



Narratives in Paintings and Sculpture **Grades 9-12** **Pre - and Post -Visit Materials for Educators**

Program Overview

In this program, students will consider ways in which paintings, photographs, and sculptures reveal information and tell stories about personal experiences. By analyzing artworks from the Museum's permanent collection and special exhibitions, students will gain insight into how an artist chooses a particular color, form, and medium to convey meaning.

Goals

- Explore the Museum's fine arts collection and learn how to analyze individual works of art.
- Understand how works of art communicate ideas through their forms and subject matter.
- Examine the variety of approaches artists use to convey meaning.

Vocabulary

Background	The part of a pictorial representation that appears to be in the distance and that provides relief for the principal objects in the foreground.
Composition	The structure or organization of a work of art, literature, or music.
Cool colors	Subdued colors including blue, green, and violet.
Culture	The arts, beliefs, institutions, and other products of human work and thought expressed in a particular community or by a particular group.
Foreground	The part of a picture or scene that appears nearest to the viewer.
Identity	The set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group.
Pattern	A repeated design of natural or accidental origin; an artistic or decorative design.
Portrait	A painting, photograph, or other likeness of a person, especially one showing the face.

Sculpture	A three-dimensional work of art.
Shape	The outline or contour of a form.
Symbol	An image that represents something else by association, resemblance, or convention.
Texture	The feel and appearance of a surface e.g., rough or smooth.
Theme	An idea, or point of view, embodied and expanded upon in a work of art.
Warm Colors	Vibrant colors including red, yellow, and orange.

Pre-Visit Activity

1. Examining a Work of Art

In the program *Narratives in Paintings and Sculpture*, students will examine the forms and subject matter of works of art in The Jewish Museum's permanent exhibition. Select a painting that tells a story and share a reproduction of it with your class. Paintings that depict a clear setting and representations of people are particularly effective for this activity.

Discussion Questions:

- What are your initial observations of the painting?
- How would you describe the way it is painted?
- Describe the setting of the painting. Does the scene take place during the day or at night?
- Describe the people in the scene. What do you think they are doing?
- How does the artist organize the figures within the composition?
- What do you notice about the colors in the painting? How do you think the artist's use of color affects the mood?
- Does this work of art remind you of anything? Has something similar happened in your own life?
- What feelings does this work of art evoke for you?
- Imagine yourself in the painting. What would you be doing or feeling if you were a part of this scene?

Follow-up Activity:

Ask students to find a painting that interests them. Reproductions of paintings may be found in a variety of different books, as well as on the internet. Have students write a story inspired by the

painting. They may tell the story about the main subject of the painting, or they can imagine what it would be like to be a person in the painting and write a first person narrative. Additionally, students may wish to use the discussion questions previously listed as a guide.

Post-Visit Activities

1. Responding to the Museum Visit

Many of the works of art in The Jewish Museum's collection are inspired by an artist's personal experiences. Some tell stories about family traditions and others are about historical events. Ask students to think about the artwork they observed during their visit to The Jewish Museum. In pairs, have students discuss the image that was most meaningful or memorable to them, considering the artist's use of line, shape, and color to express ideas and emotions.

2. Self-exploration

Robert Arneson superimposes the image of a Jewish man over that of an African American man in his work, *Simon n' Rastus*. By doing so, Arneson suggests there is a connection between the two men. Remind students of *Simon n' Rastus* from their museum visit and of the conversation they had regarding the work of art. What is (are) the message(s) Arneson conveys through his work? Draw attention to the stereotypes that Arneson presents in his work, which historically have been assigned to Jews and African Americans.

Background Information

Robert Arneson, *Simon n' Rastus*, 1990.

In combining a caricature of a Jewish man (Simon) with a caricature of a black man (Rastus), Robert Arneson, who is neither African American nor Jewish, suggests a complex relationship between the two ethnic groups. While both have faced discrimination, they have also come into direct conflict with one another. The figures at the bottom of the canvas seem to address the embattled nature of the communities and the persistence of racist and anti-Semitic attitudes.

Please note: Robert Arneson includes derogatory terms in this work of art to express the anti-Semitism and racism that Jews and African Americans have historically faced. Please ensure students understand the context in which these words are used.

After the discussion, have students create an image (in the style of Robert Arneson), where they combine a self-portrait reflecting how they see themselves and a portrait of how others might see them—their inner-self versus their image to the outside world.

Resources

Books

Acton, Mary. *Learning to Look at Paintings*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Berger, Maurice, et al. *Masterworks of The Jewish Museum*. New York: The Jewish Museum; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004.

Grossman, Grace Cohen. *Jewish Art*. Westport, CT: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, 1995.

