

Looking with Nouns, Adjectives, and Verbs | *New York* by George Bellows

Creative Writing: Poetry

Adapted from Elizabeth Diament, National Gallery of Art, Washington

Target Thinking Dispositions: Observing and Describing

Thinking Routine: Looking: Nouns, Adjectives, and Verbs

Work of Art: George Bellows, *New York*, 1911

Disciplines: Social Studies, English Language Arts, Art, History

Curricular Topics: Poetry/Urban Life/Social Class/Modernity/Early 20th Century/Transportation

Grade Level/Age: Grades 4 and 5 or Ages 9-10 (adaptable for older or younger students)

Total Time: 50-55 minutes (adaptable for shorter time frames or two sessions)

Learning Objectives: Students will respond to a work of art through careful observation, description, and creative writing as a form of interpretation; brainstorm nouns, adjectives, and verbs suggested by the work of art; and use a word bank they have created to write a collaborative poem inspired by the painting.

Materials Needed:

- Art reproduction of *New York* by George Bellows (poster, digital image, or individual prints)
- Looking: Nouns, Adjectives, and Verbs templates
- Pen/pencil and a clipboard
 - with 3 stacks of 5 sticky notes, for nouns, adjectives, and verbs (1 set per student). If possible, each stack of sticky notes should be a different color.

Looking: Nouns, Adjectives, and Verbs

1. Looking: Nouns

~7 minutes

Introduce the work of art, the thinking goals, and curricular topic(s). Ask the students to look carefully at the painting for a full minute. Invite them to list 5 nouns observed from the work of art on their first set of sticky notes (1 noun per sticky note). Remind them a noun is a person, place, or thing. Once students have individually thought of nouns, allow them to discuss their nouns with a partner, and then have students share their nouns in a whole group discussion.

2. Looking: Adjectives

~7 minutes

On the next stack of sticky notes, ask students to describe the painting using 5 adjectives. Remind them adjectives are words that describe something and can answer questions such as “What does it smell like? What does it look like? What does it sound like?” Once finished, students can share their list with a partner and then with the whole class.

3. Looking: Verbs

~7 minutes

Next, ask students to look for verbs in the painting with a partner. Explain that verbs are action words and give an example of a verb. For example: “You might describe the man who is cleaning the street as SWEEPING.” You may also encourage students to respond using words ending in “-ING.”

Optional: Document student responses on chart paper or a board.

Extending the Looking Game

Provide Background on the Artist and Artwork:

~4 minutes

Link the painting to a topic in the curriculum, such as social class, modernity, early 20th Century America, or transportation by sharing a brief story about the artist or the painting, in connection with the topic. For example, for the topic of transportation:

“George Bellows could have played professional baseball, but instead he chose to become an artist. He moved to New York from Ohio in 1904 and made this painting in 1911. As a painter of modern life, he focused on the reality of city life—showing crowded streets filled with new skyscrapers and rushing crowds. New York at this time was undergoing a huge transformation, and motorcars, horse-drawn carts, trolleys, and pedestrians shared the roads.”

Curriculum Connection – Write a Poem

~20-25 minutes

In pairs, have students lay out all their words together on a board or desk. Next, have them arrange their words into a poem. Ask them to think about what the work of art means to them, and have them turn their ideas into a poem. Once completed, have partners read their poems aloud to the entire group.

Wrap-Up:

~5 minutes

Summarize the activity for students, highlighting linkages between the thinking routine (Looking: Nouns, Adjectives, and Verbs), key dispositions (observing and describing), and any relevant curricular content.

Additional Suggested Works of Art:

This lesson can be applied to other works of art, such as:

- Fred Becker, *Rapid Transit*, c. 1937
- Thomas Hart Benton, *Departure of the Joads*, 1939
- Walker Evans, *The Breadline*, 1933

For more works of art related to the subject of transportation or history please refer to the Uncovering America resource on the National Gallery of Art website:

www.nga.gov/uncoveringamerica