Sir Lawrence Gowing's *A History of Art*. Both books contain a wealth of color reproductions of artwork reflective of the time periods we will be examining.

We can mark the appearance of the earliest paintings 30,000 years ago during the Old Stone Age. Using various colors of earth mixed with blood, fat, egg white or plant juice, prehistoric people made paints to create their pictures, largely of animals, on cave walls. Their purpose seemed to be for magical or religious reasons. Some of the most famous cave paintings were found in France and Spain.

Ancient Egyptians, (3100BC - 1500BC) in an effort to record things, painted scenes on temple walls, in tombs of dead people and even inside coffins. Through their paintings we have learned a great deal about their life and culture.

Classical Art includes paintings and sculpture of both the ancient Greeks and their conquerors, the ancient Romans (1700BC - AD300). They painted figures and scenes not only on walls of palaces and houses but also on vases.

In Europe during the Middle Ages (AD300 - AD1400) where the official religion of the Roman Empire was

Christianity, paintings were largely of a religious nature telling of the life of Christ. This period showed a wide use of frescoes (painting done on damp plaster) on church walls and painting of wooden altarpieces. Also, monks made religious books where they painted elaborate pictures and decorations on parchment called vellum (illustrated manuscripts).

During the Early Renaissance in Italy (AD1400 - AD1500) painters, influenced by the classical art of the ancient Greeks and Romans, began experimenting more with styles of art. Using tempera pigments mixed with egg yolk and water, they painted people and scenes in more realistic ways. During this same time period, painters in Flanders and Germany were using oil paints rather than tempera and their paintings, many more of which were of a non-religious nature, were filled with detail and use of colors that were jewel-like. As in Italy, painting of portraits was very popular.

The High Renaissance in Italy (AD1500 - AD1527) produced such well-known artists as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael and is considered the period where artistic achievement reached its greatest height. Many religious paintings (including frescoes), commissioned by popes, were done on the ceilings and walls of various rooms in the Vatican.

In Italy from AD1530 to AD1600 many painters sought to initiate ways of painting that were markedly different from those employed in the High Renaissance. In one dramatic style called Mannerism, artists distorted the figures and space in their paintings. Venetian artists created their own style demonstrating dramatic use of color and light and employed this style in portraits as well as in scenes on altarpieces. This period also marked more prevalent use of oil paint on canvas rather than wood panels.

In the 17th century Italy, Flanders and Spain saw a new Baroque style of painting develop and flourish. Artists produced large-scale pictures, especially suitable for churches or palaces. Particularly fashionable was the painting of scenes on ceilings. During this same time-period, Holland, which had become an independent and prosperous trading nation, became the center where numerous painters thrived. Instead of religious paintings which the Protestants there did not approve of, subjects for paintings included still-life objects, landscapes of Holland's countryside, portraits of Dutch merchants and scenes of everyday life.

In the early 18th century the Rococo style of painting was developed in France. Houses for the wealthy were decorated in this style using large windows and mirrors, delicate colors and elaborate carvings. Rococo paintings portrayed colorful 'fairylane' scenes of life the way French aristocrats would like to have lived. The first public galleries were created during this time. In England the Neoclassical style of painting was developed during this same century. These artists imitated the more plain and simple style of the ancient Romans and often chose figures from ancient history and myths as their subjects.

In Europe during the early 19th century (AD1800 - AD1850) two new styles of painting arose: Romanticism and Realism. Using strong colors and dramatic effects, Romantic painters sought to express feelings and emotions in their art and were particularly drawn to painting historical scenes that were exciting and mysterious. In strong contrast were the Realist painters who sought to portray the world in realistic terms and often chose as their subjects peasants in their everyday lives.

The Impressionist movement in France flourished during the 1870s and continued well into the 1880s. The artists of this movement were more interested in expressing atmosphere through their creative use of light and color and were less interested in the actual subject matter of the painting. Because of their interest in light, impressionists painted outdoors. Favorite subjects included scenes of nature and life in the cafés of Paris.

By the 19th century there was a decline in patronage. Art works were no longer simply commissioned by the Church, royalty or rich people. Because art dealers began selling uncommissioned art to the public, artists themselves felt they now had more freedom to paint what and how they liked. This gave rise to modern art movements where such experimentation began to take place.

