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Writing about the Big Picture: American Ekphrasis

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The Big Picture

Visual art and literature have an intimate relationship, a relationship exploited constantly throughout our modern society. Celebrities in print advertisement ask us if we "got milk" through their milky moustaches, George Lucas informs us of a story taking place "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away . . ." against a backdrop of a moon-size space station and the sword play of light sabers, and in the pages of the classic *Detective Comics*, Batman knocks out bank robbers with a wham! and a bam! after announcing through a speech bubble that "criminals are a superstitious cowardly lot." ¹ The marriage of the two is found throughout our everyday society - to have the one without the other is becoming altogether rare. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland's* titular character's famed quote reinforces this concept: "What is the use of a book without pictures or conversations?" The opposite question, of course, is just as noteworthy: What is the use of a picture without books or conversations? This unit of study will not attempt to answer either Alice's question or its "looking-glass" image. Instead, it will inject back into the English classroom the importance of the relationship between literature and the visual arts.

Calculating the Worth of a Picture and Other Objectives:

This unit introduces students to—and has them persist in—the study of ekphrasis, which is defined by *Merriam-Webster's* online dictionary as "a literary description of or commentary on a visual work of art." It is hoped that through a better understanding of ekphrasis, students will be able to tap into this literary approach as a powerful tool to improve reading comprehension, assisting them to analyze literature more deeply, as well as to understand how it has a dialogue with the very sources that, in part, were influential in its creation. Specifically, students will be learning how texts can have power over the visual arts, as literature shapes and remolds it into its own worldview. Perhaps, then, a picture is not worth a thousand words? Parallel in importance to teaching students the value of and how to analyze ekphrastic pieces, is broadening students' appreciation of the visual arts and its importance in American literary thought. Learning these skills and fostering a greater understanding of art not only fulfills Delaware's four ELA standards, but also assists in actualizing the Appoquinimink School District's mission, as the mingling of art and literature in the classroom

creates a more well-rounded student who, in turn, is better prepared to "adapt to a rapidly changing and complex global society." In essence, this unit educates the whole student.

The curriculum at Middletown High School for 11th grade English utilizes American poetry and prose for its literary context, regardless whether the coursework is designed with struggling readers in mind or strictly adheres to the College Board's Advanced Placement guidelines. As a whole, this works well, since American literature is broad enough to touch on numerous genres while containing large enough cultural and historical variety to stave off student boredom.

More than half of the pieces discussed in the unit's lessons are prose. This is atypical, as traditional ekphrasis units focus heavily—if not entirely—on ekphrastic poetry. As well those units should, as ekphrasis is more popularly expressed within poetry; some would argue, no doubt, more effectively too. The purpose, then, of choosing prose for primary texts is to give teachers a greater variety of genres from which to choose when teaching ekphrasis. Of secondary importance is that the prose pieces chosen are novels that critics have argued at one time or another to be among the so-called great American novels. As the four novels chosen for the unit (*The Scarlet Letter*, *Moby Dick*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *The Great Gatsby*) serve as the core in many high school curricula, it is hoped that their selection will create better cohesiveness for the unit throughout the school year.

Numbers and Blocks: My School and Classroom

I teach at Middletown High School in Delaware. The high school is part of the Appoquinimink School District, which, according to its website, is the fastest growing district in the state at the time of this writing. The district's growth creates unique challenges that will not be discussed in this paper; however, of late, the impact on classroom size and basic resources such as books, supplies, and classroom space has been negligible. According to the data on the "School Matters" website, the demographics of my high school, which straddles a rural and suburban mindset, is roughly 72% of the student population white, 22% of it black, and the remaining percentage a mixture of Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native. Of the total student body, about 11% is considered economically disadvantaged. The Munitguide website lists the median household income of the three towns from which the district pulls students is \$50,012 for Middletown, \$63,909 for Bear, and \$63,944 for Odessa; the United States median household income is \$52,250.

Last year, our school adopted a block schedule as part of an ongoing effort to improve its Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP) scores, as previously the school had been failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This testing falls under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. While this paper is not the forum to debate the merits or shortcomings of block scheduling or the NCLB act, the changes to the school created a new set of challenges for both student and teacher. Within the English class, a block schedule severely impacts the time students have to read literature and process new information. The impact, then, has been that the English department found it necessary to trim content being taught in order to ensure the academic semester did not become a marathon sprint through material. Additionally, teachers decided that in order to give students more time to process information, concepts and skills would be introduced much earlier than the unit in which they were focused. This would give students multiple exposures to the big ideas being taught as well as an extended opportunity to ask questions, practice skills, and – most importantly – simply think.

Is This Unit for You?

This unit is designed for a high school level English class that reads American poetry and prose as its primary literature. Still, aspects of the unit lend themselves nicely to whatever content a classroom is covering, as I have left plenty of "wiggle" room within it. Specifically, the lessons have been designed so teachers can pick and choose which ones they would like to use. Of course, it is preferable for teachers to use this unit in its entirety, as each lesson builds upon previously taught elements of ekphrasis.

Illustrating Ekphrasis: Defining the Term

As previously defined, ekphrasis is "a literary description of or commentary on a visual work of art." However, as noted in John Hollander's *The Gazer's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art*, there are different types of ekphrasis depending on the piece of art work on which the literature is based.

"Actual ekphrasis," writes Hollander, is best defined when the literature describes or comments on "a particular, identifiable work." Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus" would be an example of actual ekphrasis since the poem reflects upon an identifiable – and currently viewable – piece of art. The art in this case would be, of course, the Statue of Liberty.

Opposite of "actual ekphrasis" is when a piece of literature draws its inspiration from art that, prior to the writing of the poem, did not exist. In essence, states Hollander, the writer "urges a painter or sculptor to make one with the properties that are then detailed." This is called "notional ekphrasis." Homer's famed description of the shield of Achilles or the similarly famous "Ode on a Grecian Urn" by the English Romantic poet John Keats are both excellent examples of this ekphrastic approach. Neither the divine shield hammered by the god Hephaestus nor the urn, which is the "bride of quietness" according to Keats, exists anywhere other than in each of their respective writers' imaginations.

Sometimes literature is written about a piece of art that was in existence at one time, but now it is either "lost or untraceable." Examples include Elizabeth Bishop's "Poem," a delightful poem about a "little painting" by an uncle she remembers from her childhood. These writings, notes Hollander, are best categorized as "unassessable actual ekphrasis." While the artwork did exist at one time, he admits, because they are no longer available, the ekphrastic piece "might as well be notional."

