



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## Teaching a Second Language through Art

Curriculum Unit 81.04.12  
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Language and art can complement and assist each other. When a concept is not clear in its written form, the visual form can assist the learner to comprehend, and likewise, when the visual form is confusing and unclear, the written form can facilitate understanding.

Through the ages art has been a means of visual expression used to convey a wide spectrum of tangible and intangible ideas. Art can take the spectator into different times and into different worlds. It can also be used to introduce different levels of vocabulary to learners of a second language.

Learning a second language for most adolescents is, a very difficult and trying experience. They are not only trying to adjust to a new language but are also trying to adjust to themselves and a new environment. They are self-conscious about almost everything, but they are especially self-conscious about their performance in the classroom. By shifting the focus from the student to an object, everyone participates, thus eliminating a certain degree of self-consciousness.

The experience the student has with art in the classroom has to be enjoyable for both the student and the teacher. If the atmosphere in the classroom is too serious or stressing it will not serve any useful purpose. In fact, if there had been any of even a slight chance of getting the student involved with art (even if superficially) it might disappear completely if not approached with care. I do not propose a deep study of art but to use art as a teaching tool in language development. The underlying meaning or messages in the piece of work are not important at this point, it serves as a means of instruction, we are not really studying it (the painting itself). This situation can be compared to a boat sailing on the ocean. We are concerned only with the boat, not with everything below it. The student becomes familiar with the works of art but s/he does not really have to understand them, it is the first impression that the student receives as a new observer that will provide the starting point in introducing vocabulary.

### **Objectives:**

This unit is designed to take the Middle and/or High School students into a learning experience using visual forms instead of the usual textbook approach. This does not mean, however, that the book will not be used, but that the art form will complement the skill or concept that is being taught from the textbook.

A practical process using art as a means of instruction will be developed. In other words, my basic idea of using art as a teaching mechanism can be applied to any skill, be it naming geometric forms, numbers,

clothing, furniture, verbs, or adjectives. First, it is important to define the concept or skill that is to be taught. Suppose you want to teach the names of various geometric forms (rectangles, squares, triangles, circles, semi-circles, ovals), a great number of modern paintings can help you teach your skill. The second step then, would be to select those paintings which would assist you best to teach and at the same time help the students to learn. After selecting the paintings, you can prepare several activities for the students.

I believe Modern Art can prove most useful in developing these units. Its variety enables the teacher to select several pieces to use in the classroom in developing a concept. Modern Art ranges from Impressionism to the Abstract. This period of art covers a span of more than seventy years, from the late nineteenth century to the 1960's. This period can be expanded to include the present contemporary painting. Modern Art can be divided into different modes of expression because the artist and art was (and is) evolving as the purpose of painting changed. I am including a list of the various movements within this period of art and some well-known exponents in each. The Yale University Art Gallery has selections by the majority of the painters listed.

### *Impressionism*

Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, Degas

### *Neo-Impressionism*

Cezanne, Seurat, Gauguin, van-Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec

### *Symbolism*

Bonnard

### *Fauvism*

Vlaminck, Matisse, Dufy, Marquet

### *Cubism*

Picasso, Braque, Gris, Leger, Delaunay

### *Futurism*

de Chirico

### *Expressionism*

Munch, Kokoschka, Rouault, Modigliani, Chagall

### *Naive Painting*

Rousseau, Utrillo

### *Dadaism and Surrealism*

Dali, Ernst, Klee, Miro

### *Abstract*

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Kandinsky, Mondrian

*Contemporary*

Pollock, Rothko, de Kooning, Albers

Of course, this list is very much incomplete, but even as it is, there is such a wide variety of styles and themes for the teacher to select from that more than likely s/he will end up with more than needed. Therefore, the process of selecting just the right painting(s) is very time consuming, but I have done that for you in the lessons in this unit.

