

## Putting the Price of Art in Perspective

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### Introduction

Of the seminars offered by the Teachers Institute in New Castle County and the University of Delaware this year, I found *Numbers and Social Problems: Considering What Counts* with Professor Joel Best, Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, to be the most intriguing. I think that is because I do not know enough about discerning the accuracy of social problem claims and the statistics that are used to back up these claims and I think that a lot of my high school students know even less. Joel Best, in his book *Stat-Spotting: A Field Guide to Identifying Dubious Data*, wrote this about huge numbers like billions and trillions, “Faced with such daunting figures, we tend to give up, to start thinking that all big numbers (say, everything above 100,000) are more or less equal. That is, they’re all a lot.”<sup>1</sup> He goes on to say, “But translating all big numbers into *a lot* makes it much harder to think seriously about them. And that’s just one of the ways that people can be confused by statistics.”<sup>2</sup> I am basing my teaching unit on encouraging my students to think critically about some of the record prices paid for paintings and works of art. A triptych by Francis Bacon sold for \$142.4 million in 2013.<sup>3</sup> How do students even wrap their heads around a number that huge? Is it just *a lot*? What factors make Bacon’s set of three paintings worth that much money? Are they worth that? Who determines that worth? What are the qualities of a good work of art? Are the prices that are going to be examined adjusted for inflation? Why do paintings tend to sell for more than 3-D art? Is Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* really “priceless?” How do we know which sources can be trusted for these figures? These and other questions will hopefully generate critical thinking and thoughtful conversation among students.

I am one of three art teachers at Newark High School and my plan is to teach my unit in three of my current classes at Newark High School. Of these classes, my Advanced Drawing class is an upper level course consisting of mainly 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders. My two Art Fundamentals classes are introductory courses and consist mainly of 9<sup>th</sup> graders. These classes all have approximately 30 students in them. Newark High School is a Title 1 school with a population of over 1600 students. Over 50% of the students are considered minority, over 50% are rated as low income and over 8% are classified as special education. Newark has an A/B rotating block schedule and my classes are hour and a half blocks; my students reflect our school’s diverse population.

## **Objectives**

This unit should foster critical thinking skills and numeracy. Students should be able to effectively use the elements of art and principles of design to analyze and critique others' art and their own work. They should better understand the qualities of an excellent work of art and the established systems for critiquing art. They should be able to better understand the relationship between quality and high prices that art can command. As stated by Elliot Eisner in *10 Lessons the Arts Teach*, "The arts teach children that in complex forms of problem solving purposes are seldom fixed, but change with circumstance and opportunity. Learning in the arts requires the ability and a willingness to surrender to the unanticipated possibilities of the work as it unfolds."<sup>4</sup> I want students to be open to the experience and joy of learning about art. I have found that the majority of students at the high school level dislike abstract art and most of the students who appreciate it are the ones who have had more education in art appreciation. One of the goals of this unit is to educate students so that they can greater appreciate a wide variety of art. Some of the works of art that are now selling for fantastic prices are abstract or non-objective. Students should also foster a respect for differences of opinion about art by others.

Students should emerge with a better sense of what a huge number means and be able to compare it to other huge numbers. Another objective is to give students the skills to question the veracity of the sources for these numbers and related information.

The value difference between prints and originals will be examined. With the current technological advances, prints can easily be created that are of extremely high quality. Why is an original worth more than a high quality print? Students will also discuss why an original is worth more than an expertly created copy that can pass for the original. Students will better understand the use of signed and numbered prints and the role of scarcity and uniqueness of pieces in this field.

## **Content**

Some general essential questions that can be asked during the teaching of this unit are, "How do numbers get used to persuade people?" "Where do these numbers come from?" "Why do we even care about these numbers?" "If something is printed in a source, especially a trusted source, is it automatically true?" Art essential questions can include, "Why are some works of art more valuable than others?" "Are some art works actually better and should they be considered more valuable?" "What does a price of \$250 million even mean to you?" "What could you buy with that amount of money?" "What are the qualities of a good work of art?" "Does art become more valuable after the artist dies?"

