



Artful Connections

Teacher Guide:

America's Signs and Symbols

Grades 3+



Videoconference programs at the Smithsonian American Art Museum are supported by the Smithsonian Women's Committee.



Tips for a Successful Videoconference

Before the Videoconference

- ❑ Check with your technology coordinator to ensure your school has compatible videoconferencing equipment (H.323 protocol).
- ❑ **At least four weeks prior** to your preferred dates, schedule your videoconference with the Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration (CILC): <http://www.cilc.org>. Search the list of content providers for Smithsonian American Art Museum to view a list of our programs. All requests made on CILC will be routed to the museum and our staff will contact you to set up a test call.

Please note: We recommend you book early due to high demand for limited time slots.

- ❑ **At least one week prior** to your program date:
 - Staff will contact you with the assigned videoconference presenter's name and e-mail. Contact the presenter to discuss your plans for integrating this topic with your curriculum. Your videoconference presenter may suggest ways to customize the content of the videoconference to your needs.
 - Complete a successful test call at the scheduled time with the American Art Museum staff. This is a good time to practice turning the equipment on and off and locating the volume and other functions of your videoconference equipment.
 - Identify a space where all your students will be able to sit comfortably within your camera's view, see a projected PowerPoint, and hear the videoconference presenter.
 - Review videoconference rules and expectations with your students. Students should speak loudly and clearly to the presenter, one at a time. It's helpful to have students raise their hands and for you to call on them before they speak.
 - Review the pre-visit material (available to download at <http://AmericanArt.si.edu/education/video>). Encourage your students to write down questions for the videoconference presenter elicited by the pre-visit activities. Questions about the content, artwork, museum, and (within reason) the presenter are welcome!

During the Videoconference

- ❑ Make sure students are comfortably seated within view of the camera and can readily see the videoconference screen and projected PowerPoint presentation.
- ❑ Classroom-appropriate behavior is essential to a successful videoconference program. Students should listen to the presenter as well as each other and should behave respectfully.
- ❑ Encourage your students to ask and answer questions and give their opinions and ideas. Remind students to speak loudly and clearly for the presenter.
- ❑ Encourage your students to exercise the observation and interpretation skills you introduced with the pre-visit materials.



- ❑ Help the videoconference presenter maintain classroom management. Call on students to prompt them to ask and answer questions. Consider rephrasing or restating a question if you know your students have something to say but are shy or may not understand the question. If the presenter cannot hear students, repeat their answers for the presenter.

After the Videoconference

- ❑ Incorporate the appropriate videoconference post-lesson into your classroom curriculum (available to download at <http://AmericanArt.si.edu/education/video>).
- ❑ Contact the videoconference presenter with any follow-up questions from your students.
- ❑ Contact American Art staff (AmericanArtEducation@si.edu) with your comments and suggestions. Evaluation and program improvement are a priority and we welcome your comments.
- ❑ Follow the link to CILC below and complete a brief survey about your videoconference experience.
 - America's Signs & Symbols <http://cilc.org/evaluation.aspx?pass=9k7jQ1nSxf>



America's Signs and Symbols (Grades 3 +)

Overview

Artists use familiar American icons – the Statue of Liberty, the bald eagle, the flag – to communicate their ideas and to encourage probing thoughts about our society. After an introduction to America's signs and symbols through a pre-visit activity, participation in the videoconference, and a post-visit lesson to cement concepts, your students will be better able to:

- Understand the historical context and symbolic meanings of American icons
- Understand the role of symbols in the expression of a national identity, personal ideas, and social commentary
- Use visual vocabulary to articulate observations and interpretations of artworks

National Standards

Visual Arts

K-12.1 Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes;

K-12.3 Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas;

K-12.4 Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures;

K-12.6 Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines.



Vocabulary

US History/Civics

Amendment – (n.) a legal addition to the Constitution of the United States of America that changes or expands its meaning. The two of the four paths to amendment that have been used historically are: proposal by Congress and ratification by state conventions and proposal by Congress and ratification by state legislatures.

