



## Huntington and Scott Gallery Programs

# SETTING THE SCENE

## An Investigation into How Artists Use Setting to Relay Information



Grades 4–8

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### I. Introduction

**W**hy does art look like it does? It depends on why the work is being made, who it is for, who will see it, and what materials are available. Artists use the setting or the scene as a clue to the narrative of the artwork. The setting can help the viewer understand the social background of a sitter, give insights into daily life, location of the artwork, time period, or popular activities.

### II. Objective

- ◆ Students will identify and discuss the scene/setting artists use to give clues to the narrative of an artwork. The students will develop skills in observation and develop critical thinking skills. Students will be able to create and discuss their own artwork in context of a scene/setting.

### III. Standards Assessed

*Visual Arts Standards* California Board of Education, adopted January, 2001

Standard 1.0

Artistic Perception: Processing, analyzing, and responding to sensory information through the language and skills unique to the visual arts.

Standard 2.0

Creative Expression: Creating, performing, and participating in the visual arts.

Standard 4.0

Aesthetic Valuing: Responding to, analyzing, and making judgments about works in the visual arts.

#### IV. Materials Needed

- soft lead pencils and erasers
- colored pencils, markers or crayons
- brightly colored construction paper or tissue paper
- glue
- scissors
- poster board
- magazines
- post card, poster or colored copied image of a favorite painting

#### V. Preparation

Create an art gallery in your classroom using various artworks. Vary the artwork from representational to abstract and be sure to include art from a variety of cultures and styles.

#### VI. Lesson Activities

##### Part I, Pre-Visit (in the classroom)

In art, there is rarely a "right" or "wrong". The artist makes choices based on mood, available materials, and personal preference.

1. Should the color be blue or green?
2. Should the shape be oval or round? Should the portrait show the subject smiling or not?
3. How should the objects be arranged?

Each decision the artist makes determines how the finished work will look. Direct the students to the classroom art gallery.

Select one of the images:

1. Tell the students that they will be acting as detectives during this activity. Ask them what detectives look for when solving a mystery. Detectives seek clues that suggest a particular sequence of events in the past. Emphasize that they'll now be looking for clues in this painting that can provide insights into the narrative of the artwork. Give each student a copy of the "Observing a Scene" handout. Ask them to carefully examine the painting and answer the questions on the handout.
2. When the students have finished answering the questions, begin a class discussion based on their responses. Students will probably conclude the

- scene/setting, what time period the painting depicts, what kind of lives the subjects lived.
3. Next, hand out copies of the same painting. What if some of the decisions the artist made were different? What if the students could decide how a painting could be completed instead of the artist who actually painted it? How would the students draw the scene/setting? Would they include an animal or another person? Would the season of the year be different?
  4. Direct the students to cut the picture of the painting into main subject, foreground, middleground, background.
  5. Mount the main subject of the painting on a piece of construction paper, mat board, or poster board. Using pictures from a magazine or colored markers, pens, or pencils, have the students design the setting/scene. Encourage the students to include different elements such as an animal, a cityscape, another person in their artwork, etc.
  6. When the students are finished, give each student a copy of the "Observing a Scene" handout and have them answer the questions again. This time, have the students answer the questions based on their interpretation of the artwork.
  7. When the students have finished answering the questions, begin a class discussion based on their responses. Have the students compare their artwork with the original. Stress the importance of the artist's scene/setting with the one they chose. What is different between their scene/setting (mood, location, time period) and the artist's original? How are the two scenes/settings alike? Did the scene/setting they chose change the mood of the painting? Did the time period seem to change? Does the sitter become less important or more important?
  8. Which interpretation gives better clues into the narrative of the artwork, the original or the student's?

### **Part II (at the Huntington)**

During their visit to the Huntington, the students will participate in inquiry based learning to gain knowledge about specific works of art. By examining the scene/setting of the artworks, students will be able to decipher clues that help to interpret the narrative of the artworks. Ask the students to take note of an artwork for use in a post visit exercise.

### **Part III, post visit (in the classroom)**

Ask the students to recall a specific artwork while on their visit to the Huntington. Why did they select this artwork? Was the setting/scene important to this artwork? If the artwork was set in today's scene would it "read" the same? How would they draw it? Have the students draw their favorite artwork making sure they include clues that will help fellow students figure out what painting they are interpreting.

## Observing a Scene

Directions: Answer the following questions for each artwork that you study:

1. What types of land and water forms (mountains, valleys, rivers, etc.) do you see?
2. Can you tell what season it is?
3. What types of buildings do you see? What materials do they appear to be made of?
4. Describe the clothing that the people are wearing. What type of weather is it best suited for?
5. Does this artwork depict a scene in the United States or another country? Why?
6. What are the people doing in this picture?
7. Is this scene from the past, present, or future? Why?

## Vocabulary

<i>background</i>	the most distant part of a scene
<i>canvas</i>	a piece of cloth prepared as a surface to receive paint
<i>bust</i>	a work of art showing the upper part of the human body
<i>foreground</i>	the nearest part of a scene
<i>horizon</i>	a view of a section of countryside
<i>landscape</i>	reliance on line, rather than color or texture, to create form; smooth paint, with barely visible brush work
<i>masterpiece</i>	major work of any great artist
<i>middleground</i>	the area between the foreground and the most distant part of a scene
<i>oil paint</i>	a paint made by mixing ground (powdered) color pigment into oil
<i>pigment</i>	the coloring matter used in paint
<i>portrait</i>	a likeness of a person
<i>sculpture</i>	a carved figure of stone, wood: a modeled figure in clay or wax: a cast figure in metal
<i>still life</i>	a painting of a collection of objects usually taken from nature (flowers, birds' nests, etc.) or from domestic settings (glasses, foodstuffs, pipes, books, etc.)