Strategies and activities will be centered on helping students focus on thoughtful consideration of these questions.

Students need to understand how they can be manipulated or persuaded by numbers and develop a sense of where numbers come from. In our DTI seminar Joel Best posed some great questions about sources that our students should also consider. He asked, “How do we want to teach students to think about sources?” “Does the author have a vested interest?” “What is the author’s perspective?” “What is the purpose?” We want to give our students the tools to be critical thinkers. Best also said in class that every number is a product of peoples’ choices and that, put simply, a big number suggests a big problem. He stated that “Every number is socially constructed and we need to understand the process that produces that number,” and “Statistics take on a life of their own.” He followed with examples, some of which can be applied to my students to improve their understanding of these concepts.

In our DTI seminar, Joel Best had us scrutinize graphs. For me this was particularly interesting because previously I would look at a graph and not question its validity. One example that we examined was a graph about “Crystal-Clear Risk-A recent study of N.Y.C. gays that shows those with HIV are twice as likely to have tried meth than those who test negative...” and it had an attractively rendered image featuring a small rock (crystal) that symbolized the 18% of gay HIV-negative men and a larger crystal that symbolized the 37.8%.<sup>5</sup> The second number is approximately twice the size of the first number. However, upon closer inspection, the viewer realizes that the larger crystal is not twice as large as the smaller crystal. It is actually four times as large because the graph creator doubled the height and width, not realizing that the subsequent rock would be four times as large. Even though the graph is eye catching, it is not correct and definitely not “crystal clear.” Someone did not “proofread” the final product.

There are a lot of websites that discuss the most expensive paintings ever sold. I found one that featured a vertical graph of sorts that pictured the 10 most expensive paintings ever sold ranked in order. It listed “The Card Players” by Paul Cezanne, with this information, “...Sold-out year: April 2011... Worth \$259 Million.”<sup>6</sup> Another site was probably more accurate because it added to Cezanne’s painting, “Exact price (even the currency of sale) is not known, with estimates from \$259 million to \$300 million.”<sup>7</sup> That site starts with, “While many consider paintings from artists like Van Gogh and Picasso to be priceless, some have been sold with a hefty price tag. The following list goes into detail on the most expensive paintings sold at auction...by consumer price index inflation-adjusted value in millions of US dollars”<sup>8</sup>

For one of the activities, the students will use scheduled time in a computer lab to research in pairs certain websites that offer information on the world's most expensive paintings, photographs and prints. They will compare their findings and offer reasons for the discrepancies between the lists. Questions asked will include, "How do we know which website is most credible?" "How can one source state that the fourth most expensive painting is one piece and another site can say it is a different piece?" "Who made these lists?" and "Do the creators have a vested interest?" Students will also need to look at the date that each is published because lists will be ever-changing as paintings are added to the lists. According to the New York Post, the most expensive painting ever sold is "The Card Players" by Paul Cezanne for \$254 million, the second most expensive is Jackson Pollock's "No. 5, 1948" for \$159.4 million, the third is Willem de Kooning's, "Woman II" for \$156.5 million, the fourth is Gustav Klimt's "Portrait of Adele Bloch-Baur I" for \$152.6 million, the fifth is Vincent van Gogh's "Portrait of Dr. Gachet" for \$146.5 million, the sixth is Francis Bacon's "Three Studies of Lucien Freud" for \$142 million, the seventh is Pierre-August Renoir's "Bal du Moulin de la Galette" for \$138.7 million, the eighth is Pablo Picasso's "Garçon a la Pipe" for \$126.4 million, the ninth is Edvard Munch's "The Scream," for \$119.9 million, and the tenth is Picasso's "Nude, Green Leaves and Bust" for \$112 million.<sup>9</sup>

According to the Infographics websites, the most expensive painting ever sold is Cezanne's "The Card Players," for \$259 to \$300 million, which is the same as the New York Post site except for the price. For the second highest priced painting, the two Infographics sites differ. One states that Picasso's "La Rive" is second at \$155 million<sup>10</sup> and the other has Pollock's "No. 5, 1948," in that place and does not even include "La Rive" in the top 10.<sup>11</sup> How can that be? Upon closer inspection, the words, "...sold at auction" can be read in one of the descriptions.<sup>12</sup> Some lists may contain works sold privately and some only at auction. Some combine both. Some art exchanges hands but the sale terms are never publicly recorded.

