

Art and English Language Development

WITH THE ADOPTION OF THE COMMON CORE STATE Standards (CCSS), K–12 educators have new responsibilities. The Common Core Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects mandate that all teachers emphasize student development of skills that lead to a mastery of what is commonly referred to as “academic language.” Educators of all grade levels and in all content areas have, in effect, become literacy teachers. The expectation is that students, ELL (English-language learners) and non-ELL, will complete assignments using standard English, with appropriate use of the specialized vocabulary for each content area.

Under the CCSS, challenges facing teachers with English-language learners are greater than before. Students struggling to master the rudiments of English are expected to develop skills to utilize the English of academic language in each subject area. As language-skills specialists have long known, the lasting acquisition of specialized vocabulary is dependent on first mastering the concepts being introduced. An older approach to developing the language skills of ELL students is to assign them vocabulary lists to memorize. New research suggests that this is not the best approach under CCSS, in which the understanding of concepts (not just word memorization) is key. This research also indicates that use of art, and images in general, can be tools to achieve success.

The role of images in promoting language literacy is not new, but it is now commonly believed to be of critical importance.

The background pedagogy and theory are based on research that is best explained in more detail, but in simplified form, the approach is to use visual materials to facilitate active discussion among students. Initially, such discussion can be held in students’ “everyday language” (using the English skills and vocabulary they have mastered thus far). As they continue their discussions about the images and ideas, always referring back to what they *see*, their discussion solidifies their comprehension—in *English*—of the concepts being introduced. Classroom teachers facilitating the discussions can deepen students’ levels of understanding as they move these discussions forward. Once the concepts are mastered via discussion, the more specialized vocabulary of that content area can be introduced.

The information contained in this packet references objects from the permanent collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), and also includes a variety of classroom activities to engage students in discussion. Exercises that promote careful looking and the exchange of perspectives provide active and engaging learning experiences, as well as build students’ confidence in their oral skills. These competencies can carry over to written work. The museum’s collection—nearly all of which is easily available online at www.lacma.org—can be used for topics of discussion in many different content areas; and lesson plans can be adapted to the use of images from myriad formats.



SEATED DOG

Japan, Edo period (1603–1868), c. 1680
Kakiemon ware, porcelain with overglaze enamels
24.1 x 22.9 x 12.7 cm (9 ½ x 9 x 5 in.)
LACMA, Robert and Mary Looker (PG.2011.12)
Photo © 2013 Museum Associates/LACMA

WHAT IS NOT TO LIKE ABOUT THIS DOG? A NEW LACMA acquisition, *Seated Dog* is sure to be popular with children and adults. Clearly a canine, its playful decoration is both amusing and attention-grabbing. Children on school tours are likely to immediately identify with it, many perhaps wondering what it is doing in a museum: Is it old? Why is it decorated with those bold, colorful splotches? Who made it, and why? It clearly is an object well suited as a subject for lively discussion.

Though it looks as though it could have been created recently, *Seated Dog* is actually several hundred years old. It was created in the Kakiemon workshops in Arita, in southern Japan, in the late seventeenth century. Kakiemon porcelain is named after the pioneering work done by Sakaida Kakiemon (1596–1666), who is credited with the successful creation of overglaze enamels on porcelain. To make this object, first the dog’s body was made, with the high-quality ceramic known as porcelain, and then coated with a beautiful clear glaze, or coating, made of a thinned version of the ceramic material. After firing in the kiln at a high temperature, the dog would have been cooled and then decorated with splashes of enamel (metallic pigment mixed with powdered glass), before going back into the kiln and being fired again, this time at a lower temperature, which was needed to “fire” the enamel.

According to museum curators, this dog was made in about 1680. Its spots suggest it might be a Dalmation, which is not a breed native to Japan. Kakiemon porcelains were highly prized possessions of European royalty and aristocracy in the late 1600s and early 1700s, and were produced more for export than local use. While spots on a Dalmation are typically black, here colorful enamel glazes were used to showcase the Kakiemon technique, as well as to emphasize the fine white-porcelain background.