The last type of ekphrasis with which we will concern ourselves is simply noted as an "emblem" in *The Gazer's Spirit*. Plainly stated, we will only be using the emblem in which a picture is "accompanied" by text that serves to connect a motto, proverb, or something similar to it. ² The famous "Gadsden Flag" with its menacing curled rattlesnake ready to strike and the words in all capital letters "DON'T TREAD ON ME" has its roots in ekphrastic emblems. Certain tattoos, coins, stamps, and the like follow this tradition. Another type of ekphrastic emblem is the shaped and figured poem in which the pieces' words literally become the image it describes. George Herbert's "Easter Wings" and Lewis Carroll's "The Mouse's Tale" are notable examples.

Sketching the Big Picture: Some Strategies

The overarching strategy for teaching ekphrasis in this unit is to frequently expose students to ekphrastic works as well as the visual arts. Doing so not only reinforces the skill of analyzing such a literary approach, but also reinforces that literature and the other branches of the arts have an intimate relationship with one another. In terms of strategies used in lessons, they are as follows:

- To view, discuss, and write on artwork found in actual ekphrasis
- To present or share original artwork, ekphrastic pieces, and short academic writing based on ekphrasis
- To compare and contrast ekphrasis created by different writers
- To create pictures and diagrams derived from notional ekphrasis
- To create and write explanations for original ekphrastic pieces, including poetry, prose, and those related to emblems

Foltz's Notes: Brief Introductions to the Literature in This Unit

What Started It All: *The Iliad* by Homer, translated by Robert Fagles

While *The Iliad* clearly is not an American text, because it contains a passage that Hollander calls the "earliest ekphrasis," it has a clear place in this unit. The story of *The Iliad*, while not necessary to the actual lesson, will prove interesting to students and, therefore, will serve as a keen grabber to begin the lesson. Keep in mind that those students with fleeting familiarity with Homer's piece might erroneously give credit to *The Iliad* for the iconic Trojan Horse and perhaps also believe that the poem describes the entirety of the Trojan War; however the epic is less about Troy, as Robert Fagles insists in the introduction to his excellent translation, and more about the rage of Achilles. This rage is brought about by two events, which set the stage for the ekphrasis in which this unit has interest.

The first of the two is Agamemnon's decision to take Achilles' so-called prize of honor, the beautiful Briseis, whom Achilles loves and calls his wife. Angered, but tempering his rage so as not to kill Agamemnon (a king himself), Achilles withdraws from the field of battle, refusing to fight. As he is not only impervious to mortal weapons (the exception being his heel, of course) and the strongest fighter of the war, the loss of Achilles proves insurmountable and soon the Trojans gain the upper hand. The second moment that causes Achilles to fly into rage is the direct consequence of his having withdrawn from the war. Seeing his friends slaughtered by the Trojans, Achilles' companion Patroclus begs to use the mighty hero's armor in order to rally the men. Achilles acquiesces to his friend, a fateful mistake that causes Patroclus' death by the hand of Hector. With the loss of Patroclus, Achilles has also lost his armor; this results in Hephaestus creating a new set for him, including the beautiful and divinely wrought shield.

It is in Chapter 18, "The Shield of Achilles," that students will spend time. The creation and description of the shield begins on line 558 of the Fagles translation. There, Homer takes great pains to describe it, as the divine blacksmith is not just creating any shield. It is a "great and massive shield, blazoning well-wrought emblems across the surface . . . and across its vast expanse with all his craft and cunning the god [Hephaestus] creates a world of gorgeous immortal work." Upon this world we read descriptions of an "inexhaustible blazing sun"

accompanied by the moon and constellations. Below the sky are two cities in which activities are taking place. In one there is a wedding and a trial for murder shown; an army besieges the other, and later we witness an ambush of an army and the battle that ensues. Beyond the cities we see fields harvested and ploughed, and a vineyard ripe and ready. A contrast to these sublime fields is described, that of "a crashing attack" of a pair of lions against cattle being herded by men. As the eye moves to another section of this fictitious shield, we see a beautiful "shaden glen for glimmering flocks to graze" as well as young men and women dancing and courting one another. Finally, this divine piece of protection has "the Ocean's River's mighty power girdling round the outmost rim of the welded indestructible shield." With no disfigured god available to shape Achilles' shield, this piece of writing is a notional ekphrasis.

Eighteen Years Later He Spoke: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Cross of Snow"

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was an important American poet of the 19th century. Notable pieces of his include "Paul Revere's Ride," *The Song of Hiawatha*, and "Evangeline." It is worth mention that he is numbered among the so-called Fireside Poets. He became wildly popular during his time, gathering both commercial and critical success on both sides of the Atlantic. It is notable, however, that despite his popularity, Longfellow was criticized for echoing the European style—something, ironically, that Whitman was criticized for not doing.

"Cross of Snow" is a fine example of the European tradition, as it is a Petrarchan sonnet – named after Francesco Petrarch. The piece follows an abbaabba rhyme scheme for the octave (the first eight lines) and a cdecde scheme for the sestet (the final six). As per the tradition, the octave introduces a problem of some sort – in "Cross" the challenge or problem is the death of his wife – and the sestet further develops this, usually by commenting on it or by presenting a solution for it. Note how the focus shifts to the mountain scape.

Thematically, the poem centers on the death of Longfellow's second wife, Fanny, and the poet's inability to heal fully. It is important to note that her death was unexpected, as her dress caught fire while she was sealing envelopes with wax on July 9, 1861. Longfellow was unable to put the flames out quickly since he had been sleeping in the other room, and because her burns were so severe, she died the following day.

His brother, Samuel, reported that eighteen years later, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow had been looking through a book filled with pictures when his "attention was arrested by a picture of that mysterious mountain upon whose lonely, lofty breast the snow lies in long furrows that make a rude but wonderfully clear image of a vast cross." He would also view a painting of his Fanny at night, and "his thoughts" later "framed themselves" into the poem. ³ The photograph Longfellow gazed upon was almost undoubtedly the iconic photograph taken by William Henry Jackson in 1873, "Mountain of the Holy Cross." In addition to staring at the Jackson picture, the Maine Historical Society points out that Longfellow's eye became fixated on a portrait by Samuel Rowse of Fanny, done in 1859, over countless evenings.

