

# **Impressions of Storytelling**

*Shanna OLeary Weiss*

## **Introduction**

Ever since I was a child, I have been fascinated with stories. More specifically, I found myself intrigued by fiction. From earliest years sitting on a parents lap just looking at pictures and listening to the beautiful words; to later times of early adolescence, secretly reading after my appointed bedtime using a flashlight. I found myself surrounded by stories of pirates, princesses, gods and goddesses and even some sci-fi. Stories and books have always brought me great joy, and reading is one of the highlights of my youth. Stories take you to another place, spark your interests, and arouse your senses and emotions.

What is a story? What about storytelling has captured my attention and so much of my youth? Our first seminar session, Professor Teague spoke of a story containing basic elements of plot, character, and setting. Despite different styles, all stories contain these elements. We also referenced E. M. Forster's "The king died, and then the queen died" as a story as opposed to "The king died, and then the queen died of grief" as a plot.<sup>1</sup> Teague expressed the importance for understanding that a story is why the character did what he or she did. The first referenced sentence strikes curiosity in the reader and is open-ended, allowing for interpretation. The curiosity intrigues the reader.

Why is fiction so popular? We further discussed that by human nature, we are drawn in by storytelling as a way of communication, a connection to our own morality, and of course our empathy. Fiction advocate, Jennifer Wilkov explains "[we love to write fiction] because we use our imaginations to tantalize and indulge the imaginations of others."<sup>2</sup> It is no secret that fiction is one of the most popular genres amongst readers both young and old.

As a result of falling in love with fiction, as a child I would spend hours reading, hours coming up with my own stories, and even more hours illustrating those stories. I formed a deep passion for storytelling and illustration. In my mind there was a solid relationship between the both and both were of equal importance. I hope that my lesson helps students explore these connections too. The purpose of my unit is to help students build relationships between storytelling and artwork and through one, if not both, spark an interest and love for creativity.

## **Rationale**

Castle Hills Elementary, part of the Colonial School District, is a Title I school that hosts a very diverse population of students. Our students are ½ Hispanic, 1/3 African American and 1/3 White. Many come from low income households and suffer from economic hardship. Our school hosts free breakfast and lunch for all students. Students range from Kindergarten to 5th grade and make up the large 700 student body. Our school is located on the outskirts of a major urban city, Wilmington. This location aids in several transient families passing through and poverty of the city settling in our feeder pattern.

Castle Hills has a high percentage of Spec Ed (special education) students and ELL (English Language Learners). Although students are considered as high needs, they test average to the national levels and have made great growth in past years on reading due to a commitment by teachers to help children that are academically low, proficient readers. Although their testing results close to national average, we have many under grade level readers. The national average recognizes the need for literacy programs to be emphasized in public education. Many students are not on their proper academic grade reading level, and as they fall behind and move up in grade the gap gets larger and larger.

Reading is an essential skill that leads to life-long learning. Reading should constantly be worked on and encouraged throughout one's life but must first be established early on in elementary. Reading opens doors to creativity, imagination, information and innovation.

I currently am a Visual Arts teacher at Castle Hills and teach grades K-5. I often try to tie lessons to other disciplines such as ELA or History because I feel it helps the students make a deeper connection, as well as establish roots to successful illustrations. My degree is originally in Illustration due to my deep interest in pursuing Children's Book illustrations. With a passion for learning, I turned my passion for art and academics into a teaching prospect and obtained my Education Certifications shortly after. Transitioning from an artist who specialized in illustration from concept and text to an elementary art teacher, I feel I have an opportunity to support students by establishing connections with art and literacy.

As a visual arts teacher, I have always been passionate about reading and art. As I mentioned above, the craft of storytelling and my love for fictional characters opened doors of excitement that lead to learning. I would like to make a connection with our students by aligning the visual arts with storytelling to try and spark that passion that I was so lucky to attain.

The Connection

Both authors and artists share a powerful connection of entertaining audiences. Although different processes, they are very similar practices and share a common purpose. Both stories and art make connections through human emotion. In our seminar, Professor Teague often spoke of the importance of character and point of view for connecting to human emotion. We discussed developing both round and flat characters. Round characters are defined as anyone who has a complex personality (often the person in conflict); and a flat character as the opposite to round, a person with a specific, predictable, character trait.<sup>3</sup> Both characters are needed to create interest in a story. These characters help a reader become curious, ask questions and connect to the story. An American author, Debbie Macomber explains, "First and foremost, I consider myself a storyteller. And I'm endlessly fascinated with people, with what they do and why... and how they feel about it."<sup>4</sup> Successful writing, as well as art, make connections with their reader/viewer. Both art and stories are beautiful expressions to make a person think, feel and relate.