G. Fernandez from [www.theartwolf.com](http://www.theartwolf.com) wrote, "There are a lot of websites displaying ...most expensive paintings... or similar lists. But unfortunately, most of these sites are incorrect, often being obsolete, often ignoring private sales and showing those only sold at auction. This list showcases paintings...and it is frequently updated."<sup>13</sup> His list, like the others, lists Cezanne's "The Card Players" as the most expensive painting ever sold, but it is followed by Picasso's "La Reve," Bacon's "Three Studies of Lucian Freud," Pollock's "Number 5, 1948," Kooning's "Woman III," Klimt's, "Adele Bolch-baur I," Munch's "the Scream," Johns' "Flag," and Picasso's "Nude, Green Leaves and Bust" and "Garçon a la Pipe" as numbers 9 and 10.<sup>14</sup>

According to every site that I visited, the most expensive photograph ever sold at auction is “Rhein II,” taken in 1999 by Andreas Gursky. With a sale price of \$4.3 million, the price is far below that of top selling paintings. If you are an artist, it is exciting to look at images of these photographs that have appealed to others. Artists and art teachers are familiar with most of these works. Our students should be familiar with some of them and they will add more of them to their visual memories as they are analyzed and discussed. In “The World’s Most Expensive Photo-What Makes it So Great,” Josh Dunlop wrote, “My first impression of the photo was that I didn’t like it, . . . and it began to grow on me, . . . until I couldn’t stop looking at it . . . There are other factors involved in the price, like the prestige of the artist, and the value of their previous work, but I want to look at what makes it so good in the first place.”<sup>15</sup> He continued with, “Andreas Gursky is probably the number one art photographer in the world right now, so his status, combined with the rarity of the print (it’s the largest, and first of only 6 prints), is what made someone spend the money that they did. The photo is only worth as much as someone is willing to pay for it, so for the new owner, it was worth it.”<sup>16</sup>

The top 10 lists for the most expensive photographs differ also. *Business Insider’s* top 16 includes Gursky’s as number one for \$4,338,500 in 2006, followed by Cindy Sherman’s “Untitled #96” for \$3,346,456, Gursky’s “99 Cent Diptychon,” Edward Steichen’s “The Pond-Moonlight,” Russian president Dmitry Medvedev’s “Kremlin of Tobolsk,” Edward Weston’s photo of a nude, Alfred Stieglitz’s “Georgia O’Keeffe (Hands),” Stieglitz’s “Georgia O’Keeffe Nude,” Richard Prince’s untitled photo of a cowboy, and Richard Avedon’s “Dovima with Elephants” which sold for \$1.151,976 in 2010. The top 12 that sold for \$1 million or more were all sold after 2010.<sup>17</sup> Most of the top 10 photographs from this list are relatively new (from 1981 to 2010). Fashion photographer Richard Avedon’s photo was from 1955. Only the photos by Edward Weston and Alfred Stieglitz are considerably older (1904 and 1919). Most of our students are familiar with the work of Georgia O’Keeffe and discovering the iconic photographs taken by her husband Alfred Stieglitz will extend the connections that they make between painting, photography and history.

*Blazepress* on its site lists the same two photographs (by Gursky and Sherman) as the number one and number two top selling photographs as *Business Insider* but has Jeff Wall’s “Dead Troops Talk” as number three, followed by Gursky’s photo as fourth<sup>18</sup> that is number three on *Business Insider’s* list. There are four other photographs on *Blazepress’* list that are not on *Business Insider’s* list. That is a large percent for a list of only 10. How can the lists differ so much from each other? Students will research and discuss the reasons.

