



YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2010 Volume I: Connecting the Visual to the Verbal in the Classroom

Reading Art through Poetry

Guide for Curriculum Unit 10.01.05, published September 2010

by Sean Griffin

Leading students through this unit will not only help them to explore and experiment with ecphrastic poetry, but also to discover much more about the poetry and artwork of an extremely important era in our country's history--The Harlem Renaissance. Beginning with the exploration of Harlem itself, the unit will build student background through poetry and artwork.

Students will explore ecphrasis through examples of what was happening in Harlem in the early twentieth century in the arts, literature and in music. Focusing on the persona, free verse and the blues, students will find inspiration to write their own poetry by studying the works of poets Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks. Utilizing technique and style utilized by the poets, students will go on to study great artists such as Jacob Lawrence, William H. Johnson and Romare Bearden. Coupling the art and their own poetry will lead students to create their own ecphrastic poetry from journal seeds through writer workshop and finally to publishable pieces.

Finally students will "publish" their newly created works in a project in which students create their own books of ecphrastic poetry based on their study of the Harlem Renaissance.

(Developed for Language Arts, grade 8; recommended for Language Arts, grade 8, and English, grade 9)

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