

## ART + HISTORY: IN PRACTICE

This snapshot of how an educator has implemented the Art + History approach illustrates the many ways works of art can be integrated into the curriculum and may inspire you with ideas for your own classroom. To learn more about Art + History approach, visit [artic.edu/artplushistory](http://artic.edu/artplushistory).

EDUCATOR: Jennifer Bertacchi | Carleton Washburne Middle School, Winnetka, IL

### What was the goal of your lesson?

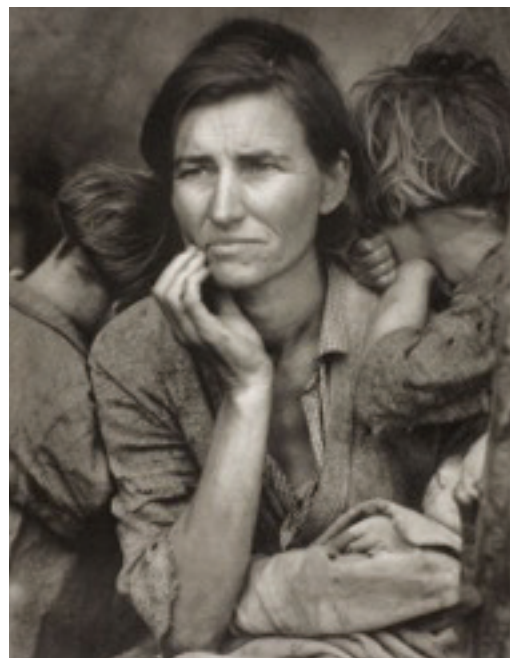
My students studied primary sources, including paintings from the 1930s, to prepare for reading John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. They then created an e-book—a unique interpretation using words and images to describe how works of art informed their understanding of the novel and the era in which it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



Dorothea Lange. *Migrant Mother, Nipoma, California, 1936*.

### 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](#)

Reginald Marsh (American 1898–1954). *Tattoo and Haircut*, 1932. Egg tempera on Masonite. The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Earle Ludgin, 1947.39. © 2018 Estate of Reginald Marsh / Art Students League, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Walker Evans, (American 1903–1975). *Coal Miner's House, Scotts Run, West Virginia*, 1935. Gelatin silver print. The Art Institute of Chicago, photography Purchase Fund, 1973.430.

Dorothea Lange, (American 1895–1965). *Migrant Mother, Nipoma, California*, 1936. Photogravure, edition 79/300. The Art Institute of Chicago, bequest of Michael Cohen, 2008.421.

### Did you use any historical sources?

Boot, William. "These Iconic New York City Photos Are Now All Yours." *Daily Beast*.  
<https://www.thedailybeast.com/these-iconic-new-york-city-photos-are-now-all-yours> (accessed January 9, 2016).



Reginald Marsh. *Tattoo and Haircut*, 1932.

### 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.”  
[www.dcmooregallery.com/artists/reginald-marsh](http://www.dcmooregallery.com/artists/reginald-marsh).

### Do you have any examples of student work?

## Tree Trunks

Arthur Dove-1934



“O.K. Someday—we're gonna get the jack together and we're gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an' a cow and some pigs and—'An' live off the fatta the lan', Lennie shouted. 'An' have rabbits. Go on George! Tell about what we're gonna have in the garden and about the rabbits in the cage and about the rain in the winter and the stove, how thick the cream is on the milk like you can hardly cut it. Tell about that, George’” (14).

Arthur Dove was born on August 2, 1880 in Canandalgua, New York. He attended Cornell, for college, as a prelaw student. While majoring in prelaw, Dove was given the job to illustrate the school yearbook. This sparked his art career. After college, Dove went to France and met famous artists such as, Alfred Maurer and Max Weber. After being inspired by Maurer and Weber, Dove started painting impressionistic paintings. Dove soon was intrigued by the idea of abstract paintings. He would emphasize an object within the artwork, then create an abstract depiction of it. *Tree Trunks*, an oil-on-canvas painting painted in 1934, is an abstract image of tree trunks. Dove as inspired to paint *Tree Trunks* while he and his wife were living on a houseboat, surrounded by nature. *Tree Trunks* indirectly reflects the amount of “abstractness” within the time era of the Great Depression; the abstract ideas of family, jobs, and money.

*Tree Trunks*, by Arthur Dove, is a very abstract work of art. It illustrates wavy images of warm colors, such as chestnut brown and navy. Within the painting, there are areas of white and gray that could perhaps symbolize light. This symbolization of light further reflects the small areas of light some people saw during the Great Depression. As the main characters, George and Lennie, in the novel, *Of Mice and Men*, are sitting by a river, they discuss their hopes and dreams of owning their own piece of land to live, tend rabbits, and grow crops on. This future they hope for symbolizes the small light that is reflected in this piece of artwork. The tree trunks, in *Tree Trunks*, represent a small ordinary thing such as life that can be so abstract and difficult. The light and the tree trunks formed together in this painting reflect the theme “the American Dream.” Although, George and Lennie’s lives are abstract and difficult, the idea of owning their own land creates a light within them.



OF MICE AND MEN  
 A NOVEL BY JOHN STEINBECK  
 AUTHOR OF 'TORTILLA FLAT'



AMERICA AFTER THE FALL  
 BY JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER

EIGHTH GRADERS EXPLORE ART & LITERATURE DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION

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EDUCATOR: Rebecca Prince | Rhodes Elementary, River Grove, IL

### 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?

Henry Ward Ranger, (American 1858–1916). *Brooklyn Bridge*, 1899. Oil on canvas. The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of Charles L. Hutchinson, 1925.720.

Artist unknown, (American). *Brooklyn Bridge*, about 1896. Albumen. Geo. P. Hall & Son; August 18, 1896, PAN US GEOG - New York no. 184 (E size) [P&P]. Library of Congress.



Artist unknown. *Brooklyn Bridge*, about 1896.

### Did you use any other historical sources?

Montgomery Schuyler. “The Bridge as a Monument,” *Harper’s Weekly*, May 26. (1883): 326.

### Describe the project you implemented in your classroom

To initiate a unit on the study of chemistry and forces, my students engaged in a close read of Henry Ward Ranger’s painting *Brooklyn Bridge*. They then read and compared a critical review of the bridge from *Harper’s Weekly* to a technical description of the bridge, both created

within a few years of Ward’s painting. These sources provided historical context, scientific perspective, and artistic/architectural perspective. They also compared a documentary photograph of the bridge, of the same era, to Ward’s painting and noted differences between the two creators’ viewpoints—one idealized and romantic, the other cool and descriptive. Students were asked to share their perspectives on each source and also on the bridge. Most took issue with the *Harper’s* writer’s opinion that the aesthetics of the bridge wouldn’t stand the test of time and argued in support of the timeless beauty of the structure. After studying and considering each source, students were asked



Henry Ward Ranger. *Brooklyn Bridge*, 1899.

to design and construct their own bridges using popsicle sticks and wood scraps. Their goal was to design a model bridge that could hold a prescribed amount of weight. Though it wasn’t part of the assignment, many students clearly took an interest in the aesthetic design of their bridges, adding decorative elements including color.

### 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