**THE BRINTON MUSEUM**

**Art Lesson – Grades 9 thru 12**

**Curriculum Area**

**Visual Arts**

**Learning Objectives:**

* Students will examine four paintings in The Brinton Museum’s permanent collection of Western art to better understand art and design.
* Students will learn about line, shape and color; composition and the placement of visual elements; and the use of color to create a feeling or mood.
* Students will interpret these elements and conclude how design, composition and color function as fundamental components in art.
* Students will show basic shapes using circles, lines, repetition, patterns or color in a finished sketch or drawing.
* Students will compose a graphic design sketch or drawing that employs at least three artistic elements found in the American Indian portraits by Winold Reiss.
* Each student will explain how his or her sketch or drawing was inspired by the art of Winold Reiss and how their choices of colors and shapes are successful as design elements.

WSDE Art Standards applied to this lesson:

FPA 11.1.A.1, FPA 11.1.A. 2, FPA 11.1.A.3, FPA 11.1.A.4, FPA 11.1.A.5, FPA 11.1.A.6

FPA 11.2.A.1, FPA 11.2.A.2, FPA 11.2.A.3, FPA 11.2.A.4

FPA 11.3.A.1, FPA 11.3.A.2, FPA 11.3.A.3

**Pre-museum Visit**

To prepare the students for a visit to The Brinton Museum, it is helpful for the art teacher to present the following art and design concepts and art history background:

All art encompasses universal or fundamental elements to creatively and artistically express a portrait or a feeling, time and place. There are numerous and various art genres, some of these are defined as: realism, impressionism, abstraction and conceptual art. Realism was the prevailing art form in the European Renaissance which is often referred to as the age of enlightenment. This time period began at the end of the Middle Ages and continued through the mid-17th century. It was during the early Renaissance that the Italian painter Giotto di Bondone (b. 1266, d. 1337) painted with a strong sense of human emotion and empathy that resulted in superbly accurate renditions of his subjects. It was his compassionate concern for humanity that was the primary strength in his work. Giotto greatly influenced other artistic masters such as Masaccio, Raphael and Michelangelo, for examples.

A group of 19th century French artists that included Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley and Frederic Bazille are credited for the founding of the first modern art movement known as Impressionism. Impressionism is defined as the use of color and light, sometimes in broken patterns, to capture a visual impression of a time and place. Breaking from the accepted style of realistic painting, impressionism was considered unconventional by the status quo. Other important artists known as Impressionist painters are Camille Pissarro and Edgar Degas. Abstraction explores forms and spatial relationships. Conceptual art is contemporary and is concerned with an idea or concept as opposed to traditional or classic forms of painting or drawing.

It is helpful for the art teacher to present the following basic concepts of art and design:

* **Design** uses line, shape and color to create form, weight and balance.
* **Composition** can be defined as the placement of visual elements that create a sense of order which is pleasing to the eye.
* **Color** creates an emotion, feeling or a mood.

The students will visit The Brinton Museum’s Ted and Katie Meredith Gallery of Western Art where they will see a display of American Indian portraits of Blackfeet Indians painted by Winold Reiss. The portraits of Little Singing Woman and Yellow Woman will be the focus of discussion illustrating the basic elements of art and design, composition, line and color. Brief information about the life and culture of the Blackfeet Indians and minimal background information on writers James Fenimore Cooper and Karl May are included in this lesson.

Students will be asked to study the painting “*Crossing The Great Divide*” by the American artist Frank Tenney Johnson to learn how color is used to create a feeling or mood. In addition, students will study the painting entitled “*Trappers Going to the Pierre’s Hole Fight*” by the American artist Frederic Remington to learn about basic elements of composition.

Winold Reiss was an artist with a remarkable career. Born in Karlsruhe, Germany in 1886, he is considered a bold pioneer of American art and design of the twentieth century who used strong bold lines, simple shapes and vibrant color to create dynamic, complex works of art.

