

Inspirations: A Journal for Writing with Art

From the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art
at Kansas State University

Additional creative writing activities from the Beach Museum of Art:

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Inspirations: Art for Storytelling

Coming Soon: Talking About Art (TAP) <https://beach.k-state.edu/explore/apps/>

MARIANNA KISTLER
BEACH
MUSEUM OF ART

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"Some of the stories told in paint are rather straightforward, easily read by most viewers: simple pictures. Others convey content through more obscure symbols, using details freighted with personal, often cryptic meaning—complex images that perhaps reflect the complex circumstances of their creation. But all suggest a basic and enduring fascination with a story well told, with a tale well painted."

Prologue, *Tales from the Easel: American Narrative Paintings from Southeastern Museums, circa 1800 – 1950*, University of Kansas Art Historian Dr. Charles Eldredge, University of Georgia Press, 2004

These exercises, using art from the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, will help build your visual vocabulary, develop visual thinking skills, and employ your creative thinking. You can view larger versions of the images in color by searching for the piece on our website at <https://beach.k-state.edu/explore/collection/>

Kathrine Schlageck, Associate Curator of Educations

Ekphrasis: a literary description of or commentary on a visual work of art.

The practice of using words to comment on a piece of visual art is an ancient one. One of the earliest and most commonly cited forms of ekphrasis occurs in *The Iliad*, when Homer provides a long and discursive account of the elaborate scenes embossed on the shield of Achilles.

One of the most famous examples of ekphrasis is *Ode on a Grecian Urn* by John Keats. A more recent example is the song *Vincent* by Don McClain:



*Starry, starry night
Paint your palette blue and grey
Look out on a summer's day
With eyes that know the darkness in my soul
Shadows on the hills
Sketch the trees and the daffodils
Catch the breeze and the winter chills
In colors on the snowy linen land*

Although ekphrasis is most often found in the form of poetry, non-fiction prose and narrative fiction can be used to write about art, as evidenced by recent novels *Girl With a Pearl Earring* by Tracy Chevalier (1999) and *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt (2013).

Sensory Circle

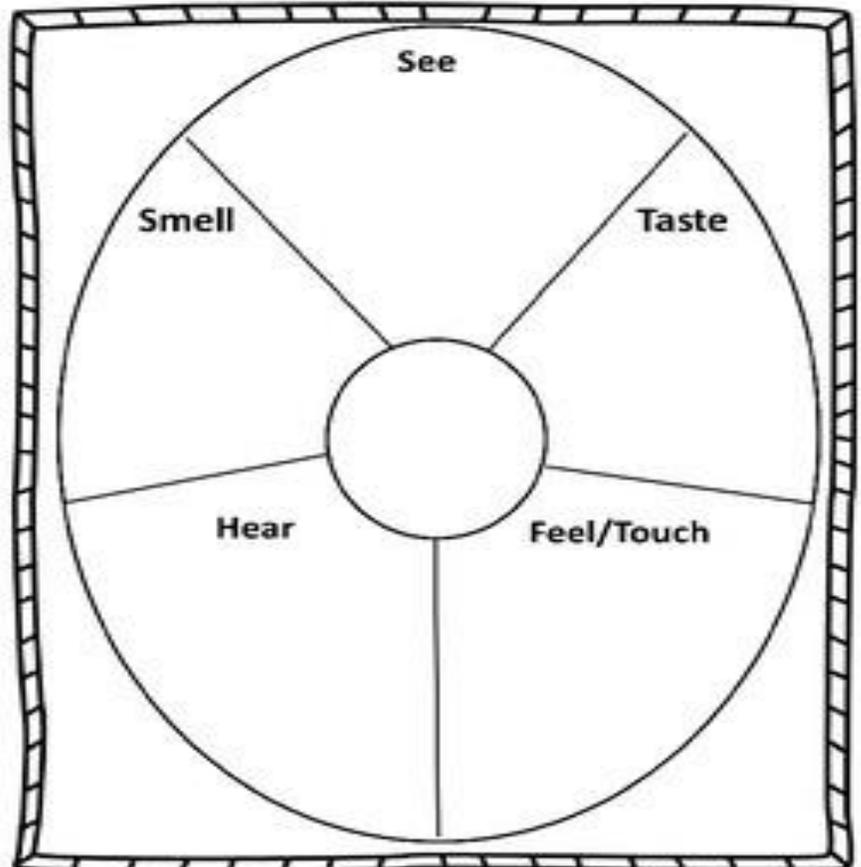


We employ our senses to interpret the world around us and observation is at the core of many disciplines, including the sciences. In science we refer to descriptive attributes like shape, size, temperature and textures. In language arts we use adjectives and adverbs to describe what we observe. In works of art we look for visual aesthetic qualities such as line, shape, color, texture, movement, and contrast – referred to as the elements of art and composition.

