Arts Integration Warm-Ups: Describe and Draw

Effective verbal and written communication are foundational skills that transfer across disciplines. In a task-based learning approach, students develop those skills in the context of meaningful, authentic tasks that have a clear purpose and outcome. The highly adaptable Describe and Draw routine is an authentic task that can be used to strengthen communication and build community in any classroom.

Speaking, writing, listening, and asking questions about visual art provides students with an authentic opportunity to use both descriptive language and language associated with spatial reasoning. When students communicate to achieve a shared goal and outcome, they also practice the skills associated with teamwork and collaboration.

Grade Level
Adaptable for all grades

Common Core Academic State Standards
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4

National Visual Arts Standards
- Anchor Standard #7: Perceive and analyze artistic work

Suggested Art Images
Click on the titles below to view high-resolution photographs on the museum’s website:
- Landscape (Spring at Bougival), around 1873, by Alfred Sisley
- Landscape with Mount Fuji, 1840, by Tani Bunchô
- Landscape with River and Exotic Church, date unknown, by Bruno Del Favero
- Mariposa, 1983, by Edna Andrade
- New Mexico Landscape, 1919, by Marsden Hartley
- Sleeping Bag, 1994, by Andrew Spence
- The Sheltered Path, 1873, by Claude Monet
- View from Koshigaya in Musashi Province (Musashi Koshigaya), 1858, by Utagawa Hiroshige I

Supplementary Art Images
- Landscape with Two Trees, around 1917–18, by Wanda Gág
- On a Blue Ceiling, Eight Geometric Figures: Circle, Trapezoid, Parallelogram, Rectangle, Square, Triangle, Right Triangle, X (Wall Drawing No. 351), 1981, by Sol LeWitt
Lesson Objectives
Students will be able to:
• Effectively communicate their observations and ideas about artwork in speech and/or writing
• Listen and/or read for information in order to create a drawing

Materials Needed
• Copies of selected Suggested Art Images
• Blank paper and pencils for drawing and writing

Lesson Process
A thinking routine is a short, adaptable strategy for focused looking. It can be a warm-up at the beginning of class, an introduction to or application of a specific topic, or an extension of students’ learning. The Describe and Draw routine can be used with any of the Suggested Art Images in this lesson, or with other images you have available.

1. If you are introducing Describe and Draw for the first time, explain to students that they’ll be working as partners to complete a challenge. The challenge relies on partners having effective communication. Ask students to share examples of effective communication. The list should include speaking clearly, active listening, and asking questions for understanding. They will need effective communication because one partner is going to draw a sketch of an artwork that only the other partner can see. Ask students what they think will be challenging about this activity.

2. Divide students into pairs. Designate one student in each pair to be the “describer” and one to be the “drawer.”

3. Explain the rules:
   o Partners may only communicate using their words.
   o The only drawing tools allowed are pencils.
   o Describers may only describe—they are not allowed to turn around to look at their partners’ drawings.
   o Drawers are not allowed to look at the artwork, but they may ask as many questions as necessary.
   o Partners will have a chance to switch roles after the first round.

4. Give students a chance to ask clarifying questions about the directions. Remind them that the purpose of the task is effective communication, and the outcome will be a sketch that shows how well partners communicated. They are not expected to produce great artwork.

5. Now have students position themselves so they are sitting back-to-back, or side-by-side but facing opposite directions. Partners may also sit facing each other and prop up folders to conceal their papers. The partner who is drawing first should have access to a flat surface. It might be useful to show students an example of how you want them to sit.

6. Start the first round by handing out copies of selected artworks to the describers and blank paper to the drawers. You may use the same artwork for all pairs, or you may use two or three different artworks. Prompt partners to begin when everyone has their materials.

7. Give students about 5 minutes to complete their first sketch. They may need periodic reminders to keep their voices at a low volume so everyone is able to hear their partners.

8. After about 5 minutes, stop the activity. Tell partners to turn around and compare the drawer’s sketch to the original artwork. Ask students to reflect in their pairs about what worked well in that first round and what they might do better next time.
9. Now have partners switch positions. When everyone is settled and ready, pass out different artworks to the new describers and blank paper to the new drawers. Repeat the activity.