During seminar, we spent a few classes reading and looking at children's books. Although made for children, as adults, we took pleasure in reading and viewing the imagery of the illustrations. We spoke of the author's intent and the importance of character. Professor Teague reiterated how even picture books are complex with characterization, plot and setting. While reading Maurice Sendak's 'Where the Wild Things Are'<sup>5</sup> we pointed out the narrative poetry and all of the dynamic elements of the story. I plan to emphasize the importance of both illustration and storytelling by forming a unit of projects based around forming stories from specific paintings. Illustrators are given material to read and then are requested to draw an image that corresponds with their understanding of the story. I would like to flip this scenario, and create a focus on the storytelling aspect derived from an image. In art, we call this observation or deeper looking.

### Impressionism in Art

Art and storytelling go hand in hand. Often writing is enhanced with visuals to help the reader, likewise, most times when reading stories we can make elaborate visuals in our head. There is a constant connection between stories and art, and the importance for both in a child's learning curriculum are crucial. The visuals my unit will focus on come from 19<sup>th</sup> century Impressionism.

Impressionism is an artistic movement during the late 1800's where artists painted in an unrealistic style that captured an 'impression' or vague resemblance of a person/place or object. During this time period, this was a revolutionary idea and a bold direction for art to go, very different from the realistic artwork prior. In contrast to lifelike paintings and exact replicas, Impressionistic style artwork was dreamlike and whimsical. The artists captured magical moments by using light, color and brush techniques opposite of traditional realistic or symbolic renaissance paintings. Artists that started the

Impressionism movement cared most about the feeling and emotion the painting captured, not the ability to correctly duplicate it.

The movement started in Paris, France amongst a small group of artists and spread rapidly. Although in the beginning it was widely disliked and criticized for being defiant against traditional academic mastery painting ideals, today, it is one of the most popular movements. The Impressionism movement paved the way through innovation to future art movements towards change. Impressionistic art is one of the easiest to identify due to a distinct style of brushstrokes, use of color, light and movement. Artists like Seurat, Degas, Van Gogh, Cassatt, Monet and Manet are some of the most well-known artists to date.<sup>6</sup>

### Why Masterly Paintings Instead of Creating Illustrations?

Asking students to create stories from masterly paintings during the Impressionism Period will make a powerful connection between visual art and the art of storytelling. Storytelling consists of leaving an emotion, feeling or spark amongst readers. Impressionist art does the same, by leaving an imprint of an idea or feeling.<sup>7</sup> Storytelling allows a reader to explore ideas, concepts and deeper meaning. Taking an impressionistic painting and developing a fictional story to align with the art will allow students to explore creativity, imagination and deeper looking. In turn, students will be able to expand upon their interpretations of other artists, and create their own Impressionistic Painting to align with a fictional story they create.

### Unit

The Unit I am planning to implement is geared towards an Elementary audience. The timeframe for the lesson will span 10, forty-five minute periods and will be chunked to ensure each objective is mastered. I plan to explore this art lesson with 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. In 3<sup>rd</sup> grade English Language Arts (ELA) classes, students are beginning to learn essential narrative writing skills. Making a connection with writing and art will help sync disciplines between core classes and the visual arts, while emphasizing prior knowledge.

### Content Objectives

The main objective for student achievement is that students will be able to create stories and artwork. This task sounds simple, but has many underlying objectives to create a meaningful piece of work in both fiction and art. Goals for the lesson include that these essential concepts will be mastered.

Students will be able to identify key elements in both artwork and stories.

Specific elements are needed to create a story. These elements are characters, setting, plot, conflict and resolution. Students will be able to create their own story using all of these elements.

Specific elements are needed to create artwork. These elements are line, shape, color, value, space, and form. Students will be able to create a piece of artwork using one or more of these elements.

1. Student will be able to illustrate a story.

Using key elements of art and basic principles of design, students will be able to create a successful piece of artwork derived from text.

2. Student will be able to create a story from an image.

Students will be able to view an image, make conclusions and create a full narrative reflecting the image. Students will use proper elements of storytelling to create a fictional story about the artwork.

Behind all of these objectives, students will also develop a sense for purpose and intention. Authors/Artists have a purpose to create work and entertain a specific audience. As we talked about in seminar, there are many types of storytelling and styles. Stories such as fairytales, narrative poetry, drama etc are intended for different audiences. Students will learn about one type of art, Impressionism, where artists make an 'impression' of the image. The artwork is dreamlike and whimsical and uses lots of brushstrokes to give the perception of an object.<sup>8</sup> This style will hopefully encourage their stories to be whimsical and fantasy as well, fiction.

