

LESSON PLAN

Ekphrastic Poem Lesson

WHAT IS AN EKPHRASTIC POEM?

Ekphrastic poems are written about art, they are art about art. The word “ekphrastic” derives from the Greek word for description. A person writing an ekphrastic poem explores and engages with a work of art and then they give words to the feelings and thoughts inspired by the work of art using a poem style of their choice.

VOCABULARY:

Haiku Poem – is an ancient form of Japanese poetry that has become very popular all over the world. Haiku poems are known for their small size consisting of just three lines; the first and third lines have five syllables, whereas the second has seven. Haikus don’t have to rhyme and are usually written to evoke a particular mood or instance.

Free Verse Poem – is a popular style of modern poetry and has a fair amount of freedom when it comes to writing. Free verse can rhyme or not, it can have as many lines or stanzas as the poet wants, and it can be about anything you like!

Sonnet Poem – the word “sonnet” is derived from the Italian word “sonnetto” which means “little song”. Traditionally, sonnets are made up of 14 lines, and are typically 10 syllables per line. The first three subgroups have four lines (which makes them “quatrains”) with the second and the fourth lines of each subgroup containing rhyming words. The sonnet concludes with a two-line subgroup, that rhyme with each other. The rhyming scheme is: ABAB CDCD EFEF GG

Acrostic Poem - this type of poetry spells out a name, word, phrase or message with the first letter of each line of the poem. It can rhyme or not, and typically the word spelt out, reflects the theme of the poem.

Limerick Poem – Limericks are funny poems. They have a set rhyme composition: they consist of a single stanza of exactly five lines. Lines one, two and five have the same rhyme. Lines three and four have the same rhyme, but it is different from the first rhyme. The last line in a limerick is often the punchline.

Ode Poem – an ode is a short lyric poem typically written to praise or celebrate a person, an idea, an event or thing. Odes are positive, usually exuberant works that sometimes are accompanied by music. The word “ode” comes from the Greek word “aeidein” which means to sing or chant. Odes are usually quite short in length, and they may or may not rhyme.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Observe: Choose a work of art. It can be any work of art: a painting, a sculpture, even a performance. Slowly let your eyes wander over the art piece. What do you notice?

Consider and write down your answers:

- Describe what you see.
- What words would you use to describe this work of art?
- What does the work of art make you think of? Why?
- How does it make you feel? Why?
- What does the work remind you of?
- What colors do you notice?
- What materials do you think were used in this artwork?
- What is the story that this artwork tells?
- What does the artwork make you wonder about?

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- Why did the artist choose to create this work of art?

Pick a prompt: There are several ways to approach writing an ekphrastic poem. Below are some ideas to consider.

1. Write about the scene you see in the artwork.
2. Pay attention to how the artwork makes you feel, write about your feelings, and why you feel them.
3. Imagine a conversation between the subjects in the artwork, write about it.
4. Write as if you are in the artwork, participating in whatever is happening.
5. Choose one aspect of the artwork and write about it (the colors, the composition, the lines etc.)
6. Write about what might be happening beyond the scene, what is the story, what's going on? Is this the beginning of the story, the middle, or the end?
7. Write what you think you know about this work of art. Is there anything confusing or challenging?
8. Write about what questions the artwork makes you ask?
9. Imagine you are one of the characters in the artwork speaking to the viewer, what would you be saying to them?
10. Consider if you are the artist that created this work of art, what would you be thinking about when creating this artwork? What would you want your viewers to know?
11. Relate the artwork to your own experience – does it remind you of something or someone in your life?

Envision: Pick a poetic form from the vocabulary list provided. Ekphrastic poems can be long or short, they can rhyme or not, and they can take on many poem forms – you might choose to write a **haiku**, a **sonnet** or a **free verse** poem. No matter the form, ekphrastic poems are always a response to a work of art.

Express: Review your answers and notes to the questions about the work of art you chose to work with. Select a prompt idea from above and use your answers and thoughts to create an ekphrastic poem, in any form you would like, about the work of art you selected.

EKPHRASTIC POEM EXAMPLES:

Example 1:



Trumpet (1984)
by Jean-Michel Basquiat

Ekphrastic Poem inspired by the artwork, *Trumpet*, by Jean-Michel Basquiat

Poem Title: *& Later*

Author: Adrian Matejka

the broken sprawl & crawl
of Basquiat's paints, the thin cleft

of villainous pigments wrapping

each frame like the syntax
in somebody else's relaxed

explanation of lateness: what had
happened was. Below blackened

crowns, below words crossed out
to remind of what is underneath:

potholes, ashy elbows, & breath

that, in the cold, comes out in red light

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& complaint shapes— 3 lines
from the horn's mouth
in the habit of tardy remunerations.

All of that 3-triggered agitation,
all that angry-fingered fruition

like Indianapolis's 3-skyscrapered smile
when the sun goes down & even

the colors themselves start talking

in the same suspicious idiom
as a brass instrument—

thin throat like a fist,

flat declinations of pastors
& teachers at Christmas in the inner city.

Shoulders back & heads up when
playing in holiday choir of hungry

paints, chins covered
in red scribbles in all of the songs.

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Example 2:



The Great Migration Series, panel 10 (1941)
by Jacob Lawrence

Ekphrastic Poem inspired by the artwork *The Great Migration Series, panel 10*, by Jacob Lawrence

Poem Title: Say Grace

Author: Rita Dove

Got a spoon
Got a pan
Got a bucket for the scraps

Got a nail to hang our things on
A wish
An empty sack

Dear Lord bless our little bit
This table
Our beds

Dear Lord who made us
And the world
Now can we raise our heads