There is no doubt that the "gentle face" that "looks at" Longfellow "from the wall" is the Rowse portrait of Fanny. As his brother had mentioned, the poet would cast his gaze upon the portrait at night, as he says in the first line. The absolute love, if not devotion to his wife who had been eighteen years dead, is captured with the descriptions of her having a "halo of pale light" around her head and by the idea that her soul, her very being, was "more white" than that of any who had died of "martyrdom." He states that she died in "this room," which is accurate, as her badly burned body had been carried to the bed where she lain through the evening and drifted in and out of consciousness as a result of both pain and the drugs administered to her by the doctor. The following morning, a bit after 10, she died. No doubt he thought of all of these things, reflecting on her goodness when he wrote that even in books of "legend" there is not a more "benedict," or blessed, person.

The sestet of the poem comments further on the death of Longfellow's wife. It does not, however, continue discussing Fanny; instead, it shifts to how the poet feels. While the "West" could refer to a physical location, likely it simply utilizes the much used symbolism of sunrise and sunset, which is to say the sun sets in the west. The west, then, would simply relate to death: the sunset of the life of his love and, perhaps, the life of Longfellow since this tragedy did irreparable damage to him. The "cross of snow" is both literal and figurative, as the mountain in the photograph has an almost unearthly representation of a white cross carved into its side. As Longfellow points out, the cross defies the sun, as it does not melt although it is made of snow. On a figurative level, it reminds Longfellow of the cross of the Bible, which is said to be a hardship or a burden. The cross he is bearing, of course, is that his wife not only is dead, but died in a horrifically violent and painful manner. Just as the sun cannot melt the physical cross in the side of the mountain, so too this "blackest of shadows," as his friend Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote, would have "no sunshine" that could ever "penetrate" it. ⁴ Hence, although the years have passed by with "changing scenes and seasons," Longfellow's feelings, his own pain and anguish – and possibly guilt – have not gone away, as they are "changeless since the day she died." As both pictures are accessible and assessable today, "Cross of Snow" is considered to be actual ekphrasis.

Easy as ABC: *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne

The Scarlet Letter is the first of three to four novels I teach in a larger, year-long "Great American Novel" unit. Specifically, the books contained in that unit are the aforementioned Hawthorne novel, Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and, depending on circumstances, *Moby Dick*.

As with Homer's *The Iliad*, we are only concerned with a small section of the novel as ekphrastic. However, because this is a piece of American fiction frequently taught in the classroom, it is assumed that the reader has at least a working knowledge of the novel. Hence it is unnecessary to explain the *The Scarlet Letter* in full. Instead, some detailed background will be given and we will linger in "The Custom House," as well as at the final resting place of Hester Prynne.

The germ of the idea for *The Scarlet Letter* is found in Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1837 piece from *Twice-Told Tales* "Endicott and the Red Cross." In the story, Hawthorne painstakingly describes a variety of men and women who are suffering "various modes of ignominy" in 17th century Salem. The punishments include cropped ears, brandings, and a mutilated nose. Notable, of course, is a young woman "with no mean share of beauty" who was sentenced to wear a capital letter A, which she had embroidered herself. Hawthorne's novel echoes both the imagery and the language presented in "Endicott," as the letter is described as a "fatal token in scarlet cloth, with golden thread and the nicest needlework." The letter, the narrator continues, "might have been thought to mean Admirable, or anything rather than Adulteress."

In Nathaniel Hawthorne's notes from 1844, the author remarked about his desire to write a longer story about a woman who was "condemned always to wear the letter A, sewed on her garment in token of her having committed adultery." He then continues in his notes, writing from his readings of *Annals of Salem* (1694), about individuals found guilty of adultery. Specifically, they were sentenced to "sit an hour on the gallows with ropes about their necks, – be severely whipt not above 40 stripes; and forever after wear a capital A." This letter is described as being "two inches long, cut out of cloth coloured differently from their clothes, and sewed on the arms, or back parts of their garments so as always to be seen when they were about." ⁵

In "The Custom House," Hawthorne treats the letter as if it is an actual item, available to be seen and touched. This introduction to *The Scarlet Letter* has the narrator finding a tattered version of the letter, with "traces about it of gold embroidery." Still, although the letter had been reduced to a "rag of scarlet cloth," the narrator

is able to see that it had been "wrought . . . with wonderful skill of needlework." He then describes the dimensions of the letter, being roughly an inch larger than the one of the late 17th century described in Hawthorne's notes. Being unsure of its initial purpose, of how it would be worn and what the letter "signified," the narrator put it on his breast and, in embarrassment, admits to the reader that he "experienced a sensation not altogether physical, yet almost so, as of burning heat; and as if the letter were not of red cloth, but red-hot iron." After involuntarily dropping the letter to the floor and shuddering in horror, he discovers what will eventually be the story of *The Scarlet Letter*.

It is clear that although the type of punishment levied on Hester Prynne did exist, the actual letter in its blazing scarlet color is, at best, not available for viewing. This piece would be considered unassessable ekphrasis. Likely though, it is notional.

While Hawthorne based his eponymous scarlet letter on notes taken from his personal research, it has also been suggested – and not without good reason – that he was inspired by a historical artifact nearby for the memorable image that ends the novel. To recall, the final paragraphs of *The Scarlet Letter* describe a King's Chapel tombstone with what "appeared the semblance of an engraved escutcheon" with text reading "On a field, sable, the letter A, gules." Robert Schackleton argues that this stone belongs to Elizabeth Pain, claiming that it is "understood to be the grave of the poor woman who gave to Hawthorne his idea of Hester Prynne." ⁶ Other critics disagree, offering other women as the Hester Prynne prototype; however, it is not Hester Prynne with which we are concerned. ⁷ Instead, for the purposes of teaching ekphrasis, it is the stone and the novel's final paragraphs that are important. Among the scholars, however, it is ironic that an anonymous author on a Bostonian tourism site says it best: "Elizabeth Pain's marker is what inspired Nathaniel Hawthorne in a passage, not her personal life." ⁸ Unlike the letter sewn to Hester's clothing, this tombstone can still be visited today, clearly marking this portion of the text as actual ekphrasis.

