

# WRITING ABOUT ART



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*Special thanks to Robbin Zella, Blaine Kruger and Gary Vincent.*

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# Introduction

This handbook is meant to be a practical guide for instructors who wish to take advantage of Housatonic's art collection, a very unique resource, in the instruction of writing. Our reason for writing this handbook is two fold. First, we would like to see students more involved with the art collection, and second, as instructors of composition, we find that the artwork helps students to develop creative and critical thinking skills. In completing these assignments, students must go beyond their own personal experiences to analyze an artwork, and then they must use their creativity to synthesize their findings.

To help the teacher, we have created one page that simply sets up the assignment, explaining how the artwork can be used in conjunction with a certain mode of writing (comparison and contrast, narrative, descriptive, etc.). In addition, there is a list of the works used in each assignment with a map indicating their location on campus. Then, we have created a page which can be photocopied for the students' use; this page explains the assignment and other requirements. In some cases, there is also a questionnaire that can be used when students view the artwork. As fellow instructors, we have found Housatonic's art collection to be an invaluable resource, and we hope that you and the students enjoy working with the art.

Amy Stein and Stephanie Hart

## Target Skill: **Gathering Ideas, Prewriting (a)**

*Appropriate for Journal Entries*

### **Background**

In gathering ideas for a paper, students must learn the freedom of simply putting ideas down on paper. Whether they choose to freewrite, brainstorm, or cluster, they are engaging in the first stage of the creative process – the stage where anything goes and where getting words out on the paper is more important than the production of correct grammar and spelling. Oftentimes, students view this creative frenzy as messy. They wonder why they must spend so much effort on generating ideas when they know that ultimately they must discard some of those ideas in order to have a well-written, organized paper. Teaching them to enjoy the first stage in the writing process, however, helps students to actually write a better paper. Without honestly thinking about their motivations for writing on a topic, a student's paper may lack personality and depth. Prewriting actually leads to a greater appreciation of the writer's art.

Jack Lembeck's neo-abstract artwork celebrates the creation process. In his untitled painting, he focuses on the artist's materials such as paint, brush stroke, line, shade, glitter, etc. Rather than paint a picture that communicates meaning on a thematic level, he chooses to concentrate on the very act of creating. He is pondering the use of materials and what impact even a brush stroke can have in a painting. While the picture may not make much sense to a viewer looking for a story, it makes a lot of sense to a viewer who enjoys contemplating this record of the creative process.



*Untitled*  
*Jack Lembeck*

### **Works Used**

Jack Lembeck's *Untitled* painting: neo-abstract brush work

### **Set-Up**

20-30 minutes museum time (optional)

Do some prewriting exercises before you take your students to study this painting

Questionnaire

### **Assignment Explanation**

After engaging in some prewriting exercises, take your students to Jack Lembeck's work. Ask them why they think that Jack Lembeck created this painting. As you get feedback, continue to question them about the creative process. Why are things like brush strokes and shadows so important to an artist? Why would they be important enough for Jack Lembeck to create a painting just to talk about them? Have your students fill out the questionnaire while they are looking at the painting, and then as homework have them write a page long journal entry on the prewriting process. Which technique is their favorite and why? How does the act of creation apply to both writers and painters? Why is it important to know the basics before one creates?

*For Student Use*

## Prewriting Journal Entry (a)

### Assignment

Jack Lembeck's neo-abstract artwork celebrates the creation process. In his untitled painting, he focuses on the artist's materials such as paint, brush stroke, line, shade, glitter, etc. He is pondering the use of materials and what impact even a brush stroke can have in a painting. While the picture may not make much sense to a viewer looking for a story, it makes a lot of sense to a viewer who enjoys contemplating this record of the creative process.

Write a journal entry comparing Jack Lembeck's painting to the prewriting process. Use your questionnaire as a point of reference.

Length:

Due Date:

### Consider

How does the act of creation apply to both writers and painters? Why is it important to know the basics before you begin writing? What kind of knowledge might painters need before they begin painting? Is it possible for writers or painters to create masterpieces without first learning the tools of their trade?

### Example

Before you start your journal entry, consider which prewriting technique is your favorite and why. Then, ask yourself how this technique might apply to Lembeck's work. For example, if you like freewriting, maybe you find that the freedom of having no grammar rules is liberating and stimulates your ideas. In the same manner, Lembeck is breaking all the rules. He is not following any set artistic composition but his own. He is enjoying the freedom of creation.



*Target Skill:*  
**Prewriting (b)**

*Appropriate for prewriting*

*which may or may not be developed into a paragraph or essay.*

### **Background**

This assignment is designed to give students something concrete on which to focus when doing prewriting. Often in prewriting exercises, students are asked to generate ideas from personal knowledge and experience. However, students will eventually be required to write essays about course content material, which is often outside of the students' realm of experience. This assignment gives them the opportunity to generate ideas about something which may be completely foreign to them. This assignment will reinforce students' prewriting skills, emphasize the importance of these skills, and force students to consider unfamiliar concepts.

### **Works Used**

Any work in the museum. You may choose a specific work so that all students are writing about the same work of art, you may put students into groups of three or four and have each group work together on a specific piece, or you may allow the students to choose whatever artwork they like and work individually or in small groups. You may have the students complete this assignment several times, once with a painting, a sculpture, a photograph, etc.

### **Set-Up**

After you have discussed prewriting techniques and practiced them with topics which are more familiar to the students, devote some class time to this assignment. You may choose to have students begin this assignment in class and complete it for homework.

### **Assignment Explanation**

Students will generate ideas about an artwork using various prewriting techniques. You may then ask students to come up with a topic sentence or thesis statement about the work and generate an outline of supporting material.



# Prewriting Exercise (b)

*For Student Use*

## Assignment

Your instructor will assign an artwork to you or ask you to select one of your own choice. You may work individually or in small groups according to your instructor's instructions. You will complete steps 1 – 4. Your instructor may also ask you to complete steps 5 and 6.

Start by looking at the artwork carefully. Look at it as a whole, and then examine details carefully. Then, reexamine the work as a whole. As you consider the artwork, take notes using the following techniques:

### 1. Brainstorm

List any ideas that occur to you. Do not write complete sentences; use words and phrases, the minimum amount of writing necessary to get the ideas down. Don't worry about spelling or whether the idea is good or bad. Just get as many ideas down as quickly as possible.

### 2. Question

Generate as many questions about the artwork as possible. Use the list marked *Consider* to help you generate a list of questions. Then try to come up with a few questions not related to the issues listed here. Be sure to leave a large blank space after each question. Once your list of questions is complete, look at the artwork again and generate a list of answers for each question.

3. You may want to repeat step 1 if you are coming up with more ideas not necessarily related to the questions you generated.

4. Look over your notes and organize them by clustering. You may end up with a large web which links a number of different clusters. Use a large piece of paper.

5. Examine your web and try to think of a unifying idea. That is, what is the main idea suggested by the ideas linked in your web? You may have to focus on a portion of your web in order to come up with a main idea. Write your main idea in a topic sentence or thesis statement.

6. Write an outline of supporting material to back up your topic sentence or thesis. Your instructor may want a scratch outline, a detailed outline or both.

Length:

Due Date:

## Consider

**Color:** value (light or dark), what colors are used, possible symbolism, etc.

**Line:** thick, thin, wavy, no line, etc.

### Image:

- what is depicted (what's happening)

- how it is depicted: representational, abstract, figurative, landscape, portrait, etc.

**Shapes:** does the image contain any circles, squares, ovals, etc.?

**Style:** realistic, photographic, pop art, op art, gestural, abstract expressionism, expressive, etc.

**Texture:** shiny, glossy, embossed, rough, smooth, etc. (examine visually, without touching)

### Brushstrokes and/or materials

**Depth:** is there the illusion of depth or is the image flat?

**Content:** what is included in the image, what is happening, what the artwork depicts

**Composition:** the way things are arranged on the canvas/in the image

**Size and Shape** of the canvas or artwork as a whole

Perhaps the **time period** in which the artwork was created

Perhaps the **culture** in which the artwork was created

## Target Skill: Revision

*Appropriate for Journal Entries*



*Wrapped Reichstag*  
Christo

### Background

This exercise is geared towards helping your students better understand the adjustments and alterations that writing can undergo. Rather than see the rough draft as an acceptable standard, students must learn to value the formulation and the revision of their words. *Wrapped Reichstag* by artist Christo and *Study for a Soft, Red Drain Pipe* by Claes Oldenburg are examples of artistic works in their early stages. You can use these sketches to emphasize the metamorphosis of a professional work. The study of these rough drafts will allow students the opportunity to connect their writings with the importance of revision and editing.