Taylor, Joshua. *Learning to Look: A Handbook for the Visual Arts.*(2nd ed.) Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1981.

Websites

www.artsedge.kennedy-center.org

The National Arts and Education Network

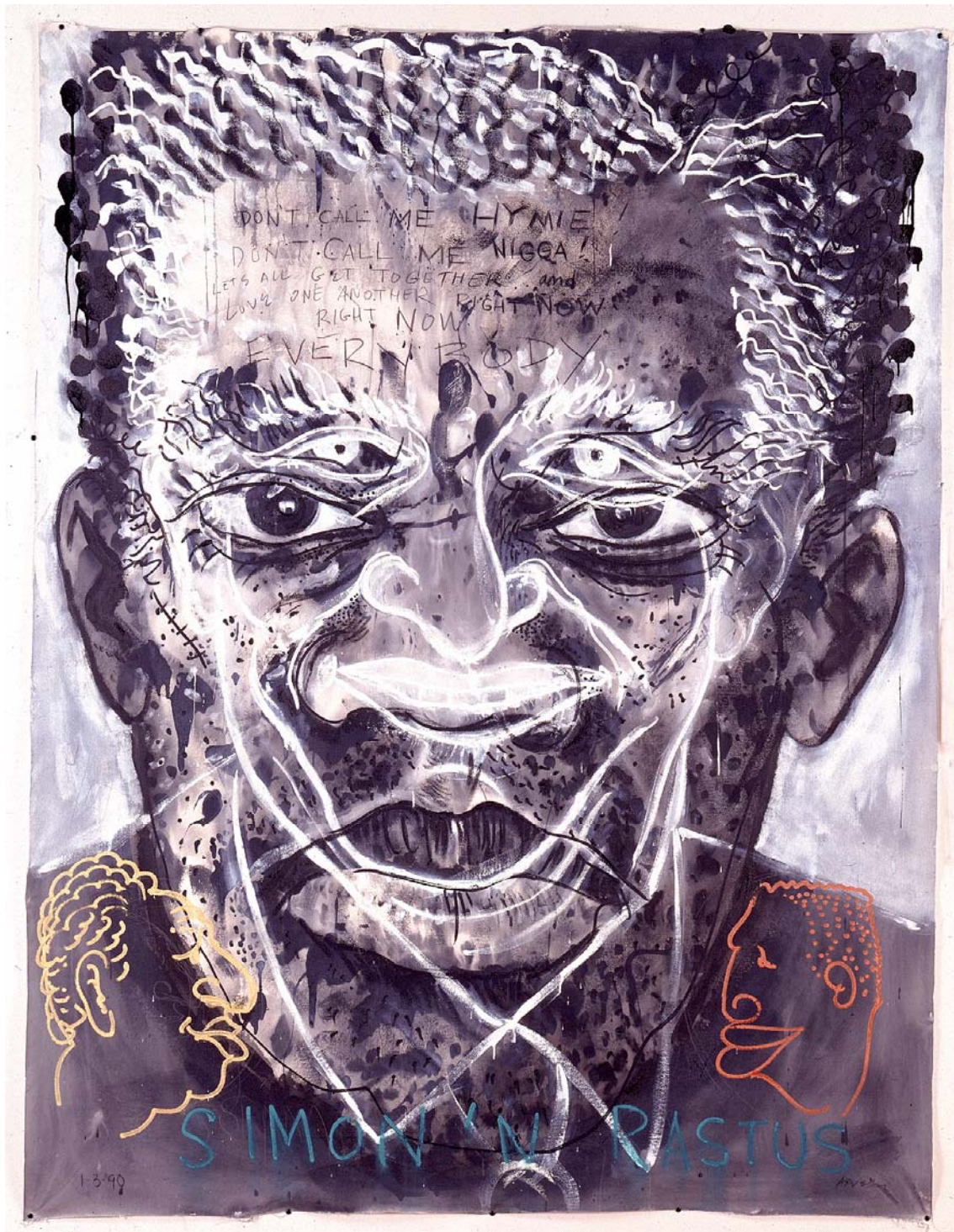
Includes lesson plans and ideas for teaching about the arts.

www.thejewishmuseum.org

The Jewish Museum Website

*Includes an online exhibition titled, **Making Connections in Art and Jewish Culture.***

The Jewish Museum is under the auspices of The Jewish Theological Seminary of America.



Simon n' Rastus

Robert Arneson (American, 1930–1992)

United States, 1990

Plastic, enamel, oil, and acrylic on canvas

94 x 72 in.

The Jewish Museum, New York

Purchased with funds given by the Kristie A. Jayne Fund, 1995-32