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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

Reflective Self Portraits: A Study of Oneself through Ekphrastic Poetry and Art

Guide for Curriculum Unit 18.02.09, published September 2018

by Leigh L. Hall

This unit is for K-12 teachers who want to infuse or integrate the arts and poetry as a therapeutic means to lessen the impact of trauma on students. With two-thirds of school-age students in the United States affected by one-time or on-going traumatic event(s) it is necessary to consider this in our teaching. Subjects like art, English Language Arts, and music, that lend themselves naturally to expression, are a perfect opportunity. This unit utilizes a poem by Bobbi Katz, “Lessons from a Painting by Rothko,” to aid in the connection between poetry and visual arts through Mark Rothko paintings. John Stone’s “Early Sunday Morning poem” and Edward Hopper’s painting of the same title are presented to students to evoke an emotional response that is developed by using art criticism and close reading skills started with the first poem. Therapeutic activities include a series of representational self-portraits and poetry writing in a visual journal with self-reflection build throughout to help students form a positive identity where it may have been compromised. The culminating activity is a self-reflective collage with poetry integrated throughout.

(Developed for Visual Arts, grade 5; recommended for Visual Arts, English Language Arts, and Guidance Counselor, grades K-12)

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