Christo's *Wrapped Reichstag* encased shows his initial ideal for actually covering a building. The sketch represents a proposal, a desire to express his artwork through a larger project. You can use this sketch to ask your students what kinds of things Christo might have to think about as he goes from the artistic sketch to the reality of encasing the building.



*Study for a Soft, Red Drain Pipe*  
Claes Oldenburg

### Works Used

Christo's *Wrapped Reichstag*

Claes Oldenburg's *Study for a Soft, Red Drain Pipe*

### Set-Up

Make sure your students are prepped beforehand, that you have gone over the basics of revision. They need to be aware of the writing process.

Handout with questions that can be used while the students are observing the sketch and then later to write a journal entry.

20-30 minutes of class time interacting with the artistic rough draft.

This assignment works best if you can take class time to join your students in experiencing the art. Helping them to make the connections between the artistic sketch and their writing is necessary in order for their observations to be thoughtful and worthwhile.

*Study for a Soft, Red Drain Pipe* can only be obtained through Robbin Zella. In addition, sometimes the museum's temporary exhibits come with rough drafts.

### Assignment Explanation

Once you have presented the basic structure of revision (coherence, language, unity, etc.), you can use the artistic sketch to reinforce these lessons. Through the questionnaire, you can focus your students' attention, and in concluding your discussion on revision and editing, you can ask them to turn in a journal entry comparing their observations and experiences with the editing process to the artwork they have analyzed. It is a good idea to have them turn this assignment in on the class period after a final draft has been due. That way the students can speak from their personal experience, and you can reinforce key concepts.

# Revision Journal Entry

*For Student Use*

## Assignment

Take your questionnaire to the museum and answer these questions as you observe the artistic rough draft. After you have absorbed the material, use the questionnaire as a point of reference for a journal entry. You should compare the artist's revision process with that of the writer's. Share your thoughts about this third stage in the writing process.

Length:

Due Date:

## Consider

Notice how both the artist and the writer are concerned with creating a vivid picture – one that lingers with the viewer/reader. How does their revision and editing reflect this craftsmanship? What kinds of things do both a writer and artist emphasize? How does a rough draft change from its conception to its final revision (for both an artist and a writer)?



## Example

If an artist were to revise this picture, he or she would add details such as color and light. The result would dramatically increase the viewer's perception of the picture. For example, the artist could draw attention to the rider's hat simply by choosing a vibrant color.

This choice might reflect what the artist thinks is important – a bold color might accentuate the rider's courage while a dull color might accentuate the rider's loss. With one choice, the artist is setting the tone for the picture. By comparison, a writer also sets the tone for his or her writing through the careful selection of words. When a writer revises a rough draft, he or she focuses on verbs and synonyms, making sure each word helps create a word picture.

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## Revision Questionnaire

1. What is your overall impression of the artist's rough draft? As a reader/viewer of the artwork, do you think anything needs to be made clearer in order for you to more fully appreciate and understand the artist's meaning?
2. What message do you think the artist is trying to get across with this image? How might that message change with light, color, lines, etc.?
3. What kinds of changes might the artist anticipate? What kinds of changes do you think the artist should consider?
4. How might these changes affect the overall image?
5. In writing, we work at creating vivid word pictures in order to support our general ideas. In much the same manner, artists work to create an image that will stick with the viewer long after he or she leaves the artwork. How might this artwork compare to the rough draft of a college essay in terms of imagery? Do you see the artist struggling to make herself or himself clearer? Do you struggle to make yourself more specific with your use of examples and therefore word pictures?

**Target Skill:****Description** (using spatial organization)

*Appropriate for Freewriting or Paragraphs*

**Background**

This assignment focuses on using spatial organization to organize a descriptive paragraph.

**Works Included**

Any one artwork the student chooses.

**Set-Up**

Have the students select an artwork that appeals to them (homework). Then have them do some prewriting, freewriting or brainstorming, focusing on various aspects of the work's appearance: size, colors, content (figure[s], background, sky/land sections for landscape paintings, etc.), materials, views from various angles (sculpture), textures (without touching, of course), etc. You may have them consider these different elements separately, or consider each of the elements while focusing separately on different parts of the artwork. Then have them prewrite (brainstorm, cluster, question) to generate ideas about the scene/figure depicted or the mood of the artwork. Use all of this prewriting to come up with a topic sentence about the tone or what is depicted in the artwork.

Then, use the prewriting to develop a scratch outline of the paragraph. The outline must organize the material according to the location of certain elements within the canvas/sculpture. You can have them complete these steps in class or for homework.

*(If your goal is freewriting, use the above suggestions to develop your exercise.)*

**Assignment Explanation**

If your goal is a paragraph, see "Set-Up" above and "Assignment" on the student sheet.

*For Student Use*

# Description

## Assignment

Write a descriptive paragraph in which you describe any artwork here at Housatonic.

Start by selecting your painting, print or sculpture. Be sure to identify the work by artist, title and medium (painting, print, sculpture, etc.) in your topic sentence. Organize your description spatially. Start at the center and move outward, start at the top and move down, start at the left and move right, or use any other spatially based organizational pattern. If the piece you have chosen to describe is abstract, focus on color or brush strokes. If the piece you have chosen is representational [it depicts figures (people) or recognizable objects], discuss its content.

Length:

Due Date:

## Consider:

The way the viewer's eye is directed through the artwork

The role of **color**

- Are some colors brighter than others?
- Do some colors seem to come forward toward the viewer while others recede?
- Do colors blend or are they sharply contrasted?
- What emotional connotations do the colors have?

The role of the **objects/figures** depicted

**Line:** thick, thin, wavy, no line, etc.

**Image:** what is depicted, and how it is depicted (abstract, landscape, portrait, etc.)

**Shapes:** does the image contain any circles, squares, ovals, etc.

**Style:** realistic, photographic, abstract, gestural, expressive, Pop art, Op art, etc.

**Texture:** shiny, glossy, embossed, rough, smooth, etc. (examine visually, without touching)

**Brushstrokes and/or materials**

**Depth:** is there the illusion of depth or is the image flat?

**Content:** what is included in the image, what is happening, what the artwork depicts

**Composition:** the way things are arranged on the canvas/in the image

**Size and Shape** of the canvas or artwork as a whole

Perhaps the **time period** in which the artwork was created

Perhaps the **culture** in which the artwork was created

**Focus***For Student Use*

Obviously, you cannot discuss all of these elements in one paragraph. You must focus your topic. In your topic sentence, the artwork you have chosen is the topic of the sentence, and the main idea is some general descriptive statement.

**Examples:**

The painting \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_ depicts a proper upper class woman . (Your supporting sentences should describe the aspects of the painting which prove that the woman is upper class.)

In the abstract painting entitled \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_, color directs the viewer's eye through the canvas. (Your supporting sentences discuss the colors of the artwork.)

## Target Skill: Exemplification

*Appropriate for Paragraphs and Essays*

### Background

In the examples essay, we ask our students to focus on concrete details. They must concentrate on their reasons for writing and clearly state how these reasons support their ideas. This writing becomes an exercise in good support. *The Pillow Project* and *The Wishbone Project* by June Ahrens are two art conceptions that allow students to use their imaginations as they work on developing the skill of illustrating their ideas with examples.

In *The Wishbone Project*, June Ahrens asks children and senior citizens to create wishbones out of play dough. The display box shows the actual wishes written next to some of the finished products. Using this idea, you can ask your students to describe their wishes using specific examples. They must describe their hopes and desires using concrete imagery.

Another option for imaginative response is *The Pillow Project*. In this art conception, June Ahrens uses pillows to create portraits of the people who sleep on them. The pillows become symbols of people's desires. You can use this concrete object to stimulate your students' thinking. Ask them to write about their dream pillow and what it would look like. Ask them to create a word picture in their paragraph or essay.