Use the painting below and fill in the sensory circle on the next page. You

may have to use your imagination!

Robert Newton Sudlow (1920-2010)
Blackbirds, 1960 Oil on canvas
KSU, Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art,
gift of Dakin Cramer in memory of Nancy Lee
Foster, 1996.87



Color Pairs

If you look at the labels on crayons or the names of colors on commercial paint chips you will notice that someone has been very creative! Examples are “midnight blue” or “spinach green.”

Use the painting by Lindsborg, Kansas artist Sven Birger Sandzén below and create a name for each of the colors you see.



Sven Birger Sandzén (1871-1954)

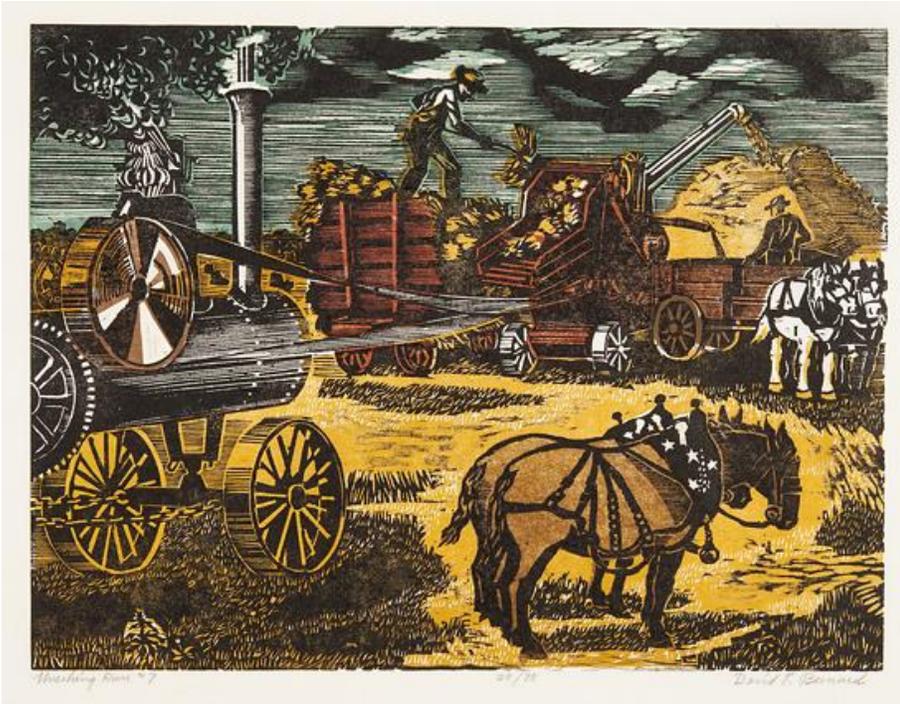
Fall in the Mountains, 1927

Oil on canvas

KSU, Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, gift of the artist, 1929.2

My New Colors for Crayola!

Looking for Sounds and Movements



David Edwin Bernard (1913-2006)

Threshing Run #7, 1984

Color woodcut on paper

KSU, Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, gift of Eloise Bourque
2001.108

Look at the woodcut to the left and make a list of sounds and movements. The sounds can be words you invent, as well as onomatopoeia/traditional sound words. Choose one or two of the words in your list and think about the visual clues that the artist provided to help you to “see” that sound or movement.

Use the list of words to write a paragraph related to what is happening in the scene.

