

Parallels at the Core: Reading, Writing, and Visual Art

Reading is a complex process. Research shows that when we read, our brains activate not only the area that controls vision and language, but also areas that control emotion, action, decision-making, memory, and much more.¹ In the history of humankind, reading and writing are relatively new phenomena. Prior to the twentieth century, the majority of people in many societies were illiterate. Yet reading is an activity that most of us do every day, whether we intend to or not: we read street signs, directions, recipes, social media posts, menus, and novels. Thus reading is an essential skill we use as we go about our daily lives.

Given its complexity, reading can be challenging for students. Reading comprehension entails using and applying background knowledge (schema) to text in order to create new knowledge. Visual art can be a critical tool in helping students develop and refine their reading and writing skills because it encourages students to use multiple modalities. Additionally, using tried-and-true reading comprehension strategies when engaging with artwork provides students with opportunities to practice these strategies in a text-free environment. Working with the same strategies across media also helps to build student understanding of metacognition, or *how* they are thinking and learning.

These curricular materials focus on six main reading comprehension strategies:

- **Asking Questions.** Asking students questions before, during, and after reading deepens their understanding of texts. Student-generated questions are even better because they activate students' curiosity and encourage authentic connections and lines of inquiry. Asking students to think about whether their questions can be answered directly from the text or inferred from the text or whether they require further research helps to build critical thinking and research skills.
- **Inferring.** Emerging readers may interpret text literally. However, in order to engage in higher-level thinking, students must "read between the lines" to make logical inferences. Because art is visual, viewers automatically have to make inferences to bring meaning to works of art. The visual arts can be used as a scaffold to help students gain confidence in constructing thoughtful interpretations.
- **Visualizing.** As students read, it is important that they visualize, or create sensory images, in their minds. With this strategy, students are encouraged to use the five senses, along with their background knowledge, to understand what they read. This in turn helps students with writing skills, as they are able to use sensory images and detailed descriptions to enhance their writing. The strategy can be easily applied when studying visual art, helping students to build their vocabularies and hold conversations about objects of interest.
- **Making Connections.** Reading is an active process whereby students use what they already know to understand and make sense of what they are reading. Here, students are asked to make personal connections to texts, make connections between different texts, and make connections between texts and the world around them. By learning this strategy through art, students are able to make personal, art-to-art, and art-to-world connections using visual prompts. These skills can be easily transferred to the written word.

¹ Mark Seidenberg, *Language at the Speed of Sight: How We Read, Why So Many Can't, and What Can Be Done About It* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

- **Determining Importance.** Identifying essential ideas and ascertaining salient information is crucial to understanding complex text, especially nonfiction. Students need to understand how the text is organized and the techniques writers use to distinguish important ideas and themes (for example, the use of punctuation and boldfaced or italicized words). When students practice determining importance in artwork, they learn the techniques that artists use to communicate what is significant within a work of art—through the use of emphasis, a focal point, or an important character, for example.
- **Synthesizing.** This strategy involves gathering important concepts and themes while reading in order to deepen understanding of a text’s big ideas. As students gather new information, their thinking evolves to create new knowledge. Narrative art, or art that tells a story, can be a powerful tool to teach the strategy of synthesizing. An artist has to incorporate key elements of a story into one moment, captured in time, to illustrate the central ideas and theme(s) of the story.

Reading is a complex process that can be supported through cross-media connections. These curricular materials demonstrate how reading comprehension strategies can be applied to visual art to support student literacy, and we hope you will integrate the highlighted artworks into your teaching. While we selected each artwork based on its natural alignment with a specific reading comprehension strategy, there are hundreds of other artworks in LACMA’s collection to choose from that would work just as well. We encourage you to explore them online at collections.lacma.org.

The strategies discussed above can be used in an art-centric, text-free environment both before and concurrent with regular practice in reading and writing. Some of these strategies are particularly helpful for emerging readers or English Language Learners, as using art allows students to gain confidence and refine their skills while learning how to read and interpret challenging text—an essential skill for all students.

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Cold Shoulder, 1963
Roy Lichtenstein

A blond woman wearing pearls and a black sleeveless top looks away from the viewer, her features indiscernible. Although the figure's back is to the viewer, she utters a greeting, "HELLO..." from a speech bubble. Upon closer inspection, we can see that the speech bubble does not have just one stem, but five, which look almost like icicles. Is this an allusion to the artwork's title, *Cold Shoulder*? Or does the title refer to the part of her body that is closest to the viewer, made visible by her sleeveless top? Alternatively, are there five people, not visible in the closely cropped canvas, uttering the same phrase?

This painting by Roy Lichtenstein (1923–1997) represents the Pop artist's early work. Pop art was an artistic movement that emerged in the 1950s in which artists appropriated images, techniques, and strategies from mass media and popular culture. By creating paintings and sculptures ("high art") that borrowed from newspapers, comic strips, and advertisements ("low art"), Pop artists sought to blur the lines between high and low art. By using familiar imagery and techniques, Pop art became one of the best-known artistic movements of the twentieth century.