### Works Used

*The Wishbone Project* by June Ahrens

*The Pillow Project* by June Ahrens

### Set-Up

Outside of class museum time

### Assignment Explanation

Explain the ideas behind *The Wishbone Project* and *The Pillow Project*, and then ask students to go study the boxes. Ask them to write an examples essay or paragraph based on one of these projects. If they choose *The Wishbone Project*, tell them to explain what their wishes would be and how they would use their wishes to make their lives better. If they choose *The Pillow Project*, ask them to give specifics when describing their dream pillow. Tell them to make sure that an artist could paint it based on their words.



*The Wishbone Project*  
June Ahrens



*The Pillow Project*  
June Ahrens



# Exemplification

*For Student Use*

## Assignment

Study *The Wishbone Project* and *The Pillow Project*. Decide which one you like better and then write an examples essay.

In *The Wishbone Project*, artist June Ahrens asks children and senior citizens to create wishbones out of play dough. The display box shows the actual wishes written next to some of the finished products. Using this art idea, describe some of your wishes and organize them into categories. Think about what you would ask for if you were given a genie and three wishes.

If you choose *The Pillow Project*, however, think about the kind of dreams that come to you at night. In this project, June Ahrens uses pillows to create portraits of the people who sleep on them. The pillows become symbols of people's desires. Write about your dream pillow and what it would look like. How does it reflect who you are or what you would like to become?

Length:

Due Date:

## Consider

Before you actually begin organizing and writing, spend some time gathering ideas. Freewrite, brainstorm, or cluster. Try to generate as many examples as possible since you will be using several when you actually begin writing. This prewriting will give you a good idea as to the direction in which you are headed, either *The Wishbone Project* or *The Pillow Project*.

## Example

If you choose the *The Wishbone Project*, make sure you are creating a vivid word picture with each wish. Give specific examples as to what you mean. For instance, don't just say, "I wish I were rich." Expand on that idea. Give me reasons for why you want to be rich – so that you can live in exotic places like Australia or use your time to explore unsolved mysteries like the Bermuda Triangle. Go into detail.

If you choose *The Pillow Project*, create a vivid word picture of your pillow. Make sure that an artist could paint it based on your words. For example, you might say that your pillow has a covering of deep blue satin to remind you of the water and its soothing sounds. Maybe you are a person who dreams of water and finds that its presence gives you energy. Whatever picture you create, remember to be as concrete as possible.

## Target Skill: Narration (a)

*Appropriate for Paragraphs and Essays*

### Background

One of the dimensions in narrative writing is the use of theme. In other words, we are asking our students to tell us the meanings behind their stories – why they are choosing to relate this information. Since artistic artifacts are generally indicative of a certain cultural ideal or value system, the study of Housatonic’s artifacts coalesces nicely with the narrative paragraph or essay.

With the *Standing Female/Hands Over Stomach*, for example, students can create a story about the supposed owner. Originally, this artifact was allowed to be seen only by the person to whom it was given. People viewed this figurine as having spiritual connections to its owner. Students can take this information and create their own reasons as to why.

Robbin Zella will offer a short lecture/question-and-answer period on each artifact. You need to make an appointment with Robbin Zella.

### Works Used (Contact Robbin Zella for viewing)

Baule Peoples – Africa, Ivory Coast: *Standing Female/Hands Over Stomach*

Africa, Zaire: *Walking Stick*

Baule Peoples – Africa, Ivory Coast: *Warri Game* (Mancala)

Ashanti Peoples – Africa: *Gold Weights*

Dan Peoples – Africa, Ivory Coast: *Ancient Masque*



*Walking Stick*



*Standing Female/  
Hands Over  
Stomach*



*Warri Game*



*Gold Weights*

### Set-Up

30 minutes in art museum with Robbin Zella

### Assignment Explanation

After presenting the background information for narration, ask your students to write a paragraph or essay based on one of Housatonic’s artifacts. Tell them they can create the story for that artifact, depending on their individual perspectives. For example, they can imagine what it was used for (religion, hunting, domestic purposes, etc.). How do they view the artifact? As they become creative with the assignment, remind them to center their story around some kind of conflict or struggle. That way they will have to focus on an outcome and a meaning for their stories. Also, tell them to use their imaginations; they do not have to be factually accurate.

# Narration (a)

*For Student Use*

## Assignment

After studying the different artifacts in the art museum, choose one to use in writing a narrative. Create a story based on your view of the artifact. How do you think it might have been used? What was its function? How might people have handled it in their time and culture? Use your imagination; you do not have to be factually accurate.

Length:

Due Date:

## Consider

We preserve artifacts for a reason. Although some may seem ordinary to you, they each point to some aspect or quality about the culture in which they originated. Think about why we might go to such great lengths to preserve these artifacts. Why might it be so important to remember its function in the culture? What does the artifact say to you about the art, religion, entertainment, work, or domesticity of that civilization?

After thinking about these questions, create a story based on your own imagination. Remember to include a struggle or conflict. Doing so will help you determine why you are writing.

## Example

If you choose the African mancala game, you might want to create a story based on two different kinds of players. Perhaps one player is from Africa, and one is from North America. You could then create a tension between them and in their game. Perhaps they both want something that the other has. Perhaps they each represent different values and ideas. Once you determine the source of their tension, you can then create the meaning of the story. For example, if my two players were competing for power, my outcome would center on the need for diversity and other points of view. I would allow the lesser power to become the stronger one. In the end, this would say something about my meaning, my desire to sustain the minority viewpoint against the power of the majority one.

*Target Skill:*  
**Narration,** including description (b)

*Appropriate for Essays*



*144-1988*  
*Silvia Taccani*

that they want, but these details must be linked to some emotion expressed by the woman in some part of the piece. Help them to find different ways of organizing their narrative in relationship to the piece (e.g. start with the central photograph and move outward, or start with one of the corner areas and spiral inward in a clockwise or counterclockwise motion). Encourage them to add descriptive details about the events they make up, even if the descriptions move away from the original piece.

### **Background**

Use this artwork to generate a fictional narrative that students can present in essay form. The narrative will be generated completely by the student, and the presentation of that narrative must include descriptions inspired by the artwork.

### **Works Included**

Silvia Taccani's *144-1988*

### **Set-Up**

Send students to look at the piece. Have them draw the basic shapes created by the arrangement of the differently tinted photographs within the piece. Have them label these shapes (area of the piece) with the predominate color in that area and some brief description of images in these regions (e.g. the woman's expression, mood or condition). When the students return to class with their notes, have them work in groups to brainstorm some ideas about a story involving this woman. They can make up any details

### **Assignment Explanation**

See student sheet.

# Narrative Essay (b)

*For Student Use*

## Assignment

Write a narrative essay which includes descriptive sentences. Your narrative will be totally fictional, but you will present it in this essay as if it really happened. Use an artwork to generate your fictitious narrative. The artwork you must use is Silvia Taccani's *144-1988*. This artwork is a conglomerate of many photos of a woman's face. Make up and narrate the woman's experience as depicted in this piece. Name the piece in the introduction and indicate that the piece depicts the woman's experience. Your thesis statement must make some general statement about this woman's experience.

Length:

Due Date:

## Organization

Use the composition of the piece to organize the events in your narrative. You may choose to describe the artwork and how the images are arranged in the introduction or in the first supporting paragraph of the essay. Either way, your introduction should identify the artwork and indicate that it depicts the experience of a woman. You may want to create a fake identity for this woman. In your narrative, move from the center out: start with the central image and move out, spiraling clockwise or counterclockwise. Or, use the opposite approach. Or, you may move in some other method of your own design. In any case, note that the piece is divided into four general areas, one of which is divided into 4 sections

1. the central, natural color photo
2. the white-tinted diamond shape of many photos surrounding the central photo
3. a green-tinted strip of photos along the edges of the white, diamond-shaped area
4. and the four corner regions, each tinted pink but each with a different group of photos

In your introduction and conclusion, make a general statement about this woman's experience. Consider what the piece shows us about this experience and how it makes the viewer feel about the narrative.

## Target Skill: Cause and Effect

*Appropriate for Essays*



### Background

In this assignment, students will write about the effects that a particular artwork has on the viewer. Rather than writing about the various effects of a single cause, students will focus on various aspects of the artwork as the cause of various effects. The unifying element will be the overall effect that the artwork as a whole has on the viewer.

