NORTON SIMON MUSEUM
STUDENT PREPARATORY PACKET
A DIFFERENT APPROACH

Developed for the *My Masterpieces* Program at the Pasadena Unified School District
Students and Teachers | Grade 5

Introduction to the Norton Simon Museum

The Norton Simon Museum is known as one of the world's most remarkable private art collections. Seven centuries of European art dating from the Renaissance to the 20th century are on permanent display, including Old Master paintings by Raphael, Rubens, Zurbarán, Rembrandt and Goya. The Museum also features a celebrated Impressionist and Post-Impressionist collection—with paintings by Manet, Monet, Degas, Van Gogh and Cézanne—as well as 20th-century works by Picasso, Matisse and Brancusi. Moreover, the Museum has one of the premier collections of South and Southeast Asian art in the country, spanning a period of 2,000 years.

Curriculum Materials

The following curriculum materials are intended to help prepare your students for their tour. These materials include lesson plans and vocabulary guides for a selection of artworks. You may also find it helpful to visit our website, where you can find information about special exhibitions, podcasts and a collections database with information about individual works of art.

Lesson Overview

Each lesson provides brief background information about the artwork and artist, followed by questions that promote observation and discussion. Suggested classroom activities offer students the opportunity to explore the collection through writing and art-making projects.

Learning Objectives

Students are encouraged to:
- *take time to look closely*
- *describe what they see*
- *connect the visual arts with historical periods and religious traditions*
- *create original artworks focusing on themes and formal elements of art found in works from the Norton Simon Museum*
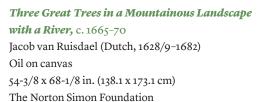
Curriculum Standards

The materials address content standards for California public schools in visual arts, history–social science and Common Core English-language arts for grades 5–12.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH: LANDSCAPES

Three Great Trees in a Mountainous Landscape with a River, c. 1665–70
Jacob van Ruisdael (Dutch, 1628/9–1682)
Oil on canvas
54-3/8 x 68-1/8 in. (138.1 x 173.1 cm)
The Norton Simon Foundation

Exotic Landscape, 1910
Henri Rousseau (French, 1844–1910)
Oil on canvas
51¼ x 64 in. (130.2 x 162.6 cm)
The Norton Simon Foundation

Description of Lesson

In this lesson, students will learn that a subject or genre—in this case, a landscape—can be painted in various ways in order to communicate different aspects or feelings about that subject.

Standards Addressed

SL: 5.1
RL: 5.9
W: 5.3
VA:Re9
VA:Cr1.2
VA:Cr2.3

Vocabulary

Background: the part of a scene or picture that is furthest from the viewer.
Composition: the overall arrangement of the various parts and elements of an artwork.
Foreground: the part of a scene or picture that is nearest to the viewer.
Horizon Line: the line that separates earth from sky.
Landscape: a genre of painting that portrays natural scenery, such as mountains, valleys, trees, rivers and forests.
Naturalistic: closely imitating nature in appearance.

Objectives

• Identify and demonstrate diverse methods of artistic investigation to choose an approach for beginning a work of art.
• Identify, describe and visually document places and/or objects of personal significance.
• Recognize differences in criteria used to evaluate works of art, depending on styles, genres and media as well as historical and cultural contexts.
• Compare and contrast stories [artworks] in the same genre on their approaches to similar themes and topics.
• Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques.

Materials

• Pencils and colored pencils
• Drawing paper
• Collage materials (magazines and other colorful images)
• Scissors
• Glue or glue sticks
• Paints and paintbrushes

Procedure

Show Ruisdael's *Three Great Trees in a Mountainous Landscape with a River*.

• Ask your students what they see in the painting.
    • **Landscape** paintings became popular in the 1600s. Before that time, **landscapes** appeared mostly in the **backgrounds** of religious paintings.
    • In the 17th century, Jacob van Ruisdael was one of the top **landscape** painters in what is now the Netherlands.

Give students another minute to look at the painting, and ask them to take time to look closely at the details and composition of the painting.