Lichtenstein rendered *Cold Shoulder* in a familiar comic-book style, whereby figures are thickly outlined in black and colors appear solid and unmixed. Additionally, the artist painted the woman's skin by hand to create the appearance of benday dots, a mechanized printing process used to make comic books in which small colored dots are uniformly clustered together. Lichtenstein's use of just a few bright colors, along with the closely cropped composition and the enigmatic "HELLO..." produces a dramatic effect that sparks viewers' curiosity and asks them to help fill in the blanks.

Reading Comprehension Strategy:
Making Inferences

In order for readers to achieve deeper understanding of texts, it is necessary to move beyond literal interpretations and make inferences. Inferences occur when readers create meaning by interpreting the literal information in the text and combining it with their own prior knowledge. Using art to practice this skill is particularly beneficial because art communicates through imagery, which can allow more access points for students to make inferences. Thus, art can act as a scaffold to help students master the strategy of inferring in a "text-free" environment—and build on that same strategy later when reading texts.

Prompts to guide students in making inferences about *Cold Shoulder*:

- Ask students to discuss the meaning of inference.
- Determine prior knowledge by asking students whether this painting reminds them of anything they have seen before.
- Give students time to share with partners what they can infer about *Cold Shoulder*.
- Ask students to support their inferences with details within the work of art using sentence starters (in bold) that encourage complex sentences. For example:
 - **Since** the woman is wearing pearls, I think she is wealthy.
 - **Because** the phrase "HELLO..." trails off and there are five stems instead of just one, it looks mysterious.
- Ask students to revisit the meaning of inference. Based on their discussion of *Cold Shoulder*, would they expand on their definitions?



Roy Lichtenstein (United States, 1923–1997), *Cold Shoulder*, 1963, oil and acrylic on canvas; 68½ × 48 in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Robert H. Halff through the Modern and Contemporary Art Council (M.2005.38.5), © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

Temple hanging, 19th century Sri Lanka

Measuring nearly eighteen feet by nine feet, this painted and dyed cotton hanging would likely have been displayed in a Hindu temple in Sri Lanka. It is the only example that exists from Sri Lanka and its large size, inscriptions in the Tamil language, and exquisite detail add to its uniqueness. The hanging tells a story called the *Ramayana* (“Rama’s Journey”), which is depicted in eight registers that are intended to be read from left to right. The story is structured as a continuous narrative, which means that its many scenes are portrayed sequentially rather than being divided by frames.

The *Ramayana* is an ancient Indian epic poem that was passed down orally for centuries before being set in writing. It tells the story of Prince Rama—the seventh incarnation (avatar) of the god Vishnu—and the trials and tribulations he endures while attempting to rescue his wife, Sita, from the demon king Ravana. The epic continues to provide a model of behavior and morality to Hindus today. The *Ramayana* is also a story to which people of many cultures can relate, as it contains memorable characters who fit into familiar archetypes such as hero, villain, demon, and god, and is replete with tales of intrigue, rivalry, battle, and betrayal.

This temple hanging has many details that can be drawn out for closer study, such as the image of Karttikeya, the Hindu god of war, near the left side of the first register (see detail below). Karttikeya is an important deity in South Asia who is often represented in temples within Tamil communities. Another interesting detail is located near the left side of the fifth register. Here, Hanuman—the monkey commander of the monkey army and a devoted follower of Rama—raises himself up on his coiled snake tail to kick the demon king Ravana (see detail below).

Reading Comprehension Strategy: Making Connections

Making connections allows students to bring meaning to what they are reading by activating their background knowledge. When readers of all ages make connections, they relate what they read to personal experiences (text-to-self), to information from other texts (text-to-text), and to information about the world (text-to-world) in order to enhance their understanding of self, text, and life. Artwork can be easily used in place of written texts to encourage cross-media connection making.

Prompts to help students make connections with this temple hanging:

- Begin by analyzing the temple hanging together. Ask students questions such as: What do you see? How is the imagery on the hanging structured? What might the images represent?
- Have students read or listen to excerpts from the *Ramayana*. Then ask questions that help students connect the story to themselves, the temple hanging, other artworks depicting the *Ramayana*, and/or the world at large.¹ For example:
 - Text to self: Does the story remind you of anything? Do you feel a connection to any of the characters or their experiences? If you were [X] character, what would you do?
 - Text to text/artwork: In what ways are the story and the temple hanging alike? Explain the connections you find. How is this text similar to other things you have read? How is it different?

¹ Search “Ramayana” or “Rama” in LACMA’s online collection at collections.lacma.org to view other artworks depicting scenes from the classic epic. You can have your students compare them to the temple hanging and to written versions of the *Ramayana*.