A painting is very much like a story and vice-versa; the student can write a composition or tell a story on what he or she sees in it, or draw what s/he “sees” in a story or composition. Before s/he can do this, a sizeable vocabulary (depending on the group’s ability and familiarity with the language) has to be built. Beginners in the task of learning a second language are facing an overwhelming number of words, which known or unknown to them, are the building blocks of the language. If the student is to survive while going through this process, it has to be programmed in such a way that it does not adversely affect learning. One does not want to give too much information to them at one time but then, neither is too little acceptable.

To be able to bring art into the classroom, the teacher may purchase reproductions for his/her personal use or use the services provided by the galleries and art museums. The Yale University Art Gallery through its Education Office can be most useful in providing tours of the gallery to public school students at no charge and also in offering their expertise and resources. The gallery is located at 1111 Chapel Street, New Haven and their phone number is 436-2490. There is more information on the gallery at the end of the unit.

The gallery has fine representative collections in the various art periods. Their Modern Art collection is on the second floor of the gallery and has proven very suitable in the development of this unit. Their contemporary art collection varies every few months so I have not included these paintings in this unit. I am very grateful for the help and attention given me by the Education Office through Mrs. Janet Dixon and Mrs. Janet Gordon.

### **Strategies:**

In the development of the process through which the student will go, the visual form can provide a vehicle for transmitting instruction. The art work can be used to: 1) name an object or a group of objects, 2) develop a list of appropriate adjectives to describe the objects, 3) convey activity words (verbs), 4) establish relationships of objects through prepositions, articles, conjunctions, and possessive pronouns, and 5) in some cases depict present and/or past actions. Questions as: “What is this?”, “What are these?”, or “What is that?”, “What are those?”, and the phrases “This is . . .”, “These are . . .”, “That is . . .”, and “Those are . . .”, should be developed before introducing any painting to the class. It is not a difficult process and most language books offer plenty of exercises in the first few chapters geared for the mastering of these forms and the verb *to be* in the present tense.

Textbooks, many times, are limited in the vocabulary they develop, for example, they teach the names of relatively few colors and seldom teach degrees of darkness or lightness in a color. Simple visual concepts such as light blue or dark brown are not taught in the lesson concerned with color. With the aid of the visual form, student(s) and teacher are able to enrich their vocabulary that is so necessary to be able to express complete descriptions and meanings.

One of the first skills taught the learner of a second language is color. Teachers usually point out various

objects in the classroom that are of the specific color being taught. I intend to eliminate that extra burden of looking around the room and then trying to decide whether that strange word that the teacher is saying is the name of the object or the name of the color of the object(s). By carefully selecting four or five paintings the names of ten to twenty colors can be taught with ease.

After this unit, geometric shapes can be introduced. This vocabulary will prove useful to those students taking math, geometry, or drafting. This concept is followed by the unit on the numbers. These three units can be worked using the same paintings, as we will see later in the lesson plans. Each skill (color, geometric shapes, numbers) can be worked on for two to five days. The lesson need not last for the whole class period but only as long as the teacher deems it necessary for the students to learn. There can be quizzes or activities prepared to test if the student has learned. Other skills developed at the same time are the usage of singular and plural agreements, for example, "This is yellow.", "These are yellow.", or "This is a circle.", "These are circles." can be joined to make longer, more meaningful sentences such as; "This is a yellow circle." or "These are yellow circles.", so skills are not isolated but are integrated to become a fully developed unit.

Another lesson dealing with the house and family includes the names of the parts of the body and the identification of the different members of the family, will be developed. Possessive pronouns and interrogative words are introduced in this unit; demonstrative pronouns will be reviewed. As the units progress, the students will incorporate what was learned in the previous unit(s).

The last lesson to be developed will include various verbs which will be very useful in the students' everyday usage.

The art work will be used with the purpose to develop vocabulary only. It will be non-threatening to the student because we will not go into deep analysis, which is not what is important at the moment. Unconsciously, the student can have his/her reactions and if s/he wishes will be free to express them and possibly ask for meaning or an explanation of the piece of art before him/her. The works are mostly non-objective and are those which I feel are most useful in achieving the purpose of the lesson.

