



Ars Moriendi: The Art of Death and Dying

Activities: Grades 9-12

1. Death is a universal, yet profoundly personal, human experience. As you explore the exhibition, find two pieces that you believe communicate death as an encounter shared by all humankind. Then, find two other pieces that explore the more vulnerable and individual emotions associated with death and dying. What do these contrasting themes mean to you?
2. Mortality can be a triggering subject for some. It can cause grief, fear, and pain. For others, our temporary existence is welcomed with peace, curiosity, and contemplation. Growing up or aging can make these subjects feel more relevant. Find an artwork that explores the experience of aging, paying attention to titles and artist statements. How does the artist express their feelings about aging? How do you see their point of view in their piece? What different feelings in regards to getting older are present? How does the theme of aging relate to this exhibition?
3. Experience Brian Christensen's work *Texting the Dead* and read his artist statement. Think about people in your life who you are distanced from, whether by death, time, or location. What conversations or experiences would you choose to preserve? What type of messages would you want to send them?

ACTIVITY:

- Using a medium of your choice, create an artwork inspired by *Texting the Dead*.
4. Find pieces in the exhibition that you think explore the idea of an afterlife. Think about how you disagree or agree with the artist's presentations of what an afterlife might look like.

ACTIVITY:

- Create a piece that communicates your views on what happens after death.
5. **Art History Connection:** The title of this exhibition, *Ars Moriendi*, is borrowed from the title of old Latin books which offered insight on how to "die well." These popular illuminated, or illustrated, texts were timely, written less than 70 years after Europe had encountered the Bubonic plague. Death weighed heavily on the minds of many, as they became more concerned with how to prepare for their own death or learn how to cope with the loss of a loved one. How is this specific theme, dating back to the 15th century, still relevant today? How do the pieces in this exhibition explore the idea of "dying well"?
 6. **Art History Connection:** The theme *memento mori* or "remember you must die" was popular amongst many artists, particularly in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. During this time, artists painted skulls, flowers, clocks, and other symbols of death to remind the viewer that life is fleeting, and death is inevitable. What symbols of death or dying can you find in this exhibition? What do these symbols communicate to you?

Additional Resources:

For students:

- To learn more about Ars Moriendi illuminated texts:
<https://www.funeralguide.co.uk/blog/ars-moriendi>
- For more about memento mori, watch “Art 101: What is a memento mori? P.S. You are going to die” from CBC Arts: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7riwDPIEAM>
- *Chill and Spill from Art With Heart*- a prompt journal for teens dealing with trauma:
<https://shop.artwithheart.org/products/chill-spill>
- Death can be very difficult to deal with or understand. If you are struggling with the idea of your own death, or the death of a loved one, please know that there are resources that can help:
 - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
 - Disaster Distress Hotline:
<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>

For teachers:

- Utah Common Core: Health II, Strand 2: Mental and Emotional Health:
<https://www.uen.org/core/health/downloads/coreguides/HealthII-MentalHealth.pdf>
- “Addressing Grief: Tips for Teachers and Administrators”:
<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/mental-health-resources/addressing-grief/addressing-grief-tips-for-teachers-and-administrators>
- Many other resources are available through Teen Mental Health:
<http://teenmentalhealth.org/>

Utah State Core Standards:

Secondary Visual Arts - (Level 1 and up)

Strand: CREATE (L1.V.CR.)

Students will generate artistic work by conceptualizing, organizing, and completing their artistic ideas. They will refine original work through persistence, reflection, and evaluation.

Standard L1.V.CR.1:

Use multiple approaches to begin creative endeavors.

Standard L1.V.CR.6:

Apply relevant criteria from traditional and contemporary cultural contexts to examine, reflect on, and plan revisions for works of art and design in progress.

Strand: PRESENT (L1.V.P.)

Students will analyze, interpret, refine and select artistic work for presentation. They will convey meaning in the manner in which the art is presented.

Standard L1.V.P.3:

Analyze and describe the impact that an exhibition or collection has on personal awareness of social, cultural, or political beliefs and understandings.

Strand: RESPOND (L1.V.R.)

Students will understand, evaluate, and articulate how works of art convey meaning for the observer, as well as the creator.

Standard L1.V.R.1:

Hypothesize ways in which art influences perception and understanding of human experiences.

Standard L1.V.R.2:

Analyze how one's understanding of the world is affected by experiencing visual imagery.

Standard L1.V.R.3:

Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts.

Strand: CONNECT (L1.V.CO.)

Students will relate artistic skills, ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.