- Text to world: What connections can you make between the *Ramayana* and our world today? How is the story similar to or different from things that happen in the real world? What themes and morals within the *Ramayana* are still relevant today?

Reading Comprehension Strategy: Synthesizing

Synthesizing is an important reading strategy that involves combining ideas and allowing a changing, evolving understanding of the text to emerge. Synthesizing information helps readers understand a text's key ideas and themes.

Prompts to help students synthesize the information they find on the temple hanging:

- Ask students to practice making connections using the prompts in the previous section. Then, ask students to share the connections they made with partners or in small groups.
- Encourage students to reflect on the connections their peers made. Ask questions such as: How are your peers' connections different from your own? What can you learn from them? Can you go back and revisit the text or artwork to look for new information? What key ideas and themes have emerged?
- Ask students to share how their thinking has changed over time as they explored the text or artwork further with their peers. Provide sentence starters such as "At first I was thinking," "then I was thinking," and "now I think...."



Sri Lanka, *Temple hanging*, 19th century, painted and dyed cotton; 108½ × 214 in., The Victoria and Albert Museum (5440[IS]), © Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Details of Sri Lanka, Temple hanging, 19th century.

Urban Light, 2008**Chris Burden**

Two hundred and two historic streetlamps, all painted the same shade of light gray, are arranged in a grid at LACMA's Wilshire Boulevard entrance. Standing at a distance, visitors might notice that the tallest lamps are placed in the center of the grid and the shortest lamps are on the edges. The artwork conveys a feeling of size that makes visitors feel small and as though they could hide or get lost in the forest of lamps. Some people have said that the lamps remind them of a Greek colonnade or a cathedral; the artist who created this work described it "as a building with a roof of light" at night.

Urban Light is one of LACMA's most famous outdoor artworks. Created by artist Chris Burden (1946–2015) in 2008, the large-scale sculpture is made of seventeen different styles of streetlamps that were originally installed throughout Los Angeles County. Unlike the museum's galleries, *Urban Light* is open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The sculpture is illuminated each day at dusk and turned off at dawn based on an astronomical timer that automatically adjusts to the local sunrises and sunsets.

Chris Burden bought the first streetlamp that appears in *Urban Light* at the Rose Bowl Flea Market in Pasadena from lamp collector Jeff Levine. The artist continued collecting lamps and eventually sandblasted, rewired, and painted each one gray. Since *Urban Light* opened to the public ten years ago, it has become ubiquitous as the face of LACMA, a point of pride for Angelenos, and a destination for visitors from around the world. Many Angelenos and other visitors celebrate special occasions such as engagements, quinceañeras, family outings, and more at the artwork. What makes *Urban Light* so special? Why do so many people come to LACMA to visit *Urban Light* and make memories?

**Reading Comprehension Strategy:
Questioning**

Asking questions before, during, and after reading is an important strategy that engages students and deepens comprehension. When students are given the opportunity to generate their own questions, they develop a greater sense of wonder, care, and interest in what they are reading. This strategy can be easily practiced with visual art.

Prompts to guide students in generating questions about *Urban Light*:

- Reveal the artwork's title to students before showing them an image of it. What questions do students have about the artwork based on its title?
- Cover a large image of the artwork with sticky notes and show it to students. Remove the sticky notes one by one and ask students to generate questions about the artwork as more of it is revealed.
- Show students the entire image of the artwork. What questions do they have about it now?
- Share written information about the artwork with students. What questions can they generate now?
- Review all of the student-generated questions as a class. Were some of them answered over the course of learning more about *Urban Light*? Identify unanswered questions and explore ways to either answer them or use them as prompts for writing activities, research, and so on. Students can also work together to categorize questions as either **thin** or **thick**:
 - **Thin** questions can be answered by studying the artwork.
 - **Thick** questions cannot be answered by studying the artwork. They are partially dependent on the students' own knowledge or individual interpretations, and they usually have many answers.



Chris Burden (United States, 1946–2015), *Urban Light*, 2008, (two-hundred and two) restored cast iron antique street lamps; 320½ x 686½ x 704½ in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Gordon Family Foundation's gift to "Transformation: The LACMA Campaign" (M.2007.147.1–.202), © Chris Burden/licensed by The Chris Burden Estate and Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA



Detail of Chris Burden's sculpture *Urban Light* (2008) at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, © Chris Burden/licensed by The Chris Burden Estate and Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

Apocalyptic Landscape, 1913
Ludwig Meidner

People run frantically in all directions as buildings sway precariously under a dark, looming sky. *Apocalyptic Landscape* by Ludwig Meidner (1884–1966) is a frenzy of sharp, thick diagonal lines that draw the eye in various directions. In the foreground, several people, their features indistinguishable, seem to panic as they run down a road, unsure whether to take the path to the left or right, both of which seem to lead to further chaos. The foreboding sky is filled with dark blue clouds outlined by thick, jagged black lines. The buildings are illustrated by curving lines, creating the sense that they are about to topple over. There is no indication as to what caused the panic and chaos evident in the painting. The only hint of optimism is the greenery located in the center and the lower-right corner of the painting.