Call This a Brief Explanation of *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville

As with Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, it is assumed that teachers have at least a basic knowledge of *Moby Dick*, knowing that Melville's novel concerns itself with Captain Ahab's doomed obsession with killing the titular white whale. While the following excerpts discussed in this section can be taught in isolation, contextual information surrounding the readings is necessary for students to have a full understanding.

Early in the story, the protagonist – who requests the reader merely to "call" him Ishmael – finds himself in a lodge known as The Spouter-Inn. Of importance to ekphrasis is the painting Ishmael takes time to observe and soak in. A "boggy, soggy, squitch picture" difficult to fully see, it is a depiction of a ship in a tumultuous storm with a whale "in the enormous act of impaling himself upon the three mast-heads." There is no literal picture known of from which Melville drew his inspiration. This piece must be categorized as notional ekphrasis.

As Melville did with the "marvelous painting" in The Spouter-Inn that caught Ishmael's eye, the author likewise devotes time to describing the gold doubloon that takes center stage late in the novel. To recall, the coin is offered as a prize by Ahab to the crew member who spots the "white-headed whale with a wrinkled brow and crooked jaw." After holding it before them, he nails it to the mast of the *Pequod*. Much later in the novel, multiple crew members cast their gaze upon the coin, perceiving it to symbolize a variety of things—the world, life, or simply money. Pip, who has lost his mind to the enormity of the sea, ends the sequence with his insightful comment: "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look," acknowledging that each person has a different perception; however, he dismisses each of the crew member's perceptions, implying that the coin symbolizes the doom of them all. Regardless of how the coin is read by the crew, it is an actual coin,

which means this is actual ekphrasis.

Specifically referred to by Ahab as a "sixteen dollar piece" in chapter 36, the coin is the Spanish 8 Escudo Doubloon. While there is no description of the side facing the mast to which it is nailed, the side examined by the crew late in the novel reveals an exact description of the real coin. Wikipedia claims that this doubloon is "known in the numismatic world as a Moby Dick Coin." Regardless of whether there is truth to this, Daniel H. Garrison convincingly argues the similarities between Melville's coin and Homer's shield of Achilles.⁹ This will be an important link to classroom lessons.

Mainly This is the Truth: Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is considered both a literary masterpiece and a book that should be banned from public education. While it is not my intent to delve into this controversy, it is important to understand that Twain's character, Huck Finn, experiences an odyssey-like journey down the Mississippi River – the "river god," as T.S. Eliot famously called it – which in turn has him reflecting and, ultimately, rejecting Tom's Aunt Sally's intent to "civilize" him. The novel is not a simple boys' story as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* ultimately was. Neither is it only a novel from which "all modern American literature" came, a thought expressed by Ernest Hemingway that is all too frequently cited to prove the book's worth. Instead it follows the tradition of the realist, which is to say Mark Twain attempts to present the world as it is versus the way it ought to be. The result is a piece of fiction that deeply and savagely criticizes the United States. Twain's work touched on issues of race, religion, politics, and culture among other things, and it did so by using a variety of approaches, including the one focused upon in what will be studied for this unit – satire.

For the purpose of our ekphrasis unit, we are only interested in a small portion of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: Chapter 17. This chapter is particularly notable in that it begins the episode concerning the Shepherdsons and the Grangerfords, two families locked in a death-dealing feud. The episode, while reminiscent of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet as lovers from opposite families fix their eyes on one another, ends with the Shepherdsons and the Grangerfords having a violent shootout with one another and Huckleberry Finn fleeing for his life. During this final sequence, Huck's friend is gunned down, which creates images of such disturbing horror that Huck "ain't ever going to get shut of them," as unfortunately he has nightmares about the sequence "lots of times." This scene of savage killing in chapter 18 is important to note as Twain's handling of it starkly contrasts with how he deals with death in the previous chapter.

It is in Chapter 17 that Huck first acquaints himself with the soon-to-be slaughtered Grangerfords. Within the chapter, it is clear that he is impressed with their perceived culture and taste, complimenting the looks of Colonel Grangerford as well as the writing talent of the deceased Emmeline Grangerford, who was able to "rattle poetry off like nothing." This point is key, as the type of poetry Emmeline Grangerford rattles off is, in Twain's eyes, completely devoid of value. Using satire, Twain pokes fun at this sentimentality. This is not the only target at which Twain affixes his pen's aim.

Prior to the "Ode", Huck describes the pictures in the room. The pictures, which are drawn with crayons by Emmeline, deal with young women in mourning. One is of a girl dressed in black and "leaning pensive on a tombstone on her right elbow, under a weeping willow." Another girl holds a dead bird in her hands, while still another is looking out a window while "mashing a locket . . . against her mouth." Each of these pictures, ridiculous in themselves, become more laughable when viewed with the inscriptions that go with them. "Shall I Never See Thee More Alas" reads the first one, "I Shall Never Hear Thy Sweet Chirrup More Alas" is the inscription for the dead bird, and "And Art Thou Gone Yes Thou Art Gone Alas" reads the final one. A last

picture described by Huck is unfinished, which results in a deformed four-armed woman that is grotesque in appearance or, as Huck said, looked "too spidery." The pictures are humorous, true; however, what Twain is satirizing is anything but entertaining.

Twain is satirizing Victorian-era influenced funerary literature and pictures. Generally, Lydia Sigourney is recognized as one of the leaders in the genre, and Julia A. Moore's poetry is cited as one of Twain's specific targets. In this widespread tradition, individuals are depicted mourning in cemeteries, leaning on tombs and coffins, or posed near items of the recently deceased. The tradition was continued as technology advanced, which resulted in mourning photography becoming popular if a family could not afford the commission of an artist. The difference was, however, that the photos generally had the family member's corpse posed in a lifelike manner – reading a book, sitting in a chair, sleeping on a bed, and so on. The purpose of the photographs was to memorialize the deceased. As Elizabeth Cussler rightly points out, this bizarre sentimentality of the Victorians is laughable when Twain brilliantly satirizes it. However, when one is faced with a snapshot or a painting of a dead baby lying in a crib, there is no humor to be found. Instead, the pictures appear as grotesque as the unfinished four-limbed girl.

Although these types of pictures certainly existed, there is no specific one from which Twain drew his inspiration. This section of writing therefore falls into notional ekphrasis.