### Works Used

Students will choose from the following:

1. any work in the color hallway (nonrepresentational works which explore color)
2. *144-1988* by Silvia Taccani
3. *The Crash* by John Salt
4. any artwork (with prior permission of the instructor)

### Set-Up

After having studied cause and effect, explain the assignment to your class as a whole. Then take the whole class to look at the artworks in one large group. Let them have a fairly quick look at each of the artworks. You may want to point out a few of the elements discussed in the assignment choices (see student sheet). End in the color hallway. Have students examine the various works in this hallway, and then begin to split them into groups according to the artworks they select. Students may choose to leave the color hallway and return to one of the other works as a topic. Ask the students to take notes while looking at the artworks they have chosen. They should make a list of the various elements of the painting (color, image, texture, etc.) and list the effects of each of these elements. Then, if there is any time left, they may return to the classroom and work with other students who have selected the same artwork on writing a thesis statement and outlining support.



*The Crash*  
John Salt



### Assignment Explanation

See student page.

# Cause and Effect Essay

*For Student Use*

## Assignment

Write an essay in which you focus on the effects of various elements of a work of art here at the college. As always, you must begin with an introduction which has a strong thesis statement. Be sure to identify the piece by artist and title in the first sentence of the introduction. End the introduction with a strong thesis statement. Although you are discussing a number of different effects that the artwork has on the viewer, your thesis must focus on some general/overall effect to which all of these smaller effects contribute. To come up with such a thesis, it might be best to focus on the tone of the work. After viewing the piece and considering its elements, ask yourself “What emotional response does this piece create in me?” Consider whether viewing this piece is a calming experience or a frenetic experience. Perhaps it creates some other emotional response. Perhaps it sends a specific message to the viewer.

Once you have settled on a thesis, reconsider the elements of the piece which led you to your thesis. Discuss these elements and their effects in the body of your essay. Remember to organize your support into strong body paragraphs, each with a clear topic sentence. Of course, end your essay with a strong conclusion.

Length:

Due Date:

## Choose from the following topics:

1. Discuss *The Crash* by John Salt. This painting depicts the wreckage of a violent event. Yet, the painting itself does not have an abrasive effect on the viewer. There are no wild brush strokes or hard edges. The image is realistic, but not photographic. Consider the image (what is depicted and what is not depicted here), the fact that it depicts the wrecked car after the crash is over, not the crash itself, the textures, and the composition (the way things are arranged on the canvas).
2. Discuss *144-1988* by Silvia Taccani. It is a conglomerate of many photos of a woman's face. The various images of the woman have different expressions. What is the effect of these perhaps conflicting images? Also, consider the arrangement and coloration of the piece. The piece has four main areas, one of which is divided into four sections: 1) the central, natural color photo, 2) the white-tinted diamond shape of many photos surrounding the central photo, 3) the strip of green-tinted photos surrounding the diamond, and 4) the four pink-tinted corner areas. Each area has a different group of images.
3. Select any painting from the “color hallway.” This is the hallway which begins to the right of the museum entrance and extends back to the library. The artworks which explore color are nonrepresentational. Thus, you will have to focus on color, texture and the shape of the canvas. Some of the canvases have odd shapes, which can have a very interesting effect. Even a square canvas can be significant in a painting that presents color in square shapes on the canvas. There are some other paintings in this hallway which are representational. If you are interested in writing about one of these works, you must see your instructor first.
4. Choose any other piece at Housatonic. See your instructor to discuss your ideas before you begin.

**Consider:**

**Color:** value (light or dark), what colors are used, possible symbolism, etc.

**Line:** thick, thin, wavy, no line, etc.

**Image:**

- what is depicted
- how it is depicted: representational, abstract, figurative, landscape, portrait, etc.

**Shapes:** does the image contain any circles, squares, ovals, etc.

**Style:** realistic, photographic, pop art, op art, gestural, abstract expressionism, expressive, etc.

**Texture:** shiny, glossy, embossed, rough, smooth, etc. (examine visually without touching)

**Brushstrokes and/or materials**

**Depth:** is there the illusion of depth or is the image flat?

**Content:** what is included in the image, what is happening, what the artwork depicts

**Composition:** the way things are arranged on the canvas/in the image

**Size and Shape** of the canvas or artwork as a whole

Perhaps the **time period** in which the artwork was created

Perhaps the **culture** in which the artwork was created

**NOTE:** Read these instructions carefully, even the ones not related to the piece you have selected as the topic of your essay. Take note of the vocabulary used in the instructions. You may need to use some of this vocabulary (e.g. “depicts” and “representational”) in your essay. If you don’t know a word, consult a dictionary and/or your instructor.

**Focus**

Your topic sentence should focus on the overall effect that the artwork has on the viewer.

Examples: This painting has a calming effect on the viewer.

OR The images and color in this work evoke the atmosphere of a Las Vegas casino.

(This second example relates to the painting *Suzie Q* by Rene Schumacher.)



*Susie Q*  
Rene Schumacher



*Target Skill:*  
**Comparison/Contrast (a)**

*Appropriate for Paragraphs or Essays*

### Background

This exercise is intended for students in EN 101 or possibly EN 100. It could be used to emphasize methods of organization in comparison/contrast essays, to combine description with comparison/contrast, and/or to emphasize point and support over personal response.

### Works Included

*Incident* by Alex Katz

*Jazz Scene II* by Russell Lawson

(Both works depict multiple figures.)

### Set-Up

You may want to prepare students for this essay by sending them to look at the paintings (either as homework or for a quick look during class) and then asking them to brainstorm ideas about the similarities and differences between these two works. Use the assignment sheet to give shape to their discussion. Ask EN101 students to come up with a thesis statement and a scratch outline. Ask EN100 students to come up with a topic sentence and an outline. You may choose to give students sample thesis statements or topic sentences to choose from.

You may choose simply to give this assignment as one of several suggested paper topics without devoting any class time to preparation.

### Assignment Explanation

See student assignment sheet.



*Incident*  
Alex Katz



*Jazz Scene II*  
Russell Lawson

*For Student Use*

## Comparison/Contrast Essay (a)

### Assignment

Write an essay in which you compare or contrast the following paintings:

*Incident* by Alex Katz

*Jazz Scene II* by Russell Lawson

Your essay should introduce the paintings by artist and title in the first sentence of the introduction. The rest of the introduction should describe the works generally and lead up to a thesis statement about some main similarity or difference between the two works. See “Focus” below for guidance in formulating a thesis statement.

Length:

Due Date:

### Prewriting

Both of these paintings depict multiple figures. Look for other similarities and look for differences. Brainstorm a list of each. Focus your essay/paragraph on one or the other: similarities OR differences.

### Consider:

**Level of realism**

**Brush strokes** (small/large, visible/imperceptible...)

**Colors:** value (light or dark), what colors are used, possible symbolism, etc.

**Background:** what is or isn't depicted, how it is depicted

**Size/shape** of canvas (the Lawson painting has two panels)

**Composition** (where things are/how they are organized on the canvas)

**Content**

- people
- what the figures are doing/wearing
- anything else in the painting

**Line:** thick, thin, wavy, no line, etc.

**Texture:** shiny, glossy, embossed, rough, smooth, etc.

**Depth:** is there the illusion of depth or is the image flat?

### Focus

You may choose to focus on mood/tone, social commentary or level of realism. As always, the focus of the essay is stated in your thesis statement. If you are writing only a paragraph, choose a narrow focus and state it in your topic sentence.

## Target Skill: Comparison and Contrast (b)

*Appropriate for Paragraphs and Essays*

### Background

Comparison/Contrast writing helps students to analyze and interpret information. They must make their own connections and conclusions. Once they have decided to look at the similarities or differences between two pieces of art, they then must decide on a schema of organization.

Housatonic's museum has several pieces with which to compare or contrast. For example, sculptor Francisco Zuniga's Mexican statue of motherhood contrasts nicely with artist Sally Michel Avery's portrait of motherhood. In the statue, students can detect the pain of motherhood as a stoic woman grimly stares into the distance while her hand rests on the swell of her pregnant belly and a young child tugs at her legs. The painting, however, displays the joy and serenity of motherhood. The soft colors and geometric forms radiate peace. A mother contentedly nurses her child while sitting comfortably.

Other good choices for this assignment include the busts of two religious females: the 15th century Hispano Flemish Reliquary (Virgin Mary) and Kuan Yin, the Asian goddess of compassion. Each piece celebrates female spirituality and depicts the differences between two cultures. Finally, Lee Bontecou's bronze statue of an abstract seated couple contrast's nicely with Silvia Sleight's portrait of a seventies couple. Students can easily form conclusions about each pair's emotional and physical closeness.

