

## Name That Tune: Exploring Themes in Art through Songs and Mystery Novels

Building confidence in the appreciation and analysis of works of art sometimes involves viewing those works with new or novel approaches. This lesson begins with the assumption that students have some experience observing and interpreting works of art in areas of composition and theme. The teacher in this lesson should allow students to independently engage with the selections as much as possible, and guide class discussion to those questions that naturally arise in a close observation of works of art. The goal here is not the critical analysis of art, but rather the product which emerges from that analysis. Students will use their understanding of these works to create character sketches, plot summaries, and music play lists.

### Curricular Areas

Language Arts, Visual Arts – Critical Response

### Grade Level

Designed for grades 9–12

### Common Core Academic State Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1](#)

### National Visual Arts Standards

- Responding: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work

### Art Images Required

Click on the titles below to view high-resolution photographs on the Philadelphia Museum of Art website. Images that are also available in the Artstor Digital Library are indicated by an ID number or search phrase.

- [Unicorns Came Down to the Sea](#), 1948, by Kay Sage Tanguy  
Artstor search: 1964-151-1
- [A Woman and a Girl Driving](#), 1881, by Mary Cassatt  
Artstor search: W1921-1-1
- [The Storm \(Black Landscape\)](#), 1926, by Yves Tanguy  
Artstor search: "storm tanguy philadelphia"
- [Portrait of Dr. Samuel D. Gross \(The Gross Clinic\)](#), 1875, by Thomas Eakins  
Not available on Artstor; Museum image can be downloaded



## Lesson Process

### PART 1

1. Display both *Unicorns Came Down to the Sea* and *A Woman and a Girl Driving* to the class. Discuss the paintings only briefly, and ask the class if they have any specific questions about either of them. Don't spend too much time in critical analysis, as this may bias or limit their thinking for the assignment.
2. Their assignment is to select one of these images and consider it as the cover of a music CD. Have students ask a few preliminary questions: What might be the theme of the CD? What sort of music or artists might be included?
3. Have students do this step at home: Create the track listing for the CD. If possible, gather a few samples (from online sites or personal music playlists) of the songs you have selected. Be ready to play a sample or two for the class on the next day as you present your CD.
4. In class (formative assessment): Write a brief synopsis of your thinking as you chose your CD song list, showing how you decided upon a theme and how your selections suit that theme.

### PART 2

5. Display both *The Storm* and *Portrait of Dr. Samuel D. Gross* to the class. Discuss briefly, similar to step 1 above.
6. Each student should take the role of a mystery writer. Select one of the two paintings and consider it as the cover of his/her newest mystery. (The mystery can be a whodunit, a police drama, an espionage novel, or any other sort of mystery novel.) Students should take a few preliminary notes, outlining the general plot of the mystery, describing the main character, etc.
7. Assignment (formative assessment): Write the opening scene of the mystery or a "key" scene if that is what comes to mind. Also, write a book flap that can be used to help sell the novel to someone browsing in a book store. Include a section describing how your interpretation of the painting led to your ideas about plot and character.

## Assessment

Have each student select a partner. The summative assessment is to write a review of the partner's CD or novel. The reviews should be positive, as the purpose of the review will be to increase CD or book sales.

## Enrichment

Try the process in reverse: find the synopsis of a novel from the web, or a song list from a CD, and find an appropriate artwork for the cover.