

## EXPLORING CONTRASTING STORY ELEMENTS THROUGH TAPESTRY AND POETRY

The Philadelphia Museum of Art's Constantine tapestries represent thirteen iconic scenes from the life of the Roman Emperor Constantine (around 270–337 CE). Each tapestry is filled with detail and drama and offers an opportunity to witness the ability of art to tell a story. This lesson uses a diamante poem to examine contrasting story elements in narrative art.



*Tapestry showing the Sea Battle between the Fleets of Constantine and Licinius, 1635*

Figural composition designed in 1635 by Pietro da Cortona, Italian;

Woven at the Barberini tapestry factory, Rome;

Workshop of Jacomo della Riviera, Flemish

Wool and silk with gold and silver threads

16 feet 8 inches x 23 feet 4 inches (508 x 711.2 cm)

Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, 1959

1959-78-9

### Curricular Areas

English – Language Arts, History

### Grade Level

For grades 4–8, Language Arts classroom

### Common Core Academic Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.1](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.3d](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.4](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.4](#)

### 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.

- [Tapestry showing Constantine Slaying the Lion, 1637, by Pietro da Cortona](#)
- [Tapestry showing the Marriage of Constantine and Fausta, 1623–25, by Peter Paul Rubens](#)
- [Tapestry showing the Apparition of the Cross before Constantine, 1633, by Pietro da Cortona](#)
- [Tapestry Depicting the Triumph of Constantine over Maxentius at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, 1623–25, by Peter Paul Rubens](#)
- [Tapestry showing Constantine's Triumphal Entry into Rome, 1623–25, by Peter Paul Rubens](#)
- [Tapestry showing the Statue of Constantine, 1636, by Pietro da Cortona](#)
- [Tapestry showing the Baptism of Constantine, 1623–25, by Peter Paul Rubens](#)
- [Tapestry showing the Sea Battle between the Fleets of Constantine and Licinius, 1635, by Pietro da Cortona](#)
- [Tapestry showing Constantine Directing the Building of Constantinople, 1623–25, by Peter Paul Rubens](#)

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- [Tapestry showing Constantine Burning the Memorials to Give Tax Concessions to the Christian Church](#), 1634, by Pietro da Cortona
- [Tapestry showing Constantine Worshipping the True Cross, Indicated by Saint Helena](#), 1623–25, by Peter Paul Rubens
- [Tapestry showing Constantine Ordering the Destruction of Pagan Idols](#), 1637, by Pietro da Cortona
- [Tapestry showing the Death of Constantine](#), 1623–25, by Peter Paul Rubens
- ARTstor search: “Constantine tapestries, Philadelphia”

## Background

1. Students should be familiar with comparing and contrasting through the use of a Venn Diagram. This lesson also requires familiarity with basic parts of speech when constructing the diamante poem.
2. Select images from the Constantine tapestries listed above. Be sure to note the size of each tapestry you have chosen.
3. You may choose to provide background information on the life of Constantine or a history of the tapestries. You can find concise biographies of Constantine on the Internet; audio tour stops for some of the tapestries are available on the Museum website.

## Lesson Process

1. View and discuss two of the tapestries. Examine the stories being told and the details included.
2. Have students use a Venn Diagram to compare/contrast the two tapestries. Discuss their results.
3. Discuss in more detail how the tapestries differ. What conclusions can be drawn from these differences? What specific details in the two chosen tapestries aid in them being considered “opposite”?
4. Introduce the diamante poem (this is a structured poem in seven lines, as follows):
  - Line 1 – one word (subject/noun) that is contrasting to line 7
  - Line 2 – two words (adjectives) that describe line 1
  - Line 3 – three words (action verbs) that relate to line 1
  - Line 4 – four words (nouns), first 2 words relate to line 1, last 2 words related to line 7
  - Line 5 – three words (verbs) that relate to line 7
  - Line 6 – two words (adjectives) that describe line 7
  - Line 7 – one word (subject/noun) that is contrasting to line 1

## Assessment

1. The diamante poem is the most obvious form of summative assessment. However, consider discussion of the significance of the individual details of each tapestry. The artist can decide to include or leave out any detail imaginable, so each choice is purposeful—what conclusions can be drawn from such choices?

## Enrichment

1. The diamante poem can be applied to any topic that involves contrasting elements. If the students struggle with the tapestries, try the diamante form for two contrasting fables, or simply a topic with

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opposing viewpoints. If this is successful, attempt the diamante with two tapestries chosen specifically to reveal opposites.

- **History:** Research more about Constantine. Focus on highlights of his career as Roman emperor and examine a map of the Roman Empire to see how it changed during his reign.
- **Art:** Have students elect two or three key scenes from their life so far. Have them draw these scenes, including details which may not be realistic but are nevertheless significant.