• How does Ruisdael create a sense of space in the painting?
    • Ruisdael makes things in the **background** of the painting smaller and paints them in cooler (bluer) tones than the objects in the **foreground** of the painting, which are larger and more detailed.
• What is the focus of the painting, and how has the artist directed the viewer's attention to that point?
    • The title of the painting directs our attention to the trees, which are the largest, most central and most dramatically lit part of the picture.
    • There are tiny people and a house, but they are dwarfed by the vastness of the **landscape**.
• Where is the viewer placed in relation to the scene?
    • The scene is viewed from above, as if the artist or viewer is standing on a hill, and the **horizon line** is so low that the sky takes up three-fourths of the **composition.**
    • Putting so much emphasis on the sky highlights the way in which the light filters through the clouds and gives the painting the impression of vastness and peace. It also draws attention to the passing storm clouds.

- How **naturalistic** is the painting?
    - The trees are so **naturalistic** that we can identify one as a birch tree and two as oak trees.
    - This painting doesn't represent a specific place. Instead, it contains elements from several **landscapes** that Ruisdael had seen and drawn, which he then combined to form a harmonious **composition**.
- How would you describe the mood of the painting?
    - The soft, filtered light and cool colors suggest that the setting is peaceful, but broken branches and passing storm clouds signal nature's chaos and impermanence, which could add a feeling of unease or awe.

Take a moment to look at Rousseau's *Exotic Landscape*.

- How would you describe the style of this painting?
    - Rousseau is known for stylized paintings featuring strong colors, crisp outlines, stiffly posed figures and flattened space. Here, enormous leaves block out the **background** and push everything up to the **foreground**.
    - He admired the polish of more trained and **naturalistic** artists, but he lacked their training. He had been a toll collector before he retired to focus on painting at age 40.
    - Rousseau was admired by artists like Pablo Picasso for his otherworldly vision.
- How would you describe the subject of this painting?
    - Rousseau is known for mysterious, magical **landscapes** with lush jungles, exotic flowers and wild animals like the monkeys seen here.
    - His paintings were inspired by his visits to the Paris botanical garden and zoo as well as by his imagination.
- Where is the viewer in relation to the scene?
    - The viewer is on the same level as the monkeys, on the ground in the thick of the jungle.
- How **naturalistic** is the painting?
    - Everything is rather flat and stylized, and the colors are bright.

Show Ruisdael's painting next to Rousseau's.

- How are these paintings alike?
- How are they different?
- How does looking at these two paintings side by side change how you interpret each painting?
- What do you think these artists are trying to say about each **landscape**?
- Why do you think each artist chose their style of painting? What effect does this choice have on the impression of the painting?
- Which **landscape** do you prefer and why?

Art and Writing Project

Have each student create a painting, collage or drawing depicting a place that is personally significant to them, choosing an artistic style that they think best represents that place and what it means to them.

Then have them write a description of the place they depicted, including the significance it holds for them. When they are finished, each student will present their work to the class, explaining why they chose to depict this place in the way that they did and what they hoped to communicate.

Differentiation

Or, have each student write a short story based on what it would be like to live inside one of these two paintings. How did they get inside the painting or the location depicted in the painting? Why are they there? What is it like there? Is it hot or cold, peaceful or chaotic, loud or quiet? What would they do there, and how would they interact with their surroundings?

Extension: Have each student take photos and do sketches of the place they chose, and/or choose a piece of music that they feel represents that place and create a multimedia work.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH: PORTRAITS

Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier)
August 1888
Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853–1890)
Oil on canvas
25¼ x 21½ in. (64.1 x 54.6 cm)
Norton Simon Art Foundation

Self Portrait, c. 1636–38
Rembrandt van Rijn (Dutch, 1606–1669)
Oil on panel
24-7/8 x 19-7/8 in. (63.2 x 50.5 cm)
The Norton Simon Foundation

Description of Lesson

In this lesson, students will learn to analyze and interpret artworks based on the subject, formal qualities and historical context. They will also learn how artists use art to communicate and find their own voice and style.

Standards Addressed

SL: 5.1
RL: 5.3
VA:Re8
VA:Cr3

Vocabulary

Brushwork: the manner in which a painter applies paint with a brush.
Emphasis: special importance given to one part of a work of art (for example, a light area surrounded by darkness) to direct the viewer's attention there. An artist puts emphasis on something by using contrast, size, color and/or placement within the composition.

