



## Introduction

These units show how to combine the study of art and literature in the classroom. The course descriptions are geared to the elementary, middle-school, or high-school levels, but all feature an attention to visual art as a key facet of students' education. All feature too a belief that *close analysis* -- learning to look attentively at one thing, be it a painting or a short story or a poem -- is vital.

In what follows, readers will encounter not only a variety of American artists, writers, and events, but also a number of helpful suggestions about how to look closely at individual works of visual and literary art. In a culture in which images move past us at a dizzying rate, in which the instant access to overwhelming amounts of information has never been greater, these course descriptions offer an antidote of sorts: the chance for students (and teachers) to stop and look at individual works of art and literature, even at specific *details* in these works. There is a trust implicit in this purpose. The seminar proceeded with this idea in mind: that with the right methods, the right patience and praise, the ability to discern something closely and imaginatively can be a source of pleasure and pride to students of all abilities. Consequently none of the units here is a broad survey touching on dozens of things and none of them closely. Only two of the units touch on Thoreau's *Walden*, but the spirit of that book suffuses much of what you will find here: the virtues of singular and prolonged acts of attention, of speaking and writing about that attention; and the discovered sense of self that might arise from that attention.

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