



YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

to strengthen teaching in public schools®

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

A Palette of Poetry

Guide for Curriculum Unit 10.01.08, published September 2010

by Rochelle Baba

The culture of today is a visual one. Between the advertisements everywhere we turn, Facebook movies, and the use of the Internet, my students are bombarded with imagery, and as a result connect best to my content when they are able to better visualize. Visualization is the most essential aspect of describing anything, and in today's busy world, one way I can help my students to stay more focused, as well as enhance their writing skills, is through ekphrasis—the dramatic description or representation of a visual work of art. Ekphrastic poetry is a genre of literature that requires writers to focus on a piece of art and write about it. When students are trained to look closely at works of art and reason about what they see, they are able to draw inferences about how history, culture and visual arts can influence each other.

I have designed this unit for eleventh grade college-bound students in my American literature class. The perfect complement for this unit will be Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, a highly symbolic meditation on 1920s America. We will explore the major characters and themes in the novel, along with "learning to look" activities, focusing on a number of art slides that tie in with the themes of the novel. Students will learn to be careful observers, and learn to articulate their thoughts and reactions to writing. Bringing visual art and writing together will inspire my students to create something new—an ekphrastic poem that reflects both the painting and my students' engagement to think critically.

(Developed for American Literature, grade 11)

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

©2023 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University, All Rights Reserved. Yale National Initiative®, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute®, On Common Ground®, and League of Teachers Institutes® are registered trademarks of Yale University.

For terms of use visit https://teachers.yale.edu/terms_of_use