



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative

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

Ekphrastic Poetry: Connecting with the Original Language and Culture Through Poetry

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Introduction

In most schools across the country, students are in the environment of testing because standardized testing has become the norm; but those who teach the students have serious concerns that students are being over tested. Teaching in a district that corresponds to this description, I submitted a proposal to be part of Yale National Initiative for teachers in the hopes that I'd find an angle to a better approach test-oriented teaching. Fortunately, I was given the opportunity to be part of this initiative for teachers. Initially, my main goal was to get my students interested in reading poetry, and secondly to use poems to reconnect them to their Native American language and heritage. I wanted to interest my students in such a way that they could realize that through creativity and interpretation of art and poems, they could fortify their spirit and academic growth. In a sense, poems and art would be the catalyst to induce them to take an interest in reading and writing. The seminar that I'm in is "Poems about Works of Art, Featuring Women and Other Marginalized Writers".

Ekphrastic poetry involves writing poems that are interpretations of objects of art. Introducing ekphrastic poetry to high school freshmen is challenging enough considering how hard it is to get them to read anything; hence using an approach that is not threatening or overwhelming is the best way to go. Familiar images of art, such as famous paintings by popular artists will be appealing. For instance, Van Gogh's "The Starry Night" and an ekphrastic poem about it by Anne Sexton of the same title (Ardagh) would work well. Other initial projects could be to view three dimensional objects of art, such as baskets, jewelry, or pottery. These objects are considered art in the present day; however, with Native Americans these items were functional in times past. I found Honor Moorman's article in the English Journal where she gives several examples of how she worked with high school students. The idea that resonated with me was working in pairs throughout the unit (EJ 96.1).

Starting the ekphrastic writing unit with paintings will entice my students since they are visual learners, and some are natural artists.

Demographics

My students are 9th graders in a rural reservation public school. The school district serves half a dozen small Navajo communities. Students are bussed in daily and most involve an hour or more bus ride one way. Due to unpaved bus routes for most reservation roads, it's not unusual to delay the start of a school day or call school off entirely during inclement weather. These are some obstacles our students face before getting into the

classroom. Our school serves predominantly Native American students from various socio-economic classes, but mainly low-income and single-parent families. Our students are exposed to community problems such as: poverty, crime, and drug addiction which are obstacles to be overcome. Partly due to these issues, most of my students have a tendency to undervalue their education by truancy, behavioral issues, and reluctance in performing to their best ability in school work. To capture my students' attention and concentrate on learning, I will introduce ekphrastic poetry.

Content

Ekphrastic poetry involves writing poems that describe a work of art, or provide a reflective point of view about a work of art. Given the demographics of my student, what better way to teach reading and writing by using poetry, ekphrastic poetry? Not only will students learn descriptive writing, but will learn about interpretation by analyzing art as well as poetry.