### Works Used

15th century Hispano Flemish Reliquary (arguably the Virgin Mary).

Kuan Yin, green marble goddess of compassion: China, Ming.

Lee Bontecou's *Seated Couple*: 1959.

Sylvia Sleight's *Felicity Rainie and Arnold Belkin*: 1971.

Sally Michel Avery's *Mother Nursing*: 1966

Francisco Zuniga's *Maternity*: 1913.

### Set-Up

20 minutes of museum time

Make sure that you read examples of comparison/contrast writing before you take your students to study the art. That way they will be ready to start analyzing and interpreting the pieces right away. They need to know ahead of time what kind of critical thinking you are expecting.

Take time to discuss each pairing of artworks as you stop in front of them. Ask the students what kinds of similarities or differences they detect.

### Assignment Explanation

After your museum time, ask the students to write about one of the three pairings. Remind them to focus on either comparing or contrasting. Most students struggle with organization, and if you reassure them that they can narrow the topic to one or the other, they may find it easier to draw conclusions about the artwork.



*Felicity Rainie and Arnold Belkin*  
Sylvia Sleight



*Mother Nursing*  
Sally Michel Avery



*Seated Couple*  
Lee Bontecou



*Maternity*  
Francisco Zuniga

*For Student Use*

## Comparison/Contrast (b)

### Assignment

Decide which pairing of artworks you want to write about.

1. Two Female Busts
  - Hispano Flemish Reliquary (arguably the Virgin Mary)
  - Kuan Yin, the Asian Goddess of Compassion
2. Two Couples
  - Lee Bontecou's *Seated Couple*
  - Sylvia Sleigh's *Felicity Rainie and Arnold Belkin*
3. Two Mothers
  - Sally Michel Avery's *Mother Nursing*
  - Francisco Zuniga's *Maternity*

Now decide whether you are going to write about the similarities or differences in the works you have chosen. Your thesis sentence should state whether you are comparing the artworks or contrasting them. Once these two decisions have been made, organize and write.

Length:

Due Date:

### Consider

A good way to organize your paper is to break down your points of discussion into three major categories. If you find three major differences or three major similarities between the artworks, then you can easily write your paper. You will have enough information to avoid writer's block.

### Example

If you choose the two mothers, you might write about the differences between the two artworks – how each artist is depicting a different aspect of motherhood. You might divide those differences into categories such as these.

1. Artistic Materials
  - painting: soft colors, pastels—accentuates peace
  - statue: bronze, hard material—accentuates difficulty
2. Faces
  - painting: no face, expression through body – motherhood as joyful concept: not singled out to one individual
  - statue: grimace—motherhood as hard labor: something to be endured
3. Physical Touches
  - painting: cradling baby – tenderness of mother
  - statue: child touching mother but mother not reciprocating – nuisance of being a mother

**Target Skill:**  
**Comparison/Contrast (c)**

*Daphnis*  
 John Griefen



Liz  
 Andy Warhol

*Portrait of a Seated Woman*  
 Kenneth Frazier

*Appropriate for Paragraphs or Essays*

**Background**

This exercise is intended for students in EN 101 or possibly EN 100. It could be used to emphasize methods of organization in comparison/contrast essays, to combine description with comparison/contrast, and/or to emphasize point and support over personal response.

**Works Included**

Choose from the following pairs:

- *Daphnis*, John Griefen and *Portrait of a Seated Woman*, Kenneth Frazier
- *Ocelots*, Hunt Slonam and *Rosedale*, Valerie Jaudon
- Chalcidian Krater (Greek vase) and *People Walking III*, Lester Johnson
- *The Incident*, Alex Katz and *Portrait of a Seated Woman*, Kenneth Frazier
- *Liz*, Andy Warhol and *Portrait of a Seated Woman*, Kenneth Frazier
- any two works

**Set-Up**

You may want to prepare students for this essay by taking a tour guided by the museum director, Robbin Zella. Before the tour, ask Robbin to discuss the similarities and differences between these works. She can use these works to introduce different types of art, and at the same time give students ideas they can use in their essays. After the tour, you may want to send students back to look at the paintings again (either as homework or for a quick look during class), and then ask them to brainstorm ideas about the similarities and differences between the two works of their choice. Use the assignment sheet to give shape to their discussion. Ask students to come up with a thesis statement and a scratch outline. You may choose to give students a sample thesis.

You may choose simply to give this assignment as one of several suggested paper topics without devoting any class time to preparation.



*Rosedale*  
 Valerie Jaudon

*Ocelots*  
 Hunt Slonam

**Assignment Explanation**

See student assignment sheet.



*People Walking III*  
 Lester Johnson



Chalcidian Krater

For Student Use

## Comparison/Contrast Essay (c)

### Assignment

Write an essay in which you compare or contrast two works. Choose from the following pairs:

- *Daphnis*, John Griefen and *Portrait of a Seated Woman*, Kenneth Frazier
- *Ocelots*, Hunt Slonam and *Rosedale*, Valerie Jaudon
- Chalcidian Krater (Greek vase) and *People Walking III*, Lester Johnson
- *The Incident*, Alex Katz and *Portrait of a Seated Woman*, Kenneth Frazier
- *Liz*, Andy Warhol and *Portrait of a Seated Woman*, Kenneth Frazier
- any two works

Your essay should introduce the artworks by artist and title in the first sentence of the introduction. The rest of the introduction should describe the works generally and lead up to a thesis statement about some main similarity or difference between the two works.

Length:

Due Date:

### Prewriting

Look for similarities and differences between these two works. Brainstorm a list of each. If you go on a tour, be sure to take good notes.

### Consider:

**Color:** value (light or dark), what colors are used, possible symbolism, etc.

**Line:** thick, thin, wavy, no line, etc.

**Image:**

- what is depicted
- how it is depicted: representational, abstract, figurative, landscape, portrait, etc.

**Shapes:** does the image contain any circles, squares, ovals, etc.

**Style:** realistic, photographic, pop art, op art, gestural, abstract expressionism, expressive, etc.

**Texture:** shiny, glossy, embossed, rough, smooth, etc. (examine visually, without touching)

**Brushstrokes and/or materials**

**Depth:** is there the illusion of depth or is the image flat?

**Content:** what is included in the image, what is happening, what the artwork depicts

**Composition:** the way things are arranged on the canvas/in the image

**Size and Shape** of the canvas or artwork as a whole

Perhaps the **time period** in which the artwork was created

Perhaps the **culture** in which the artwork was created

**Focus***For Student Use*

As always, the focus of the essay is stated in your thesis statement. If you are writing only a paragraph, choose a narrow focus and state it in your topic sentence.

1. *Daphnis*, John Griefen and *Portrait of a Seated Woman*, Kenneth Frazier  
Compare Griefen's abstract work to Frazier's representational work. While Griefen's work is about materials and process (it is a record of the process of putting paint on canvas), Frazier's work is a realistic portrait of a woman. Contrast the differing purposes and effects of the two works.
2. *Ocelots*, Hunt Slonam and *Rosedale*, Valerie Jaudon  
Both of these works employ patterning using a similar color palette on a flat surface. Slonam's is representational while Jaudon's employs a non-representational all-over pattern. Jaudon's work evokes "women's work" by employing a Celtic pattern reminiscent of lace patterns, and thus plays with the line between fine art and craft. If Jaudon's purpose in this work is to make a feminist statement, what exactly is that statement? What, on the other hand, is Slonam's purpose in *Ocelots*?
3. Chalcidian Krater (Greek vase) and *People Walking III*, Lester Johnson.  
Both of these works depict figures lined up closely together. Yet, the two works are very different in style. Compare/contrast the perspective (depth or absence of depth), the layering of the figures, the presence or absence of a sense of motion (and what creates that effect), and the overall mood of the two works. Consider also the two different media and perhaps the cultural/historical contexts of the two works.
4. *The Incident*, Alex Katz and *Portrait of a Seated Woman*, Kenneth Frazier  
Both of these works could be described as realistic. However, one is clearly more realistic than the other. Contrast the levels of realism of the two works. Consider also what is depicted in each work and the effect that the styles in which the works are painted has on their content. Be sure to discuss the mood established by each image and the different types of people depicted.
5. *Liz*, Andy Warhol and *Portrait of a Seated Woman*, Kenneth Frazier  
Examine the similarities and differences between these two works. Frazier's painting is a realistic portrait of an upper class woman seated rather uncomfortably in a stiff chair. Warhol's work is a Pop art portrait of the famous Elizabeth Taylor. Pop art was a movement in art which took place during the late 1950s and the 1960s. This movement is an apparent celebration of consumerism. Pop art evokes the brash, colorful world of advertising, comic strips and popular entertainment
6. Any two works  
Get permission from your instructor.

