

## DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

Descriptive writing vividly portrays a person, place, or thing in such a way that the reader can visualize the topic and enter into the writer's experience with all five senses. Similarly, works of art provide a rich opportunity to engage the senses through the artist's use of sensory details. This lesson is designed to help students recognize sensory details in works of art and to incorporate these details into their own descriptive writing. This lesson plan has been adapted from one of the many looking and writing activities found in the Philadelphia Museum of Art's teaching resource, *Looking to Write, Writing to Look*.



*Bicycle Race*, 1938  
Antonio Ruiz, Mexican  
Oil on canvas  
13 1/8 x 17 inches (33.3 x 43.2 cm)  
Framed: 21 1/4 x 25 1/8 x 4 1/8 inches  
(54 x 63.8 x 10.5 cm)  
Purchased with the Nebinger Fund, 1949  
1949-24-1

### Curricular Areas

English – Language Arts, Writing

### Grade Level

Designed for grade 6, but applicable for both late elementary and high school

### Common Core Academic Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.2.A-F](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.3.A-F](#)

### PA Academic Standards for Art

- 9.4: Aesthetic Response

## Art Images Required

Click on the titles below to view high-resolution photographs on the Philadelphia Museum of Art website. Images that are available in the ARTstor Digital Library are indicated by an ID number or search phrase. Entering that number or phrase into the ARTstor search bar will direct you to the corresponding image in that database.

- [Bicycle Race](#), 1938, by Antonio Ruiz  
ARTstor search: 1949-24-1
- [The Life Line](#), 1884, by Winslow Homer  
ARTstor search: E1924-4-15
- [Yabu Lane below Atago](#), 1857, Edo Period (1615–1868), by Utagawa Hiroshige I  
ARTstor search: 1946-51-34  
(\*If researching Hiroshige I further, note that not all sources use the "I" after his name.)

For more information, please contact Division of Education and Public Programs: School and Teacher Programs by phone at 215-684-7580, by fax at 215-236-4063, or by e-mail at [educate@philamuseum.org](mailto:educate@philamuseum.org).

# PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

## Lesson Process

1. Divide the class in half. One group should examine the painting *Bicycle Race* and the other should examine *The Life Line*. Do not let either group see the other's object. Have students imagine that they have entered their painting and that the painting has come to life. Instruct one student from each group to record a list of answers to the following questions: (NOTE: Compile these lists so that students can easily recall sensory details for the writing assignment that follows.)
  - o What do you see?
  - o What sounds can you hear?
  - o What textures or temperatures do you feel?
  - o What do you taste?
  - o What do you smell?
2. Following the group brainstorming, instruct students to write a letter to a close friend describing what they saw, heard, felt, etc. Be sure they select details from each of the sensory lists for their letters.
3. Have the two groups exchange letters. After students have read the letters, reveal both paintings to the class and discuss the added value of the sensory details. How successfully were students able to describe their scene? How was the image similar to or different from what they imagined after reading the letter? Did the letter carry an emotional connection as well as a visual description?

## Assessment

1. Have students rework their letters from above into poetic form. Their poems should include references to all five senses. Poems should also include figurative language (which can be assigned to meet the sophistication of the class).
2. Select one of the art works in the lesson. Write a brief essay that focuses on those details the artist used to stimulate a specific sensory reaction. What did the artist include to simulate sound? Smell? Etc.

## Enrichment

1. Display the print *Yabu Lane below Atago* to the entire class and repeat the brainstorming step above. Using details from their sensory lists compiled from viewing the image, students may either write a haiku or create a poem without a prescribed form incorporating all five senses. Share these poems with another class that has not seen the print and see how successful your students were in their descriptions. (If students struggle with writing a haiku or poem, have them write another letter using the sensory details.)