



Visual Art, Social Studies, Language Arts

Accessing Social History through Genre Scenes

1-6
Lesson by Rosalyn Payne

This lesson may be adjusted to fit whatever timeline you need. It can be the focus for one day, or worked on for an hour a day over a week or more.

Objectives

Students will:

- Analyze paintings, make inferences, construct a narrative, and critically assess the message and meaning.
- View genre paintings as a source of history to better understand the context in which they were created.
- Apply visual thinking strategies to observe details and extract historical evidence from an artistic source.
- Form hypotheses about the motives leading to the creation of paintings.
- Draw associations between historical contexts and personal experiences.
- Compare personal interpretations to the interpretations of others.

Introduction

Genre art portrays events of everyday life, scenes of ordinary people at work or leisure. Genre compositions may be realistic, imaginary, or romanticized, and sometimes are infused with moral or social comment. Examining genre art can enable us to look beyond our familiar perspective and appreciate the complexities of life in a period of time other than their own. Furthermore, genre art can facilitate our associations with social history by empowering us to identify with some of the factors that shaped the lives of those who lived long ago.

Materials

- Springville Museum of Art "Children in Art" postcard set
- Genre paintings in a format all students can see
- Paper, pencils, crayons, chalk pastels (optional)

Learning Activity

Invite students to share their thoughts about the reasons why artists might create art.

Display a painting and ask students to describe what they see, and what they think is happening. Acknowledge student responses with respect and praise. If there is a lull in responses, draw attention to additional unnoticed details, asking open-ended questions designed to solicit insightful responses.

During this part of the discussion clarify historical inaccuracies in what the students say, but do not betray any background to the painting, or lead them in any specific analytical direction.



John Hubbard Rich, *Mexican Children and Fruit*, 1932, oil on canvas

Image from the Museum Permanent Collection

- John Hubbard Rich, *Mexican Children and Fruit*, 1932, oil on canvas
- Ilvan Aleksandrovich Kozlov, *The First Television*, 1952, oil on board

Image from SELF Exhibition

- Caitlin Connolly, *Mother Painting*, 2019, oil on panel

Utah Core Standards

Utah Visual Art Core:

- 1.V.R.1 Describe artworks that show daily life experiences and how the artist(s) have created them.
- 1.V.CO.2 Compare artworks showing events of home, school, or community life from different times and cultures.
- 2.V.R.1 Identify the mood in paintings and discuss how the artist/s created this in works of art.
- 2.V.CO.2 Discuss the way art has been used in different cultures and times.
- 3.V.R.1 Identify the message you think an artist is portraying and the process they used to create it.
- 3.V.CO.2 Recognize that responses to art change depending on knowledge of the time and place the art was created.
- 4.V.R.2 Talk about the elements an artist uses to convey a message in an artwork.
- 4.V.CO.2 Make inferences about the time, place and culture in which historic artworks were created.
- 5.V.R.1 Compare one's own interpretation of a work of art with the interpretation of others.
- 5.V.CO.2 Identify how art can be used to inform or change beliefs, values, or behaviors.
- 6.V.R.1 Identify and interpret works of art that reveal how people live around the world and what they value.
- 6.V.CO.2 Analyze how art reflects changing times, traditions, resources, and cultural uses.

Social Studies Core:

- 1.S.1 Recognize and describe how schools and neighborhoods are both similar and different.
- 2.S.1 Recognize and describe how people within their community, state, and nation are both similar and different.
- 3.S.2 Understand cultural factors that shape a community.
- 4.S.2 Understand how Utah's history has been shaped by many diverse people, events, and ideas.
- 5.S.4 Understand that the 19th century was a time of incredible change for the United States...
- 6.S.1 Understand how ancient civilizations developed and how they contributed to the current state of the world.

Language Arts Speaking and Listening Standards 1 & 2 Comprehension & Collaboration



Learning Activity Continued

Pose the question, “what does this painting tell us about life in the period of time when it was created?” and open the floor for discussion among the students.

Break the class into small groups and ask them to discuss what they believe the artist is trying to say and what devices are used to tell the artist’s story. Visit with each group as they talk through their ideas. After a brief discussion, they will be asked to share their answers with the class. Ask students to identify specific elements of the painting and define how they contribute to the painting.

Have the students consider what they would like to ask the artist about the painting.

Guide the class into the question of meaning, through ‘why’ questions. Observe how certain artistic factors (figure placement, visual echoing, idealization, exaggeration, etc.) affect the meaning of the painting. Allowing student responses to guide the discussion whenever possible can reveal insights about students’ existing schemata.

Have the students hypothesize as to the motive of the artist, answering the questions, “What is the artist trying to tell us about these people?” and “Do you think the artist wants viewers to feel something or do something?” Ask students why they think the artist chose to make this artwork about this subject, and in this style.

