

Lesson Title: Paradox Worlds

Grade Level: 4 - 12

Connections: Language Arts, Visual Arts

Students examine works of art and engage in classroom and independent activities that inspire drawing and creative writing. Students also learn traditional bookmaking techniques and make their own journal to create and collect their work.

National Standards:

National Language Arts Standards -

- Develop and use an expanding knowledge base and essential processes for effective communication through reading, writing, listening, viewing, and speaking
- Construct meaning and apply critical and analytical thinking strategies when engaged in reading, writing, listening, speaking, or viewing
- Understand, accept, and appreciate cultural diversity through a great variety of reading and language experiences
- Imagine and value worlds other than their own

National Visual Arts Standards -

- Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes
- Uses knowledge of structures and functions
- Chooses and evaluates a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas
- Makes connections between visual arts and other disciplines

Performance Objectives:

- Uses the writing process to produce poetry
- Given text to read, analyzes, infers, and synthesizes meanings
- Demonstrates an understanding of a bookmaking technique
- Selects media, technique, subjects, and symbols that communicate intended meaning in their art work.

Work of Art:

Cornelis de Heem, Dutch, 1631-1695, *Still Life*, date unknown, Oil on canvas, 53 3/8 in. x 72 in.

Vocabulary:

Critic- Someone skilled in writing or talking about art.

Realistic- Term to describe art that emphasizes true-to-life representation of subject matter.

Simile- A figure of speech that compares two unlike things using like or as.

Still life- A picture of arranged objects that are not alive.

Symbolize- Use of a sign, form, image or subject to represent a meaning other than outward appearance.

Texture- The way something would feel if it were touched.

Vanitas- Paintings which contain a moral message.

About the Art and Artist:

The Dutch artist Cornelis de Heem (kor nee yis da hame') was born in 1606 and first learned painting from his father. De Heem, like his father, specialized in the type of still life painting called vanitas. This type of still life teaches a moral lesson by using symbols that the people of the time would have understood.

De Heem's compositions are extremely vivid, rich in color, and realistic. He became a master of using color and light to capture the variety and richness of textures. Seventeenth-century collectors and critics enjoyed de Heem's paintings for the challenge behind the symbolism and for the sheer joy of their beauty.

In this vanitas, *Still Life*, the food is half-eaten and flowers have turned brown. The butterfly is the only thing that is living and it may represent a person's soul or conscience. Or it might represent the idea that nothing on earth stays the same forever- that all living things change and grow old. Most Dutch people at this time would have understood the message of this painting: a person's soul is more important than personal wealth and material goods which eventually are consumed, broken, or decayed. One critic has suggested that the lobster, which has the ability to move in several directions, corresponds with a person's ability to make choices in life. It may symbolize the fact that a person has the power to make choices between right and wrong. In this painting, de Heem communicates a message and also demonstrates his skill in depicting many different types of textures.

Questions for Looking Together:

1. What is the first object you notice in the painting? (the lobster) What has the artist done to make you notice it first?
2. Is this a scene from a long time ago or one that is recent? Why do you think so?
3. Can you find objects in the painting that appeal to each of the five senses? If they were real, which objects could you see, hear, taste, touch, and smell?

Activities:

1. A critic looked at a painting by de Heem and said, "The eye is jostled about the picture like a ball in a pinball machine." Ask your students what the writer meant by this. "Like a ball" is a simile. It is a device writers use to make a comparisons. Poets often use them. Have students look carefully at the painting by de Heem and create other similes. They might start like this: The lemon looks like_____ .
2. Have a discussion about symbolism in different countries. Ask students to make a list of objects that symbolize ideas in America. Discuss the ideas behind the symbols. You might get them started by listing Uncle Sam and discussing the meaning of this symbol.
3. Have the class select 5 to 10 objects to include in a still life arrangement. They can use objects found in the classroom, objects found outside, or a combination of both. Encourage

them to use a variety of different textures. Have them include one or two objects that all agree could be symbols for an idea. For example, a flag might symbolize love of America. Have them sketch the still life.

4. Have students complete the language and visual arts worksheet activities (see attached) on their own. These activities can be completed in a journal they make themselves. (See the lesson plan “Make Your Own Journal”)

Draw it Yourself!

Still Life, ca. 1647

Cornelis de Heem, 1631-1695

1. This still life painted more than four hundred years ago by a Dutch artist teaches a moral lesson. A person's soul, represented by the butterfly which is the only living object in the painting, is more important than the things people possess. This symbolism would have been recognized by the people living in Holland during that time. Another way to think about this painting is to think of it as a warning against waste. Discuss with your class or a small group of students how people's greed and/or ignorance can harm other people or the environment. Arrange a still life with a message for the present. For example, it might warn against pollution, encourage recycling, or discourage the use of drugs. Draw the still life in your journal.
2. Still lifes can have many objects or just one. In both cases, they draw the viewer's attention to whatever the artist selects to draw or paint. Look around your classroom and select one object to draw in the frame below. Try to show the texture or textures of the object and the highlights and shadows cast by the surrounding light. Use the side, tip and even the eraser of your pencil. Write a brief explanation about why you chose this object.

Write it Yourself!

Still Life, ca. 1647

Cornelis de Heem, 1631-1695

When you look at this exquisite still life painting, your eyes are dazzled with the brilliance of colors and light. Imagine this was a flat, blank, empty canvas. With the magical power of the artist's palette and brush, you can practically touch the lush draperies, glistening yellow lemon, hard red shell of lobster, pages of music, wooden instruments. The power of colors!

Poets only have blank paper and words to paint images that encourage readers to see, feel, taste, smell, touch, imagine. Here are two poems about using colors. What would YOU do with your paint box of words?

The Paint Box

I had a paint box.
Each color glowing with delight.
I had a paint box with colors
warm and cool and bright.
I had no red for wounds and blood.
I had no black for an orphaned child.
I had no white for the face of the dead.
I had no yellow for burning sands.

I had orange for joy and life.
I had green for buds and bloom.
I had blue for clear bright skies.
I had pink for dreams and rest.
I sat down
and painted
peace.

Tali Shurel, 13 years old
Beersheva, Israel

Fresh Paint

It glistens on this wall
that turns
whatever color I conjure
when I close my eyes:

green for the moss of
memories on a stone

blue for ice caves in August

scarlet for the banners of maple leaves
triumphant in the fall

yellow for the lights
of a homebound car in the fog

white for the drift of
cherry blossoms

orange for tiger flames
leaping in the bonfire.

violet for daybreak
and violet for dusk

black for the warmth of darkness

and look
how the word don't is painted out
so the sign reads

touch.

Eve Merriam

Think about the colors in your life, in the surroundings that mean the most to you. Cornelis de Heem conveyed many ideas about the room he painted through the images he chose to show. He made you feel the textures, smell the air coming from the light in the window, taste the lemon. He made you imagine the people who lived in that room.

Think colors! Think textures! Think senses! Write your own paint box poem. Try word-painting any scene or idea that is important to you, even if it's as ordinary sounding as Closet or Living Room or Window Sill.

You might want to title your poem My Paint Box or Still Life. After you write your poem using colors and sensory words, the people who read and listen to it should be able to (as Eve Merriam says) TOUCH the images you describe.

You can use colors to paint and write about feelings, dreams, memories as well as physical surroundings. **Experiment!** After all - it's your paint box! If you want, you can start with the first line: I had a paint box...