## Target Skill: Analysis

*Appropriate for Essays*



*The Soldier*

Richard Stankiewicz

### Works Used

One of the following works:

*The Vixens*, The Gauguin Coalition

*The Soldier*, Richard Stankiewicz

*The Altar*, Michael Hafftka

### Set-Up

After you have taught your students about analysis (defined analysis and discussed an analysis essay), you can give them this writing assignment. You do not have to take a guided tour, but you will have to spend some class time looking at the artworks and generating some ideas. You may choose to use this assignment as an option among other topics for analysis.

### Assignment Explanation

Students will analyze the artwork in order to discuss its theme. Students will focus not only on the artwork itself, but the title of the artwork as well. In the case of *The Vixens*, students might also consider the fact that the painting was created by a group rather than an individual, and that this group creates artworks with a particular philosophy in mind, a philosophy related to Gauguin's idealization of the primitive.



*The Altar*

Michael Hafftka



*The Vixens*

*The Gauguin Coalition*



# Analysis

For Student Use

## Assignment

Write an essay in which you analyze a painting or sculpture. Choose one of the following works:

*The Vixens*, The Gauguin Coalition

*The Soldier*, Richard Stankiewicz

*The Altar*, Michael Hafftka

1. The Gauguin Coalition's *The Vixens* is the product of a group of artists who work together. These artists have named themselves after the well-known artist, Gauguin. You may want to read a bit about Gauguin and ask yourself why this group of artists named themselves after him. Certainly, this painting explores the idea of the primitive (as did Gauguin). Notice the primitive and refined elements of the artwork. The women in the foreground are quite refined. They wear their clothing and hair in such a way as to conform to social expectations. The fact that they are dressed the same way seems to suggest that these expectations take the form of a sort of uniform. Yet, the red color of their skirts may symbolize the passions/more primitive desires concealed by these proper uniforms. The women are contrasted with another, more "primitive" woman in the background. You can recognize her as reminiscent of Gauguin's figures. Another even more primitive element of this painting is the dinosaur in the foreground. The allusion to Gauguin in the name of the artists' group, the symbols in the painting, and the title of the painting all work together to make a statement about concepts of primitivism and refinement.
2. Richard Stankiewicz's sculpture *The Soldier* is made from found objects. The sculpture is clearly figurative. What does the figure seem to be doing? What is the figure holding? Consider the various parts of the figure and think about what each part seems to suggest about the figure. Consider the title of the sculpture. What kind of soldier is this? Has this soldier already been to war, or is he/she headed to war? Consider the materials themselves and the condition of those materials. What does it suggest that the materials are found objects? What does it suggest that they look to be rusty? Does this soldier seem to have an individual identity, or is the soldier faceless, one of a type?
3. Michael Hafftka's *The Altar* is a figurative painting though it is highly abstracted. Consider the title of the painting first. To what could the title be referring (perhaps the biblical story of Abraham or some other story of sacrifice)? What is/are the purpose(s) of an altar? What in the painting seems to be the altar, and to what use does it seem to be put in this painting? Consider also the tone (mood) of the painting. What do the colors and depth (or lack of depth) seem to suggest? What role does the figure play? How is the style of the painting appropriate for the content?

Length:

Due Date:

*For Student Use* **Consider:****The title of the work****Color:** value (light or dark), what colors are used, possible symbolism, etc.**Line:** thick, thin, wavy, no line, etc.**Image:**

- what is depicted
- how it is depicted: representational, abstract, figurative, landscape, portrait, etc.

**Shapes:** does the image contain any circles, squares, ovals, etc.**Style:** realistic, photographic, pop art, op art, gestural, abstract expressionism, expressive, etc.**Texture:** shiny, glossy, embossed, rough, smooth, etc. (examine visually, without touching)**Brushstrokes and/or materials****Depth:** is there the illusion of depth or is the image flat?**Content:** what is included in the image, what is happening, what the artwork depicts**Composition:** the way things are arranged on the canvas/in the image**Size and Shape** of the canvas or artwork as a wholePerhaps the **time period** in which the artwork was createdPerhaps the **culture** in which the artwork was createdPerhaps the **ideology** of the artist (may require research)**Focus**

Your thesis statement should focus on the theme of the artwork. That is, after you do some prewriting concerning the elements listed above, look over your ideas and try to identify a theme to which all of these elements point. Once you have discovered the theme of the artwork, write a thesis statement which identifies that theme. The body of your essay will support your thesis through analysis. That is, you will discuss the various parts of the artwork which indicate its theme. You will not be able to discuss all aspects of the artwork. Be sure that each aspect you discuss contributes something to the artwork's theme. As always, be sure that your body paragraphs are each unified with a strong topic sentence. If you need help deciding which elements of the artwork should be discussed in the same paragraph without compromising unity, get some help from a tutor and/or your instructor.

*Target Skill:*

# Analysis/Comparison-Contrast

(a) *(shaped poetry/canvas)*

*Appropriate for Essays (especially EN 102)*

## Works Used

Any one of the works on campus which have shaped canvases:

- Jesus Selgas, *Aia Mater Gratia Plena III*
- Donald Kauffman, *Other Man's Lake*
- Mark Feldstein, *Ode III*
- Janet Slom, *Untitled I*
- Any work with a shaped canvas (see museum director for artist and title if the work has no tag)

AND

A shaped poem such as "Easter Wings" by George Herbert or "Swan and Shadow" by John Hollander.



*Aia Mater Gratia Plena III*  
Jesus Selgas

## Set-Up

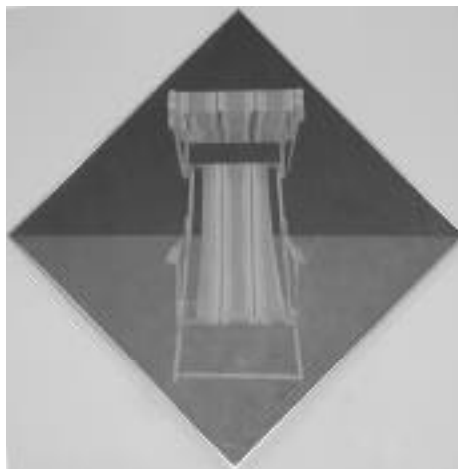
Toward the end of your unit on poetry, you may want to assign this as a paper option. Or, you could modify the assignment by asking students to write a journal entry on this topic.

## Assignment Explanation

This assignment allows students to draw a connection between poetry and another art, painting. It also allows them to examine the poem as a visual art rather than simply a work of literature meant for the printed page (and perhaps spoken performance).



*Other Man's Lake*  
Donald Kauffman



*Untitled I*  
Janet Slom



*Ode III*  
Mark Feldstein

*For Student Use*

# Analysis/Comparison-Contrast

## (a) (*shaped poetry/canvas*)

### Works Used

Any one of the works on campus which have shaped canvases:

- Jesus Selgas, *Aia Mater Gratia Plena III*
- Donald Kauffman, *Other Man's Lake*
- Mark Feldstein, *Ode III*
- Janet Slom, *Untitled I*
- Any work with a shaped canvas (see museum director for artist and title if the work has no tag)

AND

A shaped poem such as "Easter Wings" by George Herbert or "Swan and Shadow" by John Hollander.

### Assignment

Write an essay in which you compare a shaped poem to an abstract painting painted on an oddly shaped canvas. You can find at least four such paintings here at Housatonic: *Aia Mater Gratia Plena III* by Jesus Selgas, *Other Man's Lake* by Donald Kauffman, *Ode III* by Mark Feldstein, and *Untitled I* by Janet Slom. When choosing a shaped poem, consider George Herbert's "Easter Wings" or John Hollander's "Swan and Shadow."

Length:

Due Date:

### Consider

For the Painting:

**Color:** value (light or dark), what colors are used, possible symbolism, etc.

**Line:** thick, thin, wavy, no line, etc.

**Image:**

- what is depicted
- how it is depicted: representational, abstract, figurative, landscape, portrait, etc.

