



TIMKEN
MUSEUM
OF ART

Lesson: Perceptions and Point of View Grades K-12



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Grades K-12

GABRIEL METSU (1629-1667)

Gabriel Metsu was one of the most influential Dutch painters of the 17th century. Metsu was born to a Catholic family in Leiden and was already being described as an artistic prodigy by the time he was fourteen. He later moved to Utrecht before settling permanently in Amsterdam. His specialty was genre scenes—depictions of everyday life. Metsu was especially admired for his carefully observed depictions of working class men and women.

Girl Receiving a Letter (ca. 1658)

This painting depicts a young woman, seated outdoors in an arched space. She looks up from her reading to accept a letter from a young delivery boy. Presumably the letter is from an admirer. In the distance we see a large, classically designed building which connotes wealth and refinement. This panel is the companion to another painting by Metsu, today in the Musée Fabre in France, showing a man writing a letter. The two panels complement one another in size and subject, and the young man and the young woman may be the artist and his wife.



OBJECTIVE:

Using the painting “Girl Receiving a Letter” as the inspiration for this lesson, students will learn that one’s individual point of view is dependent on their personal history.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS:

Visual Art and English Language Arts

COMMON CORE STANDARDS MET:

ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.7,9

ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.3,7

ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.1,10

ELA-LITERACY.W.3.2, 3.2A&C

ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.2, 3.4, 3.6

ART MATERIALS:

Pencils

Scratch paper

Copy paper

PROCESS:

Note: For K-2nd grades, facilitate the entire project verbally.

Give a sheet of paper and a pencil to each student (K-2nd grade teachers skip this step as they will do a verbal session with their students).

Project the painting on your screen for students to look at, but not talk about, yet.

Note: We don’t want students to be influenced by what you or their peers think is going on in the painting. A goal for the lesson is to illustrate for your students how different people will have different interpretations while looking at the same thing.

Write the four questions below onto your white board. Let students know that there are no wrong answers – just interpretations.

Tell students to answer the questions on their sheet of paper. This is a silent activity – no speaking.

Who do you think the people in the painting are? Why?

What do you think is going on in the picture? What makes you say that?

Where is the scene in the painting taking place? What makes you say that?

When do they think it happened? What evidence can you find?

Go around the room and ask students to share their answers.

Talk about the title of the painting – “Girl Receiving a Letter” – and how it tells us what is going on in the painting.

While looking at the painting, give students some information on the artist and tell them what is depicted in the painting (see page 1 for artist/artwork information).

Discuss the setting and dress of the people.

Point out that in today’s world, people barely write and receive letters because the ways people communicate have changed.

Inform students that in the 1600s, the most typical modes of communication in America were: letters, sermons, speeches and meetings, pamphlets, newspapers, and magazines. With the class, define and give examples for what each of these forms of media are or look like.

Ask the class to name some different means of communication that they use.

Next, pass out another piece of paper for students to write on.*

***For students in grades K-2, pair off the students, and ask them to tell each other what they think has been written in the letter being passed between the two people in the painting. Ask if any student would like to share their imagined stories to the class.**

Lesson is finished for K-2nd grade.

For all other grades, using their answers to the questions as a resource, instruct students to write the letter that they think is being given to the woman.

Make sure to remind students that there are no wrong answers in art, just different interpretations and perceptions.

Instruct students to create a unique personal letter that includes:

- Inventing the names for the sender and the receiver
- The date
- The body of the letter
- Signature

If there is time, have a few students read what they wrote.

Compare and contrast the different ways that each person interpreted the painting.

After you have a chance to read the letters – and make sure students' names are erased or crossed out – consider leaving them around the classroom to see if kids pick them up to read over the next few days.

VOCABULARY:

Communication

The exchange of information between persons.

Interpretation

An explanation or opinion of what something means.

Setting

A place where something is positioned or where an event takes place.

Genre Painting

Paintings with scenes of everyday life.