Idealized: depicted as perfect or better than reality.

Museum label: a short caption describing an object displayed in a museum.

Portraiture: a painting or sculpture meant to represent the likeness of a specific person.

Self-portrait: a representation of an artist that is painted, drawn or sculpted by that artist.

Texture: the surface quality of a painting, created by the artist's choice of materials and methods of handling them. Textures can be smooth, rough, polished or matte.

Objectives

- Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings or events in a story [artwork], drawing on specific details in the text [artwork].
- Interpret art by analyzing characteristics of form and structure, contextual information, subject matter, visual elements and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.
- Create artist statements using art vocabulary to describe personal choices in artmaking.

Materials

- Paintbrushes
- Paints
- Canvas and drawing paper
- Pencils

Procedure

Show students Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait*.

- Rembrandt was one of the top portraitists in Amsterdam in the 1600s. He made many **self-portraits** throughout his life.
- How would you describe the **background** and **composition** of the painting?
    - The **composition** is cropped, so we see Rembrandt only from the chest up.
    - The **background** of the painting is brown. There is no indication of where Rembrandt is sitting, and there is nothing to distract from the figure himself.
- Together with the **background**, how does the lighting focus the viewer's attention? How does the lighting affect the impression Rembrandt makes on the viewer?
    - Using areas of light and dark, Rembrandt puts an **emphasis** on his own face—which would have been very recognizable, due to his many **naturalistic self-portraits**.
    - Along with his expression, the shadow on the left side of his face makes him appear serious, and perhaps somewhat mysterious.
- How would you describe the style of the portrait? Is it **idealized**? Is it **naturalistic**?
    - Rembrandt has created a very **naturalistic** image of himself. Rather than idealizing his appearance, he paints himself with wrinkles, stubble and red cheeks.
- How would you describe the **brushwork** in this painting? Is it the same throughout the painting?
    - Areas of the paint surface are built up in layers. His **brushwork** is much thicker and more detailed on his face, which helps focus the viewer's attention there. The **brushwork** gets rougher and thinner toward the edges.

- How would you describe Rembrandt's clothing in this portrait? Does it look like the kind of clothing one would wear while painting? Why or why not?
  - In this **self-portrait**, done at the height of his personal and professional success, he wears velvet with gold accents rather than a simple artist's smock.
  - The gold chain around his neck, a symbol of prestige once awarded to artists by kings, elevates Rembrandt by association, despite the fact that he was never actually awarded such a chain.
  - Rembrandt's clothing makes him look important and successful.

Show Van Gogh's *Portrait of a Peasant*.

- How would you describe the subject of this painting? What can you learn about him from his clothing and the way he is depicted in this painting?
  - He is an older man. His skin is weathered and tan, and he is wearing a straw hat and less-refined clothing.
  - The subject is Patience Escalier, a gardener who reminded Van Gogh of his father.
- How would you describe the **background** and **composition** of the painting?
  - The **composition** is cropped so that we only see Escalier from the chest up.
  - There is no indication of where he is sitting, and there is nothing but color and **brushwork** around the figure.
- How would you describe the style of the painting? Is there anything about the use of color in this portrait that surprises you?
  - Vincent van Gogh is known for his thickly painted, colorful and expressive style.
  - Van Gogh described his use of bright colors as a way of capturing "the expression and the intensification of character." This approach freed him from using color only to imitate nature, and it allowed him to use colors to show how he felt about his subjects.
- Take a moment to look at Van Gogh's **brushwork**. How do the painting's colors and **texture** affect the energy in this painting?
  - Notice how Van Gogh uses short, diagonal brushstrokes to create the **background** and long, curved brushstrokes to create the thick, rough **texture** of the straw hat.

Show Van Gogh's and Rembrandt's portraits side by side. How are they similar? How are they different? How do color, light and composition change the emphasis and mood of these portraits?

- They are both portraits, and their compositions are very similar. Both men wear hats and jackets and stare out directly at the viewer. However, their social status is portrayed very differently.
- Like Rembrandt, Van Gogh uses an ambiguous **background** to keep the viewer's attention on the sitter and to make his portrait less specific to the time and place in which he was painting. This approach directs the viewer's attention to the man and the technique rather than the setting and context.
- Both artists use thick, rough paint to evoke **textures**, but in different ways.
- Van Gogh primarily uses intense color contrasts, whereas Rembrandt uses light and shadow.

