

Stories in Art

Sometimes when art speaks, you want to talk back. Students join the conversation and discover a wealth of stories art can tell as they explore paintings, decorative arts, and sculptures through a variety of structured looking, writing, and role-playing activities.

Grade Level

Grades 1–3

Common Core Academic State Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4](#)

National Visual Arts Standards

- Responding: understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning

Suggested Learning Goals

Students will be better able to:

- Find and interpret story elements, such as plot, character, setting, and theme, in works of art
- Describe visual elements that convey meaning and emotion
- Analyze artwork for multiple points of view
- Express ideas and opinions about artwork in discussion with others

Essential Questions

- What kinds of stories can we discover by looking at works of art?
- How can we learn to “read” a work of art like we read literature?
- How can we respond to art?

Suggested Vocabulary

Author	Illustration
Character	Plot (beginning, middle, end)
Dialogue	Setting
Illustrator	



Bicycle Race, 1938

Antonio Ruiz (Mexican)

Oil on canvas

13 1/8 x 17 inches (33.3 x 43.2 cm) Framed: 21 1/4 x 25 1/8 x 4 1/8 inches (54 x 63.8 x 10.5 cm)

Purchased with the Nebinger Fund, 1949
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Lesson-Specific Activity

This activity is designed to prepare students for thinking and talking about artworks they may see during a “Stories in Art” lesson.

- Introduce students to visual storytelling through a read-aloud. Any picture book, or even a comic strip, will do; however, it is helpful to use a book in which the illustrations closely reflect a character’s actions or emotions. *When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really, Angry...* by Molly Bang is a good example.
- As you read aloud, review story elements like plot, character, and setting. Model making connections between the text and the illustrations. Ask students how they think an illustration shows a character’s thoughts and feelings or makes the reader feel a certain way.
- After reading the story through at least once, use sticky notes to hide the text. Ask students to help you retell the story just by making meaning from the illustrations. Encourage them to point out details in the pictures that help them to remember the plot, describe the setting, or understand what a character thinks or feels.
- Next, have students work in pairs to invent their own narrative for panels of a comic strip or graphic novel without text. Instruct students to collaborate on an invented narrative or dialogue to tell the story of the images. You might even provide some blank panels and ask them to imagine or predict what happened before and what will happen next. Invite the pairs to share their invented story with the class. This activity can be adapted for writing, drawing, or speaking, depending on the abilities and needs of your students.
- As an extension, select one of the wordless picture books suggested below to share with the class. Each of these selections tells a complex story entirely through images. Guide students through a shared writing activity, developing a narrative for the story based on the illustrations. Encourage students to use the images to describe a setting and to develop a strong sequence of events.

Supplementary Materials

- *When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really, Angry...*, by Molly Bang

Wordless picture books:

- *Chalk*, by Bill Thomson
- *Draw!*, by Raúl Colón
- *Unspoken: A Story from the Underground Railroad*, by Henry Cole