### *Teaching Strategies*

Being a visual arts teacher, of course a majority of my assignments are project based. I plan to use a lot of visuals and modeling for teaching strategies. , a graphic organizer and a project to complete. Below you will find specific details to each objective.

### Technology

Each main objective has an engaging activity to start through using a Power Point presentation to assist in lecture by using visuals. My smartboard allows me to project images during the presentation to capture the attention of students and to ask constructive response and open ended questions.

When I am ready to demonstrate the 'art' assignment by showing step by step instructions on how to draw or paint, I use my Ipevo (similar to an Elmo) a small camera

that projects a live feed to my projector. This allows my students to follow along, as well as see me demonstrate in real time.

### Graphic Organizers

A small book will be made to help children organize their elements of both narratives and art in a place where they can resource it. The small book will also be a hands on activity to help emphasize the target information for elements to be learned.

### Assessment

Students will be assessed by their finished products by a rubric to check for understanding of lesson objectives and craftsmanship. Students will also be constantly monitored during assignments for understanding and being on task. Students will be cold called to check for understanding during presentations and instructions.

### Demonstration

Students always find it helpful to see an example of work both completed and a work in progress. Every lesson I model a drawing or skill activity. I often have fellow students help with this as well for learners that struggle. I always speak out loud as I am doing each step to assist my audio and visual learners.

### Essential Questions

Some of the guiding questions to ask during the presentation will be the following Essential Questions:

- What is the purpose of creating a story or creating artwork?
- What do artists/authors have in common?
- What is Impressionistic Art?
- How does one look for clues in a painting to determine the story?
- What elements are needed to create a successful story?
- What elements are needed to create a successful piece of artwork?

### **Classroom Activity**

#### Objective 1 Activity 1

*Students will be able to identify key elements in both artwork and stories.* In order to do the final project, students must first understand objectives. The first objective consists of studying the elements of art and narrative writing. These elements for both narratives and art will be presented through a Power Point presentation. I plan to use a graphic organizer in the style of a small book to write out the elements for each

component. (Reference Appendix B) Students will follow a long and write notes and draw pictures to fill in their book. Students will work collaboratively to fill in these boxes with definitions and visual representations of each category. As a check for understanding, students will use a well-known story, such as Three Little Pigs to give one example for each narrative category.

Exploring the Elements of Art will allow children to make more specific and knowledgeable choices to create artwork. Understanding the different elements, or tools, to create art, they will make complete work with greater detail and structure. The basic Elements of Art include Line, Shape, Space, Value, Color, Texture and Form.<sup>9</sup>

Students should be able to identify elements in artwork and explain definitions of these elements. Students will be able to reference their graphic organizer (small book) to talk about the elements of both narratives and art.

#### Objective 2 Activity 2

*Student will be able to illustrate a story.* I will present students with a few short poems/stories and have them create an illustration to compliment the story. We will look at author/illustrator pairings and discuss important features of an illustration. A perfect author/writer for this activity would be famous poet Shel Silverstein who uses illustrations to compliment his very vivid poetry. We will review the Elements of Art, and students will use their organizers to help them use these tools to create an illustration.

As a conclusion, I would like students to show their illustrations and try to guess which poem/story the student illustrated. This will make a deeper connection with the importance of writing and visual art.

#### Objective 3 Activity 3

*Student will be able to create a story from an image.* Students will create/write their own story to go along with one of the masterly paintings of their choice (see Appendix B). I would like to have the students write the story using their elements of fiction organizer to make sure they have all the components of a story.

After the students write their own creative story, I would like them to share via a video recording. I would like to display the images in the background while the students read their stories. We will watch together as a class and talk about similarities/differences in each story.

### **Final Project**

Prior to the final project, all activities are warm-ups to allow students to explore concepts of storytelling and art. The prior activities, creating an illustration with a text and creating a narrative using the art of Impressionism, prepare students for the final project. During the last of these activities, their study reflects 19<sup>th</sup> century artwork from a specific time period and European art culture. Students are able to explore and observe paintings from real life places and time. Students will learn information about artists of this time and about the geographical location. I am hoping that although the Impressionism paintings are dreamlike and appear fictional, they were created from life. The paintings will connect the purpose of fiction and prior knowledge for the final project.