Lessons/Activities

As noted earlier, the lessons embedded in this unit are spread over an entire school year. In many cases, the ekphrasis lesson is a smaller part of a lesson that the teacher would already be teaching. As a result, the assessments tend to be formative in nature, while the few summative assessments suggested here are deliberately limited in scope in order to keep a narrowed focus on the ekphrasis lesson.

Objectives: All of these activities hammer home the same point: Pictures and text have a relationship with one another. And to a certain degree, that relationship is confrontational as one tries to assert its authority and power over the other. Additionally, these lessons challenge the notion that pictures are the best mode of expression or communication. While pictures are "worth a thousand words," texts have the ability to reshape our thoughts and perceptions of pictures.

"The Shield of Achilles" - Homer

Purpose: Introduce the year-long unit on ekphrasis, which will focus primarily on the relationship of literature and art. Notional ekphrasis is introduced.

One of my core strategies in teaching is to dip constantly into the previous knowledge of my students, making sure that new ideas can be linked with the old and familiar. To do so for this lesson, write on the board the phrase "a picture is worth a 1000 words," a concept that most students should find familiar.

A brief class discussion about the phrase's meaning should take place – no more than a minute or so – and then have students write a few sentences or a paragraph (depending on teacher goals) about whether they agree with the idea and why. Afterward, students will share their thoughts with their neighbor(s) and then within the context of the whole class. As class discussion develops again, guiding questions could include:

What does this say about words? About pictures? About the relationship between the two? Can you think of examples where pictures and words work together? Against each other? Questions such as these help to underscore the relationship of text and pictures, but also introduce the idea that the relationship is confrontational.

After the phrase has been discussed, introduce the concept of ekphrasis (there is another way to spell it: ecphrasis). Likely, no students will know the word; however, they might be able to work out the definition depending on what foreign language background they have. Regardless, after defining the word for students and literally writing down key words of that definition ("description," for example), briefly brainstorm a few ideas of what pictures can do that text cannot (assuming this was not done in the previous activity). Do this too for texts. Because my students are used to me having them constantly write – it is a culture I build with them early in the school year – I would have the kids brainstorm and write short sentences or paragraphs in response to the aforementioned questions. Another option is for students to brainstorm in pairs or small groups, then after checking on answers by walking around the room during the activity, I would do a "whip around the room" so that everyone has the opportunity to participate. This also has the benefit of reinforcing a safe learning environment for students who generally are less participatory in nature since teachers will have checked answers prior to the final part of the activity.

After questions have been suitably answered, ask students to imagine that pictures and texts are living and breathing things, competing against one another to be the greatest mode of communication and, more specifically, superior art. How would pictures and literature feel about one another? The answer to this question opens the door to a complex aspect of ekphrasis: art and literature competing against one another and, on certain levels, holding disdain for one another. While this unit does not thoroughly cover this concept, one of the major aspects covered is that literature – while usually relegated to an inferior mode of communication in the popular view (recall the picture being worth a thousand words) – can manipulate pictures and, in many instances, holds authority over them. At any time during the lesson, the teacher should feel free to "reveal" the overall objective of the current lesson and the larger unit.

It is now time to introduce an ekphrastic work. Do so by remarking that Homer is generally recognized as the earliest user of ekphrasis, and that it is in his famed epic poem *The Iliad* that it is used. Acknowledge that Homer is, of course, not an American writer, but because his work lays the foundation for works to come, it is important to read him. The teacher should ask the class if it knows the story of the Trojan War, and allow students to explain it. Correct any inaccuracies or fill in any gaps where necessary. While it is not necessary to give more than a fleeting biography of Homer, discussing the legend of him being blind brings a new dimension to the assertiveness of words versus pictures.

Depending on the class, students may have already been given to read at home the chapter 18 excerpt from *The Iliad*. If not, read the excerpt in class, stopping to ensure understanding at appropriate places using typical forms of assessment. After ensuring that the students understand the shield has various scenes on it, break them up into seven groups: city one, city two, plowland, king's estate, vineyard, cattle and lions, and the dancing girls and boys. It is possible to combine the shorter scenes, such as the king's estate and plowland. Determining what scenes exist can be done in a variety of ways: teacher issued, during in-class reading, in small groups or pairs.

After students are broken into groups and assigned a scene, they should jot down in a list what is going on in each scene. Using the plowland as an example, students might write the following: broad rich plowland tilled for third time, plowmen going up and down the land, plowmen given drink of wine each time they end a strip,

the plowland compared to solid gold.

When an appropriate amount of time to finish breaking down the scenes has been given, students will share what they learned with the entire class. This can be done in a variety of ways: brief presentation by the entire group, a single student can deliver the information, or as groups finish they write the information on a designated section of the board for the entire class to see. Depending on time, the last of these options generally is most effective. Regardless of the approach, the teacher will need to fill in any gaps, as well as share the description of the river making up the outer section of the shield.

Afterward, discuss with students what the text was able to do: the key concept being that Homer has described something so clearly that the reader can visualize or, if the reader wanted, can actually create a piece of artwork based on the author's words. This final discussion transitions into the next activity.

Either working at home or in small groups at school, students will create a diagram of where the images on the shield would be located. After a suitable amount of time is given, assuming this is done in school, the groups will come together as a whole class and, led by the teacher, draw the diagram on the board. If there is a capable student to lead, this is preferred. Regardless, there will be dispute among the students as to the location of certain elements. Upon finishing the class diagram, share with students the attached diagram.

Additionally, share some of the other versions of the "Shield of Achilles," the most notable one that of John Flaxman. After exploring the shields with the students, ask them their opinion on this topic as well as opinion questions such as what do they like, what do they not like, which one is their favorite, and so forth. Be sure to reinforce the lessons objective by asking the following simple question: What was the text able to do? The answer, of course, is Homer's text created the shield. It made something that was intangible become real. If it has not already been done, the teacher should introduce the difference between actual ekphrasis and notional ekphrasis.



The final lesson assignment related to Homer's piece involves students creating their own shield. This assignment can be done individually or in groups; however, it is suggested that the groups remain small.

Using any of the diagrams –group, class, or teacher handout—students will create their own "Shield of Achilles." While the student must fill each section with appropriate material (e.g., the section pertaining to war should be filled with content relating to war or violence), how students go about it is completely up to them. Original artwork, pictures taken from magazines, newspapers, the internet, and descriptive words or words associated with the section (names of people and places, dates, movies, books, etc.) are all acceptable. Teachers may choose to require students to use a mix of pictures and words, of course. Or, possibly, require that a minimum number of descriptive words, thematic words, pictures, etc. be used or that certain types not be used. Regardless, students will also be required to hand in a paper—length to be determined by teacher—describing the shield and, depending on time available in the course, to give a brief presentation of their shields. It is also suggested that the shields be displayed around the room, or possibly in one section of the room, to serve as visual reminders of notional ekphrasis.

