What was the goal of your lesson?
My students studied primary sources, including paintings from the 1930s, to prepare for reading John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*. They then created an e-book—a unique interpretation using words and images to describe how works of art informed their understanding of the novel and the era in which it was created.

Which grade level and subject do you teach?
Eighth-grade English.

What line of inquiry did you want to explore with your students?
How literature and art of the time reflected the various beliefs, ethics, and values of the Great Depression.

Which works of art did you use in this lesson?
All of the paintings in the 2016 Art Institute exhibition *America after the Fall: Painting in the 1930s*.


Did you use any historical sources?

Describe the project you implemented in your classroom:
In the fall of 2016, my students studied the novel *Of Mice and Men*. Prior to a close reading of the book, we visited the Art Institute of Chicago to explore Reginald Marsh’s *Tattoo and Haircut* and applied the technique of close observation and questioning to two paintings of the students’ choice in the special exhibition *America after the Fall: Painting in the 1930s*. Through examining these sources and documentary photographs of the era, students were immersed in the themes, symbols, and sentiments of the Great Depression. They also took notes on the text that accompanied the exhibition and on the labels specific to each work. Throughout the reading of *Of Mice and Men*, I asked the students to annotate specifically for thematic connections to the works of art they had explored. Upon completion of the novel, each student selected a single work of art that resonated with the text.
I then assigned the students to create a two-page spread that included an image of the painting, a paired quotation from the novel, research on the artist, and a unique interpretation of the ways the painting helped to enhance understanding of the underlying themes of the book. These two-page spreads were compiled as an e-book. I plan to use this final project to introduce next year's class of students to the historical context of Of Mice and Men.

Did you incorporate any other instructional resources?

I introduced the Analyzing a Work of Art* form to my classroom and then used this form throughout the museum as students engaged in close readings of works of art. Back in the classroom, as they engaged in research, students used a modified version of the Building Context around a Work of Art* form and were directed toward quality sources in their research.

Please reflect on the use and effectiveness of the Art + History approach.

I felt this project was successful, primarily because the works of art provided entry points for students of all levels and interests and really helped them to engage more fully with the content and concepts of the lesson. They made more profound connections between visual representations and text than between texts alone and later I was able to refer back to these experiences with works of art in order to help them connect them to the processes of close reading and text-to-text analysis. The project was also successful in giving students the much-needed experience of lingering—of sitting with an image or an idea for an extended period of time, and of really digging in. After I run an Art + History session with students, I feel their sense of excitement and pride in their discoveries and newfound ability to “get” art. However, the beauty of these moments also presents the challenge of time. Allowing students to visit an artwork, to revisit, to excavate, to discuss, to find primary source material, to write, and to visit again is time-consuming, but this lengthy, thoughtful process is essential for students who are accustomed to sound bytes and tweets.

After learning the Art + History approach, I now incorporate works of art into almost every unit. Even kids who aren’t the strongest readers are engaged. We often refer back to the image throughout the reading of the text. I ask, “Let’s look again. What do you see now?”

Bibliography

DC Moore Gallery, “Reginald Marsh - Artists.”

*These forms can be downloaded at artic.edu/artplushistory.
What was the goal of your lesson?
My students were assigned to build bridges of their own design as part of the “chemistry and forces” curriculum. I introduced the lesson by having them do a close read of multiple historic sources that addressed the aesthetic and technical aspects of bridges.

Which grade level and subject do you teach?
Eighth-grade science.

What line of inquiry did you want to explore with your students?
How we can use the painting Brooklyn Bridge by Henry Ward Ranger to inform building a bridge of our own.

Which works of art did you use in this lesson?


Did you incorporate any other instructional resources?
Students used the Analyzing a Work of Art* form during the close read of Ward’s work and other sources.

Please reflect on the use and effectiveness of the Art + History approach.
Since adopting the Art + History approach and pursuing this project, I notice that my everyday questioning skills have improved—I’m better at helping students engage and consider multiple perspectives. In science we often talk about “right” or “wrong” answers. I’m now better at helping to steer students and help them develop and consider a diverse range of responses.

*This form can be downloaded at artic.edu/artplushistory.