

Objectives

- Students will learn about the elements of a well written artist statement.
- Students will write a first person present tense artist statement from the point of view of a famous Utah artist.

Introduction

Show the students *The Rhinoceros*, by James Christensen. Ask them to look at the piece carefully and talk about what they notice. Discuss the painting's details such as the red ball in the corner, the painted moon on the wall, the little bird on the rhino's back, and the armor the rhino is wearing.

Next, ask the students what they can guess about the artist who created this artwork. Ask the following questions:

- Is the artist serious or imaginative?
- Does the artist like to paint realistically or creatively?
- Do they think the artist is old or young?
- What might have inspired the artist to paint this picture?

Explain that we can guess what an artist might be thinking or what a painting is about, but sometimes having a little more information from the artist helps us to understand an artwork.

Read the students this brief artist statement from James Christensen:

I like to make things up. I like to tell stories. I like to take ideas and words and play with them. I like to communicate. My aim always begins with a desire to connect with another imagination. My work is an invitation to let your imagination run wild, explore, and make interpretations spontaneously.

Ask students what they can learn about the artist from his artist statement. What is important to him as an artist?

Learning Activity

Explain to students that they will be learning how to write an artist statement by pretending they are a famous Utah artist. Once they have written and edited their artist statements they will have an exhibit opening where they will create a display of their artworks and artist statements.

Discuss the differences between first person and third person.



James Christensen, *The Rhinoceros*, 1981

Materials

- Images of Portraits (See Images from the Museum)
- Springville Museum of Art Educational Postcard Set
- Paper
- Pencils
- Cardstock

Images from the Museum

- James Christensen, *The Rhinoceros*
- Images from Utah Artists

Utah Core Standards

Language Arts, 4th Grade, Writing Standard 2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

Visual Arts, 4th Grade, Standard 3, Objective 1

Discuss, evaluate, and choose symbols, ideas, subject matter, meanings, and purposes for artworks.

Visual Arts, 4th Grade, Standard 4

(Contextualizing): The student will interpret and apply visual arts in relation to cultures, history, and all learning.

Learning Activity Cont.

1. Each student will choose one image from the Springville Museum of Art's educational postcard set (or any other images from Utah artists).
2. Students will imagine that they are the artist who created their chosen artwork.
3. Students will answer the following questions about their chosen artwork from the artist point of view.
 - a. What is your name? (the name of the artist)?
 - b. What kind of artist are you? (painter, sculptor, etc...)
 - c. What kind of artwork do you like to create?
(Landscapes, portraits, still-life, abstracts)
 - d. What is most challenging about being an artist?
 - e. What do you love about being an artist?
 - f. What do you want others to feel or think when they see your artwork?
4. Students will then use their answers to write a two paragraph (3-5 sentences each) artist statement from the point of view of their artist. Artist statements should be written in the first-person present tense. For example, "I am" not "I was," or "I do" not "I did."
5. Have students edit each other's artist statements and revise them as needed.
6. Students will type their final artist statement and print it on cardstock to be hung next to their postcard. Students should include the artist name, birth year, title of the artwork, and media on the artist statement. See the example below.

Conclusion

At the end of this activity have student create an exhibition of their chosen artworks. Postcards could be hung in a school hallway or in the classroom along with their artist statements. You could have some simple snacks and music and encourage the students to go around the exhibition and read the artist statements.

Use this lesson as practice to help students write an artist statement for their own artwork. When working on an art project encourage students to answer the same questions about their own work, and display their artist statement with their work.

Assessment

Assess students using the following criteria:

- Did the student answer the 6 questions about their artist?
- Did the student write their artist statement in the first person present tense?
- Did the student take the point of view of the artist?

Extensions

You could incorporate a research project as part of this activity. Students could spend time researching their Utah artist or Utah history before they write their artist statement.

James Christensen, b. 1942

The Rhinoceros
oil on canvas

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