"Cross of Snow" - Longfellow

Purpose: Introduce the concept that texts have the power to transform picture meanings. Actual ekphrasis is introduced.

"Psalm of Life" is usually used to introduce Longfellow to my students, as it nicely captures the most famous part of the transcendentalist spirit that the class will delve into during their studies of Emerson and Thoreau. As a result of introducing him so early, other works of Longfellow—including "Paul Revere's Ride" (1860) and this unit's "Cross of Snow" (1879) – are introduced to students much earlier than their chronological order would dictate. As a result, teachers might want to save this piece for use later on in the year, especially if they want to stick to a strict chronological presentation.



Regardless, in introducing "Cross of Snow", teachers should show William Henry Jackson's "Mountain of the Holy Cross" (1873), a photograph that assisted in inspiring Longfellow's writing the poem. Give students a good minute or two just to look at it. Instruct them not to talk, but direct them to take in the entire image. Do not directly lead them to the white cross embedded in the mountain. Likewise, do not share the name of the picture until after a student has mentioned the cross. After giving the students time to look at the photograph, have them describe what they see and include their personal reactions in a written form. As always, it is up to the teacher to determine the specification of the writing. Additionally, the teacher can split the writing into two questions: What do you see? What is your reaction to it? – and why?

After students share their thoughts and the painting is discussed, ask them how they think people would respond to it or, more specifically, the actual mountain if they saw it in the 1870s. What might influence a viewer's reaction? What if the viewer was Christian? Non-Christian? An atheist? Again, teachers have the option of having students commit their thoughts to writing or merely to discuss it. Of course, students can be paired to have this discussion together, afterward discussing it in the whole class context. It is important to stress to students late within the conversation that many people have viewed it reverently, as the name "Mountain of the Holy Cross" certainly suggests.

After students have adequately discussed and pondered Jackson's piece, introduce them to Longfellow's connection to it by relating the story of his beloved wife's death and his brother's journal entry about him writing the poem "Cross of Snow." Introduce Fanny's portrait, stressing that it was painted in the 1850s and hung in Longfellow's bedroom. Be certain to reinforce that this is an example of actual ekphrasis. Reiterate similar questions asked about the "Holy Cross" picture, but ask students to apply them to Longfellow while keeping in mind that Fanny's portrait hung in his bedroom at the time when he looked at the other picture. In light of his wife's death, how would he view the picture? Would it make him happy or sad? After students jot down notes on their thoughts, introduce Longfellow's poem, only telling them that it relates to his wife and the picture.

Because this unit is built for 11th grade, most students will be familiar with rhyme scheme and a variety of poetic elements such as alliteration, metaphor, and so on. Regardless of student background, have the poem read aloud first. Afterward, students should pull from the poem the aforementioned poetic elements, marking the poem as each is discussed. An effective method I use for breaking down poetry is to project the poem onto a wipe board or chalk board. By doing this, teachers are able to model to students how to mark up texts as well as to create a more visually interesting environment. Unfortunately, if a teacher does this, then the ability to display the photograph is likely lost. Another effective method of breaking down poetry is to read only one or two lines at a time. Students then write down a few words next to each line to summarize it. This continues with the teacher using a question and answer strategy with students throughout the class until the poem's meaning is satisfactorily brought out. Following the line by line dissection of the poem, the meaning of the poem is further reinforced by having students write a summary paragraph.

After discussion of the poem, if it is not already evident to students, bring out how Longfellow's poem takes a photograph of a mountain that was viewed positively by many, and shifts it into something mournful. Relate this thought back to the initial concept, "a picture is worth a thousand words," but ask the question what happens to that picture when a thousand words are used to describe it. Again, this underscores the conflict between pictures and text. Which is the better mode of communication, and what happens with the two when they are in conflict?

To reinforce the concept of text having the ability to create meaning for pictures, students will be asked to do something similar to what Longfellow did. Using a variety of Ansel Adams pictures – which can either be displayed throughout the room in an art gallery setup or posted online using the various free webpage builders – students create either a work of prose or poetry. Be sure to share with students the significance of Adams and, if it is still timely during the teaching of this lesson, discuss with them the current controversy regarding the recently "discovered" negatives. The skill the teacher wishes to refine and the exposure students have previously had in poetry will determine the level of complexity of poem the student will write. If the students have already studied Wheatley or Bradstreet, this exercise can be used to reinforce a variety of poetic forms and devices. If the students are not yet ready to create their own original poetry, then a piece of prose – preferably one that connects on a personal level as Longfellow's poem does for him – would be the assignment. As with previous assignments, teachers may choose to display student work as well as have students orally present their efforts.

The Scarlet Letter: The Physical "A" - Hawthorne

Purpose: As with the previous lessons, this one further reinforces the relationship between pictures and text. Additionally, it underscores the power that text can have over pictures. In the case of the scarlet letter A, text mitigates the power of centuries' worth of symbol and definition. Notional ekphrasis is reintroduced.

To begin the lesson, jot down the letters A-Z on the board. Remind the students of elementary school– A is for apple, B is for ball, and so forth. Instruct students to write down their own words for each letter, but with the rule that the words cannot be boring (such as the examples given. Feel free to model one or two "good" words if necessary). Only give a few minutes for this assignment. After they have a list, students should write their words on the board for each letter until the entire alphabet is finished. Afterward, there is sure to be some joking and laughter about some rather strangely chosen words; this works well since the good humor is going to juxtapose with the seriousness of the words related to puritanical justice.

Before introducing the Puritans, however, ask the students what the purpose of this type of exercise is in

elementary school. The obvious answer is to help to model and memorize letters and sounds, which assists in learning. After the brief discussion, erase the board and write the letters B F H M R T. Students are now given specific instructions to think of more words for these letters, with one caveat however: the words must be associated with a crime. Teachers might want to remove the letter R, however, so as to avoid students writing the word "rape" on the board; or, the teacher might use the letter R as an example, writing Rogue next to it. The letters stand for the following: Burglary Forgery, Hog Stealer, Manslaughter, Rogue, and Thief.