Ludwig Meidner was a German Expressionist painter and printmaker born in Silesia. From 1911 to 1916, Meidner created a series of landscape paintings showing apocalyptic imagery, which was perhaps indicative of the turmoil and turbulence preceding World War I (1914–18). He painted *Apocalyptic Landscape* in 1912, just one year into the series. While these paintings would become some of Meidner's most popular works, he would never repeat the style or subject matter in his later art, which consisted of portraits, self-portraits, and religious paintings.

The paintings in the *Apocalyptic Landscape* series can be considered Meidner's most expressionistic works. Expressionist artists were more interested in conveying moods or emotions than faithfully portraying objective realities. In this series, Meidner depicts intense panic as people flee for their lives, buildings totter to the point of collapse, and the sky looms menacingly overhead.

Reading Comprehension Strategy:
Visualizing

The ability to create pictures in one's mind while reviewing a text is an important reading comprehension strategy. This ability, called visualizing, helps readers connect to the text and also makes the text more memorable. Visualizing can be taught by helping students conjure up images as they are reading a text. Readers can draw on all five of their senses to create sensory images that help them make personal connections, gather, and retain information while reading a text. When accompanied by reading, the visual arts can be a valuable tool to teach the visualizing strategy prior to visualizing text.

Prompts to help students learn to visualize based on *Apocalyptic Landscape*:

- Read the first paragraph of this essay to students without showing them Meidner's *Apocalyptic Landscape*.
- Have students create sketches of what they are visualizing as you read the paragraph (reading it several times will be necessary).
- Have students share their artwork and artistic choices with partners. Have each pair compare their artworks.
- Show students *Apocalyptic Landscape* and lead a discussion of the work of art. Questions to ask include:
 - Did the paragraph accurately describe what they see?
 - What more would they add to the description?
 - What sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures occur to them as they view the painting?
- Ask students how their sketches are similar to and different from *Apocalyptic Landscape*.



Ludwig Meidner (Germany, 1884–1966), *Apocalyptic Landscape*, 1913, oil on canvas; 37½ x 31½ in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Clifford Odets (60.65.1b),
© Ludwig Meidner-Archiv, Jüdisches Museum der Stadt Frankfurt am Main., photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

The Banquet of Seowangmo (Xiwangmu), Queen Mother of the West,
Joseon dynasty (1392–1910), 18th–19th century
 Korea

Two figures occupy magnificent thrones at the center of this painting. In front of each figure is an elaborate banquet table laden with dishes of food. Both figures wear red, as do the many attendants who surround them. The concentration of red elements causes the two groups to stand out against the yellowish background. Large trees heavy with golden fruit are visible behind and to the side of each throne. Moving further outward from the center, we can see a greenish railing, which shows that the festive, ceremonious scene is taking place on an elevated terrace.

This screen depicts the legendary banquet held by Seowangmo (Ch. Xiwangmu), the Chinese goddess Queen Mother of the West, to celebrate the ripening of her famous peaches every three thousand years. In the Daoist tradition, Seowangmo was believed to dwell in a beautiful palace made of precious stone that was surrounded by a lush garden. The Queen Mother is joined at the banquet by the King Father of the East, Dongwanggong. Together, the Queen Mother and King Father embody cosmic harmony and the unity of yin and yang, the two primary principles of East Asian philosophy. The Queen Mother represents the female yin, while the King Father represents masculine yang energy.

In front of the Queen Mother and King Father, musicians accompany a dance performance featuring a pair of phoenixes. The Queen Mother's immortal guests—including the famous Daoist philosopher Laozi—can be seen on the three panels at the far left, descending from the sky on clouds or floating across the water. The Queen Mother's banquet was a popular subject in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Korean painting, and was often chosen to celebrate birthdays and other special occasions.

Reading Comprehension Strategy:
Determining Importance

Determining importance is a necessary skill for understanding text because it helps students decide what information they need to hold onto and what information they can disregard. One way to teach students how to determine importance is to show them what authors (and artists) do to help readers locate main ideas and themes. Just as authors use text features such as headings, boldface words, and tables of contents to show importance, artists use the **elements of art** and the **principles of design**. Students will likely need a primer on these elements and principles before beginning the following activity.

Prompts to guide students as they determine importance using *The Banquet of Seowangmo*:

- Begin by asking students, “How do artists communicate what is important in their artworks?”
- Then, show students an image of the artwork. What do they notice first? What do they notice next? Write down all student observations. Avoid making interpretations!
- Connect student observations to the elements of art and the principles of design. For example:
 - “I see two groups of people in the middle wearing red.” The artist used a bright **color** and central **placement** to **emphasize** these people.
 - “I see huge trees and rocks everywhere in the painting, but mostly in the middle and on the right. They are much larger than the people.” The artist used different **proportions/scale** to draw our attention to these natural elements.

