

Writing About Art

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Grade Level: Middle-High School

Time Frame: 45 - 70 minutes

Objective: Students will draw inspiration from various contemporary artworks to write their own poems using a combination of imagination and the five senses.

Prior Knowledge and Skills: Grade level reading and comprehension

Required Materials: Paper, pencil, art images (provided below)

Sequence of Activities:

Welcome and Introduction (10 minutes)

The facilitator or teaching artist can introduce the session by expressing some of their own personal relationship to the arts. If you make art, share it! Expand your definition of art to include cooking, dancing, and any act of creativity. Bring something to share with students.

Here is an example of something I might say at the start of this lesson: “This week, let’s write about art. I *love* painting and drawing. Confession: I love painting and drawing *even more* than I love writing (gasp!). And sometimes, writing and art go together for me and are inseparable or related. Below is a painting that I made recently on silk.”



“I also find inspiration in the art that others make. The art of other people can sometimes inspire a story or a poem in me. It also helps me escape my own mind, especially in dark times. When poets write poetry inspired by visual art, it’s called **ekphrastic poetry**.”

After a brief introduction, open a discussion about the arts. This is a great opportunity to gauge where students stand in their own relationship to the arts. Do they love it? Is it accessible to them? Do they find it boring? Encourage honesty and depth of discussion. Be curious and use this time to get to know students in a new way.

- Do you like to make art? Tell me about your own art. (Or if not, what else do you like to do?)
- Do you like to look at art? Why or why not?
- Have you ever seen a piece of art that really sticks with you in your mind or heart? Tell me about it if so...

Looking at Images (10 minutes)

Below are three images. Create a slideshow or print/project these images so students can view them closely.

As students view each image, ask them to journal about the following:

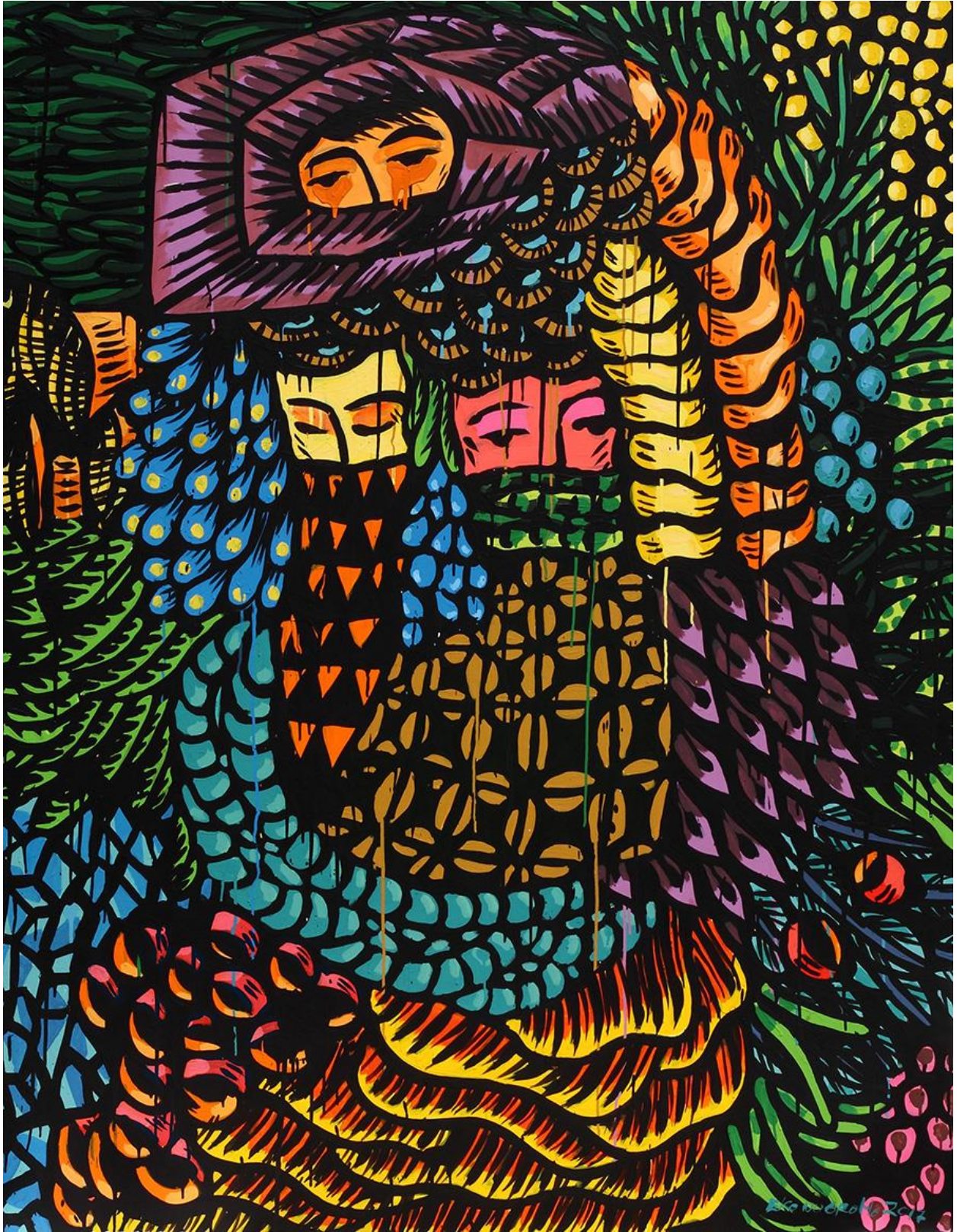
- What is going on in the image? Who are the people in each picture?
- What colors did each artist use? How do the colors make you feel?
- Are there any small objects in the images or things you didn’t notice the first time you looked?
- Which image did you like the best and why?



[Ana Leovy, Mexico](#)



[Andrea Pippins, Swedish](#)



[Eko Nugroho, Indonesia](#)

Individual Writing (20-30 minutes)

Below are two prompts. Use one or both, depending on student interest and time.

Prompt 1

Pick your favorite image and write a poem about it. This poem can simply be your observations on the objects, colors, and textures of the image, or it can be an entire story of what you imagine is going on in the image.

Write at least six lines and break them up however you like. Try reading your poem out loud to help you decide where to break your lines. But remember, there's no special rule for line breaking, which means there is no wrong way.

Prompt 2

Put yourself in one of these images. Where in the art will you choose to stand, what perspective will you take? Put yourself completely in that world. Imagine it 3-dimensional and surrounding you. What do you see? What do you witness? Write a poem! Don't worry about rhyming or line-breaking, just write, write, write, and don't stop until you completely run out of ideas. Then stop. Don't fix or edit anything, just let it live exactly as you wrote it the first time.

Optional Extension Activity (15-20 minutes)

Make your own piece of art inspired by one of these images. In image 1, the trees have faces. In image 2, words come out of a character's mouth. In image 3, mysterious faces are wrapped in plant-like stems, leaves, and flowers. Pick one of these images and make your own version in that style. What objects around you will have faces? Or what words will come out of your mouth? Or what materials will wrap around you like plants covering everything but your eyes?

Optional Sharing

If time allows, students can read their poems aloud or share their artwork.