The prices for photographs and prints are far lower than those commanded by paintings. And where do copies and reproductions fit into the picture? In Paul DiMaggio's article about cultural entrepreneurship in 19<sup>th</sup> century Boston, he explored the mission of education at the Museum of Fine Arts. He wrote, "...the Museum managers sought to educate through distinguishing true from vulgar art- at first, cautiously, later with more confidence. In the years that followed they would place increased emphasis on the original art that was available to them, until they abandoned reproductions altogether and with them their emphasis on education."<sup>19</sup> One does not see reproductions in museums today normally except for sale in the museum shops. Essential questions could include, "Is there a difference between an inferior and high quality reproduction?" "If one cannot tell the difference between the original and a high quality reproduction, why does it matter?" "When an excellent forgery comes to light in a museum, why is it not hung in a museum next to the original?" Examining the missions of a couple museums may help answer those questions along with the issues of integrity, value, and aesthetics.

To give an added dimension to the unit, research was done on the possible inclusion of graphs dealing with art prices. One site features a graph by Felix Simon. He explained, "I had lunch with *Artnet's* Thierry Dumoulin last week, and we talked a bit about the...NYT chart of box-office grosses...I wondered if it might be possible to do something similar for artists- to show how different artists have their auction peaks at different times, and how some artists fade away while others become newly fashionable."<sup>20</sup> He showed a color-coded chart with top artists from the Impressionists and the modern and contemporary periods and he admitted, "None of this is particularly scientific, but it does put today's record-setting auction prices in perspective. Once you adjust for inflation, they're basically back at 1990 levels..."<sup>21</sup> This chart is quite interesting and the readers' comments with their criticisms about the chart's flaws that follow the article are even more interesting. Provided the comments are still there or are replaced with equally perceptive comments, then the students should be able to discuss them in class.

Since the Delaware Art Museum with its current money woes is close to home, it should provide an interesting example of real-life issues tied to high painting prices. Or, in this case, it illustrates the ramifications of auctioning off art that fails to bring the anticipated high prices. I have followed the news stories over several months. *USA Today* website headlines included, "Outlier Delaware Art Museum shunned by art groups," and "The sale of famous work of art for \$4.25M cost the museum its accreditation and reputation."<sup>22</sup> About this sale, AAMD (Association of Art Museum Directors) President Susan Taylor wrote in a statement, "With this sale, the museum is treating its works from its collection as disposable assets, rather than irreplaceable

cultural heritage that it holds in trust for people now and in the future.”<sup>23</sup> Margie Fishman from the *Wilmington News Journal* wrote, “The Delaware Art Museum’s first painting up for auction... William Holeman Hunt’s “Isabella and the Pot of Basil,” sold for \$4.25 million Tuesday morning, far short of Christie’s low estimate of 8.4 million...” and she added, “The lower-than-expected price could mean the museum will be forced to sell four works or more to reach its \$30 million goal.”<sup>24</sup> Students can research the back story to discover why the museum felt that it had to start selling off works of art and they can discuss some considerations for which pieces may be selected for sale or auction. The first painting, “Isabella and the Pot of Basil,” is one of the examples of the Pre-Raphaelite time period for which the museum is famous.

Other art museums have also faced fiscal problems that could affect their collections. John Miller in a June, 2013, article in the *Wall Street Journal* described the possible effects of Detroit’s budget woes on the Detroit Institute of Arts. He opened with a reference to Diego Rivera’s famous “Detroit Industry Murals” in which “... a panel shows a balding, bespectacled accountant as he stares down with a furrowed brow into an open book... he is oblivious to all that surrounds him...,” and he refers to that scene in the painting when he writes, “Yet the cold calculations it depicts may come to represent the sad fate of DIA’s art collection as the city it calls home lurches toward bankruptcy.”<sup>25</sup> Miller explained how the city owns most of the collections and even the building itself. He wrote, referring to threats of selling art from museums, “These experiences suggest that collectors may want to think twice about whether their donations will enrich cultural institutions or serve as collateral for governments that can’t balance their budgets.”<sup>26</sup>