Visual Art

To demonstrate the use of poetry on visual art, I selected Georgia O'Keefe's painting "Red Hills and Bones" as an introduction. My intention is to ease my students into reading and writing ekphrastic poems, so my students will relate to this painting because it's about red hills and the stillness of the land. Georgia O'Keefe was born the second oldest of seven children in 1887 and grew up on a Wisconsin farm. She studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, and later at the Art Students League in New York. In the early 1900's she taught art in South Carolina and West Texas A&M University where she was the head of the art department. She is famous for being America's first woman abstract artist. Her early abstract paintings caught the attention of Alfred Stieglitz an art dealer and photographer who in 1916 exhibited O'Keefe's work in New York. O'Keefe married Stieglitz, who continued to manage her art shows and help with promoting O'Keefe's bold colorful paintings. They lived in New York for years, and when Stieglitz died O'Keefe moved to New Mexico permanently in 1949 (okeefemuseum.org). She lived in Santa Fe until her death at the age of 99 years. Her house has been converted to the Georgia O'Keefe Museum where her famous paintings of large flowers and landscapes are displayed. While living in New Mexico, she painted the southwestern landscape using the rich colors of the earth including her views of the vast space of the southwest with the contrast of bleached animal bones or bright flowers. The New Mexican landscape is similar to that in Northern Arizona where my students reside. Using an artwork that my students can relate to visually will help them in breaking down any barriers and reluctance to learn about ekphrastic poetry writing. The painting, "Red Hills and Bones", depicts the familiar reddish colors of Mother Earth and the overpowering barrenness and solitude of the land. The stark white bones in the forefront can be interpreted many ways: finality, cleanliness, passing of time or the stillness of time. The reddish clay mound in the middle ground is contrasted with the bits of color and shades of beige and yellow in the background. The overall landscape of the painting is similar to the land on the Navajo reservation. It's quite safe to conclude that my students have probably played and roamed on such mesas near their homes. The clay sandy mesas are prevalent on the Navajo reservation and feature colors from the reds to lavender to muddy shades of green. My students will have the opportunity to work with this image, a familiar scene that will therefore provide familiarity and reassurance. Perhaps it will instill some pride in the fact that something so familiar and ordinary is a subject for a famous painting by a renowned artist who shares her perspective and vision, transforming a mundane landscape.

In my effort to have my students make connections to their Native American language and heritage, I will be using a painting by Navajo artist, Shonto Begay. Mr. Begay comes from a small community on the Navajo reservation in northern Arizona. He describes himself as being fortunate to be raised in the old ways by his parents and grandparents. Begay's family taught him early in his childhood their traditional customs and instilled in him the value of his Navajo language and culture. Those lessons are what come from living the traditional way of life: understanding lessons that come from the land; raising a flock of sheep, planting a plot of farmland, and learning the old songs and stories of one's ancestors. His early formal education was in a government boarding school, and he went on to study art at California College of Arts where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts and then studied at Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he received an Associate's degree in Fine Arts. Mr. Begay currently resides in Flagstaff, Arizona, where he has a studio at the foot of the western sacred mountains of his people. Shonto claims that he has taken back his native identity through his art and has learned to balance the harshness of reservation life with the beauty of the land, people, and heritage depicted in his paintings and writings (westofthemoongallery.com). The painting that I will be using in the classroom is titled, "My Mother's Kitchen" The prominent focus in the foreground is an elderly Navajo woman standing near her wood burning kitchen stove making tortilla bread. She wears traditional dress, in muted colors of red and blue. Her hair is pulled to the back in a traditional hairstyle called tsiyeel. This hair bun that is tied with white yarn is symbolic in that the hair is an extension of our thought processes which includes a connection with nature. The hair, being a symbol of the mind, should be tended to daily and kept neatly tied with a white yarn which represents clarity, orderliness and steadfastness. This hairstyle defines the identity of Navajo people and is recognized by the holy deities and other people in defining who we are. Again, this style is particular to the Navajo; other Native tribes each have their own style of clothing and arranging their hair. Just as with the traditional dwellings, there are traditional clothing customs that the Navajos adhere to. There are taboos in relation to how one is dressed and how one should conduct oneself. From the title of the painting, the artist tells us that this woman is a mother, and we can make an assumption that she's also a grandmother, considering her age. We arrive at the conclusion that she is older based on her greying hair, and the signs of age on her skin. Her expression and stance shows the confidence of a matron who presides over her household. The Navajo people are matrilineal, so the offspring take their mother's clan as their first clan, and their father's as their second clan. The entire clanship structure includes the mother's, father's, maternal and paternal grandfathers' clans. These four clans identify an individual Navajo, thereby establishing their place in the community and in the progression of their family tree.