A variety of different styles was developed in the post-impressionist era. These artists were influenced by photography and Japanese prints that found their way to Europe in the late 19th century. The invention of photography in the 1830s, with its ability to produce highly accurate pictures, encouraged many artists to move away in different directions from painting realistically accurate scenes and figures.

In the 20th century in both Europe and America, abstract artists used colors and shapes to express their ideas and their feelings. Representational artists used new methods and subjects in representing real objects as in Surrealism and Pop Art.

Painting developed and flourished in other parts of the world as well. In India, from 600BC to AD1900, art was primarily influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism and later, as a result of Muslim invaders, the most famous of which were the Moguls, by Islam. The Moguls brought the Persian tradition of painting miniatures to India and the subject was never religious but rather involved scenes of life in palaces or were portraits of rulers and their families. Similarly, in the Far East, from AD200 to AD1900, art was influenced by religion, primarily Buddhism and Taoism. Chinese painters expressed simplicity and stillness in their paintings which were typically done on scrolls of paper. During the 18th and 19th century, Japanese artists produced colored prints by using carved wooden blocks that showed scenes of everyday life there.

Section II: Meet the Artist and His Painting

Vincent Van Gogh

Vincent Van Gogh is one of the greatest Post-Impressionist painters. Born in Holland in 1853, Van Gogh did not become a painter until later in life. In fact, it was at the age of twenty-seven that he decided to devote himself to art, after which time he produced some 1500 oil-paintings, watercolors and drawings during his short career (from 1873-1890). It is said of Van Gogh that "he felt through his eyes and showed his feelings with his paintbrush" (Richardson, 71). Taking his own life, he died in 1890 at the age of thirty-seven. Throughout his life Van Gogh was often poor, sick and hungry, and he did not receive any real recognition of his work even among most of his peers during his lifetime. Now he is one of the most popular painters of all time.

The Night Café, 1888

Van Gogh painted this picture while living in the southern French town of Arles. He loved the beautiful countryside around this small provincial town and would walk for hours looking for open air scenes to paint. Bringing all he had recently learned in Paris about using light and color, Van Gogh painted grassy sun-soaked landscapes, agricultural scenes, fishing boats on the coast and blossoming fruit trees of spring during the day. At night, instead of resting, he would go out to paint more. He often chose café scenes. Candles that he had stuck in his hat provided him with necessary light by which to paint at night.

The Night Café takes us indoors to the Café de l'Alcazar, where Van Gogh lived from April to September, 1888.

In fact, he painted it for his landlord in lieu of rent. Van Gogh's intent was to present the darker side of the café-world at night. In this painting he "explored the terrors of the night's underworld in strident colors" (Wallace, p.113). Van Gogh knew well the many temptations of the bars and brothels in Arles. The dark reds and greens are meant to express, as Van Gogh himself describes, "the terrible passions of humanity" (Schapiro, p.70) and contribute to the stifling atmosphere of the room. This café is a place for those with no home in which to find refuge, and we see drunken figures slumped over tables. The clock above informs us that it is after one in the morning. The empty chairs pushed aside were earlier used by those who have long since gone home to bed. Overhead are lamps encircled with wild haloes of light. The strong perspective of this picture leads the viewer to the bright yellow doorway, the silhouette of which seems to match that of the man hovering near the billiard table. (Some critics suggest that this doorway leads to other forbidden enticements). In a letter to his brother, Theo, Van Gogh explains that in *The Night Café* he sought "to express the idea that the café is a place where one can ruin oneself, go mad or commit a crime" (Wallace, p.93). His purpose, however, is to warn rather than indict, and his particular emphasis on strong color is meant to convey a feeling of hopefulness rather than of despair. But Van Gogh's use of bold colors also probably reflected his mental imbalance. Soon after completing *The Night Café* he suffered a mental breakdown.

Salvador Dali

Born in Figueras, Spain, in 1907, Salvador Dali had his first drawing lesson at the age of ten. During his younger days his primary interest was in Impressionism. As a student in Madrid, Dali went on to experiment with a variety of styles, including Dadaism and Cubism, but by 1929 he had become a leading figure in the Surrealist movement and remained so during the next ten years. Dali, with his trademark handlebar mustache and flamboyant manner, brought a flair for showmanship to his approach to modern art. His most famous paintings are typically dreamlike landscapes filled with bizarre, puzzling objects. He referred to these productions as 'hand-painted dream photographs' and they have otherwise been described as "a handmade color photography of concrete irrationality" (Weyers, p.19). Dali died at the age of eighty-five. He is one of the twentieth century's most popular and most unusual artists.