The DIA mess was just recently resolved. According to various news articles in August of 2013, Christie’s International was called upon to appraise some of DIA’s art. In November of 2014 Mark Stryker wrote in the *Detroit Free Press*, “Museum leaders spent the past year and a half fighting to prevent the sale of any of its irreplaceable treasures to satisfy city creditors- an epic battle for its life that ended with Friday’s court approval of the bankruptcy restructuring plan that preserved the DIA collection.”<sup>27</sup>

After studying Delaware Art Museum’s problems and those of other art museums such as Detroit’s, it would be fitting to take a field trip to visit Delaware Art Museum. It is difficult to arrange field trips but one of the best ways to appreciate art is to actually see real paintings, drawings and other art objects and artifacts. It should enhance the students’ appreciation of these objects. Many of my students have never been in an art museum. I want my students to see the pieces that may be up for sale but, even though I have read nothing official, certain paintings have been mentioned. Fishman in the article mentioned above wrote, “But Winslow Homer’s 1875 “Milking Time” and Alexander

Calder's 1959 "Black Crescent" mobile have disappeared from the Wilmington museum's galleries and database. The museum has committed not to sell any work acquired by gift or bequest."<sup>28</sup> Fishman suggests that these pieces are next on the chopping block.

During the writing of this unit there arose the opportunity to take some of our students to three of the University of Delaware art galleries. Taking advantage of this opportunity, our students benefitted by applying skills that they have learned to the viewing of the art. More is written in Lesson Plan 2 that follows.

### **Teaching Strategies**

Before differentiated instruction was a buzz phrase, art teachers were implementing the concept with their students. Since in my classes I have class valedictorians sitting at tables with special education students, honor students, and college prep students, I use a variety of activities and teaching strategies to maximize effective learning for all. Some will need more additional reinforcement, focusing and explanations than others. I will introduce a lesson using a variety of strategies which may include using Power Points, hands-on examples, charts, discussions, and demonstrations.

Since Newark High School is the home of the Yellow Jackets, teachers use a classroom lesson introductory activity or strategy called a "stinger" which engages students while the teachers take attendance. I have already tried one that I labeled "Qualities of a good piece of art." The students were asked to generate a list of at least five considerations and their suggestions included use of creativity, craftsmanship, effective use of the elements of art and principles of design, presentation, aesthetic appeal, and effort/time spent on its creation. I followed that stinger with a follow-up the next class period asking what they consider to be the role of time and effort in a good piece of art. Can a piece be good if the artist created it quickly? How much does all the preparation, practice and study count if an artist "whips out" a piece? The ensuing discussion was lively.

Another useful strategy is the CRISS (Creating Independence through Student-owned Strategies) called "Think Pair Share."<sup>29</sup> Students read or perform some task and then discuss it with a classmate. For larger classes this can be a small group activity instead of a paired activity.

The majority of my students are visual versus kinesthetic or audio learners. To ensure understanding, I use visuals as frequently as possible. I also write the concepts on the board and have the agenda on the board so that students know what to expect. The



essential questions are posted on the board and a word wall with vocabulary words is on a cabinet. I use whatever surfaces are available (and some that are not) for display.

## **Standards**

I reference the Delaware State Art Standards in my teaching. Our district is now requiring that we also incorporate the Common Core State Standards. They are a natural fit with the arts. Of the Standards for Mathematical Practice, “Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them” and “Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others” both apply to this unit.<sup>30</sup>

This unit will align with the Delaware State Art Standards that pertain to analyzing and evaluating works of art and cross-curricular connections. Using “Standard 2: Using knowledge of structures and functions” and “Standard 5: Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others,”<sup>31</sup> students will effectively use the elements of art and the principles of design and the steps of art criticism to examine, analyze, interpret, and evaluate certain works of art. They will also develop a better understanding of how the creation of art and the prices that some art can command may be influenced by society, culture, politics, history, and public opinion. Numeracy is addressed in “Standard 6: Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines.”<sup>32</sup>