The final product, or classroom activity, will be creating an 'Accordion' style book. This book will consist of two panels/sides. On one side students will create their impression style artwork, and on the other side create a fictional narrative (see Appendix B). Final pieces will include a cover, back, narrative and impressionism artwork all created by the student. Creating an accordion book as well as illustrations uses mixed mediums such as pencil, crayon, glue, paint, markers and scissors. Constructing images using different mediums and processes is essential to creating a successful piece of artwork.

During this project, students will be stippling, or using a technique that requires making little dots on their papers to form an image (see Appendix B). Impressionistic artwork is made from brushstrokes or pointillism. Students will need to learn this technique in order to make artwork reflective of the art period.

After completion, students will have a finished project that physically represents the relationship between fiction and artwork. Students will have learned fundamental skills in creating both pieces and made connection on how they work together.

## **Resources**

Two paintings I plan to explore and focus on are 19<sup>th</sup> century Van Gogh's *Starry Night*<sup>10</sup>, and George Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon on the Grande-Jatte* (Paintings can be viewed through Google Images)<sup>11</sup>. These paintings are all very well-known and identifiable. It will be interesting for children to explore these images deeper and stir curiosity by allowing them to create their own stories. The subject matter for this lesson includes evaluating paintings from the Impressionistic Period. Students will be able to recognize and describe artwork of this style. A key concept of Impressionism is that the artwork is dreamlike and whimsical. Students will be able to make artwork that represents Impressionistic Ideals.<sup>12</sup> Aligning to this idea of dreamlike and whimsical, I hope their stories will match as whimsical and fictional.



I hope that this exploration will heighten a sense of awareness in children to look at pictures deeper, practice storytelling and build a better understanding of the connection between art and writing. Even more, I hope the experience will allow a child to fall in love with storytelling and illustration, encouraging them to read more.

## **Appendix A**

### Implementing District Standards

This lesson will touch upon standards from both the Delaware Visual Arts standards and National Core Standards for ELA. An important part of this unit is to make a strong connection between Writing and the Visual Arts. Interdisciplinary learning creates a stronger connection and relevant learning experiences for children to understand key concepts.

All areas of the unit will reflect upon standard targets. Students are making a clear connection between writing ELA standards and Visual Arts standards. Students will be able to produce both artwork and stories, as well as be able identify tools used for both.

### **Visual Arts Standards:**

**Standard 1: Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes.**

**Standard 2: Using knowledge of structures and functions**

**Standard 3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols and ideas**

**Standard 4: Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures**

**Standard 5: Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others**

**Standard 6: Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines**

ELA Common Core Standards for 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade:

### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3**

**Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.**

Students will be creating imaginative fiction using elements of writing to create a story from start to end. Students will use their experiences to create a story using their art to create a sequence of events.

### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3.A**

**Establish a situation and introduce a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.**

Students will develop characters that face problems and have to conquer an obstacle. Students will organize events to their story in an organized fashion that make sense to a timeline and the story.

### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3.B**

**Use dialogue and descriptions of actions, thoughts, and feelings to develop experiences and events or show the response of characters to situations.**

Student will develop characters to express emotion and feelings. Students will use character traits to express different events that interact in the story.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3.C**

**Use temporal words and phrases to signal event order.**

Students will be able to use words like now, then, last to establish a proper sequence of time frame and events.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3.D**

**Provide a sense of closure.**

Students will come up with a thorough summary for their story. Events leading up to the event will result in a clear ending that supports a solution to the established problem

## Appendix B

### *Objective 1 Activity 1:*

The book will used to reference vocabulary and parts of artwork/stories will look like this:

<u>Elements of Art:</u> Line  Shape	Form
Color	Space
Texture	Value

(On the REVERSE side)

Elements of a Fictional Story: Title	Setting
Central Message	Plot
Character(s)	Conclusion

***Objective 3 Activity 3:***

Fictional Story from a 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade student using Seurat's Sunday Afternoon on the Grande Jatte. Artist will look at master painting and create an original story about the illustration.

Sunday at the park  
It was a nice day at  
the park. There was a lot  
of people at the park. People  
would take walks. Kids would  
play in the park and people  
would walk their dogs. One day  
people were doing the same old  
things and a monkey escaped

from the zoo and that  
that same day one family  
was having a picnic and a  
dog ran over to the family and  
took a sandwich then the day  
was finally over.

by  
Samantha M.

Story created by a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student, Samantha M.<sup>13</sup>

Final Project:

A mixture of Impression artwork illustrations used on the back of the narrative stories.