How do these paintings use color, composition and light to communicate ideas and mood? What are these artists trying to tell their audience about themselves as artists?

Art and Writing Project

Have each student make a self-portrait that represents their individual artistic style and the self-image they hope to project to others, in their preferred medium.

Then have each student write an artist statement describing their personal style, what they hope to communicate with that style and how their portrait exemplifies this style and the reasoning behind it. End by having students do a gallery walk and present their own work and/or talk about what they notice.

Differentiation

Alternatively, have each student create two self-portraits, one naturalistic and one more colorful and abstract. Which do they think better represents them? What, if anything, have they learned about themselves and artistic styles in the course of this project?

Extension: Have each student write a **museum label** describing their self-portrait. (Show the museum labels for Rembrandt's and Van Gogh's portraits as examples.) Then hang the self-portrait of each student with its corresponding label in the classroom. Or, before hanging the labels, shuffle them and pass out one to each student. Students should read the labels and, after looking carefully at each self-portrait, try to match each label to its corresponding portrait.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH: DANCE IN SCULPTURE

Shiva as Lord of Dance (Nataraja), c. 1000
Tamil Nadu, India
Bronze
overall: 31-3/4 x 24 x 9-1/2 in. (80.6 x 61 x 24.1 cm)
The Norton Simon Foundation

Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen, 1878–81
Edgar Degas (French, 1834–1917)
Painted bronze with cotton and silk on a wooden base
37-5/8 x 13-3/16 x 9-15/16 in. (95.6 x 33.5 x 25.2 cm)
Norton Simon Art Foundation

Description of Lesson

In this lesson, students will learn about the significance of dance in various cultures and explore different ways in which dance has been depicted. They will also experiment with artistic mediums and materials.

Standards Addressed

SL: 5.1
W: 5.7
VA:Cr2.1

Vocabulary

Ganga: the goddess of the Ganges River, from which all life flows.
Hinduism: the most widely practiced faith in India, based on the belief that the material world is illusory. It has three principal deities: Shiva, the destroyer; Vishnu, the preserver; and Brahma, the creator.
Mudras: symbolic hand gestures used in Buddhist, Hindu and Jain art.

Samsara: the endless cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth that is a central belief in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.

Shiva: the Hindu god of destruction, one of the principal gods of Hinduism.

Objectives

- Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.
- Experiment and develop skills in multiple art-making techniques and approaches through practice.

Materials

- Model Magic modeling compound
- Armature wire
- Styrofoam squares for sculpture bases
- Colored pencils
- Drawing paper
- Acrylic paints
- Paintbrushes
- Canvas paper

Procedure

Show *Shiva as Lord of Dance (Nataraja)*. Give students time to look at the picture, and ask them to look closely at the details and think about what stands out to them.

- What can you tell about this figure just by looking at him?
    - This is not a sculpture of an ordinary person: he has four arms and a third eye, and he is surrounded by a circle of fire. This is a sculpture of **Shiva**, the god of destruction. **Shiva** is one of the principal gods of **Hinduism**.
    - **Shiva** enables the rebirth and continued harmony of the universe through his dance, and he is frequently depicted in this form as the Lord of Dance.
    - This sculpture conveys the concept of the never-ending cycle of death and rebirth, or **samsara**, wherein every end leads to a new beginning.
- Let's take a closer look at those details you noticed. What did you see, and what questions do you have about what you saw?
    - **Shiva's** four arms indicate his dominion over the four directions. In two of his hands he holds the flame of destruction (the outer right hand, if you are facing the sculpture) and the hourglass-shaped, double-sided drum (the outer left hand), which he uses to beat the world back into creation. The two other hands make the **mudras**, or hand gestures, of reassurance (the inner right hand) and refuge (the inner left hand).
        - The flame, the drum and the circle of flames surrounding **Shiva** are visual representations of **samsara**, the circle of life.
    - **Shiva's** third eye symbolizes his ability to see everything and destroy ignorance with his gaze.
    - The cobra draped over his arm signifies his mastery over death.

