

Beginning-Level Activity

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to

- analyze a story about a family depicted in a drawing and **symbols** depicted in a **relief** sculpture;
- write sentences using nouns and adjectives about items found in works of art;
- form **tableaux** based on close observations of an eighteenth-century drawing;
- make a sculpture for a brave person that demonstrates an understanding of line and shape.

Materials

- Reproduction of *The Father's Curse: The Ungrateful Son* by Jean-Baptiste Greuze
- Reproduction of *Sketch for a Fireplace Overmantel* by Francesco Antonio Franzoni
- Background Information and Questions for Teaching about the drawing and relief
- Paper
- Pencils
- Self-hardening **clay** (one four-ounce pack per two students; Crayola® Model Magic® in **terracotta** would work well) (optional)
- Sculpting tools (i.e., plastic silverware, toothpicks, straws) (optional)

Lesson Steps

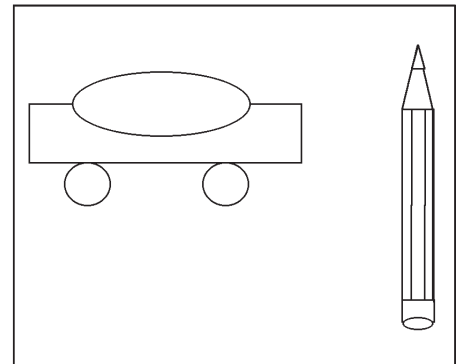
1. Display a reproduction of *The Father's Curse*. Allow students to look at the drawing for one minute, and instruct them to list everything they see. Write students' responses on the board. Ask students to help you sort the words into two charts, one that includes people, places, and things; the other that includes descriptive words. Point out that you are separating the words into two different charts so that the class can review the difference between nouns and adjectives. Remind students that nouns are people, places, and things, and adjectives are descriptive words. Have students think of words that could describe the nouns, and add students' responses to the list of adjectives. Pass out paper and pencils. Allow students to refer to the charts on the board, and instruct them to write one sentence that describes the drawing using nouns and adjectives.
2. Prompt students to discuss the drawing with the following questions:
 - How many people are in the drawing?
 - What do you notice about them?
 - How are they dressed differently than people today?
 - What is each person doing? What do you see that makes you say that?
 - What emotions do you see in their gestures and facial expressions?
3. Have students point out all the different lines in the drawing. Help students to see the diagonal, parallel, and perpendicular lines created by the bodies and clothing of the people in the drawing.

4. Tell students that they will re-create the drawing as a live tableau. Choose eight volunteers to pose with the same gestures and facial expressions as the people in the drawing. On the count of three, have all the students in the tableau freeze. Ask students who are not in the tableau if they noticed anything else about the drawing after looking at the tableau. Do they notice anything different between the people in the drawing and the students posed as them? Invite the observing students to make recommendations for refining the tableau to make their peers' gestures and facial expressions better match the drawing. Point out how the parallel lines created by the limbs and clothing of the figures on the left point toward the tallest figure reaching out with his right arm.
5. Now that students have looked more closely at the drawing, ask them who they think the main characters are. Instruct students to tell a story about what is happening in the drawing. Have students share their stories with a partner.
6. Explain that the drawing depicts a person leaving even though his family does not want him to. Have students point out which of the figures this is. Explain that the artist is depicting a son who is leaving his family, including his elderly father, for the army. Ask for eight new volunteers to re-create the tableau. Once again, invite students viewing the tableau to make recommendations for refining it. This time, ask each student in the tableau to state what he or she believes his or her character is thinking.
7. When finished with the tableaux, ask students the following questions:
 - How does the family feel about the son leaving?
 - Why do you think an artist would create a drawing like this?
 - How do you think the artist feels about war?
 - What do you think will happen next? What do you think happened before?
8. Display a reproduction of *Sketch for a Fireplace Overmantel*. Repeat step 1 in this activity using this relief.
9. Ask students to look at the relief and describe what they notice first. Where do their eyes move next? What shapes do they see? What lines do they see? Have students point out all the different lines of the sculpture, including parallel and diagonal ones. Point out how the edges of various shapes are made up of lines. These **leading lines** direct one's eye around the frame and point to different objects depicted in the relief. Explain to students that this work was made as a study (or sketch) for a large marble mirror frame. The finished frame (or **overmantel**) would have been placed above a mantelpiece (a shelf projecting from the wall above a fireplace) in a grand palace.
10. Instruct students to imagine that they are going to decorate a frame that many people who visit them would see, and discuss the following with a partner:
 - How would you decorate the frame?
 - What kinds of objects would you want visitors to see (i.e., objects you are proud of)?
 - What objects would you put on the frame?

HISTORICAL WITNESS

★ SOCIAL MESSAGING ★

- Return to the image of *Sketch for a Fireplace Overmantel* and the list of nouns that you wrote on the board. Ask students to add to the list any objects they may not have noticed the first time. Explain that the overmantel was made for the Braschi family in Italy. Ask students to look closely at the nouns they listed on the board. Do any of the nouns have something in common? (*They are all military and religious symbols.*) Judging by the kinds of objects that decorate the overmantel, ask students what they think the Braschi family was proud of.
- Explain to students that a pope (Pius VI) was a member of the Braschi family, which is why the overmantel includes objects like a cross, miter (a bishop's headdress), papal tiara (a three-tiered crown that is a symbol of the papacy), and chalice (a goblet used for wine in Christian mass). Ask students why they think there are a lot of military objects in the overmantel. If the Braschis wanted to include military objects in an overmantel that many people would see, how do the students think the family felt about war? Discuss how the Braschi family's message about war differs from Greuze's feelings. Explain that the Braschi family had many military and religious triumphs. Discuss the fact that many governments believe that war is the only way to resolve a conflict with another country or within a country. Unfortunately, military successes come with consequences, as depicted in the Greuze drawing. Not only must a soldier separate from his or her family, he or she must be very brave to risk his or her life to fight in a war.
- Ask students for examples of different ways people can show bravery. Inform students that they will be making a sketch for an overmantel for a person in their family or in a story who they think demonstrates bravery. Pass out self-hardening clay (i.e., Crayola® Model Magic® in terracotta) and various sculpting tools (i.e., plastic silverware, toothpicks, and straws). (If clay cannot be acquired, pass out paper and pencils and allow students to draw their overmantels.) Before students begin to make their overmantels, allow them to explore the materials. Allow students ten minutes to play with the various tools and create different kinds of shapes and lines. Have students create circles, squares, ovals, rectangles, and triangles, and show students that everyday objects can be created with clay by arranging different shapes together (see figure above).
- After they sufficiently explore the materials, tell students to choose the brave person for whom they want to make the overmantel. Ask them what objects come to mind when they think about this person (i.e., objects that signify an occupation or hobbies). Tell students to brainstorm, using the self-hardening clay to create different objects that could be included in their overmantels. Inform students that their overmantels must use at least three different shapes and three different lines. After they create all the objects they want to include in the overmantel, tell students to make a rectangle to represent the frame of the overmantel.



Assessment

Assess whether students' overmantels contain three different shapes and three different lines. Assess students' sentences using nouns and adjectives.