Bill of Rights – (n.) the first ten amendments to the Constitution that provide Americans basic freedoms of speech, religion, petition, assembly, and the press as well as the right to bear arms and the right to due process.

Constitution – (n.) adopted in 1787, the Constitution of the United States of America is the basis for law in the United States, organizes the federal government, and defines its relationship to all American states and citizens

freedom – (n.) assurance that a government will not oppress its citizens

immigrate – (v.) to enter into a country with the intention of establishing a life and livelihood

liberty – (n.) the enjoyment of certain social, political, and economic rights and privileges¹. For example, America's freedom from the rule of England and ability to self-govern.

sign – (n.) a mark or shape that stands in place of written words or an idea

symbol – (n.) something that stands for something else due to a relationship, association, or accidental resemblance²

Visual Arts

composition – (n.) the arrangement of elements such as shape, line, value, and form within an artwork

interpret – (v.) to derive meaning from observed features or traits

landscape – (n.) a picture representing natural scenery

museum – (n.) an organization traditionally concerned with acquiring, conserving, studying, and exhibiting objects

observe – (v.) to note the visible features or traits of an artwork

portrait – (n.) a pictorial representation of a person, usually showing the face

process – (n.) a combination of methods and techniques used to create an artwork

subject – (n.) the principal idea conveyed by a work of art




¹ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. 11th ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc. 2004. [adapted]

² *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. [adapted]






Topic Related Artwork

A representative sample of the artworks in our collection that support the videoconference topic appears below. These are suggested for use during pre-videoconference activities. Images used during your videoconference may vary.

<p>TITLE: Fourth of July Parade (from book, Suburbia)</p> <p>DATE: 1972</p> <p>ARTIST: Bill Owens</p> <p>MEDIUM: gelatin silver print on paper mounted on paperboard</p> <p>DIMENSIONS: image: 8 1/2 x 6 in. (21.5 x 15.2 cm.)</p> <p>CREDIT LINE: Smithsonian American Art Museum Transfer from the National Endowment for the Arts</p> <p>ACC. NUMBER: 1983.63.1054</p> <p>WEB LINK: http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=19134</p>	
<p>TITLE: Liberty</p> <p>DATE: ca. 1884</p> <p>ARTIST: Frederic Auguste Bartholdi</p> <p>MEDIUM: bronzed terra cotta and tin</p> <p>DIMENSIONS: 46 x 12 x 11 in. (116.8 x 30.5 x 28.0 cm)</p> <p>CREDIT LINE: Smithsonian American Art Museum Transfer from the U.S. Capitol</p> <p>ACC. NUMBER: XX76</p> <p>WEB LINK: http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=1415</p>	
<p>TITLE: Preamble</p> <p>DATE: 1987</p> <p>ARTIST: Mike Wilkins</p> <p>MEDIUM: painted metal on vinyl and wood</p> <p>DIMENSIONS: 96 x 96 in. (243.8 x 243.8 cm.)</p> <p>CREDIT LINE: Smithsonian American Art Museum Gift of Nissan Motor Corporation in U.S.A.</p> <p>ACC. NUMBER: 1988.39</p> <p>WEB LINK: http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=27722</p>	