Graphic Organizers: What do *you* know about this work of art? What do you wonder? When selecting works of art for English language instruction, consider representational works with easily-recognizable images, such as animals. Start with what students know about the work and scaffold in subject area content during the course of the conversation. Use a graphic organizer to record the discussion, documenting student responses through words *and* pictures. The additive approach is accessible because it activates and builds on students’ prior knowledge and experience. It also makes student thinking visible for the group and encourages deeper inquiry at the individual level. Try the approach when introducing a new topic in order to identify what students already know. Revisit the same artwork and approach later in the school year to evaluate student progress and the depth of student responses over time.

What I know about this artwork.	What I wonder about this artwork.
<p>It is an animal.</p> <p>This animal is a dog.</p> <p>His tail looks happy.</p> <p>His paws are ready to jump.</p> <p>He has blue, red, and black spots.</p>	<p>Is it old or new?</p> <p>How big is it?</p> <p>What is it made of?</p> <p>What tools were used?</p> <p>Where was it made?</p>



CARLOS MÉRIDA
 Guatemala, 1891–1984, active Mexico
Structural Study for a Mural (Estudio estructural para mural), 1921
 Oil on canvas, 73. x 83.2 cm (28 ³/₄ x 32 ³/₄ in.)
 LACMA, The Bernard and Edith Lewin Collection of Mexican Art (AC1997.LWN.323)
 © Carlos Mérida Estate, Photo © 2013 Museum Associates/LACMA

ACCORDING TO LACMA CURATORS, *STRUCTURAL Study for a Mural* (*Estudio estructural para mural*) is one of Carlos Mérida's most accomplished early works. Mérida was born in Guatemala, but he moved to Mexico in 1919 and spent most of his career there. While living in Paris before that, from 1912 to 1914, he met a number of avant-garde artists, including Pablo Picasso and Mexican artist Diego Rivera. Upon his return to Guatemala in 1914, Mérida studied his native country's art traditions and folklore, which he believed could serve as the basis for a higher art, one equal to the work he had seen in Europe. Mérida was able to incorporate his deep understanding of pre-Columbian art and the result was an aesthetic that transcended national boundaries.

The simplified shapes and bold patches of color in this mural study show the strong influence of art created before the Spanish conquest of the New World (which began in

the late fifteenth century). Among these characteristics are geometric abstraction, from the art of the ancient Maya peoples; use of flat colors; and emphasis on human forms. This mural study is universal in its depiction of people and family groups, yet it is also culturally specific, which resonates in particular with museum visitors familiar with Latin American cultural traditions.

Word Sort: What do you see in this work of art? What more can you find? Take an inventory of student findings using a word bank, then reflect on the discussion by sorting responses according to pre-determined categories (based on the lesson objective). The process of recording and organizing student thinking elucidates parallels between everyday and academic descriptions. It offers a comprehensible approach to vocabulary development and fosters practice with both English and the language of the visual arts. Use the elements of art as the word sort categories to introduce the terms line, shape, and color.

Word Bank			Word Sort		
Triangle	Curvy	Swirly	LINES	SHAPES	COLORS
Orange	Blue	Yellow	Curvy	Circle	Orange
Circle	Oval	Wiggly	Swirly	Triangle	Blue
			Wiggly	Oval	Yellow



MILLARD SHEETS

United States, 1907–1989

Angels Flight, 1931

Oil on canvas, 127.6 x 101.6 cm (50¼ x 40 in.)

LACMA, Gift of Mrs. L. M. Maitland (32.17)

© Millard Sheets Estate, Photo © 2013 Museum Associates/LACMA

THIS PAINTING BY LOS ANGELES—AREA ARTIST MILLARD Sheets, who led a circle of twentieth-century Southern California artists known as Regionalists or American Scene painters, depicts an early-1930s downtown—Los Angeles scene: the top of the well-known landmark, Bunker Hill. The vantage point is from above; the figures look down along the path of a stairway mounting the slope. Bunker Hill could be ascended by climbing a series of steps and ramps, or by riding on the incline railroad Angels Flight (still at work today, but in a different form). Sheets did not include the railway in his painting, though photographs of the site suggest that the women in the foreground might be standing on the platform at the railway terminus.