## Lesson Plan I

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***Objectives Students (1) will learn the names of ten colors and shades of some colors, (2) will count to ninety-nine, (3) will learn the names of the lines and several geometric figures, and (4) will be able to differentiate between singulars and plurals.***

***Materials needed Slides (available at the Yale University Art Gallery, Education Office) or reproductions of:***

1. Piet Mondrian— *Composition , Fox Trot A , Fox Trot B*
2. Josef Albers— *Homage to the Square: Unconditional, Homage to the Square: Broad Call*
3. Richard Anuszkiewicz— *Splendor of Red*
4. Alexander Calder— *Fourth Flurry* (mobile)
5. Kasimir Malevich— *The Scissors Grinder*

6. Wassily Kandinsky— *Bright Circle*
7. Patrick H. Bruce— *Composition V*
8. Fernand Leger— *Viaduct, Composition #7*

**Procedure Students will view the slides and teacher will point out different colors. Mondrian's works include white, blue, yellow, black, and red. Gray and light blue are in Albers' *Homage to the Square* ( there is a series of paintings with this title, and all are useful in the teaching of the colors) along with white and black. In *Splendor of Red* , red, blue, and green intermix. Only white and black are found in Alexander Calder's *Fourth Flurry*. *The Scissors Grinder* is a review of the colors already presented. *Bright Circle* introduces orange and brown. *Composition V* has all the before mentioned colors plus purple, turquoise, and several tertiary colors. Leger's works can be used to review the names of all the colors.**

After the teacher has pronounced the name of the color once or twice, the student points out another place in the painting where there is the same color. The teacher prepares a ditto with an imitation of one of the paintings (I suggest Mondrian style) and have the students color it in (as they wish) with crayons, magic markers, or watercolors. These should be displayed for all to see. Along with their own paintings, the students can write simple sentences describing what they did or what colors they chose.

Using the same group of slides, numbers are introduced. Using the same order as before, and the phrases, "There is . . ." and "There are . . .", the student counts whatever amount of shapes that there are within the painting. The names of the circle and square are given at this time. Numbers should first be given to the students from one to ten; then from eleven to nineteen, and then twenty to one-hundred to be counted in tens. Twenty-one to twenty-nine should be used as the model for counting from thirty to ninety-nine.

In Mondrian's paintings, counting will not go over ten unless we use one of his paintings found in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, *Broadway Boogie Woogie* , and in this one painting, students are able to count well into the sixties and seventies. Activities in simple addition and subtraction can be incorporated at this point. Students will be drilled orally on the names of the numbers and will be given written quizzes.

Once again using the same set of slides, students will learn the names of several geometric forms which include, straight lines (horizontal, vertical, and diagonal), curved lines, parallel lines, triangles, squares, rectangles, circles and amorphous forms.

Mondrian's *Fox Trot B* and *Composition* are excellent beginning points for the study of straight lines, vertical and horizontal, and the squares and rectangle are introduced. The teacher may say, "There is a red rectangle.", or "There is a white square.", "Rectangles and squares are made up of four straight lines." In Albers' *Homage to the Square* there are four squares, one within the other. *Splendor in Red* main focus point is a square.

Alexander Calder's work is made up of small and large circles. A classroom activity to construct mobiles is encouraged. This mobile can contain the geometric shapes the students have learned so far. These can be made easily with thin dowels or straws, string and colored construction paper. The students cut out six or seven shapes in different colors of construction paper and perforate a hole at the top of each shape. They tie a piece of string to the shape end tie the string to the straw or dowel. These strings should be of different lengths to create interesting balances. A final string is tied to one end of the stick to the other to allow for hanging from the ceiling. The finished product should look like this:

(figure available in print form)

The shapes can also be cut out of heavy cardboard and painted or they can be cut out of plastic lids and decorated with magic markers.

