



LESSON PLAN: THE ART OF OBSERVATION READING ART

Topic/Theme:

Learning to see visually

Class Level:

Educators / Seniors / Adults

Duration: 2 hours

Learning Experience

Brief Description of Unit:

This class is about learning to look and using artworks as a vehicle to assess a situation quickly. It will start with a brief survey about how to look at art using famous (and not so famous) paintings and murals to 'read' the scene. It will be very interactive. It should last about an hour. The second hour will be devoted to really looking at the mural to explore what the artist is trying to convey about transportation, the city, and people of the time. They can take the class by visiting the mural and walking around it.

Specific Learning Objectives

- 1. Cultural Context:** Students Learn about what cultural context is and how to read it.
- 2. Artwork:** Students learn about visual perception and how to 'read' an artwork
- 3. Forensic:** Students learn about provenance: what is it, where do you go to find out more about something you see that may not be well known.
- 4. Judging Artworks:** Students learn about how artworks are judged and valued.

Resources

Artwork: *The History of Transportation*, Helen Lundeberg



LESSON PLAN: THE ART OF OBSERVATION

READING ART

Brief Description

Background:

This is based on the work of Amy Herman who was the Director of Education for the Frick Museum for 11 years and then at WNET. She developed a 3-hour class on the art of perception where she taught people how to look at artworks and use them as a vehicle to read the visual world around them.

The class held at the Frick took on a life of its own and she began using art to teach Columbia medical students diagnosis, Scotland Yard, the New York City Police Department and the FBI how to use art to read a crime scene, soldiers about to be deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan how to read foreign cultures. The idea was to understand quickly what the work is telling you, what's important and what is not and then be able to act on it. The methodology consists of setting the context with a slideshow showing a range of artworks, learning which details to look at, what questions to ask, and then how to communicate what the work is telling you.

Classroom Applications:

1. The teacher does not have to be the expert.
2. The teacher allows the students to "read" the artwork.
3. The students tell the class what they see.

Questions for Teachers:

It is important to start with a series of paintings that people might be familiar with such as *the Girl with the Pearl Earring*, or by Van Eyck that they may really have not looked at carefully before. Here the teacher will talk about how the people are dressed, how is the room furnished, are the people rich? Are they healthy? Sometimes people hold things? What does that mean? After a few examples, then the class can move on to the Lundeborg mural. Ideally, it is so big, that it should be viewed in site as it is hard to see in its entirety in photographs.

Questions could be raised about what is depicted and how? This was painted during the 1930's. Does the painting evoke anything about the period? Can you tell anything about the New Deal? Were the fashions that people wore during the 30's depicted realistically? Is the color palette typical of the period? Is it typical of the Artist? What about the selection of forms of transportation that the Artist chose: the airplanes were the most advanced. What are the details? What does that mean? There are a few sections where the mural was too decayed to reconstruct accurately; the conservators chose to acknowledge it by restoring it slightly differently; can you tell? Is this an appropriate approach?