<p>TITLE: Miss Liberty Celebration DATE: 1987 ARTIST: Malcah Zeldis MEDIUM: oil on corrugated cardboard DIMENSIONS: 54 1/2 x 36 1/2 in. (138.4 x 92.7 cm) CREDIT LINE: Smithsonian American Art Museum Gift of Herbert Waide Hemphill, Jr. ACC. NUMBER: 1988.74.14 WEB LINK: http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=15517</p>	
<p>TITLE: Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii DATE: 1995 ARTIST: Nam June Paik MEDIUM: 49-channel closed circuit video installation, neon, steel and electronic components DIMENSIONS: approx. 15 x 40 x 4 ft. CREDIT LINE: Smithsonian American Art Museum Gift of the artist ACC. NUMBER: 2002.23 WEB LINK: http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=71478</p>	
<p>TITLE: Vaquero DATE: modeled 1980/cast 1990 ARTIST: Luis Jiménez MEDIUM: acrylic urethane, fiberglass, steel armature DIMENSIONS: 199 x 114 x 67 in. (505.5 x 289.6 x 170.2 cm.) CREDIT LINE: Smithsonian American Art Museum Gift of Judith and Wilbur L. Ross, Jr., Anne and Ronald Abramson, Thelma and Melvin Lenkin ACC. NUMBER: 1990.44 WEB LINK: http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=31943</p>	



Additional Resources

Nam June Paik: Zoom It

<http://americanart.si.edu/education/insights/zoom/paik/>

Explore a photograph of our video installation *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii*, using the "zoom" tool. To design this monumental map of the United States, the artist Nam June Paik arranged 336 televisions on a scaffold and overlaid it with almost 600 feet of neon lights.

Superhighway Scholars

<http://americanart.si.edu/education/rs/index.cfm>

Superhighway Scholars is a [classroom activity](#) designed to complement the elementary-school [state history curriculum](#). Inspired by Nam June Paik's monumental video installation *Electronic Superhighway*, students use historical and geographic facts about their states to create collages. They then [submit the collages](#) for posting in our [student showcase](#), where the public can view their artwork.

Ben's Guide to US Government for Kids

<http://bensguide.gpo.gov/3-5/symbols/index.html>

U.S. Government Printing Office's kid-friendly site that introduces both American government and American symbols.

Symbols on Coins: U.S. Coins Evolved from Ancient Times

<http://www.usmint.gov/kids/teachers/LessonPlans/viewLP.cfm?lessonPlanId=127>

Students will learn about the evolution of coins, and can design their own coin, using features that have been carried over into modern times.

U.S. Department of the Treasury: Portraits and Designs

<http://www.ustreas.gov/education/faq/currency/portraits.shtml>

FAQs presenting information on the significance of signs and symbols incorporated into American paper currency.

Celebrate America in Poetry and Art Edited by Nora Panzer. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian American Art Museum: 2001).

Through the years, America's writers and visual artists have sought to capture the pulse of the American experience through poetry and art. *Celebrate America* unites these diverse artistic expressions in one volume, examining this country's identity as a cornucopia of beliefs, cultures, and peoples.

The Art of Freedom: How Artists See America by Bob Raczka (Millbrook Press: 2008).

What is America? See a variety of answers through the eyes of eighteen artists.

How Artists See America by Colleen Carroll (Abbeville Press: 2002).

Appropriate for grades 3 to 6. Readers will see how Childe Hassam's festive images of a New York street send a clear message of patriotism; how Romare Bearden captured the colorful sights and sounds of a jazz band in New Orleans; how Grant Wood's portrait of a man and woman expresses the no-nonsense, hard-working character of midwesterners; and how Georgia O'Keeffe used bones and other objects she collected to portray the openness and beauty of the Southwest.

How Artists Use ... (series) by Paul Flux (Heinemann Library: 2007).



Appropriate for K to 3. An introduction to art concepts including color, line, shape, and perspective. Ideas for studio activities grow from an understanding of how artists use particular visual qualities in their work. Full-color images of artworks are enriched with simple text.



Learning to Look: Pre-Visit Lesson

Grades 1 – 4

Overview

After completing these activities, students will have strengthened their visual vocabulary by making observations of and expressing their interpretations of artwork.

Discussion

Define “observation” with students. Observations are statements of fact relating to what students see, not what they think might be happening.

Define “interpretation” with students. Interpretations are statements that ascribe meaning to the artwork based on observations.