After students write their words down (not on the board, however), it is a good time to discuss with students how the Puritans punished individuals for crimes committed by means of branding. The more theatrical the description the better, as experience has shown that lingering on details – that is, describing the hiss the branding makes, the smell of burning flesh and so forth – is exceptionally effective in grabbing and keeping student attention. It goes without saying that students should first be given the opportunity to share their knowledge, and the teacher can build on those thoughts, livening them up with additional details where necessary. During discussion of branding, prompt students for different words. An example might be: the teacher describing someone stealing something, getting caught, and being branded: With which letter would the person be marked? A man has taken another's life, but accidentally. He still must be reminded of this crime against God's law every day – let's brand him with a what? And so on. At this time the students might get a bit rowdy, as some will blurt out questions about the branding and different types of crimes. When the discussion is finished, erase the board that is by now filled with a list of the various crimes, and – with perhaps a bit of flair – write a gigantic letter A on the board: What about this one? After appropriate responses are given, segue into an explanation of the "Custom House." Preparation for this will be for the teacher to create a real scarlet letter – something made from plain cloth which can be purchased from any hobby or craft store. Again, theatrics are necessary.

While explaining the Custom House, move about the room as the narrator does. Perhaps turning off lights and using a flashlight to search the class. Upon reaching the part of finding the scarlet letter, reveal it to the students – preferably pulling it from a desk, a drawer, off a table, or whatever is suitable. Explain how the letter used to be beautiful, how if a person looks close enough – hold it out to the students and watch their necks crane – one can see golden thread. If the students are into this moment, ask one of them: Can you see the thread? Of course, it is up to the teacher's discretion to actually use some golden thread.

At the fateful moment of describing the letter being hot, the teacher holds it to his or her chest and then flings it away, preferably towards a student desk. Generally, the students flinch away or recoil if the A lands on their desks. As before, ask them directly about the A – is it hot? They will answer no, of course (unless a sly teacher has found some way to keep it warm), so the teacher should claim that it was hot for just a moment.

The theatrics are up to individual teachers, of course. Even a poorly done acting job creates wonderful engagement, laughter, and – importantly – moments to reference over and over again while teaching *The Scarlet Letter*, since undoubtedly students will remember the visual of a teacher being repulsed by the A.

After the teacher picks up the A from wherever it might have fallen, ask what it might have been used for. Many will say adultery and eventually (and likely immediately) students will rightly say that it is sewn onto the clothing of an offender. Feel free to connect this form of marking to how people historically marked other individuals; the Nazis' use of the Star of David being the easiest connection. Stress to students that this was real, that people truly did this to one another. Feel free to bring up Hawthorne's journal entries, remarking that he had determined to write a story about it. Also, ask them what this type of writing would be considered since it is based on a piece of art – in this case, tailoring. Ekphrasis, of course, is the answer.

While students would likely be told to keep track of how the scarlet letter changes meaning throughout the book anyway, this is particularly important for the ekphrasis unit. At the end of the novel, or while going over the section in which the letter changes meaning (the meaning changing from Adultery to Abel, or Angel, or Amor/Arthur), discuss what Hawthorne's text was able to do to the art. Connect back to the power of Longfellow's poem to change something "holy" into something painful. Appropriately, Hawthorne does the exact opposite in that he transforms something painful into something good, if not necessarily holy. The lesson learned then is no different than before, but serves as a strong reinforcement: The text has the ability to reinterpret art, to change art, to manipulate art. The picture, however, is silent and powerless before the text's interpretation.

The Scarlet Letter: Gravestone - Hawthorne

Purpose: This lesson reinforces the above lesson's purpose, but instead uses a gravestone as its piece of art. Like the literal scarlet letter, Pain's marker is transformed from a mark of shame. "Emblem" as an ekphrastic term is introduced and actual ekphrasis is reintroduced.



Prior to reading the text and prior to the A lesson, show students Elizabeth Pain's grave marker. Give students a few minutes to examine it and to jot down notes about what they see. Instruct students to hold on to their notes as they will be used at the end of the unit. Do not have them share with the class.

After finishing the novel, put the image back up for the students to view. Ask them to reread what they wrote previously. Did they want to add anything to their notes on the gravestone in light of reading the book? Have students share their ideas and thoughts about the gravestone. After the discussion, share with students the history of Elizabeth Pain and, if none have noticed, point out the A.

What does the story do to the gravestone? What does that show about the text? How did the text manipulate this piece of art? During the conversation be sure to tease out from the students that they are once again visiting ekphrasis and that this type of ekphrasis is known as emblems.

The Scarlet Letter: Hugues Merle's Painting - Hawthorne

Purpose: This not only reinforces the concept of ekphrasis with students, but is a (limited) review of the novel.

As a final project tying ekphrasis and *The Scarlet Letter* together, students will first be exposed the Hugues Merle painting titled "The Scarlet Letter" done in 1861.



After being given some time to examine the painting, students will be asked to point out different features of it – perhaps they will note the two characters in the background who are likely Dimmesdale and Chillingworth, or maybe they will note Pearl touching the scarlet letter as she does so frequently in the novel; the astute student might even bring out how Hester herself is in the shape of the letter A. During the conversation, share with the students that this was Hawthorne's favorite visual depiction of his novel (feel free to tell students that he only saw a photograph of it, and not the actual painting). What do you think he liked about it? Why would this be his favorite? The teacher might simply share the aforementioned information prior to asking students to examine the picture, thus combining the two steps.

Since this painting was created after the Hawthorne piece, the issue involved is not specifically ekphrastic. Regardless, students will be asked to do something similar in that they are assigned to choose a painting/picture/sculpture not directly connected to Hawthorne's novel, but that they feel connects to it in one way or another. A writing assignment related to the choice, explaining how the piece of art connects should also be assigned. Generally, a multi-paragraph piece not exceeding a page works well. Afterward, and depending on time, students should share their artifacts.

Moby Dick: Spouter-Inn Painting - Melville

Purpose: In both lessons, the concept that reality is conditioned by perception is learned. This continues to underscore the power that text can have over pictures. Notional ekphrasis is reintroduced.

Ask students to recall the shield of Achilles activity, specifically that they built their shield based on Homer's description. As with the Homer lesson, have students break down the "Spouter-Inn" painting from Melville's *Moby Dick* in pairs or small groups, diagramming what Ishmael sees. The painting is notional ekphrasis.