## **Classroom Activities**

There will be a variety of classroom activities. Some will be short. For example, to help give a sense of the largeness of a number such as the \$250 million that was paid for Cezanne’s “The Card Players,” students could guess how many jelly beans are in a jar. The students would then be told the number and that each jelly bean represents a dollar. They would have to calculate how many jars it would take to have 250 million beans. After the activity, the student who came the closest would get a handful of the candies. Everyone else would share the rest. An alternative would be to calculate how many years a couple would have to save to afford the painting if they could spend half of their \$50,000 yearly salary on art. It would be interesting to see how many students would know immediately that it would be an impossibility. The same activity could be applied to the highest selling photograph, Gursky’s “Rhine II” for \$4,338, 500, since that is a smaller sum and may be easier for students to understand. Students will also be asked on what would they spend their money that if they were suddenly to become multi-millionaires.

Students will also examine and discuss the buyers of the art that has sold for high prices. Some of the buyers like the royal family of Qatar and Steven Cohen own multiple paintings from the lists previously mentioned. What would students consider to be

reasonable prices for art created by students in our school or artists in our local community?

After this unit, there can be tie-ins to knowledge learned. For example, the students in Art Fundamentals will be creating collographs in the future as part of the printmaking unit. Collographs are prints created by pulling prints off of inked plates that have been created from layered cut cardstock shapes. They will sign and number the prints. The purpose of limited edition signed and numbered prints will be reviewed.

The three lesson plans below explain selected activities in more detail.

#### Lesson Plan 1: In-School Gallery Tour: Adaptation of the *Token Response* Activity

Even though I am teaching this unit to high school students, some of the students have short attention spans. To ensure their engagement and participation, hands-on activities will be used liberally. A thought-provoking and intellectual but fun introduction to this unit will be the use of the *Token Response* activity/game created by Mary Erickson and Eldon Katter.<sup>33</sup> I will adapt it to fit this unit. For this activity, prints of art are set up around the classroom. At my school we are really lucky to have a permanent gallery so using it will add to the aesthetic experience. I will hang copies of art that have sold for the highest prices in the world. I have prints of some but the rest I will just copy off the internet or remove from old books. This list contains realistic, abstract and non-objective art.

In *Token Response*, each student is given a set of 8 differently shaped tokens cut from paper. These include a heart (Positive Preference), a diamond (Negative Preference), a house (Others Might like This in Their Home), an alarm clock (Time Expenditure), rectangle (Economic Consideration), a hand (Craftsmanship), a light bulb (Originality) and a ribbon (Judgment).<sup>34</sup> I have used this before and have found that using all 8 is too cumbersome so I would pare it down to 6. These can be cut out of construction paper. I want to make a master copy of each and add the name and idea or purpose on each shape for easy reference. For example, I would create one 8½" x 11" sheet of four large hearts and write on each, "I like this piece of art the best." Then I would use the copier and print on pink or red paper enough copies so that I would have one for every member of the class plus extras. I want to print the rectangular money token on green with a dollar sign and explanation, "I think that this one costs the most." The light bulb, indicating the most original, will be on yellow. I will follow the same pattern for the rest. I want to change the diamond to a circle with an unhappy face for the student's least favorite, have a blue ribbon for the best, and a hand for the work that is well made or best crafted. These can be laminated and used again. Extras are made because some undoubtedly will get lost or misplaced.

We will visit the gallery and each work of art will have a piece of opaque paper like construction paper on a chair in front of it. The students will make their selections and slip their tokens under the piece of paper in front of each of their selected art pieces. I have found that if the paper is not used, then students can see what others have selected and are influenced by their peers' selections. After the students have finished, volunteers will be selected to tally the votes for each work and write the data on a chart on a board.