The grandmother in the picture is making bread, the substance that nurtures her family physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. The act of mixing ingredients to make a food of sustenance demonstrates her ability to work from what seems like nothingness to arrive at an essential product with which to fortify her family. The expectation and wonderment of her nurturing extends itself to the covered cast iron Dutch-oven on the stove. She has taken the stance of defense of her family against any foe, even hunger, as she gazes off into the distance waiting for her family members to return for the meal. Perhaps her family members are out doing tasks like tending to livestock, chopping firewood, or checking on the status of a new foal. The setting is a traditional Navajo dwelling called a hogan which is usually constructed with cedar logs in a circular shape and with an earthen roof. The hogan is commonly a single family dwelling that is one room with an earthen floor. Traditionally, hogans are built with the entrance facing the east to invite the first light of a new day, and offerings of cornmeal or corn pollen are made to the holy deities that appear at the horizon with the dawn. This practice which was first demonstrated by the creator for First Man and First Woman has been passed down through generations. The traditional Navajo home has stories associated with the original prototype built by the holy deities that are part of Navajo folklore, prayers, and chants. Navajo

families are very protective of their traditional beliefs regarding the home since it is representative of life, family, and security. The subject and theme of this painting, “My Mother’s Kitchen”, will resonate with my students. My freshmen students will become nostalgic since most Navajo homes are now equipped with electric or gas ranges, and my students live in small communities with modern conveniences like electricity and indoor plumbing. Introducing this painting to my students will be an excellent opportunity to point out what was and what is now. I’m expecting a full discussion, and many remembrances and nostalgic moments.

Art of this kind with its emphasis on traditional values can be used in so many ways, such as explaining how the Navajo language is being replaced by English. Other analysis will concern the daily life styles of the Navajo people, and the encroachment of assimilation on all facets of our being. Modes of transportation, clothing, hair styles, and more importantly how the family structure have all changed to an extent that causes considerable concern because of the negative effects of these changes on the younger generations of Navajos.

Poems

Red Hills and Bones (Excerpt) by: Laura Kasischke

“Where there are no flowers, Everything/becomes a flower./Without water, everything turns to water-/the hills/are red water stirred by a hand, and will/always be. Bright light in the dull bones.”

Laura Kasischke, a writer and poet from Michigan, wrote an ekphrastic poem about Georgia O’Keefe’s painting, “Red Hills and Bones”. Laura Kasischke was born in 1961 and raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She received a Masters of Fine Arts degree from University of Michigan in 1987. Kasischke is the author of numerous books, some of which have been adapted to film. She has several books published on poetry, and has received many awards including the National Book Critics Circle Award for poetry (lsa.umich.edu).

Laura Kasischke was interviewed by Monica Petersen for Superstition Review, an online literary magazine, regarding her writing of novels and poetry. The poet was asked a question about an earlier comment Kasischke had made about writing “...no such thing as too much passion when it comes to making art...”; and the interviewer asked: “How is passion embodied in your writing process?” Kasischke’s responded with “I do feel that way. I guess in some ways I say that more like as inspiration for students to think ‘Ok, we’re really going to devote ourselves to this and get excited. If we argue we’re not going to feel bad about that, because we want to have, and we do have, strong opinions about this.’ That part of at least continuing to write through a lifetime, is really deciding that it’s magical, that it’s sacred. I myself have never liked the whole idea of “craft” and the whole writing process seems much more supernatural to me than that. I guess that I don’t always, every time I sit down to write, feel that I am having a supernatural experience. But I write much better when I’m thinking of it like that than when I’m thinking about mechanics and outlines and what other people think of my writing. Even if nobody reads this poem that I sit down to write, it really matters because it matters to me.” (Petersen, SR, Issue 12).