*The Scissors Grinder* has several triangles along with circles, squares, and rectangles. This painting is more complicated in terms of geometric forms but can prove to be a lot of fun for the students to see how many triangles can find. In Kandinsky's *Bright Circle*, the students will review the different shapes and lines. Curved lines and semi-circles are added here. In *Composition V* students find many amorphous shapes, and will not find many of the shapes studied before but they can search for the ones they know, and in stating what they have found, they can say, "There is one blue triangle."

Leger's *Viaduct* and *Composition #7* contain several examples of parallel lines and can be used to review all the shapes. The singular and plural forms of nouns are dealt in all the units and are reinforced each time the student has to say or write a sentence about a particular shape. Also, they are now able to construct sentences with one or two adjectives as in "There are two yellow squares." or "There are twenty-one white circles."

At this time, I would suggest a visit to the Yale University Art Gallery so the students can see the original paintings. Teachers can schedule a tour by calling the Education Office. Arrangements can be made to have your class picked up at your school (New Haven School System). To arrange a tour and transportation, get in touch with the Education Office.

## Lesson Plan II

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**Objectives Students will learn (1) the names of the parts of the face and body, (2) the names of the family members, and (3) clothing.**

**Materials needed Slides or reproductions of:**

1. Amadeo Modigliani— *Portrait of a Young Woman*
2. George Bellows— *Lady Jean*
3. Jean Edouard Vuillard— *Interior*
4. Pablo Picasso— *First Steps*
5. Andy Warhol— *Self-Portrait*

**Procedure This unit is approached more or less in the same way as the first, but the number of slides is reduced.**

*Portrait of a Young Woman* by Modigliani can be used to teach the parts of the face. Although the young woman's face may seem strange to the students, it is a face with human features; eyes, nose, mouth, eyebrows, forehead, cheeks, neck, hair. The ears are not visible but the teacher can point these on him/herself or have a drawing of one nearby. Bellows's *Lady Jean* is a portrait of his nine year old daughter. This is a full portrait and we can use it to point out other parts of the body; arms, hands, chest, legs, feet. Some imagination may have to be used at this point but this should not prove a major problem. *Interior* by Vuillard shows us the backside of a woman who may be doing a variety of things, sorting clothes, sewing, or reading. The teacher can show the back of her head, her back, and hips. In Andy Warhol's *Self-Portrait* we see the male face and the students will learn that the names are the same for both male and female facial features.

*First Steps* by Picasso portrays a toddler with his/ her mother at the moment of his/her taking the first steps alone. The shapes used in portraying the child (straight, rather boxed-in forms) give the sensation of great difficulty for the child in achieving his/her goal. The mother is presented in a different style, far more flexible and obviously able to move about easier. The child is seen completely here and the teacher can review the parts of the face and body, and include fingers, toes, foot(feet) to the previous list.

The same group of slides are also used in naming members of the family. Modigliani's *Portrait of a Young Woman* may represent an older sister, a young college student, the oldest daughter in her late teens or early twenties. *Lady Jean* is a young girl, she could be the youngest sister, an only child, or granddaughter about nine years old. The woman in *Interior* may be somewhat older, and can be a wife or mother. The *Self-Portrait* by Warhol can be the father, brother, uncle, cousin to any of the ladies mentioned before. *First Steps*, the mother and child (baby, son, daughter) relationship is established.

Students in the classroom draw their own family, as they wish, (remember any child has the potential to be an artist; it is the adult who destroys that potential). These drawings can later be used as the motivation for writing about their families when they have developed enough vocabulary.

The unit on clothing may be started with the painting of *Lady Jean*, but the use of magazines and sale shoppers found in the newspaper are very helpful. Students cut out and prepare a booklet with men's, boys', ladies', and girls' clothes and accessories. It is a project they enjoy doing and helps them to remember the names more effectively. A sentence under each example is important because the student receives reinforcement.