Have the students look for evidence of what the artist or society might have valued at the time this painting was made. Ask students to discuss whether they think this painting was important or valuable when it was made, and if it is important or valuable now. Ask who they think this painting should be seen by, and why.

Inquire, “If you were the artist, what might you add or change in this painting? What choices would you make differently, and what would you keep the same?” Have them explain why they would make these artistic choices.

Have the students imagine they were painting genre art for future observers to discover what life is like when and where we live now. What would be important to include in the painting and why?



Ivan Aleksandrovich Kozlov, *The First Television*, 1952, oil on board

Assessment

Did the student participate in the discussion, respectfully listening and sharing ideas?

Did the student’s comments demonstrate critical thinking?

Extension Activities

Show a second parallel work from a different historical period. Follow a similar procedure as before, but this time add questions that draw associations between the two paintings and analyze them as history, as art, and in terms of the artistic devices they use. After the analysis, compare the two paintings in order to show the uniqueness of each work as well as the similarities of the two.

Imagine living in the period depicted in the painting. Make up a story in response to questions generated while observing the painting. Then compare that story with other stories about the same artwork.

Draw a genre scene that illustrates something about our own culture and values. Consider how to communicate the mood and message of your subject using art elements (line, shape, form, space, color, value, texture) and principles (balance, unity, movement, proportion, placement, rhythm, emphasis, variety). Can symbols be incorporated to express deeper meaning?



Extension Activities Continued

Compare personal observations and explanations with historical source information. Does this additional information clarify anything that was vague or ambiguous?

Write a paragraph evaluating the painting and hypothesizing the artist's motives.



Student-made genre scenes from Rosalyn Payne

Variations

For younger grades, teachers can use the following models of inquiry to simplify the conversation:

Visual Thinking Strategies:

- What do you notice?
- What do you see that makes you say/think that?
- What else can you/we find?

Feldman's Model of Art Criticism:

1. Description (observe subject & physical details)
"What do you see?"
2. Analysis (examine processes & artistic devices)
"What do you think?"
3. Interpretation (hypothesize purpose & meaning)
"What does it mean?"
4. Judgment (evaluate based on criteria & evidence)
"What is it worth?"

<http://www2.gvsu.edu/hipshean/resources/Feldman%27s%20Model%20Crit.pdf>



Caitlin Connolly, *Mother Painting*, 2019, oil on panel

Sources

Looking at Art: Seeing Questions:

<https://www.incredibleart.org/files/crit.htm>

Art criticism lesson with descriptive words for art analysis:

<https://www.incredibleart.org/files/crit3.htm>

Genre Paintings in the Public Domain:

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/paintings-by-genre/genre-painting?select=featured#!#filterName:featured,viewType:masonry>



John Hubbard Rich, *Mexican Children and Fruit*, 1932, oil on canvas



Ivan Aleksandrovich Kozlov, *The First Television*, 1952, oil on board



Caitlin Connolly, *Mother Painting*, 2019, oil on panel



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Looking at Art: Seeing Questions

Describe it.

What kinds of things do you see in this painting? What does this painting show?
What words would you use to describe this painting? What other words might we use?
How would you describe the lines in this picture? The shapes? The colors?
Look at this painting for a moment. What observations can you make about it?
How would you describe this painting to a person who could not see it?
How would you describe the people in this picture? Are they like you or different?
How would you describe (the place depicted in) this painting?

Relate it.

What does this painting remind you of? What do you recognize? What things seem new to you?
How is this painting like another one we saw? What are some important differences?
How is this picture different from real life?
What interests you most about this work of art?

Analyze it.

What can you tell me about the placement of elements in the painting?
Which objects seems closer to you? Further away? Does it look crowded?
What can you tell me about the colors in this painting? What color is used the most?
What can you tell me about the person in this painting?
What can you tell me about how this person lived? How did you arrive at that idea?
What do you think is the most important part of this picture?
How do you think the artist made this work?
What questions would you ask the artist about this work, if s/he were here?

Interpret it.

What title would you give to this painting? What made you decide on that title?
What other titles could we give it? What sounds would this painting make (if it could)?
What do you think is happening in this painting? What else could be happening?
What do you think is going on in this picture? How did you arrive at that idea?
What do you think this painting is about? How did you come up that idea?
Pretend you are inside this painting. What does it feel like?
What do you think this (object) was used for? How did you arrive at that idea?
Why do you suppose the artist made this painting? What makes you think that?
What do you think it would be like to live in this painting? What makes you think that?

Evaluate it.

What do you think is good about this painting? What is not so good?
Do you think the person who painted this do a good or bad job? What makes you think so?
Why do you think other people should see this work of art?
What do you think other people would say about this work? Why do you think that?
What grade would you give the artist for this work? How did you arrive at that grade?
What would you do with this work if you owned it?
What do you think is worth remembering about this painting?

Note: These questions were supplied by Prof. Craig Roland of the University of Florida, Gainesville.
<https://www.incredibleart.org/files/crit.htm>