We will start the discussion with how we should respect each other's opinions and the positive ways in which we can disagree. We will then look at the chart as a class and note which results immediately stand out. If a certain painting or work of art has garnered a large amount of votes (positive and/or negative), then we will start the discussion with that one. Questions can include, "How can the same work be both some peoples' favorite and others' least favorite?" "Does that mean that someone is correct and someone is wrong?" Volunteers who voted one way or the other can explain their opinions. Other questions can include, "Is it okay to dislike a piece of art?" "Are some pieces really better than others?" "Do we judge them all using the exact same criteria?" The discussion can be teacher-guided to make whatever points we want them to understand. Following the discussion pertaining to their guesses of the most expensive piece of art, the prices of the pieces that have sold for the highest amounts will be disclosed. Students can offer possible explanations for those prices and what those amounts of money mean to them.

## Lesson Plan 2: Museum Gallery Tour

Since I have actually just used this activity, I am going to describe it as it took place. Since Newark High School is close to University of Delaware, we arranged for a field trip for some of our students to three special exhibits at the University of Delaware museum galleries. Because of the proximity, the students walked, saving the cost of bus transportation. In preparation for this visit, Ivan Henderson, Curator of Education, University of Delaware Museums, and Jan Broski, Collections Manager, also from University of Delaware Museums, visited our students at Newark High School during our half hour advisory period. They prepared them for the visit by discussing aesthetic perception and walking them through the process of analyzing, interpreting, and making judgments about the works of art that they would be encountering. They used two pieces of art to generate discussion. The first was an actual African mask from the museum collection. The gracefully carved and abstract wooden mask was from the Chiwara (Twiwara) tribe. The second was a color copy of Ethel Pennewill Brown Leach's *Delaware Awake!*, a 1918 oil on canvas from one of the museum collections.

Ms. Broski explained why she handled the mask carefully with gloved hands. She said that it is okay to walk up to a work of art and say, "This is worse than chopped liver." She said that is the beginning of a dialogue with a work of art. She explained to the students

that there are four informed responses to a work of art. Questions are used to explore each response or “property.” She said that when responding using Sensory Properties (descriptive) to define art, we look at the art and describe how it appeals to our senses. She asked the students to respond to her outfit which consisted of a bright yellow top and black pants. Many hands immediately waved in the air. The students knew that she was wearing Newark school colors and she responded that she wore them on purpose to elicit a sensory response. Referring to the mask, she asked, “What do you see?” The students remarked on the colors, textures, size and lines of the sculpture (mask). Ms. Broske added that since she was closer, she could also smell the mask’s aroma.

Ms. Broske then explained that when using Formal Properties (analysis) to assess work, the viewers respond to how the artist used the formal elements such as repetitive forms, balance, unity, and related principles of art. The students discussed their responses. Next was Expressive Properties (interpretation). Ms. Broske asked questions dealing with how the mask made the viewer feel and why the students feel the artist created it. She asked if the students would like to possess this mask. She explained that the mask was used in agricultural festivals in the spring for planting and reaping in the fall and that it was a composite of blended animal symbols that added to its majesty.

The last response or property was Technical Properties (judgment). Ms. Broske’s questions included, “How do you think this work was created?” “What medium and tools do you think were used?” The students correctly guessed that the mask was wood that was hand-carved using sharp implements. The same process using the four properties was used to thoughtfully examine and respond to the painting “Delaware Awake!” After the presentation students were invited to go up to the display table to examine the Chiwara mask and ask any additional questions of the presenters.