## Lesson Plan III

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**Objective Students will learn (1) at least twenty action words and (2) will be able to use these in the present, past, and future tenses.**

**Materials needed Slides or reproductions of:**

1. Pablo Picasso— *First Steps*



2. George Bellows— *Lady Jean*
3. Jean Edouard Vuillard— *Interior*
4. Vincent van Gogh— *Night Cafe*
5. George Bellows— *The Rope*
6. Edward Hopper— *Western Motel*
7. Reginald Marsh— *Coney Island*

**Procedure This unit will develop a working vocabulary of everyday action words. The verbs to be presented are: to be, to walk, to help, to stand, to sit, to think, to read, to write, to sew, to cry, to study, to talk, to play, to drink, to smoke, to work, to carry, to build, to wait, to look (at), to climb, to swim, to lie (down), to sunbathe, to eat, to run. The paintings will stimulate the students to express complete sentences when referring to the action taking place.**

The verb *to be* is essential to every beginner of a second language—or its equivalents) to know. In *First Steps*, sentences such as, “This is a child.”, “This is the mother.”, “The child is a boy (girl).”, can be made *Lady Jean* may be introduced this way; “This is a young girl. She is nine years old. Her name is Jean. Jean is a girl’s name.” Several concepts aside from the verbs are included here, such as possessive pronouns and the “s” which also shows possession. The concept of age is also included and because the students now know the numbers and the conjugation of the verb *to be* they can now say their name, age, and address.

At this point, return to the first slide, *First Steps* and introduce the verbs *to walk* and *to help*. Sentences such as, “The baby walks.”, “The mother helps the baby.”, “She helps the baby to walk.”, can be made by the students. Such concepts are not difficult to grasp if the student has the painting to help him/her. Subject pronouns can also be reviewed here.

*Lady Jean* is performing a passive action (no movement) and this may prove a little more difficult to get across but nevertheless, the verb *to stand* (still) can be presented. Have the students stand up and be still for one minute and this will definitely get the message across.

In Willard’s *Interior*, many verbs can be pulled out due to the ambiguity in what the woman is really doing. She is sitting (that’s obvious!) so the verb *to sit* should pose no problem. The other verbs that can be drawn out of this painting are: to think, to read, to write, to cry, to sew, to study. Your students might think of many more, so the list can grow much longer.

It may seem awkward to use only the present tense in presenting these verbs but the past and future tenses follow at a later time so as to not confuse the students.

*Night Cafe* by van Gogh may be a somewhat controversial subject to many teachers but many of our students play pool, smoke, and/or drink. This is not to say that I commend these activities, but they do exist and knowing their names does not have to mean that they will go and do all three. The verbs in this unit are: to



play, to drink, to smoke, to talk. As part of the lesson the names of different games can be added such as cards, monopoly, scrabble, chinese checkers, and others. The names of different liquids that are drunk can be incorporated; milk, water, soda, lemonade, tea, juice, beer, etc. A guest speaker or a film on the effects of smoking and drinking on the human system would be appropriate at this time.

In *The Rope*, men are working. The verbs here are: to work, to carry, to build. Sentences can be made with these verbs to describe the activity going on in the painting. Some additional vocabulary has to be added here; ship, rope, boat, wood, nails. The sentences are simple, following subject-verb agreements: "The men work. They build a ship. It is a large ship. A man carries a rope. They build many ships and boats."

*Western Motel* by Hopper depicts a woman sitting in a sofa. She is waiting for someone. The verb here is to wait, to really convey this, the teacher will have the students number one through ten on a piece of paper and tell them to wait. They will wait for the teacher to begin but s/he never does. They become anxious or uneasy but then isn't this the feeling(s) one has when one has to wait?

*Coney Island* is full of action! People are talking, playing, running, and it seems that everyone is doing something different. The verbs are: to climb, to swim, to lie (down), to sunbathe, to eat, to run. Students will understand these verbs better if they act out some of the actions, in games such as "Simon Says", once they get the idea of the game it is a lot of fun. If your class is on the first floor, take them to the second floor and come back down, go through the motions of swimming, eating, running; the other actions are easily understood.

This unit and all the other units can be modified to the needs of the teacher. This is also true of all the lessons included. Once the teacher knows the verbs and vocabulary s/he wants to teach, it is only a matter of selecting those paintings or sculptures which will convey that meaning.

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