

IS THERE ART IN NATURE? WHAT IS THE NATURE OF ART?

The connection between art and nature is central to the understanding of each. Before the widespread use of photography, much of what we refer to as the visual arts involved an attempt to re-create the natural world. This lesson uses comparison and contrast to examine more closely this relationship, and to see if we can better understand the nature of art.



Right Shoulder, Arm, and Hand, 1880
(cast 1930)

Thomas Eakins, American
Bronze
Length: 27 1/2 inches (69.9 cm)
Gift of R. Sturgis and Marion B. F.
Ingersoll, 1944
1944-35-3

Curricular Areas

Science, English Language Arts

Grade Level

For grades 7–9, with modifications for elementary and high school

Common Core Academic Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RST.9-10.9](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.7](#)

Art Images Required

Click on the titles below to view high-resolution photographs on the Philadelphia Museum of Art website. Images that are available in the ARTstor Digital Library are indicated by an ID number or search phrase. Entering that number or phrase into the ARTstor search bar will direct you to the corresponding image in that database.

- [Right Shoulder, Arm, and Hand](#), 1880 (cast 1930), by Thomas Eakins
ARTstor search: 1944-35-3
- [Dunes](#), early 1650s, by Jacob Isaacksz van Ruisdael
ARTstor search: : PMA cat 563
- [Night Sea](#), 1977, by Edna Andrade
ARTstor search: Not available

Lesson Process

1. Draw a large Venn diagram on the chalkboard (be sure to leave significant room in the common center of the diagram). Review the purpose of the Venn diagram as an organizational tool. This will be the key to the lesson.

For more information, please contact Division of Education and Public Programs: School and Teacher Programs by phone at 215-684-7580, by fax at 215-236-4063, or by e-mail at educate@philamuseum.org.

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2. Opening question: How would you define "art?" Focus the question on that art which refers to painting and sculpture. What specific characteristics make something "art?" List these characteristics separately from the Venn diagram. After the open-ended discussion, refer to the list. Which characteristics of art are also generally found to be characteristics of the natural world? Indicate these in the common area of the Venn diagram. Complete the contrasting areas of the diagram through further discussion as the lesson progresses.
3. Introduce the concept of a scanning electron micrograph (formed by a scanning beam of electrons through a scanning electron microscope). Show an example of a scanning electron micrograph from a textbook or from the web.
4. Ask: What characteristics of art do you see from the Venn diagram that can also apply to this image? Could this image, then, be considered "art?"
5. Return to the Venn diagram and revise your information as needed from the ongoing discussion.
6. Display the image of the sculpture *Right Shoulder, Arm, and Hand* by Thomas Eakins.
7. Ask: Should this sculpture by a famous painter be considered "art" or "science?" What qualities does it share of each? If Eakins made this piece as a model to help him create more anatomically correct paintings, would that insight change your response in any way? Revise the Venn diagram as needed.
8. Display the image *Dunes* by Jacob Isaacksz van Ruisdael.
9. In what ways does van Ruisdael's landscape seem "scientific" and in what ways does it seem to be fantasy? What does he accomplish by following the "rules" of nature, and what does he accomplish when he violates them?
10. Display the image *Night Sea* by Edna Andrade.
11. How does this fit your growing concept of art and of science? Can it be related to the natural in any way? Revise the Venn diagram as needed.

Assessment

1. Formative assessment through ongoing discussion.
2. Summative assessments:
 - o What connections seem to exist between art and nature? (Discuss)
 - o What about science appeals to people that also can be found in art? (Discuss or writing prompt)
 - o ESSAY PROMPT: Albert Einstein is one of the most famous scientists in history, and yet he once said, "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious." How does Einstein make the connection between art and science in this famous quote? What do you see as the connection between art and science?

Enrichment

1. Pull up an image of a rainbow, and discuss it as a work of art.
2. How can images of the nighttime sky be viewed as art?
3. Read Walt Whitman's poem "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" and discuss the theme of the poem.