10. When partners have completed the second round of describing and drawing, ask them to reflect again, briefly, on the experience.

11. Bring the whole class together for a discussion, using the following questions as prompts:
   - What was most challenging about this exercise?
   - What was your team most successful at? What strategies did you use?
   - What was one thing your partner did that was especially helpful?
   - What, if anything, did you do differently the second time?
   - Which role felt more comfortable to you, and why?
   - Compare sketches of the same artwork. How are they similar or different? Why do you think there are differences?
   - What did you learn from doing this activity?

**Differentiation**

- Select images that are appropriate for your classroom context. The landscape paintings will encourage more descriptive language about the size, shape, and location of natural features. The abstract works, *Mariposa* and *Sleeping Bag*, could be used in a math class to apply understanding of fractions and geometry.

- Prepare students to use relevant vocabulary. This might include everything from right, left, and center to more technical vocabulary like portrait, landscape, foreground, and background.

- Students may feel self-conscious about their drawing abilities. If this is the case, show them the sketch *Landscape with Two Trees* as an example of what an outcome might look like. Describe the sketch together. Notice details such as how the artist showed two different kinds of trees using very simple differences in line and shape. Encourage students to notice imperfect features of the sketch, like wobbly lines and scribbles.

- Adapt the exercise for younger learners by being the describer for the whole class and allowing all students to draw. They will still benefit from listening, asking questions, and synthesizing information. Once students are comfortable with the exercise, let one at a time volunteer to be the describer.

**Extension**

Sol LeWitt’s *On a Blue Ceiling, Eight Geometric Figures: Circle, Trapezoid, Parallelogram, Rectangle, Square, Triangle, Right Triangle, X (Wall Drawing No. 351)* is an example of a conceptual artwork. The artist conceived of the idea and wrote the minimal instructions in the title, but the wall drawing itself was executed by others. Use LeWitt’s work as an inspiration for students to write descriptions for their classmates to draw.

1. Start by reading the title of the artwork together. Ask students to imagine what this artwork might look like. Give them a moment to visualize, and then pass out copies of the image. How is the artwork similar to or different from what they imagined? What might explain the differences?

2. Tell students how *On a Blue Ceiling, Eight Geometric Figures: Circle, Trapezoid, Parallelogram, Rectangle, Square, Triangle, Right Triangle, X (Wall Drawing No. 351)* was created, or play the audio tour recording for them.

3. Ask students if they think all their drawings based on the same written description, or instructions, would look the same. Why or why not?
4. Have students practice with simple instructions you provide. Use the following suggestions or write your own:
   ○ Three concentric circles surrounded by wavy lines
   ○ Eight stars evenly spaced
   ○ Twenty cereal shapes in a zigzag pattern
   ○ Four similar rectangles, each turned ninety degrees clockwise

5. Ask students to compare drawings with a neighbor. Give them a minute to discuss what they notice.

6. Now have each student write their own short instructions for a drawing. You can impose limits, such as no color words, or leave the possibility space wide open.

7. Collect all the instructions in a container. Pass the container around the room and have each student pick out one paper, checking to make sure they didn’t choose their own.

8. Give students as much time as they need to complete their drawings. When they are finished, display the drawings with the instructions as titles. Ask students to take a gallery walk and compare the drawings and descriptions. What do they notice about describing and drawing? What lessons can they take away about written communication?
On a Blue Ceiling, Eight Geometric Figures: Circle, Trapezoid, Parallelogram, Rectangle, Square, Triangle, Right Triangle, X (Wall Drawing No. 351), 1981, by Sol LeWitt (Philadelphia Museum of Art) Purchased with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and with funds contributed by Mrs. H. Gates Lloyd, Mr. and Mrs. N. Richard Miller, Mrs. Donald A. Petrie, Eileen and Peter Rosenau, Mrs. Adolf Schaap, Frances and Bayard Storey, Marion Boulton Stroud, and two anonymous donors (by exchange), with additional funds from Dr. and Mrs. William Wolgin, the Daniel W. Dietrich Foundation, and the Friends of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1982-121-1a,b © 2016 The LeWitt Estate / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
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