**Shapes:** does the image contain any circles, squares, ovals, etc.

**Style:** realistic, photographic, pop art, op art, gestural, abstract expressionism, expressive, etc.

**Texture:** shiny, glossy, embossed, rough, smooth, etc. (examine visually without touching)

**Brushstrokes and/or materials**

**Depth:** is there the illusion of depth or is the image flat?

**Content:** what is included in the image, what is happening, what the artwork depicts

**Composition:** the way things are arranged on the canvas/in the image

**Size and Shape** of the canvas or artwork as a whole

*For Student Use*

Perhaps the **time period** in which the artwork was created

Perhaps the **culture** in which the artwork was created

**Symbolism**

For the Poem:

**tone**

**word choice**

**connotations**

**imagery**

**figures of speech**

**sound** (euphony, cacophony, alliteration, assonance, rhyme, etc.)

**rhythm**

**symbolism**

**theme**

**form**

- the shape makes the poem a closed form poem
- the shape's relationship to the poem's topic/theme
- if the shape forces the reader to read the poem in a particular way, or if it allows for several different methods of reading the poem (e.g. In Hollander's poem, does the reader first read the words which make up the neck of the swan and then move to the body or wing, or does the reader read the lines from left to right without interruption, in spite of the blank space which interrupts each line between the neck and the wing of the swan? Clearly, any good analysis must consider both of these ways to read the poem, and perhaps others as well.)

## Focus

Be sure to identify the poem and painting by author/artist and title early in your introduction. Your thesis should focus on the unusual element of an unconventional shape. You may focus on the fact that playing with the shape contradicts the reader's/viewer's expectations. In any case, be sure that your thesis is about both the poem and the painting.

The body of the essay will support the thesis with a combination of analysis and comparison. That is, analyze one of the works first (poem or painting), and then analyze the other drawing attention to similarities between the two works. Though your analysis will consider many elements of each work (e.g. tone, image, word choice for the poem; color, depth, line for the painting), your analysis should focus on how these elements are affected by shape. Your conclusion should reiterate your thesis statement.

On the other hand, you may focus your analysis on the poem only, and use the painting as a frame for your essay. In writing, a frame is a device in which the writer uses a motif (in this case, a brief discussion of a shaped painting) in the introduction to grab the reader's attention and create a context for the real topic of the paper. In the conclusion, the writer returns to this same motif (the shaped painting) again, adding a few additional remarks to bring closure to the essay.

*Target Skill:*

## **Analysis, Comparison-Contrast** **(b)** *(poetry and sculpture)*

*Appropriate for Essays*



*15th Century Hispano  
Flemish Reliquary  
(arguably the Virgin Mary)*



*Kuan Yin*

### **Background**

Kuan Yin is the Goddess of Compassion and Mercy. Kuan Yin is revered for her joyous devotion and saving power. It is believed that anyone in distress who calls on her with sincerity will be rescued from suffering and harm. Kuan Yin is a symbol of compassion and aids in the quest for enlightenment. In India, she changes into a male form of Bodhisattva and is referred to as the “Regarder of the Cries of the World.” Kuan Yin is often described as wearing white, as is Mother Mary. Kuan Yin is her Chinese name, Kannon in Japanese.

The Virgin Mary is known as the mother of Jesus, and people pray to her for mercy and guidance. It is believed that she conceived while still a virgin. Thus, she represents purity, and her pregnancy is a direct manifestation of God’s power. Although Mary knew that Jesus would be killed, she still remained faithful to God and was actually present at the crucifixion.

Students should analyze the poem(s) and sculpture with these facts in mind.

### **Works Used**

Kuan Yin, sculpture

“Kuan Yin,” poem/prayer adapted from W.E. Soothill’s translation of Lotus Sutra (The Lotus of the Wonderful Law), Curzon Press (attached)

or

15th Century Hispano Flemish Reliquary (arguably the Virgin Mary)  
“The Salve Regina” and/or “Memorae” (attached)

### **Set-Up**

Have your students read the poems/prayers for homework and discuss them in class. Make sure that they take notes during the discussion. For homework after the discussion, have them look at the two busts and consider the aspects of the sculptures which reflect the themes of the poems. Students should take notes as they look at the sculptures using their class notes and the poems as guides. This homework assignment can be discussed briefly in class before the paper assignment is distributed. Or, you may assign this as one option among many and omit any class preparation.

### **Assignment Explanation**

Students will choose to write either about Kuan Yin or the Virgin Mary. The paper will analyze both the poem(s)/prayer(s) and the sculpture of choice. The student may use the poem as a key to his/her analysis of the sculpture, or use the sculpture to back up his/her analysis of the poem. Or, the essay could be a standard comparison/contrast essay discussing similarities between the two works. Alternatively, the student may compare/contrast Kuan Yin to the Virgin Mary. In this case, the student must focus on the poems/prayers, not the sculptures.

# Analysis *(poetry and sculpture)* (b)

*For Student Use*

## Assignment

Write an essay in which you discuss a poem and a sculpture. You may choose to write about one or both of the poems/prayers about the Virgin Mary (“The Salve Regina” and/or “Memorae”) and the bust of the Virgin Mary. Or you may choose the poem “Kuan Yin” and the bust of Kuan Yin. The paper will analyze both the poem(s) and the sculpture of choice. Alternatively, you may compare/contrast Kuan Yin to the Virgin Mary. In this case, focus on the poems/prayers, not the sculptures.

Length:

Due Date:

## Background

Kuan Yin is an Asian, female goddess. She is the Goddess of Compassion and Mercy, rescuer of lost souls. Kuan Yin is revered for her joyous devotion and saving power. It is believed that anyone in distress who calls on her with sincerity will be rescued from suffering and harm. Kuan Yin is a symbol of compassion and aids in the quest for enlightenment. In India, she changes into a male form of Bodhisattva and is referred to as the “Regarder of the Cries of the World.” Kuan Yin is often described as wearing white, as is Mother Mary. Kuan Yin is her Chinese name, Kannon in Japanese. (Eastern)

The Virgin Mary is known as the mother of Jesus, and people pray to her for mercy and guidance. It is believed that she conceived while still a virgin. Thus, she represents purity, and her pregnancy is a direct manifestation of God’s power. Although Mary knew that Jesus would be killed, she still remained faithful to God and was actually present at the crucifixion. (Western)

## Focus

You may take one of four approaches to your essay: 1) Choosing either Kuan Yin or the Virgin Mary, you may focus your essay on the sculpture and use the poem as a key to your analysis of the sculpture. 2) Choosing either Kuan Yin or the Virgin Mary, you may focus on the poem and use the sculpture to back up your analysis of the poem. 3) Choosing either Kuan Yin or the Virgin Mary, you may write a comparison-contrast essay discussing similarities between the two works, poem and sculpture. 4) You may compare Kuan Yin to the Virgin Mary; use the poem/prayer about Kuan Yin (and/or the sculpture of Kuan Yin) to support your discussion of her qualities, and use the poem(s)/prayer(s) to the Virgin Mary (and/or the sculpture of the virgin) to support your discussion of her qualities. In any case, your thesis statement should present an idea concerning both of the works you choose to discuss (or both Kuan Yin and the Virgin Mary if you choose option 4), and it should identify the focus of your essay (e.g. the sculpture reflects something that is in the poem, the poem can be better understood by examining the sculpture, that the two works have something in common, or the like). The words used here are vague; you will have to specify what that “something” is. Ask yourself, “What does this poem/prayer do for the reader?” and “What does this sculpture do for the viewer?” (Or, “what are they intended to do?”) **Keep in mind that the poems here are prayers and thus have a specific purpose and fewer images than many other poems about which you might write. Also, because they are prayers, the speaker and reader are the same.**

*For Student Use***The Salve Regina**

Hail Holy Queen,  
Mother of Mercy,  
Our life, our sweetness, our hope.  
To thee do we cry,  
Poor banished children of Eve;  
To thee do we send up our sighs,  
Mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.  
Turn then, most gracious advocate,  
Thine eyes of mercy toward us and after this  
Our exile show unto us the blessed fruit of thine womb, Jesus.  
O element, O loving, O Sweet Virgin Mary!

