

Activity

Students analyze, write and perform poetry inspired by art, also known as Ekphrastic Poetry.

Grades

9-12

Content Areas

English Language Arts

Skills

- Visual Thinking Strategies
- Poetry Analysis
- Reflective writing
- Poetry Writing
- Public Speaking

Understandings

1. Poets and artists may look to each other's works for inspiration.
2. Poetry may be used to process or more deeply understand a topic.

Procedure

1. Introduce students to the word "Ekphrastic" and define its meaning. In short, ekphrastic means to be inspired by art, and Ekphrastic Poetry is any poem that has been written about or in response to a work of art. These two articles from the Poetry Foundation and poets.org provide more complete descriptions and examples; go to <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/ekphrasis> and https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poems?field_form_tid=408.
2. Explain to students that they will be using this style of poetry to analyze and respond to a piece of art from the *Takuwe* exhibit. At this stage, it may be helpful to show students an example of a poem and the artwork that inspired it. The following link is to the website of a teacher who has compiled a large selection of poems and the paintings on which they are based. Go to <http://mseffie.com/assignments/paintings%26poems/titlepage.html> and select a poem that works well for the context of the class. For example, during a unit focusing on American poets or literature, the poem "Edward Hopper and the House by the Railroad", by Edward Hirsch, highlights both a famous American artist and a poet. You may also select a poem for its particular literary devices or historical context.
3. Discuss the connections between the selected example poem and the artwork. Identify any literary devices that may strengthen the connection or reveal a main idea. Provide a couple more examples of Ekphrastic Poetry students can access or physically touch. Give students time to reflect by journaling or completing an exit ticket on what they learned about Ekphrastic Poetry. For more information about exit tickets, along with possible prompts, please go to <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/exit-cards>.
4. Lead students through a "gallery walk" in which they will be exposed to the *Takuwe* artwork. Depending on the class, you may show a select number of pieces or the entire exhibit if accessible. Choose one piece of artwork as the focus for a whole group "Visual Thinking Strategies" session. VTS is a way of facilitating open ended conversations about artworks and asks students to expand on their observations by providing visual

evidence. Although there are extensive trainings for educators on Visual Thinking Strategies, implementing VTS in your classroom can be as simple as posing three questions to students:

- a. What is going on in this picture? (Before and after asking this question, provide students plenty of time to look closely at the image.)
- b. What do you see that makes you say that?
- c. What more can we find?

It is also important to note that there are truly no wrong answers in a VTS session. All responses should be met equally and neutrally. The following two sites provide more in-depth information on the complexities of Visual Thinking Strategies, and provide examples of its implementation in a classroom. Go to

https://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/teaching_visual_thinking_strategies.shtml or <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/analyzing-images> for more information.

5. After analyzing the artwork, ask students to take another gallery walk and look deeply at each piece. Tell them they will be choosing one piece to write about. The artwork students choose must speak to them in a way that inspires emotion. Record student choices—maybe in an exit ticket.
6. In the following class, review Ekphrastic Poetry.
7. Discuss writing strategies with students. Ekphrastic Poetry will include other poetic forms and can be approached in many ways. You might provide students with a list of potential approaches similar to the following:
 - Describe the scene being depicted.
 - Write in the voice of a person or object shown in the work of art.
 - Write about your experience of looking at the artwork.
 - Imagine and describe what was going on in the mind of the artist as he/she was creating the piece.
 - Write in the voice of an object or subject of the artwork.
 - Speak directly to the artist, object or subject of the artwork.
 - Imagine the story behind what we see depicted in the artwork.
8. Discuss poetic forms students may use. This list can be adapted to the class and teacher's preferences. Poetry forms that may work particularly well for this activity include free verse, imagery poems, elegy, ballads, or refrain. You may also encourage students to use a more structured form such as haiku, triolet, "I am" poems, listing poems, tanka, diamonte, etc.
9. Provide students with digital access to, or physical copy of, their individually chosen *Takuwe* artworks so they may refer back to them as they write.
10. Have students complete an exit ticket or journal entry about their experience using Visual Thinking Strategies.
11. Allow students time to work on creating their poem.
12. Students perform their poems.