This writer’s comment on writing better when she’s concentrating on the passion of her writing rather than the mechanics of writing is profound. This is a comment from a renowned published author, and an important point to make with my students, especially the reluctant writers and readers. The poem, “Red Hills and Bones”, begins with a juxtaposed concept in the first two lines: “Where there are no flowers,/ Everything becomes a flower.” In the painting the artist presents the idea of renewal through the ending of one life shown through the bones, which in turn will bring new life as shown symbolically through the flowers. In the third

line, the poet is making a statement that when there's no water, a drought situation, life turns to water in desperation to stay alive. And, in the next couple of lines the poet is describing or commenting on the artist's technique of painting hills after mixing paints made from the minerals in just such hills. In this poem, one example of figurative language is the poet's comparison of the spine of the skeleton to a ladder. The poet could be comparing the alteration of the bones made by time with the progress through time one makes climbing a ladder. The remaining lines show an outline of a ladder if the poem is seen vertically, like an image poem. The poem is written simply but descriptively, using ordinary words, and easy to follow in vocabulary and form.

In My Mother's Kitchen

Shonto Begay

Fragrance of fresh tortillas and corn stew
Fills my mother's kitchen
Sparsely furnished
Crowded with warmth
Soot-grayed walls, secretive and blank
She moves gently in and out of light
Like a dream just out of reach
The morning light gives her a halo
That plays upon her crown of dark hair
Strong brown hands caress soft mounds of dough
She gazes out into the warming day
Past sagebrush hills, out towards the foot of Black Mesa
How far would she let the goats wander today
Before it rains
Childhood dreams and warmth
Tight in my throat, tears in my eyes
The radio softly tuned to a local AM station
News of ceremonies and chapter meetings
And funerals

Flows into the peaceful kitchen
Lines upon her face, features carved of hard times
Lines around her eyes, creases of happy times
Bittersweet tears and ringing silvery laughter
I ache in my heart
My mother's gentle movements light up dark corners
Her gentle smiles recall childhood dreams still so alive
My mother moves in and out of light
Like clouds on days of promising rain

Another poem that I will introduce to my students is Shonto Begay's ekphrastic poem about his painting "My Mother's Kitchen." This poem is descriptive of his subject in the painting, his mother. Begay is honoring his mother, and the deep love and respect he has for her is portrayed in his words. In spite of the sparseness of the surroundings, he talks of the warmth of the home, and the halo adorning his mother's head as she moves in and out of the light. Clearly, Shonto Begay is contrasting the sparseness of its material circumstances with the abundance of love and warmth in the home. He talks of the strength of his mother, yet she displays tenderness in her gaze as she's contemplating the care of her goats. Goats could be representative of her family, who will wander away from home but they are still on her mind and she is protective of them. Begay could be at an age when he's thinking of the inevitable which is leaving home, leaving his childhood, and the apprehension of being away from his mother, his home, and his land. The radio knits her small community together. The poet honors the life of his mother by knowing that her life was not easy, but she's sweet and a happy woman. She is the foundation for him, as he sees her strength and goodness with her movements into and out of the light. He ends with hope, through the words "promise of rain", and with the rain comes a rainbow which is symbolic of brightness and hopefulness. The poem is very personal from a son to his mother, expressing the deep love and respect he has for her and what she stands for as a Navajo woman who immersed her family in the tradition and culture of her people. My students will appreciate the sincerity of the poem, and together with the painting they will visualize and hear how an ekphrastic poem is an effective way to communicate a message. Studying a Navajo artist and writer's work will encourage my students, and with that model before them they can visualize what they can do themselves. My students will confidently venture into reading and writing the English language more effectively.

Poems can be instrumental in teaching English Language standards, such as literary terms and conventions, figurative language, mood, tone, point of view, or modes of persuasion. In Laura Kasischke's and Shonto Begay's poems, students can learn from the metaphors and symbols inspired by the paintings the poets wrote about.