Artwork created by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student, Kimberly.<sup>14</sup>





Artwork created by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student, Samantha.<sup>15</sup>

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“George Seurat” 19<sup>th</sup> century impressionist painter

<http://www.biography.com/search?query=george%20seurat>

Accessed on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Google Images search for “George Seurat’s Grande Jatte”

[https://www.google.com/search?q=george+seurat+grande+jatte&biw=1821&bih=889&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjnte\\_6r9rJAhVJ1B4KHTN NBrsQ\\_AUIBigB&dpr=0.75](https://www.google.com/search?q=george+seurat+grande+jatte&biw=1821&bih=889&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjnte_6r9rJAhVJ1B4KHTN NBrsQ_AUIBigB&dpr=0.75) Accessed on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Google Images search for “Van Gogh’s Starry Night”

[https://www.google.com/search?q=george+seurat+grande+jatte&biw=1821&bih=889&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjnte\\_6r9rJAhVJ1B4KHTN NBrsQ\\_AUIBigB&dpr=0.75#tbm=isch&q=van+gogh%27s+starry+night](https://www.google.com/search?q=george+seurat+grande+jatte&biw=1821&bih=889&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjnte_6r9rJAhVJ1B4KHTN NBrsQ_AUIBigB&dpr=0.75#tbm=isch&q=van+gogh%27s+starry+night)

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> E. M. Forster [www.brainyquote.com](http://www.brainyquote.com)

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer S. Wilkov, [www.yourbookisyourhook.com](http://www.yourbookisyourhook.com)

<sup>3</sup> Karen Bernadino, "Characterization in Literature"

<sup>4</sup> Debbie Macomber [www.brainyquote.com](http://www.brainyquote.com)

<sup>5</sup> Maurice Sendak, *Where The Wild Things Are*

<sup>6</sup> Impressionist Artists

<sup>7</sup> Robert Katz & Celestine Dars, "A Comprehensive visual reference to one of the best-loved period of Art History,"

<sup>8</sup> Ines Janet Engelmann, "Impressionism: 50 Paintings you should Know"

<sup>9</sup> Eileen S. Prince, "Teaching the Elements and Principles of Art"

<sup>10</sup> Ines Janet Engelmann, "Impressionism: 50 Paintings you should Know"

<sup>11</sup> Google Images

<sup>12</sup> Robert Katz & Celestine Dars, "A Comprehensive visual reference to one of the best-loved period of Art History,"

<sup>13</sup> Permission from student S. Melvin.

<sup>14</sup> Permission from student K. Ruvalcava-Garcia.

<sup>15</sup> Permission from student S. Melvin

Curriculum Unit  
Title

*Impressions of Storytelling*

Author

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

The main objective for student achievement is that students will be able to create stories and artwork. Goals for the lesson include that essential concepts of art and storytelling will be mastered. Story elements are characters, setting, plot, conflict and resolution.. Specific elements are needed to create artwork. Art elements are line, shape, color, value, space, and form.

1. Student will be able to illustrate a story.
2. Student will be able to create a story from an image.

Students will be able to view an image, make conclusions and create a full narrative reflecting the image. Students will use proper elements of storytelling to create a fictional story about their artwork.

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

What is the purpose of creating a story or creating artwork?  
What do artists/authors have in common?

Both of these questions revolve around the central concept of creating work for a purpose and specific audience. Using specific tools and thinking processes, students can create both.

**CONCEPT A**

**CONCEPT B**

**CONCEPT C**

Identify Key Elements in both Art and Stories

Identify Impressionist style artwork and create a story.

Create Impressionist style artwork and narrative.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS A**

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS B**

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS C**

What elements are used to create a story?

What elements are used to create artwork?

What is Impressionistic Art?

How does one look for clues in a painting to determine the story?

What elements are needed to create a successful story?

What elements are needed to create a successful piece of artwork?

**VOCABULARY A**

**VOCABULARY B**

**VOCABULARY C**

**Elements of Art:** Line, Shape, Form, Color, Space, Texture and Value  
**Elements of Story:** Central Message, Title, Character, Setting, and Conclusion

Impressionism  
Vincent Van Gogh  
Claude Seurat

Landscape  
  
Narrative

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

**Objective 1 Activity 1:**

A small graphic organizer/book will be mnade and used to reference vocabulary of parts of artwork/stories.

**Objective 2 Activity 2:**

Present students with a few short poems/stories and have them create an illustration to compliment the story.

**Objective 3 Activity 3:**

Fictional Story from a 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade student using Seurat's Sunday Afternoon on the Grande Jatte. Artist will look at master painting and create an original story about the illustration.

**Final Project:** Mixture of creating Impression artwork illustration and creating a narrative story. Student will make an Accordion Book with both illustrations and a narrative story that collaborate with their artwork.