Word List

Descriptive Paragraph

Compare and Contrast



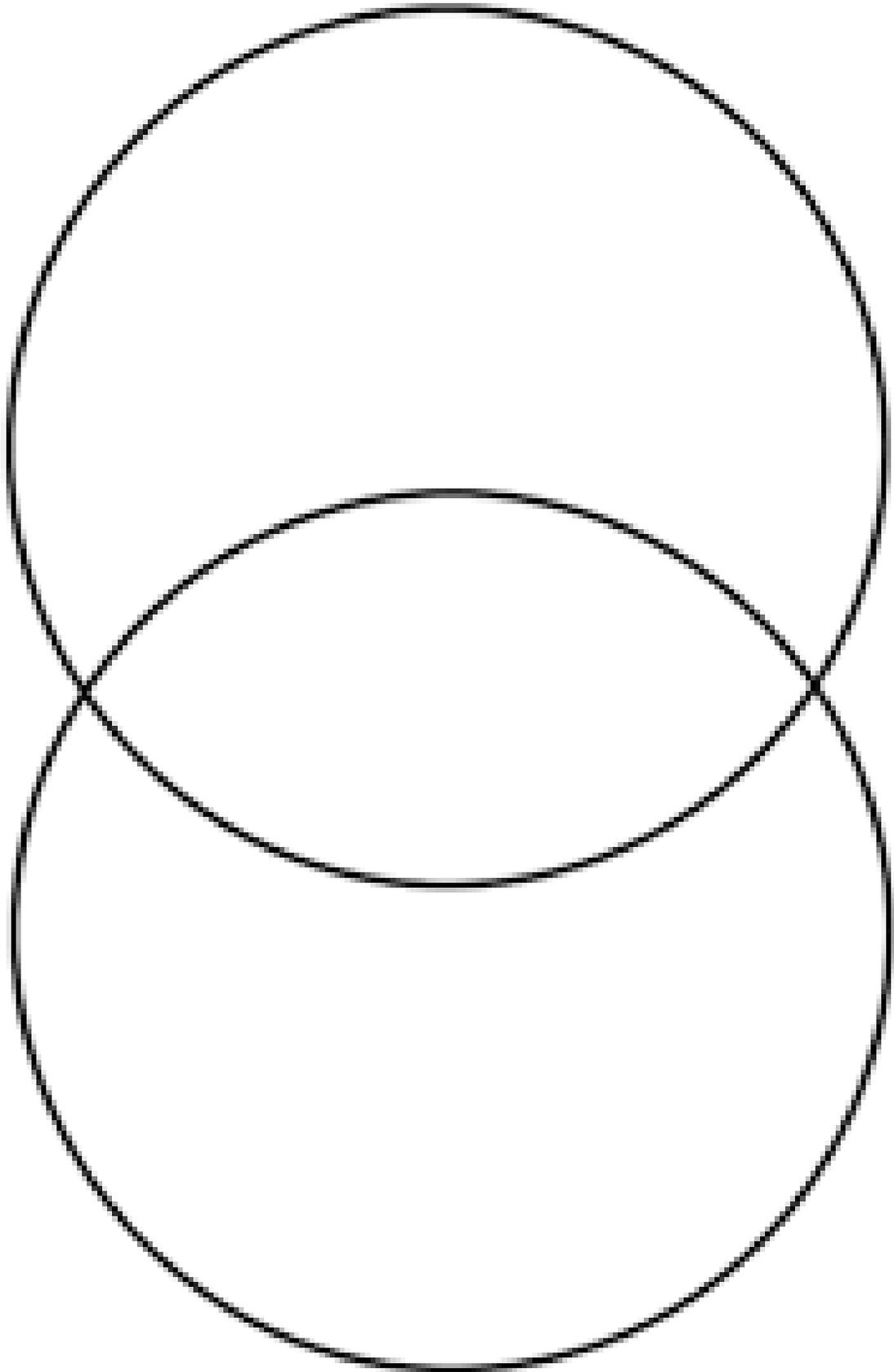
John Steuart Curry (1897-1946)
Sunrise (Sunrise Over Kansas)
1935

Oil on canvas KSU, Marianna
Kistler Beach Museum of Art,
Friends of the Beach Museum
of Art purchase 1996.18

John Steuart Curry (1897-1946)
Sun Dogs, 1930
Oil on Canvas KSU, Marianna
Kistler Beach Museum of Art,
acquisition made possible with
funds provided by K-State
students, faculty, and members of
the Manhattan community, 1933.3



Use the Venn Diagram to compare and contrast the two paintings by John Steuart Curry.