The Persistence of Memory, 1931

Salvador Dali got the idea for this painting after an evening meal when he found himself staring intently at the remains of runny camembert cheese. He projected this image using drooping forms of clocks as well as the 'soft self-portrait' melting on rocks underneath it, and added them to the barren landscape. In contrast to these elements of softness and perishability are the gaunt rocks and strange blocks to be found in the painting. All that is man-made or human has been conquered by time, including the artist's own self, while the cliffs in the background (the landscape of Cap de Creus) covered with bright light, display a permanence where the true 'persistence of memory' lies. In this painting with its haunting, dreamlike reality, linear time as measured by mechanical clocks is not important, as all things human are transitory. When compared with the eternity of the landscape, technical measurement of time has no value or importance. The live ants crawling on the solid clock have been said to suggest our inevitable death. We are all conquered by time. "The 'soft watch' acts as a metaphor for the ephemeral nature of mankind, our inevitable decay and our subsequent obsession with the nature of time set against us" (Bradbury, p.70).

Pablo Picasso

Born in Malaga, Spain, in 1881, Pablo Picasso showed a phenomenal talent for drawing and painting when very young. His father, a painter and art teacher, encouraged his son's pursuit of art and he went on to become one of the greatest artists of the twentieth century. At the beginning of his career he moved to Paris,

and it was in France that he would spend most of his life. Picasso is probably most famous for the incredible number of styles and genres his work went through during his long and prolific career. His work can best be studied in terms of the particular women (wives, mistresses) that he happened to have relationships with during particular phases of his life. He was always eager to try something new in his art and he was at the forefront of the development of modern art (along with the artist, Georges Braque, he founded the Cubism movement). He was celebrated not only for his paintings but also for his sculptures, drawings and prints. "Picasso brought a new sense of freedom to both painting and sculpture" (Mason, p.5). Up until he died at the age of ninety-two, Picasso continued to explore and experiment with new ways of artistic expression.

First Steps, 1943

Picasso painted *First Steps* during World War II when France had been occupied by Nazi Germany. Instead of fleeing the country as many did, Picasso chose to stay in Paris and continue his work there. Inevitably his work reflected the grim atmosphere of that time-period-reflected in the grayish colors of this painting. But life goes on, and maternity was always a strong and recurrent theme in Picasso's artwork. *First Steps* shows a mother guiding her child (personified by his maid, Inez and her son) as he makes his first attempts at walking. She lovingly bends over him, holding both hands to give him the support he needs to step forward. In both the sad eyes of the mother and the jagged tense lines of the child's straining body Picasso is expressing the heavy burden and terrible toll that the war had taken on the people of France. His choice of dark blues, grays and maroons conveys a very somber mood. However, Picasso offers us hope in this touching scene of a child learning to walk. "Through his drawing, composition and magnified scale, Picasso suggests the momentous drama of the scene" (Barr, p.232). The Cubist distortions serve to convey this drama from the child's perspective with all the insecurity he must feel in trying to walk for the first time. The mother is painted very large as the child would see her. The reassuring closeness of the mother helps the child to overcome his apprehension (as evidenced in his puckered face). With determination he lifts his left foot and steps forward. Picasso's characteristic style of distorting and dislocating the subjects in this painting is very effective and "serves to enhance the original subject rather than destroy it" (Barr, p.232).

Edward Hopper

Edward Hopper is considered the twentieth century's foremost American realist painter. He was born in Nyack, New York, in 1882 and began drawing at an early age. The blackboard his mother gave him for Christmas when he was seven became his first easel. After high school he went on to study art illustration and then painting under the direction of Robert Henri, who encouraged Hopper to look at life around him and paint what he saw. And so he did! Hopper painted the streets of New York, storefronts, gas stations and interior and exterior views of buildings. As is true of many self-made artists, Hopper was slow in reaching maturity. It was only in his early forties that he started to express himself fully in his painting. It wasn't until then that he began to achieve real recognition for his work (p. 39, Goodrich). Hopper painted the ordinary things he saw around him but he managed to instill in them a quality of drama and mystery that greatly dignified their existence. The salient mood of many of his paintings is the alienation of the individual within society a universal theme which accounts for his enduring popularity. Hopper died in 1967 at the age of eighty-five.