Strategies

Close Read

A reading comprehension strategy will be for my students to use close reading. Firstly, students will have a hard copy of the poem, so they can number the lines and make notations as we continue on to subsequent readings. The initial reading will be just that, as the students read the poem to themselves for the first time. As a result of the second reading students will number the lines, underline words they don't know, and make notations in the margin if they have any questions about the words or phrases. On the third reading, students will demonstrate their comprehension of the content: What is the poet saying? Students will annotate in the margins and make comments, ask questions, make note of any uses of figurative language, symbolism, and imagery, and determine the mood of the poem. Once the students have had a chance to interact with the poem alone, the next stage will be to have them share with a partner. At this point, they have much to share with another student and they can explain and defend their individual reaction to the poem. Students can make clear to one another what interpretations they arrived at independently. Before this activity, I will caution my students that there are many equally valuable methods for analyzing a poem or any piece of writing. Each individual is free to arrive at whatever aspect they are searching for, and no one is to be ridiculed or intimidated because of what they say. Of course, in the class setting this will have been modeled for them while we read the poems as a class. My students will be trained to pay close attention to how the text makes meaning through literary devices such as imagery, symbolism, and figurative language. Additionally, students will pay attention to word choice, sentence structure, and writing style. After discussions in pairs, students will have an opportunity to see the art object that the ekphrastic poem is relating to. Still working in pairs, students will analyze and make comparisons of their interpretation of the art object to that of the poet. This reading strategy is important to my students since most of them are poor readers, and that's the reason it's ideal that they learn the steps of the procedures for close reading. It'll be essential for my students to learn the close reading procedures when first getting used to reading poems, so they will continue using the strategy they have learned for other reading activities.

Questions and Activating Prior Knowledge

Effective questions and cues focusing on what is important is another strategy that I'll use with my students. This is a strategy that will also build on prior knowledge, which will be particularly important during the analytical activity of interpreting the art objects in this demonstration: the two paintings by Georgia O'Keefe and Shonto Begay. Some questions I'll be using will be the types of inquiries used by art teachers, such as: What types of lines, shapes, colors, texture, and forms do you see? What does the picture mean? What was the artist successful at depicting? These are the art teacher's forms of questions, focusing on helping the student with describing, analyzing, and judging art objects. The level of question is critical in asking effective questions: the more thought provoking question will be the higher level questions according to the depth of knowledge scales. In order for students to focus on analyzing a painting, they will need direction on how to be art critics. Therefore, the types of questions that are posed to them will have to be well designed and focused to help students perform better at critiquing art. Some students will have prior knowledge of art pieces, perhaps as visitors to museums or as artists themselves. Again, the questions asked of all students need to be focused and well developed in order to jar their memories and activate their prior knowledge.

Questions that will help students in critical analysis of art objects such as painting would concern the artist's use of colors, shadows, and how the setting is portrayed--for example students will analyze the simplicity of

how the artist used shadows, and muted shades of color in the interior furnishings of the hogan in “My Mother’s Kitchen”. In the same painting, urge the students to analyze why the main character is given an older style of dress and hairstyle from an earlier period of Navajo life. Students will generate their own questions and reflect on the message from the painting. For example, some questions might be: Why did the clothing and hairstyle change? What was the style of dress in earlier times before colonization? Does dress and hairstyle identify individuals as to who they are? In western style clothing, do you remain Navajo? And, more poignantly, how do you feel about not speaking Navajo if that’s who you are? Do you think that the Navajo people are beginning to lose their own language? Should Navajos save their language, and why is that important?

Direct Instruction

The assumption is that direct instruction is being performed in the classroom; however, is it structured, sequenced, and modeled by the teacher so students are learning? In any professional development, teachers are presented any number of ways to model strategies for their students, focusing on learning goals, sharing of standards or academic expectations, and organizing the lesson so students can understand and avoid confusion. For example, sequencing this unit will be critical since ekphrastic poetry writing and analyzing art objects will be new territory for my students. I have to consider the timing, the sequence of introducing the poem or visual and making sure my students have enough time so they’re not overwhelmed. The resources, handouts, and other teaching aids will need to be distributed at the right time. For my students, I’ll have many additional handouts that focus on vocabulary specific to analyzing art objects, how to critique art objects, art terminology, literary terms, to name a few. Finally, there will be a method to check for understanding and allowing for feedback, helping the teacher work out ways to reteach if needed,

Discovery and Inquiry based Learning

This strategy uses learning from personal experiences, such as: field trips, case studies, investigations by groups or individuals, and research projects. Students are actively engaged in developing questions, identifying and explaining evidence to justify answers, and defending arguments or claims. This strategy will be used when my students perform fact finding research projects on an art piece, artists, or poets. Additionally, students will be required to take effective notes, write in their journal, and present their findings to the class or to their group. The effectiveness of this strategy will be determined by the effectiveness of topic discussion and group or individual presentations.