Present students with one artwork that relates to your scheduled videoconference topic. (A selection of artworks related to each tour is included in the “Tour Information” document available to download at <http://AmericanArt.si.edu/education/video>). Have students begin by sharing only their observations. When students offer interpretations, or ideas about what they think is happening in the artwork, ask: “What do you see that makes you say that?”

Questions that prompt observations:

- *Who or what do you see in this artwork?*
- *What is the largest thing you see in this picture?*
- *What is the smallest thing you see in this picture?*
- *What colors do you see in the artwork?*
- *Is the scene outside? Inside?*
- *If there are people, are their clothes similar to or different from what you are wearing? How?*
- *Is the scenery similar to or different from where you are? How?*
- *What can you tell me about the colors in this artwork? What color do you see the most?*

Next, invite students to share their interpretations about what is happening in the artwork if they haven’t already done so. It is acceptable for students to have different interpretations of the same object. Make sure students support their interpretations with direct observations about the artwork. You may notice that some observation-focused questions lead directly to interpretation-focused questions. All interpretations should be founded on answers to observation questions.

**Questions that prompt interpretations:**

- *What is going on in this picture?*
- *Where do you think this scene is taking place?*
- *What season is it? What time of day is it?*
- *When was this artwork made?*
- *What do the scenery and the clothing or objects tell us about when this artwork was made?*
- *Does this scene look like it could be taking place today? Why or why not?*
- *Indicate a figure in the artwork:*
 - *Who is this person?*
 - *Is s/he similar to or different from you? In what ways?*
 - *What is s/he doing?*
 - *What do you think s/he does for a living?*
 - *How does s/he feel?*
 - *Where do you think s/he is?*
 - *What do you think it sounds like where s/he is?*
 - *What do you think it smells like where s/he is?*
 - *What kind of weather is this person experiencing?*
- *How do you think the artist feels about this person or thing in the painting?*
- *How does this artwork make you feel?*
- *How do you think this artist made this artwork?*
- *What types of materials do you think the artist used? Paint? Clay? Wood?*
- *How long do you think it took to make?*
- *What kind of mood or feelings do the colors give the artwork?*
- *Do you like the colors that are in the artwork? If you were the artist, would you have used different colors?*
- *Why do you think this artist made this artwork?*
- *What do you think the artist is trying to say?*

Activity

Either working in groups or independently, have students select a person or object in the artwork and complete the included worksheet, "Give this artwork a voice!" Have students refer back to their observations to support their interpretations of the person or object they chose. To take this activity further, have students create their own artwork based on the worksheet writing prompts "I wish..." or "Tomorrow, I am going to..."

Questions to ask students:

- Who or what did you choose to write about and why did you choose them?
- What in the artwork helped you make decisions about what the subject is thinking or feeling?
- Did you use the title or date of the artwork to inform your decisions? If so, how did they influence what you wrote? If not, do they contradict or reinforce your interpretation?



If your students want to know more about the artwork or learn about other interpretations from scholars, art historians or curators, visit <http://AmericanArt.si.edu>, <http://AmericanArt.si.edu/luce/>, and your school library to research more about the artwork. If you have specific questions about an artwork, you can ask Joan of Art at <http://AmericanArt.si.edu/research/tools/ask>.



Give this artwork a voice!

Choose an artwork and pretend you are one of the people or things in it. How would you finish these phrases?

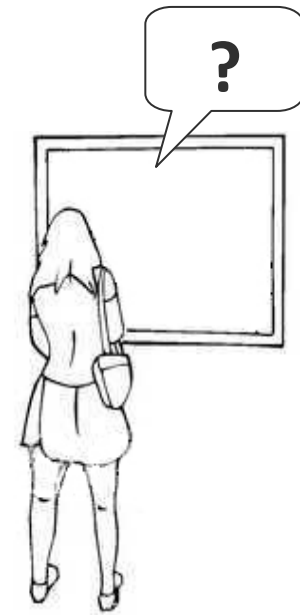
Here I am...