Sunlight in a Cafeteria, 1958

"Although Hopper did not offer political or social statements in his art, he was profoundly interested in mood and human interaction" (Levin, p.49). In *Sunlight in a Cafeteria*, which Hopper painted in his later years, the feeling is one of loneliness and isolation. Two people, a man and a woman, sit at separate tables in a sunlit cafeteria. The view is one of being inside the room looking out. The eyes of the two subjects do not meet and,

in fact, there is no interaction between them, and the warm sunlight that fills the room "serves to create the frozen stillness of this composition" (Berkow, p.78). While the woman sits in the full light, the man is placed in a semi-shadow. There is an unmistakable emotional tension created between them in which the viewer hopes one of them will break the silence and strike up a conversation. But the room with its empty, polished tables does not encourage such an interaction. Even the sunlight seems to act more like a barrier between them. Hopper effectively expresses how lonely our modern, urban life can be. People remain strangers toward each other even in close proximity.

Section III: Art Elements of a Painting

I will begin this section by reading Laura Conlon's book, *Painters*, to the class. In word and through photographs it provides a very simple description of what a painter does and the material he/she uses. At this time I will introduce such vocabulary terms as canvas, easel, gallery, palette, sculptor, sketching and studio.

From this basic description we will move to a more detailed study of the important elements found in a painting in an effort to prepare my students for the upcoming viewing and analysis of the four paintings described in Section II. I have used the following sources in creating my descriptions of these elements: Clarkin's *National Gallery of Art Activity Book*, Richardson's *Looking at Pictures*, and Knapp and Lehmberg's *Off the Wall Museum Guides for Kids*.

I will be using the four paintings focused on in this unit to lead my students through an examination of the basic art elements found in paintings. To better appreciate the artist's use of color and perspective, we will study Van Gogh's *The Night Café*. Lesson Plan I provides a detailed example of my approach. For the purposes of examining how light is used and mood created we will look at Hopper's *Sunlight in a Cafeteria*. To examine how lines and shapes are used in a painting we will study Picasso's *First Steps* and to better understand how an artist plans a composition or uses symbols we will look at Dali's *The Persistence of Memory*.

I have simply defined these basic elements of painting below. The teacher may find these descriptions useful when preparing to present these concepts to their students. However, it is essential that they be presented within the context of a painting to ensure a clearer understanding and appreciation of their role in and effect on the painting.

Distance

There are three distances to look for in a painting. The part of the painting closest to the viewer is called the foreground. The middleground is the part between the foreground and the part which is farthest away is called the background. It's important to train yourself to look at each of these distances one after the other consecutively. In this way, the viewer will be able to take notice of and see things that he/she might have missed in the initial viewing of the painting.

Color

Artists use colors to convey feelings and moods within their painting. They can create a cheerful mood by placing bright colors next to each other. They can create a calm or gentle mood by placing soft colors

alongside each other. Basically colors can be divided into warm (reds, oranges, yellow) and cool (blues, greens and violets) colors. It is interesting to notice which colors the artist uses, which ones stand out and how colors make you feel as you view the painting. When complementary colors (blue and orange, red and green, yellow and purple) are used alongside each other, they intensify each other and look extra bright. The artist also uses black to tone down colors (shades) and white to lighten them up (tints).

Light

Painters spend a lot of time studying the way light falls. They often experiment with light in their paintings simulating natural light or using hidden spotlights to focus your attention on what they want you to notice in the painting. Light affects the color of the subject and objects in the painting look real and solid if the artist shows the way light falls on them. Use of light and darkness also conveys particular moods in a painting. It is important to look for the light sources in the painting and describe their effect on the appearance of the subjects and on the overall mood it communicates.

Line

Artists use various types of lines (diagonal, curved, vertical, and horizontal) to express ideas and feelings in their paintings. Be sure to look for various lines in a painting and note where they are and what they seem to convey.

Shapes

An artist uses shapes to express ideas. They may be circles, triangles, rectangles, ovals, or squares. When arranged close together they help add energy to a painting. When placed far apart they look more serene. It is interesting to find both small and large shapes in a painting, counting how many you find of each and noting the similarities they may possess.