- After this, students can begin making interpretations by turning their observations into questions. For example:
 - Why did the artist use bright red for some things and not others?
 - Why are the two figures on thrones located at the center of the painting?
 - Why are the trees and rocks so large?
- If students are stumped or are getting off track, share bits of information about the painting. Once students know the whole story behind the painting, ask them which elements they think are most important in communicating the story.



Korea, *The Banquet of Seowangmo (Xiwangmu)*, Joseon dynasty (1392–1910), 18th–19th century, eight-panel screen; ink, color, and gold on silk; 65 × 164 in. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with Museum Funds (M.2000.15.31a–h), photo © Museum Associates/LACMA



Detail of Korea, *The Banquet of Seowangmo (Xiwangmu), Queen Mother of the West*, Joseon dynasty (1392–1910), 18th–19th century



Detail of Korea, *The Banquet of Seowangmo (Xiwangmu), Queen Mother of the West*, Joseon dynasty (1392–1910), 18th–19th century



Detail of Korea, *The Banquet of Seowangmo (Xiwangmu), Queen Mother of the West*, Joseon dynasty (1392–1910), 18th–19th century

Classroom Activity Communicating Importance

Essential Question	How do artists show us what is most important in their artwork?
Grades	K–6
Time	One to two class periods
Art Concepts	Celebrations, narrative art, elements of art, principles of design
Materials	Paper, pencils, erasers, a photograph depicting a celebration, images of <i>The Banquet of Seowangmo (Xiwangmu)</i> , <i>Queen Mother of the West</i> , highlighters, 12 × 18 in. white paper, scissors, colored pencils
Talking About Art	<p>People all over the world celebrate special events. Some are common to all cultures, such as weddings and birthdays. Others are specific to individual cultures. Which celebrations are important to you? Make a list of all the different kinds of celebrations you can think of. Next, look closely at a photograph of a celebration (teachers, pre-select a stock photo that clearly depicts a celebration that students will recognize, such as a birthday). What do you observe in the photo? What do you see in the photo that is familiar to you? What do you interpret, based on what you see? Observation is about what you see, whereas interpretation is about the meaning you make from what you see.</p> <p>Teachers, go over the elements of art (line, shape, form, color, value, texture, space) and principles of design (emphasis, balance, movement, proportion, contrast, rhythm, unity, pattern). Then, look at the photograph again and work together to identify the elements of art and principles of design as they are illustrated in it.</p> <p>Next, look closely at <i>The Banquet of Seowangmo (Xiwangmu)</i>, <i>Queen Mother of the West</i>. What attracted your attention the most? Why? What else do you observe? Make a list of your observations. Can you connect your observations to the elements of art and principles of design? For example: I see two groups of people in the middle wearing red. The artist used a bright color and central placement to emphasize these people.</p> <p>Move into interpretive mode next by asking questions about the artwork. Examples: Why did the artist use so much red in certain areas? Who are the two figures on the thrones? Why are they located at the center of the artwork? The trees are full of fruit; what might this symbolize? Why are there musicians and dancers present?</p> <p>Teachers, use the corresponding essay in this packet to share information with students about <i>The Banquet of Seowangmo (Xiwangmu)</i>, <i>Queen Mother of the West</i>, then prompt them to answer the following questions: How is the story about the Queen Mother’s peaches communicated in the painting? Why do you think the artist chose to depict this story? Were you able to identify the most important elements before knowing the story? Can you answer some of the questions you came up with before? For those you cannot answer, can you use your knowledge of other celebrations to make inferences, or educated guesses? Look at the painting again and see what else you can find.</p>

Making Art

Teachers, to transition from exploring how artists communicate importance in their artwork to identifying the important elements in a text, ask students to write a list of all the elements involved in planning a specific celebration. They can write their list on a blank sheet of paper or make a six-page book to write in using a single sheet of 12 × 18 in. paper. For instructions, search “how to make a six-page book with one sheet of paper” in your web browser or go to:

http://www.laurenstringer.com/uploads/2/5/6/4/25641572/make_a_six-page_book_out_of_one_sheet_of_paper.pdf.

Prompts to generate thinking about your specific celebration: What is the setting? Who are the characters? What props/objects are there? What are the people doing? Once you have written your list, read it over and highlight the most important elements. How could you rewrite the list to show importance? For example, you could write it in order of most to least important, use large print at the top and smaller print near the bottom, bold some words, or use different colors. Have students write and illustrate an invitation (emphasizing certain elements to show importance!) to a celebration or write a story about planning an event. All of these writing activities can be contained in the six-page book.

Reflection

Share the list you made with a classmate or small group without telling them what celebration you chose. Can they identify the celebration based on the important elements? How did you show which elements were most important? What are some of the ways artists show us what is most important in their artwork?