Students can explore their knowledge of their Navajo language and determine what Navajo words they know and make a list to share with the class. A topic for discussion could be the student’s concerns about the erosion of the Navajo language. What are the ramifications of a people losing their original language? How do you feel about losing the language of the Navajo Code Talkers that helped win a war? Students will be given the opportunity to discuss their concerns in preparation for writing an ekphrastic poem about the painting by Shonto Begay, “My Mother’s Kitchen.”

Field Experience, Field Trips

This strategy involves a field trip to a museum or to a park that has wall murals that the students can analyze. This is enrichment or a reward activity that will give students the benefit of learning outside the school setting. This type of activity will involve other staff members, parents, and the students themselves; therefore, planning is critical, especially with mindfulness of the school calendar. This experience will be the most beneficial for students to have since they will experience art, with lectures from experts or artists and writers,

and community input in the real-world. Most importantly, the purpose and procedure of the expedition has to be made clear, if this type of experience becomes available, I will provide a handout outlining what has to happen, and clear instructions on the objectives and expectations. The handout will also include a clear sense of what the end product will be along with a rubric of the expectations of the assignment.

Strategic Grouping

Grouping students together, known as cooperative learning, has been promoted in most schools, in some more forcefully than in others. I understand that group work is beneficial for students; however, not all the time and not for every student. What I find more beneficial for my freshmen students is to group students according to the task, and the dynamics of the class. Also, I hold off on group work until after the first quarter in the school year. The most successful grouping strategy I have found for my 9th grade students is grouping and re-grouping as the project or assignment progresses. Otherwise, students become too familiar with one another to the point of distraction and being off task. Sometimes, for various reasons some students refuse to work in a group, in which case, I have to approach the student to determine the reasons for their reluctance in joining a group. Often times, these students will be the ones with an IEP, and the case manager has to get involved. The fine line here in grouping is “ability” grouping, and some school districts discourage this type of grouping. Again, if the material is complex and challenging, this type of grouping could be beneficial initially. Once the students feel comfortable with the lesson, they can be re-grouped. Teacher led group is, of course, what happens daily and is most effective when introducing new material or summing up a unit. However, student led group can contribute to student learning as well, and can take several forms. The group could be task oriented, with the student leader having control over the topic and the group dynamics. Student led groups give students opportunities to develop leadership skills, high level thinking; they develop responsibilities for tasks and toward other group members, and a responsibility for their own learning.

Word Wall

For the word wall in the class room, students will select literary terms related to the content of study, words for critiquing art objects, and challenging words. To personalize the activity for the students, they will participate in the selection and display of the words. Some ideas to consider would be to extend the word wall to become a tool to teach vocabulary, spelling, and parts of speech. As the students become familiar with the purpose of the word wall, they will gain independence by using the word wall in daily writing activities.

Classroom Activities

The teaching strategy in the beginning to introduce the content of ekphrastic poetry is direct instruction. As a launch activity that sparks interest among my freshmen students, I will present Van Gogh’s “The Starry Night” using a digital image. Once the students have observed the art piece, I will ask the students if they have seen this painting. To ensure further discussion, I will ask general questions about the image, color, and mood the painting creates. After the discussion, I will show an eight minute video titled “Better Know: The Starry Night The Art Assignment, PBS Digital Studios” ([youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8B811111111)). This video short gives a brief description of Van Gogh’s life and art work. The video includes an explanation of when “The Starry Night” was created and the circumstances that led to its creation. All detailed information that would interest teens and grab their attention. This will definitely lead to another discussion, and it will be important for the students to be

immersed in the topic, which will lead to an opportunity for a writing assignment. Students will write a short reflection about their experience in seeing the painting, the video, and their discussion. The writing format will be a free write with the purpose of having students' thoughts and ideas on paper.