Composition

Artists seriously plan how they will arrange elements like color, line and shapes in their paintings. This is called composition. Some artists make a master plan before they actually begin the painting. Others plan as they go, deciding how to arrange things as they paint. The composition helps to draw the viewer's eyes into the picture and guides him/her as he/she walks through the painting. A composition is often likened to an invisible skeleton that holds the painting together.

Perspective

Through perspective artists convey 3-dimension space. Perspective makes a flat picture look 3-dimensional and have depth. How an artist layers the three distances of foreground, middleground and background is one way he/she creates perspective. To create deeper space an artist may make parallel lines come together. To give the effect of distance the artist may make the objects in the background smaller in size, lighter in color or less detailed.

Symbols

Artists often include symbolic objects in their paintings. A symbol can be defined as something which has a special meaning or a special message. Artists use them to express such ideas as life, death, hope and faith in God. A painting may have hidden meanings within it as expressed in the symbols the artist uses. For example,

the sunflower in Van Gogh's paintings represents ideas of the sun, the south, and hope. In paintings by Van Dyck, the sunflower symbolized the king, Charles I.

Section IV: Looking at Pictures

I have devised a series of thought-provoking questions for each of the four paintings that we will view. I have patterned these questions after those used in *Meet The Masterpieces* . They will fall into two categories: 'First Glance' questions and 'Closer Look' ones. In the first category I ask more open-ended types of questions in an effort to elicit my students' first impressions of what they are seeing before they even think about it. These are followed by the second type of questions and comments where I provide background information, such as when the artist lived and where, what techniques he used, and the ideas or themes detectable in the paintings.

The Night Café

First Glance

1. What words would you use to describe the mood of the people in this painting?
2. Look at the painting. Now close your eyes. Which person in this painting do you remember the most? Why?
3. Name three activities that are happening in this picture.
4. How many objects in the room can you name?
5. How does this painting make you feel?

Closer Look

1. How does Van Gogh make our eyes move around the painting?
2. Besides color what else helps move our eyes around the painting?
3. What kind of place is Van Gogh painting?
4. Can you find the vase of flowers in the room? What might it symbolize?
5. Who are these people?
6. Are there any people looking at us?
7. Which people are closest to you?
- 8 What is in the background of this picture?

The Persistence of Memory

First Glance

1. How many objects can you find in this picture?
2. What sounds might you hear if you were there?
3. How does this painting make you feel?
4. What adjectives would you use to describe this scene?
5. What would you title this picture?

Closer Look

1. What objects are in the background?
2. Is anything moving in this scene?
3. Is the scene inside or outside? How can you tell?
4. What is the biggest and boldest shape in this painting?
5. Is this a realistic painting. Why or why not?
6. What do you think soft clocks are a symbol of?
7. What is the background of this picture?

First Steps

First Glance

1. How many people can you find in this painting?
2. What are the people in the painting doing?
3. Are they related?
4. What sounds might you hear if you were there?
5. How does this painting make you feel?

Closer Look

1. Why does the mother look so large?
2. What is the child learning to do?
3. Did you notice the two sides of the child's face are different? Cover one side and look at the other. What is the child feeling? Now switch sides. What is the child feeling?
4. Why do you think Picasso painted the mother and child in a nonrealistic way?
5. How does Picasso show us the mother's feelings about her child?

Sunlight In A Cafeteria

First Glance

1. What are the people in the painting doing?
2. Name the objects you see in this painting.
3. How does this painting make you feel?
4. What season of the year might this scene be taking place in?
5. What would you title this painting?

Closer Look

1. Are there any shadows in this painting?
2. Are the people related to each other? How can you tell?
3. How does the woman feel? How does the man feel?
4. What objects tell us this is a cafeteria?
5. How is the room lit?
6. What shapes do you see in this picture?

At this point, after my students have gained experience in looking extensively at these four paintings, examining their elements and considering thought-provoking questions about them, they are now ready to 'revisit' two of the paintings, *The Night Café* and *Sunlight in a Cafeteria*. and compare and contrast them. Lesson Plan II offers a detailed explanation of how I plan to accomplish this.

Section V: Experimenting With Color

Color is a very complex art element and elicits diverse responses from people. Colors can be labeled as warm or cool causing people to feel certain emotions. Very simply defined, warm colors approach red-orange and cool colors approach blue and green. Colors suggest certain moods and can symbolize abstract ideas like freedom and hope. "Response to color is so complex because we react to it in three ways that are all merged together: visually, emotionally, and symbolically" (Silberstein-Storfer, p.85). It therefore seems appropriate that my young students, who have been carefully examining paintings done by some masterful artists, have the opportunity to experiment with color and create some artwork of their own, perhaps trying to imitate the styles they have seen.