Curriculum Connections

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.3 With prompting and support, identify characters, settings, and major events in a story.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.7 Explain how specific aspects of a text’s illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting)
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) Content Standards for California Public Schools
1.1.3 Identify the elements of art in objects in nature, in the environment, and in works of art, emphasizing line, color, shape/form, and texture.
1.3.3 View and then describe art from various cultures.
6.1.1 Identify and describe all the elements of art found in selected works of art (e.g., color, shape/form, line, texture, space, value).
6.4.1 Construct and describe plausible interpretations of what they perceive in works of art.

Classroom Activity Before and After

Essential Question	Through the use of observation, question formulation, inference making, and visualization, can you write and draw before and after scenarios based on a work of art?
Grades	2–8
Time	One to two class periods
Art Concepts	Landscape, Expressionism, foreground, middle ground, background, mood, one-point perspective, narrative
Materials	Pencils, lined paper, “before and after” handout, watercolor paper or heavy drawing paper, watercolor palettes, oil pastels, paintbrushes, cups, paper towels, spray bottles (optional)
Talking About Art	<p>German artist Ludwig Meidner painted <i>Apocalyptic Landscape</i> in 1913. It is considered an Expressionist painting. Spend a few minutes looking closely at the artwork and discussing Expressionism. What do you think this term means? How might it relate to the painting and the style in which <i>Apocalyptic Landscape</i> is painted?</p> <p>Expressionism was an international movement in art and architecture that flourished between c. 1905 and c. 1920, especially in Germany. Expressionist artists were more interested in conveying underlying moods and emotions than faithfully portraying objective reality. These artists made use of strong, assertive forms and lines, and often violently distorted, symbolic colors.</p> <p>Many paintings can be divided into three parts: the background, middle ground, and foreground. Discuss each term and then work together to identify them in Meidner’s painting. What do you see in the background? Do the colors, lines, and forms tell you anything about the mood? What is happening in the middle ground? What is happening in the foreground? Pay special attention to the wide road in the foreground that narrows as it moves into the middle ground and disappears. The road was painted using one-point perspective, which creates the illusion of spatial depth. Finally, explore the painting’s title and its relationship to the artwork.</p>
Making Art	<p>With a partner, divide a sheet of lined paper into two columns. Spend three minutes writing down as many questions as you can come up with about <i>Apocalyptic Landscape</i> in the left column. Then, spend three minutes writing down inferences about the painting in the right column. Teachers, discuss the meaning of the word “inference” with students before they begin and go through one or two examples together to check for understanding. Example: I think it is going to rain because the sky is full of dark clouds.</p> <p>When everyone is finished, take turns sharing your questions and inferences with the rest of the class. Were any of your questions answered by other groups’ inferences? How do the other groups’ questions and inferences impact your understanding of the painting? Which of your questions are you most interested in exploring further? How might you find answers to your questions?</p>

Making Art (cont.)

The next activity involves visualization, which is the ability to create pictures in your mind of different scenarios. We want to visualize what might have happened before and after the scene depicted in the painting so that we can extend it, like a story. Use the “before and after” handout (see the following page) to record your work. Teachers, the writing activity can be extended for students who require more rigor.

First, work with your partner to complete the middle portion of the handout, which asks you to write two sentences that describe the action in the painting, using the present tense. Next, work together to imagine what happened before the action in the painting. Use your senses to imagine the scene. Is it dark or light? What is the weather like? How close or far away is the observer? Is the scene indoors or outdoors? Work together to write two sentences describing the “before” scene using the past tense, then create a quick sketch of it on your own. Go through the same process to complete your “after” scene in the third box, using the future tense. Remember that a sketch is like a first draft of an idea: it’s just a way to get your ideas onto paper.

The final step is to recreate your sketches using watercolors and oil pastels on sheets of watercolor paper. Start by using the oil pastels for linework only. Then, use watercolors to fill in and embellish your artwork. Try to work in a style similar to Ludwig Meidner.

Teachers, briefly demonstrate how to set up a watercolor palette by wetting each color ahead of time. Then, hand out the watercolors, brushes, cups, and paper towels and, if using them, the spray bottles. Have the students wet one area of their paper at a time, either with a wet paintbrush or by spraying the area lightly using a spray bottle. Then, use watercolor right over the oil pastel lines (the oil will resist the watercolor pigment). Remind your students to use colors that FEEL like the moods they are trying to evoke and to fill the page with color from top to bottom!

Reflection

While the artworks are drying, have a gallery walk to view everyone’s paintings. When the artworks are dry, share both the images and the written stories with the class. How do the three scenes relate? What happens over the course of three images/scenes? How does each medium (painting versus writing) express the story differently?

Curriculum Connections

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1 Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.3.1.E Form and use the simple (e.g., I walked; I walk; I will walk) verb tenses.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1 Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.5 Describe the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.7 Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.



Draw what you think happened **before** the scene pictured in the artwork. Then, using the past tense, write two sentences describing what you think happened.