Afterward, discuss with students why it was difficult for Ishmael to make out the painting – it is dark and dirty, he is tired and in an unfamiliar place, and so on. Continue the conversation: Is Ishmael seeing the actual painting, or is something else going on? Perhaps he is projecting his own experiences or fears onto the painting? If that is the case, what does this say about art – or at least certain types of art?

Display to students one or two optical illusions – the Rubin vase or Hill's rendition of the 1888 young girl-old woman picture. Have students write down what they see, and then discuss with the class what they saw. Sometimes, when it comes to art – or other things in the world – we see what we want to see, or what we are trained to see. A set of videos that further punctuate this point are the Simons and Chabris selective awareness tests, which revolve around a group of basketball players and a gorilla.

After the students are comfortable with this idea – perhaps they give their own examples – introduce the Rorschach test. Many students will be familiar with the word at the very least, because of the character of the same name in the movie *The Watchmen*. Share sample images of the Rorschach test, which can be found on Wikipedia or with a basic web search, and have students jot down what they see or how they feel when they see the pictures. Be sure to model one together with the entire class. For example, I might show an ink spot image that looks like two people embracing to me. I will explain to the students that this is the strongest image that comes to my mind, and it possibly might have to do with my upcoming marriage. Thus, my personal life influenced what I saw.

After sharing an appropriate number of images – perhaps half a dozen or less – discuss the images with the students, and share with them the most common pictures people see when shown the test. Ask students what they think the value of the test might be – does it show a person's personality or is it quack science? What type of traits might the test show in a person: e.g., what does it say about a person who sees many violent images during the test? Perhaps that person is depressed or pondering suicide. Do not collect what students wrote or force anyone to share since this is somewhat personal.

The concept of how reality is shaped by perception is, of course, not limited to artwork. In fact, this lends itself well to introducing the concept of an untrustworthy narrator if students have not been introduced to it yet.

Moby Dick: The Doubloon - Melville

Purpose: The concept of reality based on perception is reinforced.

Share with students the doubloon graphic, which was taken from Wikipedia. Remark to them that critics have compared Melville's description of it to that of Achilles' shield. The coin is actual ekphrasis.

Ask the students why the two would be compared (the circle, it is gold, there are distinct separations on the coin, the lettering circles the edge like the river). Students can do their comparisons in pairs or small groups, possibly using a Venn diagram or one of its variations. Afterward, put a similar chart on the board and fill it in with student responses.



Remind students that each character saw something different when they looked at the coin. Why would characters see different things in the coin? Feel free to connect to the Rorschach test and the concept of reality shaped by perception. Afterward, break into groups and assign one character to each group. Students are to describe the character based on the description of the coin given. For example, Ahab's description focuses on himself, which is apt in that his actions to destroy the whale are altogether selfish, as they do not take into account his crew's well-being – financial or otherwise.

A successful method of reporting this information is for the students to write the descriptions on a large piece of paper to be later hung about the room for discussion. While the large sheets can be used only for this lesson, they also lend themselves to be continuously added to for the rest of the novel or to be recalled at the end of the novel for the purpose of review. Regardless, as each group reports its information, characters can

be naturally compared to one another to encourage deeper thought about the novel.

While it is not necessary, a project to cap off the lesson could require students to examine currency of the United States and possibly beyond. Students would look at images of money, regardless of its origins, and write down thoughts and reactions to it. Afterward, they can do minor research on their money, comparing their response to the concrete explanation of the art. If time lends itself, students could briefly present their currency to the classroom. This type of assignment lends itself well to teaming up with foreign language classes.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: Emmeline's Pictures - Twain

Purpose: In ways comparable to what was learned in the other lessons, Twain is able to twist the meaning of something with his words. Like Hawthorne, he is transforming something perceived by us as morbid into the exact opposite.

In discussing Stephen Dowling Bots from chapter 17, be sure to stress that it is satirizing Victorian death poetry. Generally I initially build the poem up to be one of America's most famous and best written pieces. Inevitably, when I ask students to tell me why the poem is so moving and so famous, a student remark that it "sucks" and, with that one hole in the dike, it usually breaks quickly and my class beats down the piece to its deserved place. Indeed, they see through my joke quite quickly and ruthlessly assault poor Mr. Bots.

After we discuss how "Bots" is a satire of Victorian death poetry and sentimentality, I direct the kids' focus to the pictures described in the chapter. Almost immediately they understand that these pieces, too, satirize the morbid sentimentality of the era. Although the pictures described by Twain are based on real pieces, there are no specific ones known; therefore, this would fall into the category of notional ekphrasis. During discussion, ask questions - Why is it humorous? Why is the bird painting particularly funny? How does the text for each picture add to the ridiculousness of them all?

After the class has had a good chuckle with the pictures, share with them various mourning pictures and portraits, which are easily found on the internet. Upon seeing the pictures, the students likely will not laugh - especially if the teacher chooses to share the photographed mourning portraits. Have them write down their feelings, their reactions. After students get an opportunity to express their reactions to the pictures, narrow the discussion: What was Twain able to do with something so morbid? The conversation needs to be steered in the direction that regardless of the picture, text can manipulate it. In this case, Twain was able to make disturbing pictures of death humorous.

The Great Gatsby: Eyes of T.J. Eckleburg - Fitzgerald

Purpose: Final review of ekphrasis.

If *The Great Gatsby* is used as an end of the year novel, then an excellent example of ekphrasis is the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg. Here a teacher can discuss how Fitzgerald's words not only describe an advertisement for an eye doctor as being ominous in nature, but also turn it into the eyes of God.

Keeping a connection to Eckleburg, students will create a piece of advertising. This will serve as a final review of ekphrasis and the concepts associated with it. The specific assignment will be to create their own piece of advertising for an item that would be considered useless in our society. More than anything else, this demonstrates how text has the power to manipulate the meaning - or the value - of something. An alternative

approach would be for students to create a piece of advertising for a product, but not to focus on its true selling point.

In addition to stressing the unit's objective with this project, teachers might choose to enhance it substantially by requiring students to utilize a variety of other skills taught throughout the school year. For example, if persuasion is a major skill taught to the students this particular year, then perhaps there would be an additional requirement of using all of Aristotle's Appeals.

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