- **Shiva** stands triumphant in his dance atop a dwarf representing ignorance. His pose represents the victory of knowledge (represented by **Shiva**) over ignorance.

This sculpture shows Shiva as Lord of Dance. What elements of this sculpture indicate movement and dance? It may help to ask students to try standing in Shiva's pose.

- His limbs are very gracefully posed, and he is standing on one foot, with his other foot hovering in midair. This is not a stable pose; as the students will experience, it is difficult to stand still in this position for long without falling over.
- **Shiva** normally wears his dreadlocks coiled on top of his head in a bun, but during the spinning of his dance, his hair flies out in all directions.
- As a result of this spinning, the tiny figure of **Ganga**—the goddess of the Ganges River, from which all life flows— is no longer caught in **Shiva's** hair. She is flung away from him and brings forth the water of life on Earth.
- The cord around **Shiva's** waist and the scarf on his arm both fly outward as he spins.

Show Degas's *Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen*.

- Degas is famous for his paintings and drawings of 19th-century life, focusing on the ballet, horse races and the workforce; however, his sculptures are less well known.
- Degas created many sculptures from modeling wax, clay and other materials, but none were cast in bronze, like this sculpture, until after his death.
- With the exception of *Little Dancer,* Degas's sculptures were never shown in public during his lifetime. Instead, he kept them to himself in his studio and apartment.
- What **textures** do you notice on the surface of this sculpture?
    - Notice the detail of the hair, bodice and tutu, and the way that the dancer's tights slightly bunch at her knees.
    - The original *Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen* was made of beeswax and dressed with real silk ballet shoes, a cotton bodice, a tulle tutu and a silk ribbon tied around a wig made from real hair.
- Ask students to stand in the same pose as the figure. How does it feel? What if anything did you notice about her pose after acting it out?
- If you were going to create a picture or sculpture of a dancer, how would you choose to portray them? What are some qualities you expect from dancers? How does this sculpture match up with what you've described?
    - You might expect dancers to be shown dancing, but Degas shows this dancer in a pose that dance students assume during a moment of rest in class or between movements in a ballet.
    - Her eyes are half-closed and she seems tired from practice, and yet she is at attention, ready to begin dancing again when called upon.
- How would you describe this sculpture? How would you describe the girl?
    - Degas's model, Marie van Goethem, was a 14-year-old student of the Ballet de l'Opera, where Degas often sketched classes and rehearsals.
    - Though the sculpture is beloved today, the first critics to see it were shocked. The sculpture caused an uproar when it was exhibited in 1881 because it was considered so realistic. Nothing was **idealized**. She was described as arrogant, slouching, ugly and scrawny, rather than graceful and beautiful.
        - Are you surprised to learn that this sculpture upset many of Degas's contemporaries? Why or why not?

Show images of the two sculptures side by side. How are these two pieces alike? How are they different? Compare the materials, pose and expression of the two figures. How does the appearance of the bronze differ in these two sculptures?

- They are both bronze sculptures of dancers, but they are products of different cultures, time periods and traditions.
- The color of the bronze differs as well as the **texture**.
- Dance represents very different things in each context.
  - **Shiva** is a god, and Degas's dancer is a tired young girl.
  - Dance is very important in **Hindu** practice; ritual dance is an integral part of religious ceremonies in the temple, and sculptural poses are often derived from these ritual dances.
  - Dance was an extremely popular form of entertainment in 19th-century Paris, but dancers were usually very poor young girls of low social status.

Art and Writing Project

Ask students to research the history of dance in 19th-century France, ancient India and/or 21st-century America. How does dance and its importance differ in these cultures?

Ask students to choose an activity that they enjoy and create artworks in two different mediums (sculpture, drawing, painting, film or photography) depicting that activity. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each medium? Which medium do they think best represents that activity?

Differentiation

Ask students to divide into groups of three, and have each student come up with a dance pose that reflects their personality. Then have them collaborate with their group members to combine their poses into a short dance to a favorite song that they think communicates something about themselves and their personalities. Finally, students can perform their dance for the class.

Alternatively, students could look up other depictions of **Shiva** and/or Degas's other depictions of dance or his contemporaries' depictions of dancers. How are they similar or dissimilar?