



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative

2018 Volume II: Poems about Works of Art, Featuring Women and Other Marginalized Writers

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## **The Third Space: Ekphrasis, Confessional Poetry, and Mental Health**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 18.02.03, published September 2018

by Krista Baxter Waldron

Written for an image-oriented group of students who are mostly behind in grade level and literacy skills, this unit pairs art and poetry in the study of poems written about works of art, or ekphrastic poetry. Students will learn or improve visual literacy skills, deep-reading skills, and poetry writing skills while they practice mature discussions around the three main strands of the unit: confessional poetry, ekphrastic poetry, and poets who struggle with depression and bi-polar disorder. Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath are the three poets whose ekphrastic poems we will study. The artists whose work is written about are Johannes Vermeer, Vincent van Gogh, and Giorgio de Chirico, respectively. We'll finish the unit by studying works of art—mostly by artists who have their own mental health struggles—and writing our own ekphrastic poems. In addition to the academic objectives of the unit, we want to honor and explore the struggle of these creative people. In my student body, mental health issues are common and not often treated. Because of the sensitive but relevant nature of the poets' lives and their poems, this unit is intended for my more mature students in 11th and 12th grade.

(Developed for English III and IV, grade 11; recommended for English III, grade 11, English IV, grade 12, and Language Arts, grades 11-12)

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