While Sheets's body of work actually concentrated more on rural California, this scene gave him the opportunity to follow his impulse to paint his immediate surroundings, including the city. A big influence for Sheets and his contemporaries was the New York-based Ashcan School, a group of artists who advocated painting scenes of the rapidly urbanized East Coast cities, showing residents at work and at play.

Another favorite in museum school tours, *Angels Flight* offers arrays of both scenic perspectives and people—of many ages, engaged in different activities, and wearing various types of clothing. Any of these aspects or scenarios will invite close examination and elicit discussion. Students are likely to immediately recognize the painting as an urban scene, though its large Victorian homes and apartments that once populated downtown Los Angeles were torn down long ago.

Sentence Frames: If you were a person in this painting, what would you hear? What would you see, smell, and feel? Consider approaching a work of art from the viewpoint of a person, an object, or even a building. Immersive prompts allow students to try on different roles, to evaluate different perspectives, and to experience the "environment" created by a work of art. Sentence frames can help students synthesize their thinking and identify new understandings discovered through the process of perspective-taking. They also model proper grammar and syntax for students, while managing the (often negative) emotions that arise for ELL students when writing about works of art. This strategy reduces anxiety, and increases self-esteem and motivation.

"I think the women are feeling . . . because . . ."

"Imagine the laundry could think. I think the clothes would be thinking . . . because . . ."

"Imagine the billboard could talk. I think the billboard is saying . . . because . . ."



ROYAL PEACOCK BARGE

Murshidabad, West Bengal, India, late 19th century

Ivory, 61.9 x 106.7 x 16.5 cm (24 3/8 x 42 x 6 1/2 in.)

LACMA, Gift of Cynthia and Ken Boettcher, Laguna Niguel, California (M.82.154)

Photo © 2013 Museum Associates/LACMA

VIEWING THIS IVORY BARGE PROVIDES MANY opportunities for student discussion. Identifying its numerous details—from the guns mounted on the barge's front to the elephants on its base supporting the vessel's weight—instigates close examination and contributes many jumping-off points for conversation.

There is a long and rich history of ivory carving in India. Over the course of its millennia of artistic expression, several natural sources of ivory, antler, and bone have been utilized to create a wide variety of objects. The largest Indian carved-ivory objects—sometimes made from an entire tusk and more—are ivory boats like this one. They were made during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Murshidabad, the great Bengali center of ivory carving, in what is now northeast India.

Among these depictions of vessels are ivory models of royal pleasure boats, called peacock barges (*mayūra-pankhī* or *morpankhī*), because their prows were shaped in the form of a peacock. These boats were used by the governor (*nawāb*) of Bengal and his guests during festivals on the Ganges river, and the ivory models, made in varying sizes, portray the elaborate peacock barges in detail. They typically feature, as this one does, one or two covered pavilions in the forward section, which were used for entertaining the ruler and his guests and housed musicians, dancers, and a communal pipe (*hookah*.) A number of servants also are often in attendance, including one whose job was to pull the cord of the swinging ceiling fan (*pankhā*). The stern is occupied by several pairs of rowers and a helmsman.

Group Work: What is one detail that you see in this work of art? What is one detail that your partner noticed that you did not?

"Think/pair/share" prompts give students the opportunity to practice listening and speaking skills in an intimate setting. Even when a partner speaks on behalf of a student to the larger group, the student's voice is honored and recognized through paraphrase and summary. Consider a "four square" activity that encourages students to join a small group based on their reaction to a work of art. Assign a different statement to each corner, such as:

1. I like this work of art.
2. I do not like this work of art.
3. There are things that I like and do not like about this work of art.
4. I would change this work of art.

Or try "numbered heads together," by assigning each student in a small group a number and proposing a question, such as "What is one similarity or difference between these two works of art?" Call, at random, on student number one or student number four to report findings back to the larger group. Equal voicing activities such as these foster communication, giving students to opportunity to make individual contributions through group collaboration.

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