In designing the following lessons, I have used Topal's *Children and Painting* as my primary resource. According to the theory of color, there are six basic colors on the color wheel which are divided into two groups. The primary colors are red, yellow and blue and cannot be made by mixing other colors. The secondary colors, green, orange and purple, lie between the primary colors on the color wheel and are made by mixing the primary colors together. In order for my students to get a clearer sense of how colors combine to create other colors, I will begin by having them paint a color wheel. Lesson Plan III will describe this project in more detail. Essentially, my students will take a circular paper, 12" in diameter, and, using tempera paints, paint small circles of each of the primary, secondary and intermediate colors on the wheel, correctly positioning each one. They will mix the colors on small mixing palettes and take delight in the combinations they create. Through this lesson they will learn which colors contrast, which ones dull each other, and which color combinations are pleasing to the eye. As a result of this project, they will gain a better understanding of why the color wheel is called the artist's reference sheet.

Our next project will be composing a color collage and mixing media. I will instruct the students to choose one color and then try to find tints, shades and mixtures of that color from a box of assorted types of colored paper. After cutting the papers into geometric and freeform shapes, they will arrange them on a large piece of white drawing paper and then glue them on. After the glue has dried, they will prepare to paint over the paper shapes with tempera paint using the originally selected color, a related color and white. They can mix the colors on a small palette or directly on the paper and are to cover the whole paper with a mixed range of hues and tints. These mixed-media artworks will be displayed in the room.

I will begin this next lesson by displaying a poster size print of Georges Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, explaining that this artist invented a new painting technique called pointillism. I will call attention to the way in which the colors in this print seem to recombine as we view them. Pointillist painting consists of small dots and touches of pure bright color. When viewed from a distance the dots blur together to form other colors. In this lesson the students will have the opportunity to imitate this technique. They will quickly notice how mixing dots of certain colors create other colors. It is best to use white paper that is small in size (5" x 6") because it will take time to fill the paper with dots. They can choose between using

crayons, craypas, tempera paints (using Q-tips) or felt-tip markers for this project. I will instruct them to use three primary colors plus white and they will be able to decide on their own subject: a scene from a window, an object in front of them, a photograph or a magazine picture.

In this fourth activity my students will gain an appreciation of the range of shades within a single color. For this project they will use watercolors on white drawing paper. I will instruct them to begin by selecting a simple subject or scene and to sketch it first in pencil. I will tell them that we are going to create a monochromatic painting using only one color but we will use many shades of it. By mixing different amounts of water with the selected color, they will be able to create and use many shades to paint over their sketch. If done correctly, they will be able to show a 3-dimensional nature of their subject. I will instruct them to use dark tones for the shadow and light tones for areas exposed to light.

I have found that young people have an acute curiosity about art and a real appetite for examining its possibilities in order to give expression to their own feelings and insights. It is never too early (more often it is too late!) to provide opportunities for nurturing and developing a vital and informed appreciation of art in our young people, and that is what I have set out to do in my curriculum unit.

Lesson Plan I

Objectives: To focus on and gain an understanding of how the elements of color and perspective can be used in a painting. To examine how Van Gogh employs them in his painting, *The Night Café*, to express mood and feelings.

Materials: A large print of Van Gogh's *The Night Café*, notebook paper, pencils.

Procedure:

1. Begin by having the class sit around the large Van Gogh print. Refer to the posted time-line to indicate the year (1888) in which it was painted. Encourage their careful examination through the use of such questions (taken from Section IV of this unit) as:

1. Look at the painting. Now close your eyes. Which person in this painting do you remember the most? Why?
2. Name three activities that are happening in this picture.
3. How does this painting make you feel?
4. How does the artist, Van Gogh, make our eyes move around the painting?
5. What kind of place is he painting?
6. Are there any people looking at us?

2. Introduce the element of color by saying that artists use color to express their feelings and create a particular mood in a painting. Elicit from the students which colors could be called warm colors and which ones could be called cool colors. After listing them, ask them how they feel when they look at the colors that Van Gogh has used. Point out the thick brushstrokes he uses and explain that they are typical of his style. You may want to add that yellow was his favorite color and he used it a lot. Have the students imagine how they would feel if their classroom were painted in dark red or yellow or light green or blue.

