



Art that Tells Stories



Henri Rousseau (French, 1844-1910)

The Castle at Night, 1889

Oil painting on linen

SBMA, Gift of Wright S. Ludington (1993.1.9)

Grades/Level: Upper Elementary (3-5)

Subjects: Language Arts, Visual Arts

Time required: One to two class periods

Lesson Overview:

- Students will learn about the **elements of art**, and about how artists create a sense of space using **foreground, middle ground, and background**
- Students will learn vocabulary for describing **sensory details**
- Students will learn how to **analyze details** and their connection to **cause and effect**.
- **Students will learn how artists communicate information** through visual details
- Students will create an original artwork that uses perspective, and the elements of art to create a real or imaginary scene.
- Students will learn how to generate alternative endings; create a context for a narrative

Discussion:

What do you see? Describe the scene.

“Walk” students through this scene by starting with the foreground, then proceed to the middle ground, and the background.

- Plants, hills, houses, trees, silvery stream, ruins--a castle/fortress, sky, moon and stars.

Describe the elements of art: colors, lines, shapes; lines-horizontals, verticals and diagonals; lights and darks.

Do the plants, hills, trees, castle look real? Why or why not?

- All the elements of art: lines, shapes, colors are very simple. There is little realistic detail.

Sensory Details

What time of day do you think it is? How do we know?

What about the light? Does it look realistic (what about that diagonal slice of light on the hillside?)

If you were in this landscape, what sounds might you hear?

If you could hear music to go with this scene, how would it sound?

What words would you use to describe the **mood** of this painting (How does it feel?)

Happy? Sad? Mysterious? Scary?

If you could walk into this picture, where would you be? Would you want to be alone?

Form Conclusions

Adding up the visual details, would you conclude that this is a real place, or an imaginary one?

We don't know for sure. We do know that this artist used his imagination a lot, so this is probably an imaginary place.

Alternative Endings

How would this scene be different if:

- It were daytime
- It were summer and the colors were light and bright
- There were people in it
- There were animals in it

Would you like it more—or less-- if it were sunny and daytime? If there were people or animals in it? Why?

Writing Projects

Give it a new title. We don't know what the artist's original title for this painting was. It has been given a number of different titles, including *The Castle-Fortress*, and *The Dungeon*.

What title would you give it?

Make up a story that takes place inside this setting, in these houses or up on the hill.

What type of characters would inhabit this setting? Plot?

Write a poem. Use the list of words that you used to describe this scene and your feelings about it to write a poem.

Art Activity: Every Story Needs a Picture

Materials: Watercolor or copy paper, pencils, and watercolors.

Create a landscape painting illustrating your original story inspired by *The Castle at Night*. Be sure to add the characters (people & animals) and any other details that are important to your plot.

Standards Addressed

Language Arts

Third Grade

2.0 Writing Applications

2.1 Write narratives:

- a. Provide a context within which an action takes place
- b. Include well-chosen details to develop the plot
- c. Provide insight into why the selected incident is memorable

2.2 Write descriptions that use concrete details to prevent and support unified impressions of people, places, things, or experiences.

Fourth Grade

2.0 Writing Applications

2.1 Write narratives:

- a. Relate ideas, observations, or recollections of an event or experience.
- b. Provide a context to enable the reader to imagine the world of the event or experience.
- c. Use concrete sensory details.
- d. Provide insight into why the selected event or experience is memorable.

Fifth Grade

2.0 Writing Applications

2.1 Writing Narratives

- a. Establish a plot, point of view, setting, and conflict.
- b. Show, rather than tell, the events of the story.

Visual Arts Standards

Third Grade

1.0 Artistic Perception

1.3 Identify and describe how foreground, middle ground, and background are used to create the illusion of space.

1.5 Identify and describe elements of art in works of art, emphasizing line, color, shape/form, texture, space, and value.

2.0 Creative Expression

2.3 Paint or draw a landscape, seascape, or cityscape that shows the illusion of space.

5.0 Connections, Relationships, Applications

5.2 Write a poem or story inspired by their own works of art.

Fourth Grade

1.0 Artistic Perception

1.5 Describe and analyze the elements of art (e.g. color, shape/form, line, texture, space, value, emphasizing form, as they are used in works of art and found in the environment.

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing

4.5 Describe how the individual experiences of an artist may influence the development of specific works of art.

Fifth Grade

2.0 Creative Expression

2.6 Use perspective in an original work of art to create a real or imaginary scene.

Artistic Perception

3.0 Aesthetic Valuing

4.1 Identify how selected principles of design are used in a work of art and how they affect personal responses to and evaluation of the work of art.

Background Information for Teachers

Henri Rousseau was a self-taught artist whose dreamlike, poetic imagery linked him with his contemporaries, the French Symbolist poets and painters. Rousseau worked most of his life as a municipal toll collector in Paris, which earned him the nickname “Le Douanier” (The Customs Official). He only became a full-time painter when he was almost 50 years old. Because he lacked formal training, he was more or less ignorant of the academic rules of scale, perspective, modelling and coloring. But his sincere, awkward manner, crisp outlines, strong colors, and stiff, flattened forms often convey a mood of mystery and magic that anticipates the 20th century Surrealists. Dismissed by most contemporary critics as naïve or primitive, his paintings were admired by a few progressive figures, such as the playwright Alfred Jarry, and later Guillaume Apollinaire. Pablo Picasso bought several of Rousseau’s paintings and donated them to the Louvre Museum. In 1908 Picasso hosted a legendary banquet for Rousseau that confirmed his high standing among the younger generation of artists.