Continuing with the ekphrastic poetry unit, my class will get a hard copy of Anne Sexton's poem, "The Starry Night". Students will perform a close read individually, the second read they will number the lines in the poem, highlight unknown words, and make notes of ideas, questions, and discussions topics on the side. After class discussion of the poem by Anne Sexton, and question and answer session; students will compare their free write reflection to the poem and analyze the two pieces. They will determine if there are any similarities of ideas compared to the poet. Students will share with another student what they learned about this activity. Again, they will perform a free write and reflect on the entire experience and discuss this with their partner. With my students generally being reluctant readers, I believe that this introduction activity is critical to overcome the challenges of reading, analyzing, and interpretations by ninth graders. Since my classes are 55 minute sessions, the activity described here will be two class periods, perhaps a third day to recap and summarize.

The two paintings described in the content; "Red Hills and Bones", and "My Mother's Kitchen" will be introduced in a similar manner. To have my students experience the vibrant colors, and the depth of the paintings, both art pieces will be displayed on screen digitally. The accompanying poems with the same titles will be presented in hard copy so students can annotate their copy. As part of the concluding activities, students will be given background information on what the Navajo people create today as art objects, and which had practical uses in the past. Students will do a mini-research on the various art pieces to broaden their knowledge of the history of utensils and tools used by the Navajos. This activity will boost interest among my students about their culture and language. Along with learning about art objects, there will be numerous teachable moments that I can share with my students especially since I was raised in a traditional Navajo home. So, this unit is an excellent opportunity for my students to learn to express themselves in English, but they will also learn about their native culture and language. Students will write an ekphrastic poem on art objects made by Navajos which are also functional pieces; such as pottery, baskets, rugs, sand paintings, and fans. Students will be free to choose what piece they'll write an ekphrastic poem about. In conclusion, the poems and a picture of the art piece will be displayed as student work in the hallway.

The assessment criteria will be outlined on a rubric with creativity as the focus, the sincerity of the analytical work, and presentation of the writing. I don't want to stifle the creativity of my students, so the points for the conventions portion of the writing will be lenient.

ELA Standards

Reading Standards: Craft and Structure

9-10.RL.4 - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

9-10.RL.5 - Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it, and manipulate time create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

9-10.RL.6 - Analyze how points of view and/or cultural experiences are reflected in works of literature, drawing from a variety of literary texts.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

9-10.RL.7 - Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment.

Writing Standards: Text Types and Purposes

9-10.W.2 - Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Writing Standards: Research to Build and Present Knowledge

9-10.W.7 - Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Speaking and Listening Standards: Comprehension and Collaboration

9-10.SL.1 - Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

9-10.SL.3 - Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, use of evidence, and use of rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

Speaking and Listening Standards: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

9-10.SL.4 - Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

Language Standards: Conventions of Standard English

9-10.L.1 - Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

9-10.L.2 - Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Language Standards: Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

9-10.L.4 - Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 9–10 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

9-10.L.5 - Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Resources

Ardah, Emily. emilypoetryblog.com. A Poem for Everyday. "A Starry Night" by Ann Sexton

<https://www.azed.gov/standards>. ELA Standards (Grades 9 – 10)

Better Know: The Starry Night The Art Assignment. |PBS Digital Studios. Youtube.com.

EJ 96.1' "Backing into Ekphrasis: Reading and Writing Poetry about Visual Art." *English Journal* 96.1 (September 2006): 46-53.

Okeefemuseum.org. Santa Fe, New Mexico

Lsa.umich.edu. University of Michigan

Petersen, Monica. Superstition Review. Issue 12

Westofthemoongallery.com. Flagstaff, Arizona

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

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