Boy, am I...

I wish...

I think I might...

Tomorrow I'm going to...





Learning to Look: Pre-Visit Lesson

Grades 5 – 12

Overview

After completing these activities, students will have strengthened their visual vocabulary by making observations of and expressing their interpretations of artwork.

Discussion

Define “observation” with students. Observations are statements of fact relating to what students see, not what they think might be happening.

Define “interpretation” with students. Interpretations are statements that ascribe meaning to the artwork based on observations.

Present students with one artwork that relates to your scheduled videoconference topic. (A selection of artworks related to each tour is included in the “Tour Information” document available to download at <http://AmericanArt.si.edu/education/video>). Have students begin by sharing only their observations. When students offer interpretations, or ideas about what they think is happening in the artwork, ask: “What do you see that makes you say that?”

Questions that prompt observations:

- *Who or what do you see in this artwork?*
- *What is the largest thing you see in this picture?*
- *What is the smallest thing you see in this picture?*
- *What colors do you see in the artwork?*
- *Is the scene outside? Inside?*
- *If there are people, are their clothes similar to or different from what you are wearing? How?*
- *Is the scenery similar to or different from where you are? How?*
- *What can you tell me about the colors in this artwork? What color do you see the most?*

Next, invite students to share their interpretations about what is happening in the artwork if they haven’t already done so. It is acceptable for students to have different interpretations of the same object. Make sure students support their interpretations with direct observations about the artwork. You may notice that some observation-focused questions lead directly to interpretation-focused questions. All interpretations should be founded on answers to observation questions.

**Questions that prompt interpretations:**

- *What is going on in this picture?*
- *Where do you think this scene is taking place?*
- *What season is it? What time of day is it?*
- *When was this artwork made?*
- *What do the scenery and the clothing or objects tell us about when this artwork was made?*
- *Does this scene look like it could be taking place today? Why or why not?*
- *Indicate a figure in the artwork:*
 - *Who is this person?*
 - *Is s/he similar to or different from you? In what ways?*
 - *What is s/he doing?*
 - *What do you think s/he does for a living?*
 - *How does s/he feel?*
 - *Where do you think s/he is?*
 - *What do you think it sounds like where s/he is?*
 - *What do you think it smells like where s/he is?*
 - *What kind of weather is this person experiencing?*
- *How do you think the artist feels about this person or thing in the painting?*
- *How does this artwork make you feel?*
- *How do you think this artist made this artwork?*
- *What types of materials do you think the artist used? Paint? Clay? Wood?*
- *How long do you think it took to make?*
- *What kind of mood or feelings do the colors give the artwork?*
- *Do you like the colors that are in the artwork? If you were the artist, would you have used different colors?*
- *Why do you think this artist made this artwork?*
- *What do you think the artist is trying to say?*

Activity

Have students select a different artwork and complete the included Observation/Interpretation worksheet. To take the activity further, have students refer to it as they write about the work of art. Students can choose words or phrases that they think best describe the artwork and use them as material in a poem, story or podcast.

Questions to ask students:

- *Why did you choose that artwork?*
- *Who did you choose to write about and why did you choose them?*
- *What in the artwork helped you make decisions about what the subject is thinking or feeling?*
- *Did you use the title or date of the artwork to inform your decisions? If so, how did they influence what you wrote? If not, do they contradict or reinforce your interpretation?*



Student: _____

Artwork Title: _____

Artist: _____ Date: _____

Observation	Interpretation
<i>Definition: What you see?</i> <i>Example: Dark grey sky, no rain, dry ground</i>	<i>Definition: What you think based on what you see?</i> <i>Example: A storm is approaching</i>
What is the main idea of the artwork?	



Imagine yourself inside this work of art.

What do you hear?	What do you smell?
What do you taste?	What do you feel?

Imagine that the artwork is one part of a larger story.

What happened right before this moment?
What will happen next?