As a boy in Germany Reiss read books written by the American 19th century novelist James Fenimore Cooper (b. 1789 – d. 1851) who was a popular writer of historical fiction and the author of the classic novel “*The Last of The Mohicans*”, published in 1828, about the French and Indian War. Many of his epic books were translated into other languages – including German – and sold in Europe. In addition, Reiss read classic adventure novels of the Old American West written by the well-known German author Karl May (b. 1842 – d.1912). It was Reiss’s dream to paint the romanticized American Indian of the western United States.¹

When Reiss came to America to New York City, he was disheartened to find that Indian peoples did not live in the countryside as had the peasants that his father drew in Germany. However, it was while in New York that he became a successful graphic designer known for his brightly colored illustrations some of which appeared on the covers of notable magazines. He made his first trip to Montana in January 1920 with his student Langdon Kihn and returned again in 1927 at the commission of the Great Northern Railway to create an extensive series of American Indian portraits. It was at the railroad station that the Blackfoot Indian Turtle recognized Winold Reiss, effusive greetings were made through Eagle Calf, an Indian interpreter.² For several summer seasons Reiss painted beautiful, vibrant portraits of the Blackfeet Indians who readily visited the artist in his studio in a Glacier National Park hotel. Hundreds of these superb American Indian portraits were reproduced in calendars published by the railroad. A series of 34 Indian portraits as well as a self-portrait in watercolor, dated 1920, are owned by The Brinton Museum. Reiss was also devoted to painting portraits of African Americans, Asian Americans and Mexicans and continually endeavored to represent the dignity found in human beings.

Who were the Blackfeet Indians? The nation of Blackfoot or Blackfoot Indians – often referred to as the Blackfeet – consists of four different tribes: Blackfoot Siksika, Blood/Kainai, Pikuni/Peigan, and North Peigan Pikuni who live primarily in the northwest United States in Montana and Idaho and also in Alberta, Canada. The name Blackfoot is an English translation of the Indian word siksika which means black foot, referring to the dark color moccasins the Blackfeet Indians wore.³ Some of the honored traditions and beliefs of the Blackfoot Indians include the belief that nobody is born evil, that truth and honesty are the basis of leading an honorable life, that all people deserve respect whatever their age or rank, and that a good sense of humor is essential if one wants to live life to the fullest.⁴

Reference sources:

¹“*Winold Reiss Native American Portraits*” with an essay by Scott J. Tanner and introduction by Richard V. West, published by the Frye Art Museum, Seattle, WA

²”Winold Reiss” Bradford Brinton Memorial, Big Horn, WY and Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, MO exhibition catalog 2000/2001 with an essay by W. Tjark Riess

³”Blackfoot Indian Fact Sheet” www.bigorrin.org/blackfoot

⁴*The way of life for Blackfoot Indians*, indians.org/articles/blackfoot-indians.html

 “*To Color America / Portraits by Winold Reiss*” by Jeffrey C. Stewart with an essay by John C. Ewers, published by the Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Portrait Gallery, 1989

**Museum Visit**

40 minutes

  “*Little Singing Woman”* by Winold Reiss

* What basic design elements does your eye notice first in the portrait of Little Singing Woman and explain way? (Discussion should be guided to elaborate on line, shape, simplicity, balance and color.) (Example: How does line in this painting define form and shape?)
* How many colors did the artist use in this painting and explain how these colors (or lack of color) enhance the design?
* Students will identify the ‘triangle’ in this portrait painting.
* Examples should be sited of how the artist Winold Reiss uses repetition in his design. (Example: The earrings have matching circles)
* If you imagine a vertical line drawn down the center of this image, describe how symmetry is critical to placement and balance in this portrait? Explain what this tell us about composition and design?
* If you can imagine a horizontal line drawn across the center of this image, describe how the use of color and the lack of line and color (the background) are balanced?

  “*Yellow Woman”* by Winold Reiss

* Compare this portrait to Little Singing Woman and explain how color is used differently in this painting?
* Students will identify the ‘triangle’ in this portrait painting.
* Is there a rhythm or pattern to the use of color?
* How does the use of color and line create balance?
* How is the viewer’s eye directed by the composition?