The next day students walked to the University of Delaware and met the tour guides (Mr. Henderson, Ms. Broske and an art student guide) at the galleries. The two exhibits in Old College Gallery were “Treasures and Tales of Italy’s Art Recovery Team: Antiquities from Guardia di Finanza” and “Delaware Awake! World War I at Home and Abroad.” On exhibit in Mechanical Hall Gallery was “Renderings: New Narratives and Reinterpretations,” an exhibit featuring prints. Handouts with the four aesthetic perception properties were available for the students to aid them in their responses to the art objects in each collection. The guides in each of the three groups gave the students a real-life application/mission. For example, the students in the ancient antiquities group were asked to work in pairs or small groups and come up with stimulating questions that would encourage 6<sup>th</sup> graders whose area of interest was computers (not art!). These questions were supposed to encourage these 6<sup>th</sup> graders to make connections and enjoy the exhibit instead of being bored by it. The students in the group then meet as a whole

group again and discussed their findings together. The creative ideas ranged from comparing the mosaic tesserae (small pieces that make up a mosaic) in an ancient Roman floor section to the pixels of a computer screen image to comparing the repeating patterns on some of the Grecian vessels or vases to computer game patterns.

After the three groups were finished in the galleries, the groups met up again. The tour leaders encouraged the students to share their findings and experiences.

### Lesson Plan 3: Computer Research of Lists of Most Expensive Art

Because all of the students in the class will be working on computers, a lab will be reserved ahead of time. Students will work in pairs but each person in the pair will sit next to the other so that each student will have access to a computer. There will be a list of sites for the 10 (or more) most expensive paintings, photographs, prints and sculptures ever sold. Each pair should select two in one category from the list and put a check next to them, indicating that they have been selected. They may also find their own instead of picking from those provided. Even though Wikipedia is not usually a school-sanctioned site for research papers, their sites, complete with concise, well organized lists of expensive art, will be included for reliability comparison.

Each pair of students will create Power Point slides showing and comparing their lists. They will also list the reasons why they think the order and specific pieces of artwork are slightly different, showing examples as necessary. They will also each list their favorite piece of art from the lists and explain their reasons for selecting those particular pieces.

A couple of volunteer students will put all of the slides into one presentation which will be shown to everyone the next class period back in the class room. The class will discuss the lists and choices.

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## Notes

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**Curriculum Unit Title**

Putting the Price of Art in Perspective

**Author**

Karen Yarnall

**KEY LEARNING, ENDURING UNDERSTANDING, ETC.**

This unit is intended to foster numeracy and critical thinking in students and to encourage them to question numbers and who uses them. This will be applied to studying works of art and examining the reasons for and the impact of huge prices that some of them command. The students will learn how to think critically about some of the record prices for works of art. They will improve their evaluative skills through analyzing and critiquing art and also examine why prints are considered to have less value than original art.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) for the UNIT**

What makes a piece of art good? How do we critique art? What does a price such as \$250 million represent? How do we wrap our heads around a number that is so huge? How do we know which sources to trust for the highest selling pieces of art in the world? Is Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" really priceless?

**CONCEPT A**

Understanding high selling prices of art

**CONCEPT B**

Qualities of a good work of art

**CONCEPT C**

Getting the most out of a gallery visit

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS A**

What factors make certain works of art worth so much? Are they worth that? Who determines that worth? Why do original art pieces sell for more than photographs or prints? Who buys these pieces?

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS B**

What are the qualities of a good work of art? What makes one piece of art better than another? Who decides that one piece of art is better than another?

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS C**

What do you see? Which elements are used effectively? What is the center of interest? What is the artist trying to tell us? Do you like this work? How was the work created?

**VOCABULARY A**

aesthetics, statistics, auction, limited edition, signed and numbered prints, inflation

**VOCABULARY A**

composition, elements of art (line, shape, color, value, form, texture, space), principles of design (balance, contrast, emphasis, movement, pattern, rhythm, unity)

**VOCABULARY A**

aesthetic perception, properties: Sensory (descriptive), Formal (analysis), Expressive (interpretation) and technical (judgment)

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/MATERIAL/TEXT/FILM/RESOURCES**

Prints or images of some of the art that has sold for the highest prices in the world for use in a "gallery" in school or classroom, a visit to an actual gallery or museum, use of a computer lab (for research on lists of most expensive paintings ever sold, most expensive sculptures ever sold, and most expensive photographs ever sold that students will analyze and collectively turn into a Power Point), handouts with elements of art and principles of design, handout on steps used in art criticism, Delaware Art Standards