3. Introduce the element of perspective by explaining that this painting is actually flat so how does the artist show that the draped doorway on the back wall is farther away. Help them to actually use their fingers to trace the diagonal lines (impressing on them that in a museum this is not allowed because it would ruin the painting) on the floorboards and billiard table. Next they can trace an imaginary diagonal that starts at the heads of the figures sitting by the right wall all the way to the draped passageway and also the one that starts at the head of the man sitting by the left wall, past the heads of the couple and on to the same passageway. Explain that we call this element perspective and that artists use it to show the distance in a painting, that is, to make some things look farther away than others.

4. End with a 10-15 minute reflection time when the students write about how this painting makes them feel and why.

Lesson Plan II

Objectives: To compare and contrast aspects of Van Gogh's *The Night Café* and Hopper's *Sunlight In A Cafeteria* using a Venn diagram. To imagine oneself in the painting and describe in paragraph form what you would experience with the five senses.

Materials: Large prints of both paintings for display in the classroom, postcards (from the Yale Art Gallery) of both paintings for partner use, a Venn diagram drawn on large chart paper, dark markers in three colors, notebook paper, pencils.

This activity follows a close analysis of each of these two paintings so that the students already have a familiarity with them.

Procedure:

1. Explain that we are now going to revisit these two paintings and explore ways that they are different and similar. Reiterate the obvious fact that, of course, they were done by two different artists and in two different time periods. Refer to the time-line. Explain that now we are going to take a closer look to find out more.
2. Before breaking up into pairs, provide a guide for the class by listing some aspects that they will want to include in their comparison such as: colors, shapes, lines, figures, objects, time of day, season of the year, mood, what action is taking place and how you feel when you look at it.
3. Provide each pair with writing paper which they will fold in half to create two columns labeled same and different. Also, pass out the two postcard reproductions of these paintings for each pair to refer to. The teacher then walks around, offering assistance and monitoring. Allow 15-20 minutes for this activity.

4. Ask all the students to reassemble in one large group and ask individuals to offer their findings as you record their ideas in the appropriate places (in different colors of markers) on the Venn diagram. Expect and encourage discussion as this is done. What follows are some possibilities that you may include:

(chart available in print form)

5. Following this activity, ask the class to imagine they are in the picture. Ask them to write in paragraph form about what they are doing there and to describe what they see, hear, taste, smell and touch. Ask them also to include how they are feeling in this setting.

6. Ask partners to share their writings with each other and then volunteers may share their writings with the larger group.

Lesson Plan III

Objectives: To see and understand the relationships between the primary and the secondary colors by making a color wheel.

Materials: containers of yellow, red and blue tempera paint, small plastic spoons, paintbrushes, rectangular pieces of light-weight cardboard to use as palettes, paper towels, water dishes, paper circles 12" in diameter, small bottle caps, chart paper

Procedure:

1. Begin by demonstration. Using a small bottle cap for each primary color (red, yellow and blue) color, trace and then color in each circle in paint on the paper color wheel. Be sure to position them correctly to form a triangle where the blue circle is in the top left section, the red one directly across from it on the top right side and the yellow circle at the bottom of the wheel. Emphasize how you must wash and wipe your brush each time you change colors. Take a moment to list on chart paper what these primary colors are. Then circulate to assist the students in this part of the activity.

2. Explain that now we are going to mix colors carefully to produce our secondary colors to show on this wheel. Elicit from the students which two colors they think will make orange, green and purple. Demonstrate mixing small dabs of color on the palette. Emphasize that you put only a small dab on the palette and then, using a different spoon, dab on the other color. Tell them that it is important to mix the colors with your brush until there are no streaks left. When the color is made, students are then to paint the color circle on their wheel. There is a particular order in which this is to be done. First, make yellow on top of red to create orange. Paint the orange circle between the yellow and red one on the wheel. Then add blue to yellow to create green and paint that circle between the yellow and blue circles on the color wheel. Finally, add blue to the red to create purple and paint the circle between the red and blue circles. Emphasize again that you must rinse your brush after creating each new color.

3. List on the chart the secondary colors of orange, green and purple.

4. Allow the color wheels to dry. They will be used for future reference by the students as they do their

paintings.

adapted from Cathy Weisman Topal's *Children and Painting*, pp. 46-47.

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