Using the present tense, write two sentences describing what you think is happening in this artwork.

Ludwig Meidner, *Apocalyptic Landscape*, 1913. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Clifford Odets (60.65.1b), © Ludwig Meidner-Archiv, Jüdisches Museum der Stadt Frankfurt am Main. Photo © Museum Associates/LACMA



Draw what you think is going to happen **after** the scene pictured in the artwork. Then, using the future tense, write two sentences describing what you think is going to happen.

Classroom Activity **Art, Comics, and Storytelling**

Essential Question	How can art inspire narrative?
Grades	1–12
Time	Two to three class periods
Art Concepts	Comic book art, composition, design, panels, text and image, drawing, painting, narrative
Materials	Sketch paper, watercolor paper or heavy drawing paper, pencils, erasers, black fine tip ink pens, watercolor sets or colored pencils, rulers
Talking About Art	Look closely at Roy Lichtenstein's <i>Cold Shoulder</i> . How is the painting similar to a comic? Specifically, what elements in this painting do you recognize from comics? In what ways is the painting different from a comic? What do you think is happening in the painting? Make inferences: what does the color palette tell us about what is happening? To whom do you think the figure is speaking? What do you think happened just before the moment depicted here? What do you think will happen next? Write your ideas down and then discuss as a group.
Making Art	Make a quick sketch of the painting. Then, using your sketch as a reference, develop a story around it. You will create a one-page comic that tells a story with a clear beginning, middle, and end. You can use a ruler to measure and divide up the page to create the comic's panels, or you can draw the panels by hand (a panel is an individual frame, or single drawing, in a comic). You can create as many panels as you like; it just depends on what makes the most sense for your story. Make sure you include a panel containing your drawing of <i>Cold Shoulder</i> somewhere in your comic. This panel can come at the beginning, middle, or end of the story; it's up to you! When you are ready to begin drawing, start by sketching out the story lightly with a pencil. Next, trace your lines with a fine tip black pen and then erase your pencil lines. Finally, color in your comic using watercolors, colored pencils, or markers. Think about how the colors you choose can help tell your story.
Reflection	Now we will share our comics in small groups. Show and read them aloud to each other. As you share, notice and compare how you and the other members of your group used the <i>Cold Shoulder</i> panel in your comics. Specifically, where did everyone choose to insert the panel in their story? What role does the woman in the painting play in your story? Did anyone incorporate other details from the painting into their comic?
Curriculum Connections	Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.7 Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3-12.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3.A Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3.B Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue,

**Curriculum
Connections**
(cont.)

description, and pacing, to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.

Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) Content Standards for California Public Schools
5.2.6 Use perspective in an original work of art to create a real or imaginary scene.
5.2.7 Communicate values, opinions, or personal insights through an original work of art.

Classroom Activity

Generating Arguments

- Objectives** Students will generate a claim for an argument about the character Hanuman in the ancient Indian epic poem the *Ramayana*. Who is he? What does he represent? What can he tell us about power? About devotion? In order to accomplish this, students will read and reread three “texts” (one written text and two artworks) that capture Hanuman, utilizing the reading strategies inferring and synthesizing.
- Grades** 9–12
- Time** One to two class periods
- Materials** Text One:
Excerpt from R.K. Narayan’s *The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic*, page 120, starting with Jambavan’s comments to Hanuman, including Hanuman’s response.
- Text Two:
Detail of Sri Lanka, *Temple hanging*, 19th century, painted and dyed cotton; 108½ × 214 in., The Victoria and Albert Museum (5440[IS]), © Victoria and Albert Museum, London
See: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O168474/temple-hanging-unknown>
- Text Three:
Hanuman Visits Sita in Lanka, Folio from a *Ramayana* (Adventures of Rama), India, Gujarat, circa 1775–1800, opaque watercolor and ink on paper, 6½ × 12½ in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by Christian Humann (M.72.11), photo © Museum Associates/LACMA
See: <https://collections.lacma.org/node/238305>
- Process**
- 1. First Reading:** Look at the three texts about the character Hanuman from the Indian epic the *Ramayana*. What do you notice? When you consider these texts together, what can you infer about Hanuman? How would you characterize him? Discuss your findings with a partner and then share those findings with the larger group.
 - 2. Second Reading:** Consider the following information about Hanuman. In the *Ramayana*, Hanuman, the leader of the monkey army, becomes devoted to Rama, particularly Rama’s cause to save his wife Sita from Ravana, the demon king of Lanka. In his shortened prose version of the *Ramayana*, R.K. Narayan describes Hanuman as “the greatest devotee of Rama” (xxviii) and “one of the most important and worshipful characters” (156).¹ With this new information, return to the three texts and reread. What can you infer now? How would you characterize Hanuman? Discuss your findings with a partner and then share those findings with the larger group.
 - 3. Third Reading:** Consider the concept of power: How does an individual gain power? How would you characterize someone who has power? Then, reread the three texts with a focus on power. What kind of power does Hanuman have? How did he gain it? How does he use it? Would you characterize Hanuman as a powerful figure? Why or why not? If we consider that the *Ramayana* can help us understand the Hindu religion, how do Hindus view power? Discuss your findings with a partner and then share those findings with the larger group.