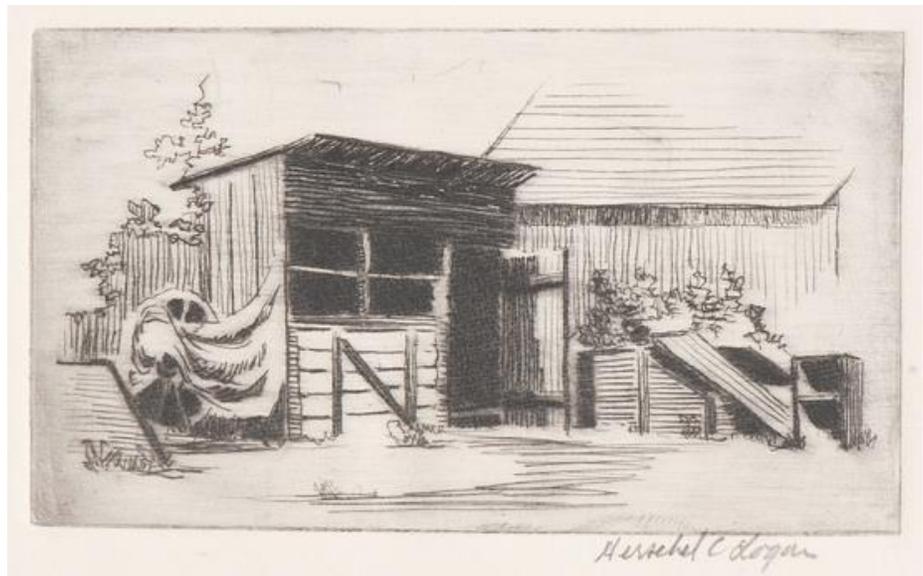
Acrostic Poem

One model for creating an ekphrastic poem is the acrostic. Start by choosing a word that relates to the work of art and writing it vertically. This will give you a title and the letter for the first word of each line. It's up to you whether your line is one word, several words with the same letter, or a sentence starting with that word.

One way to do this is to take each letter and generate as many words as you can for that letter inspired by the artwork. This will give you a word bank for your poem. Then each line should start with that letter. If you wish you can have all the words in the line start with that letter. You may also decide to just use one word per line. The choice is yours!

Here is an example:

Shed
Silver slivers splintered.
Hard, heavy hunks -
Evenly edged.
Dry, dead dwelling.



Herschel C. Logan (1901-1987)

Old Shed, mid-20th century

Etching with drypoint on paper

KSU, Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, gift of Peggy L. Sondergard & Samuel H. Logan, 2002.128

Use the photograph on the next page to create your acrostic poem.



Larry W. Schwarm (Born 1944)
Earth, Fire, and Water, Z-Bar Ranch, 1994
Chromogenic print
KSU, Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, Friends of the
Beach Museum of Art annual reception purchase, 2001.73

Word list

Acrostic Poem

Dialogue

Imagine the dialogue in the photo below. Give the characters names and write down what they are saying.



Gordon Parks (1912-2006)

Untitled, 1955 Chromogenic print

KSU, Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art,
gift of Gordon Parks and the Gordon Parks
Foundation, 2017.419

Portrait Autobiography

Pretend you are the person in the portrait and fill out the interview sheet on the next page. Be sure to look for visual hints as to your identity in the portrait.



Roger Y. Shimomura (born 1939)

Kansas Samurai, 2003

Color lithograph on paper

KSU, Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, G. E. Johnson Art Acquisition Fund, 2005.3

Portrait Autobiography

Pretend you are the person in the portrait and, using the clues the artist provided, answer the following questions to write your "autobiography." Be prepared to back up your statements with information in the portrait.

My name is _____.

I am _____ years old.

I live in _____.

The year is _____.

What hints helped you determine the above information?

My job is _____.

In my spare time I like to _____.

My favorite thing is _____.

I have a little/ some/ a lot of (circle one) money. How can we tell? _____

People use the following words to describe me (think about personality as well as looks).

I am thinking about (use facial expression to help)

I like the way the artist portrayed my _____

Why? _____

I don't like the way the artist portrayed my _____

Why? _____

What else can you say about yourself based on the portrait? _____

What Am I Thinking?

You might want to try this activity several times. Does your mood impact what the figures is thinking?

Paul Calle (born 1928)
Waiting, late 20th century
Color lithograph on paper
KSU, Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, gift of Gilbert
E. Johnson,
2017.40



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