**Memorae**

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary  
That never was it known that anyone who fled to Your protection,  
implored Your help,  
or sought Your intercession was left unaided.  
Inspired with this confidence, we fly to you, O Virgin of virgins, our Mother.  
To You we come; before You we stand, sinful and sorrowful.  
O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not our petitions,  
but in Your Mercy, hear and answer us.



**Kuan Yin***For Student Use*

Listen to the deeds of the Cry-regarder,  
Who well responds to every quarter;  
Vast is her vow as deep the sea,  
Age-long, and inconceivable,  
Who hears her name and looks to her,  
Will end the sorrows of existence.

Sorrows of birth, age, disease, death,  
All will thus be ended.  
True regard, serene regard,  
Far-reaching, wise regard,  
Regard of pity, regard compassionate,  
Ever longed for, ever looked for,  
In radiance ever pure and serene!

Wisdom's sun, destroying darkness,  
Subduer of woes, of storm, of fire,  
Illuminator of the world!  
Law of pity, thunder quivering,  
Compassion wondrous as a great cloud,  
Pouring spiritual rain like nectar,  
Quenching all the flames of distress!

Voice of the Regarder, wondrous voice,  
Voice of the rolling tide, brahma-voice,  
Voice all world-surpassing,  
Ever to be cherished in mind  
With a never doubting thought.  
World's Cry-Regarder, pure and holy,  
In pain, distress, in death or woe,  
Potent as sure reliance,  
Perfect in every virtuous merit,  
All-beholding with eyes of pity,  
Boundless ocean-store of blessings!  
Prostrate, let us make obeisance.

# Glossary

**Abstract art:** non-representational art. That is, art which does not represent people, animals or objects in the real world, but which attempts to communicate meaning either through dramatically simplified or invented forms.\*

**Abstract Expressionism:** a movement in American art from the late 1940s to the late 1950s. Artists produced large-scale, dramatic abstract painting. There were two main types: "Action Painting" (paint is applied to the canvas in an energetic way, and the resulting paint forms make a record of the painting's creation) and "Color-field Painting" (which used broad expanses of color).\*

**Artifact:** an object produced or shaped by human craft, especially a rudimentary art form or object, as in the products of prehistoric workmanship. Only in the last ten or twenty years have works of various native peoples been considered art rather than artifacts, and displayed in museums of art as well as of ethnography.

**Composition:** the way the various parts of the image are arranged in the artwork.

**Depict:** to represent in a picture.

**Expressionism:** a movement in German and Austrian art of the early twentieth century (1905 to 1920s). The artists' main purpose was to express emotions and/or a sense of deeper reality, through vigorous brushstrokes, and distortion or exaggeration of shapes and colors. There were two main groups: Die Brücke (The Bridge) and Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider). Van Gogh and Munch were key influences. The term is often also used to identify a characteristic of Modern art.\*

**Expressive:** an artwork may be expressive without being part of the movements known as Expressionism or Abstract Expressionism. When we say that an artwork is expressive, we mean that it clearly communicates the artist's ideas or feelings.

**Figurative art:** depicts recognizable human forms (figures). It may or may not include other recognizable elements such as animals or objects. Figurative art is a specific kind of representational art, the kind that includes figures.

**Fine art:** collective term to describe painting, sculpture, drawing and print-making and sometimes also music and poetry. The main difference between fine and applied or decorative arts (such as pottery or embroidery) is that fine arts serve no practical purpose.\*

**Foreground:** the area of a picture or field of vision, often at the bottom, that appears to be closest to the viewer. Also, to give priority to one aspect of a thing over another.

**Found object:** a naturally-occurring or man-made object, such as driftwood, fabric or a bottle which, unaltered, is either exhibited as an artistic object in its own right, or incorporated into a work of art.\*

**Landscape:** an artwork which depicts a view of natural inland scenery. (An artwork which depicts ocean scenery is a **seascape**.)

**Op Art:** An international movement in art which took place during the late 1950s and the 1960s. The name is short for Optical art. It refers to a geometric abstract art that manipulates the viewer's visual response and creates the illusion of movement. Artists use theories from the psychology of perception to achieve this effect.\*

**Perspective:** the technique artists use to project an illusion of the three-dimensional world onto a two-dimensional surface. Perspective helps to create a sense of receding space. Fundamental techniques used to achieve perspective are: controlling variation between sizes of depicted subjects, overlapping some of them, and placing those that are on the depicted ground as lower when nearer and higher when farther away. In addition, there are three major types of perspective: aerial perspective, herringbone perspective, and linear perspective.

**Pop Art:** A movement in art which took place during the late 1950s and the 1960s. This movement is an apparent celebration of consumerism. The work evokes the brash, colorful world of advertising, comic strips and popular entertainment.\*

**Realism or the Realist school and realism:** the realistic and natural representation of people, places, and/or things in a work of art. The opposite of idealization.

**Realistic:** an image created in such a way that it resembles, to some extent, the item's true appearance in nature. Realistic is a relative term. That is, two artworks can both be realistic, but one can be more realistic than another.

**Render:** to represent in a drawing or painting, especially in perspective. Also, to create an interpretation of another artist's work, perhaps in another form.

**Relic:** an object which is venerated (regarded with respect and admiration) because of its association with a saint or martyr.

**Represent and Representation:** to stand for; symbolize. To depict or portray subjects a viewer may recognize as having a likeness; the opposite of abstraction. A representation is such a depiction.

**Representational:** depicts recognizable elements such as objects, animals or people. Representational art may or may not depict human forms. If so, it can be referred to as "figurative art" because it includes figures (people). If the artwork does not depict human forms, it must be referred to as "representational" (not "figurative").

**Nonrepresentational:** An artwork which does not depict recognizable objects or figures (abstract).

\* All definitions marked with an asterisk are taken from the book *Ausborne Introduction: Understanding Modern Art* by Monica Bohmn-Duchen and Janet Cook (Usborne).

# Elements to Consider When Viewing Art

**Color:** value (light or dark), what colors are used, possible symbolism, etc.

**Line:** thick, thin, wavy, no line, etc.

**Image:**

- what is depicted
- how it is depicted: representational, abstract, figurative, landscape, portrait, etc.

**Shapes:** does the image contain any circles, squares, ovals, etc.

**Style:** realistic, photographic, pop art, op art, gestural, abstract expressionism, expressive, etc.

**Texture:** shiny, glossy, embossed, rough, smooth, etc. (examine visually, without touching)

**Brushstrokes and/or materials**

**Depth:** is there the illusion of depth or is the image flat?

**Content:** what is included in the image, what is happening, what the artwork depicts

**Composition:** the way things are arranged on the canvas/in the image

**Size and Shape** of the canvas or artwork as a whole

Perhaps the **time period** in which the artwork was created

Perhaps the **culture** in which the artwork was created

Perhaps the **ideology** of the artist (may require research)

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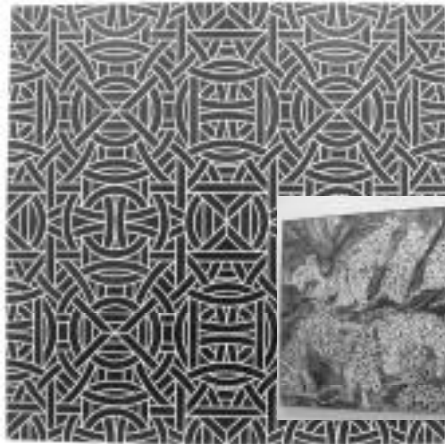


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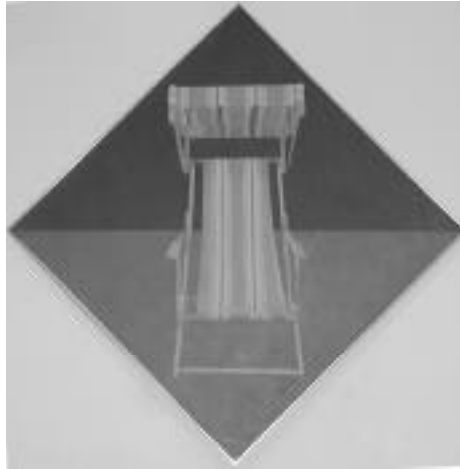


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*Untitled I, Janet Slom, page 35*



*Susie Q, Rene Schumacher,  
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*Other Man's Lake,  
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*Ode III, Mark Feldstein, page 35*

