

## Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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### Tip #11: Putting the "Art" in Language Arts

Did any of you attend Staci Hurff's presentation at the Nov. 11 in-service? Staci is an 8th grade teacher at Goldenview who seems to know how to put the "art" into language arts. Because of her, I attended a workshop on this very topic at the NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English) Annual Convention.

1. Find a colored transparency of famous painting or an art print to share with your class. (Did you know the Holt literature anthology has a separate binder called Audiovisual Resources? In the first section there are Fine Art Transparencies.) Later in this activity, you will need three poems that somehow reflect the content of the painting you have chosen.
2. Ask students to sketch what they see from the transparency or print. Drawing slows down the eye, so this should help students look for details. After sketching, ask students to describe their drawing process. Many students will have probably started with the main structures in the painting and then added details as they discovered they had more time. Discuss the similarities between the art process and the writing process. (Many of us write a sketchy first draft essay, and then we go back in and focus on the "explains" and "proofs.")
3. Next have students draw a T chart (two column notes) on their paper. Label the left side what we know is definitely true about the painting. On the right hand side label it what might be possibly true. This is an excellent step in helping students to make inferences from visual text. For example: I definitely see a building. I think it might be a barn. I definitely see bright sunlight in the painting. I think it is midday. Ask them to justify their thoughts. Where in the painting did it lead them to believe... Students have such difficulty making inferences from written text. Perhaps working more with the visual will help our kids develop this skill which is necessary for reading comprehension.
4. Finally, distribute a handout with three different poems that relate to the content of the painting you have chosen. (To find potential poems, use any popular poetry web site and search based on your content key word: <http://www.pmpoetry.com>) Ask students to first read the poems on their own. For a second reading, ask them to choose the poem they think best matches the painting. For a third reading, read them aloud. (All poetry is meant to be read aloud at some point.) Ask them to jot down the reasons why they think the poem



they have chosen best matches the painting. Also ask them to jot down reasons why they think the other two don't match. This really will give them an opportunity for close reading. Discuss their findings as a class to determine which poem they feel matches the best and why.

### *Possible extensions*

- Write an original poem based on the painting. Use a highly structured format like haiku or cinquain for instant success with kids reluctant to try free verse.
- Choose an important line from one of the three poems to use as a starting point for an original poem.
- Using other resources, have students find one more published poem that matches the painting. Create a hallway display of the original painting and the collection of student poetry. Then ask students on other teams to find the poem they think matches the painting the best.
- This month's NCTE journal, *Voices From the Middle*, is dedicated to poetry. Use the following web site to find the links that were highlighted in the December issue:

[www.npatterson.net/poem.html](http://www.npatterson.net/poem.html)