¹ R.K. Narayan, *The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic* (London: Penguin Classics, 2006).

Process (cont.)

4. Synthesis: Drawing on your multiple readings of these three texts, what claim can you make about Hanuman? Use one of these sentence frames to generate your claim:

Hanuman, in the *Ramayana*, is...

In the *Ramayana*, Hanuman represents...

Through the character of Hanuman, the *Ramayana* illustrates that...

Share your claim with a partner; be sure to share the evidence from the three texts that supports your claim. Then, share your claim and supporting evidence with the larger group.

Curriculum Connections

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-12.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6 Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

Images



Images: (top) India, Gujarat, *Hanuman Visits Sita in Lanka*, Folio from a *Ramayana* (*Adventures of Rama*), circa 1775–1800, opaque watercolor and ink on paper; 6 1/2 x 12 1/2 in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by Christian Humann (M.72.11), photo © Museum Associates/LACMA; (bottom) Detail of Sri Lanka, *Temple hanging*, 19th century, painted and dyed cotton; 108½ x 214 in., The Victoria and Albert Museum (5440[IS]), © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Resources

Books for Students and Teachers

Chris Burden: Streetlamps

Russell Ferguson, Christopher Bedford, and George Roberts

This book explores Chris Burden's work with antique streetlamps, objects he began to amass in the early 2000s. Burden realized five major streetlamp sculptures in both public and private spaces, all of which are lavishly documented here from conception through installation.

Comprehension Connections: Bridges to Strategic Reading

Tanny McGregor

This book is a guide to developing children's ability to fully understand texts by making the comprehension process achievable, accessible, and incremental. McGregor's lessons build bridges between the concrete and the abstract by incorporating writing, discussion, song, art, and movement into a web of creative connections that reinforce each strategy on a variety of levels.

German Expressionism: The Graphic Impulse

Starr Figura and Peter Jelavich

This volume draws from the Museum of Modern Art's outstanding holdings of Expressionist prints, enhanced by selected drawings, paintings, and sculptures from the collection, to explore the importance of printmaking in German Expressionism.

Ramayana (Audible Audiobook)

Retold by William Buck and performed by Ram Dass

This wondrous tale of cosmic adventure tells the story of Prince Rama, the seventh incarnation of the god Vishnu. At about 50,000 lines, the original *Ramayana* is one of the longest epic poems in history. Grades K and up

Ramayana: Divine Loophole

Sanjay Patel

Artist and veteran Pixar animator Sanjay Patel lends a lush, whimsical illustration style and lighthearted voice to one of the best-loved and most enduring

Hindu tales. Patel's telling features more than one hundred colorful full-spread illustrations, a detailed pictorial glossary of the characters who make up the epic story, and sketches of the work in progress. Grades K and up

The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic (Penguin Classics)

R. K. Narayan

R. K. Narayan recreates the excitement he found in an eleventh-century telling of the *Ramayana*, making this luminous saga accessible to new generations of readers. Grades 6 and up

Roy Lichtenstein (Getting to Know the World's Greatest Artists)

Mike Venezia

This book for kids examines the life and work of the twentieth-century American artist whose paintings of cartoon panels, advertisements, and other subjects from popular culture helped to establish Pop art. Grades K and up

Tao Te Ching

Laozi

Laozi was an ancient Chinese philosopher and writer who is best known as the reputed author of the *Tao Te Ching* and the founder of philosophical Daoism.

Transcendence & Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China

Suzanne E. Cahill

This book examines the greatest Daoist goddess of the Tang dynasty, the Queen Mother of the West, who was associated with transcendence and divine passion.

Using Art to Teach Reading Comprehension Strategies: Lesson Plans for Teachers

Jennifer Klein and Elizabeth Stuart

Written by experienced educators, this book provides both classroom and art teachers with an overview of six different reading strategies and integrated reading and art lessons that they can implement in their own classrooms and schools.

Online Resources

“Ludwig Meidner”

Museum of Modern Art

https://www.moma.org/s/ge/collection_ge/artist/artist_id-3909.html

Roy Lichtenstein Foundation

<https://lichtensteinfoundation.org>

“The Story of Urban Light”

LACMA Unframed

<https://unframed.lacma.org/2018/02/06/story-urban-light>

“Treasures from Korea: Arts and Culture of the Joseon Dynasty, 1392–1910”

Philadelphia Museum of Art

<https://www.philamuseum.org/exhibitions/2014/795.html?page=1>

“‘Urban Light’: Everything You Didn’t Know about L.A.’s Beloved Landmark”

Los Angeles Times

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-ca-cm-lacma-urban-light-20180214-htmllstory.html>