Students will explain why it appealed to Winold Reiss to paint portraits of the Blackfeet Indians and what influences (appreciation, empathy and fascination, for examples) the writings of James Fenimore Cooper and Karl May might have had on his work. Discussion should include how an artist’s knowledge about his subject translates onto canvas or paper as art. A parallel can be made between the early Renaissance artist Giotto (di Bondone) and the artist Winold Reiss, as both artists incorporated a strong sense of the human condition in their art that translated to a vivid and accurate portrayal of their subjects. Students will be asked to theorize on why empathy for the human condition is an artistic strength.

  “*Crossing The Great Divide*” by Frank Tenney Johnson

“*Crossing The Great Divide*” was painted by the Western artist Frank Tenney Johnson who was known for using blue

tones to depict nocturne and moonlit scenes. In this instance, color is used to create an emotion, feeling and mood.

* Students will explain the mood or feeling of a night scene created by blue tones.
* Students will elaborate on what colors might be used to create a sunrise or day scene and why these colors create a specific mood.
* Students will analyze the use of composition and balance in this work of art and how composition and balance work together to create a finished design.

  “*Trappers Going to the Pierre’s Hole Fight*” by Frederic Remington

“*Trappers Going to the Pierre’s Hole Fight*” painted by the 19th century artist Frederic Remington is a superb example

of ‘textbook’ composition. Background: Pierre’s Hole was the site of the historic 1832 rendezvous attended by

mountain men, fur traders, trappers and Indians. During the 1832 rendezvous, a battle took place between a group of

Gros Ventre Indians and American trappers who were assisted by Nez Perce and Flathead Indians. The Pierre’s Hole

rendezvous was one of the largest held in the Rocky Mountains.

* Students will be asked to perceive two diagonal lines created by the placement of two fallen tree trunks or branches shown in the forefront of the painting.
* Students will elaborate on how the progression of riders in the background leads the viewer’s eye to the main subject of the painting which is the trapper and horse depicted in the center of the canvas.
* Students will explain how the trees and the use of shadow in the upper left of the painting also directs the viewer’s eye to the main subject of the painting.
* Students will interpret why this painting might be considered a narrative and not a portrait painting and should explain the difference between a narrative and a portrait. What might the similarities be?
* Discussion will explain the use of black, white and gray as ‘colors’ in this work of art.
* Discussion by the art teacher or museum education docent will introduce the term ‘en grisaille’ (pronounced: gri zai) which refers to using only shades of gray to create a monochromatic painting. The French word ‘gris’ means gray.

Students may have ten minutes for a guided tour of the “*To Honor the Plains Nations*” exhibit of American Indian art and

artifacts to explore how the tribes of the Great Plains and Plateau regions used color and design as both decorative and

sacred elements.

**Post Museum Visit**

Each student will create a graphic design sketch or drawing in a format of 16” x 20” that incorporates the use of line, shape, composition and color. The finished piece does not have to be a portrait but is required to include circles, lines, repetition, patterns and color.

Students will explain the artistic elements in their finished piece and how line, shape, composition and color create balance in a work of art. In addition, students will explain how their artworks were influenced or inspired by the art of Winold Reiss.

Materials needed:

* Drawing paper, preferably Strathmore or a heavier-weight plain paper designed for studio art drawing
* Graphite pencil(s)
* Color pencils and/or color markers
* Art erasers
* 12” ruler (optional)
* Collage and mixed-media materials are optional

**Rubric for Drawings**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  **4 (advanced** | **3 (proficient)** | **2 (basic)** | **1 (below basic)** |
| Includes all the design elements: circle, line, repetition, pattern and color in a complex composition | Includes all the design elements:circle, line, repetition, pattern and color | Includes four of the design elements: circle, line, repetition, pattern or color | Includes two or more of the design elements: circle, line, repetition, pattern and color |
| Circle, line and color are used in a complex design with repetition and pattern evident | Circle, line and color are used with more than one repetition and pattern evident | Circle, line and/or color are used with minimal repetition and minimal pattern evident | Circle, line and/or color are used; no repetition or pattern is evident |
| Circle and line are evident and work together to create a harmonious and balanced pattern  | Circle and line are evident that show a strong sense of composition  | Circle and line are evident and help support a finished composition  | Circle and line are evident but do not support a finished composition  |
| 4 or more colors are used in a balanced way that enhances the composition | 3 colors are used | 2 colors are used | 1 or no colors are used |

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