

# FREEZE FRAME

## The Google Art Project as Springboard for Tableau Vivant

ART AND LANGUAGE ARTS

GRADES: 7 – 12

(can be adapted for any grade)

### BASED ON



Charles T. Webber (1825-1911), American  
*The Underground Railroad*, 1893  
Oil Painting  
Cincinnati Art Museum, 1927.26

### OBJECTIVES

- Students will access the Google Art Project to view paintings located at the Cincinnati Art Museum.
- Students will select a painting to use as the basis for the creation of a tableau vivant for a classroom living museum.
- Students will create a solo, pair or group tableau vivant using the painting selected from the Cincinnati Art Museum collection on the Google Art Project.
- Students will work alone or in a group to execute a solo, pair or group tableau vivant using the painting selected from the Cincinnati Art Museum collection on the Google Art Project.

### CONCEPT

If you could magically step into any work of art, which would you choose and why? If you could suddenly speak to a person in a work of art, what do you think s/he would say?

Looking at art is not a passive activity. It is active. It takes time and effort to interpret “life” into a work of art that appears very two-dimensional and “lifeless” to our students. The connection between fine art and literature is essential in the language arts classroom if students are to understand the cultural or historical context which produces the literary works studied in class. Just imagine a lit book without the accompanying artwork that enriches understanding of the text.

The strategy of “tableau vivant” comes from the French term for “living picture.” In this activity, students re-create a painting – a still picture – in order to capture and communicate the essence of the painting without talking. In order to complete the task, students must understand the idea behind the artwork and then be able to communicate it utilizing physical poses, gestures and facial expressions rather than words. Whether the project is completed solo or in pairs or groups, the collaborative strategy provides kinesthetic learners (and all students) a way to be actively creative while strengthening comprehension of a concept.

By looking carefully at works of art, students can discover many things. For example, students can learn about the people who created the art or the world in which the artist lived. This activity causes students to critically look at the work of art and think about what is going on in the scene before dramatizing it. Students become the characters in the painting, ultimately connecting to the work of art in more intimate ways than just viewing provides.

### MATERIALS

- Access to Google Art Project (my students accessed via SmartPhones, iPods and classroom computers)
- Clothing and accessories brought by student (or fabric, material, sheets, etc.)
- Other student props as indicated by the work of art

### VOCABULARY

**Tableau Vivant** – from the French, meaning living picture.

In theater, it is a device known as “freeze frame.” It describes a group of actors carefully posed in order to depict a narrative, dramatic moment or scene. Throughout the duration of the display, the people involved do not speak or move.

### PROCEDURE

#### Introductory Activity on Day One

- Introduce activity by showing students *The Underground Railroad* by Charles T. Webber. Explain to students the procedure for finding the painting via the Google Art Project and then the Cincinnati Art Museum. [Note: I have a projector in my room attached to my desktop. You could use a SmartBoard or computer lab to complete this step.]
- Tell students they will be selecting artworks to use for creating “frozen scenes” or tableau vivants, but we are using *The Underground Railroad* as an example of how to complete the assignment.
- Model the assignment for students -- take volunteers to re-create *The Underground Railroad* in class.
- Ask students to form a frozen scene based on the painting. Give 3-5 minutes for students to create the scene.
- When the group is ready to present, ask students to close eyes or put heads down.
- Presenting group should get into formation and freeze.
- Tell students to look at the scene from the painting.
- As a class, discuss what just happened using the possible student feedback questions under assessment:
  - ❖ Did the point of the work of art come across?
  - ❖ What techniques were effective in getting the point across?
  - ❖ How did the students’ expressions show emotion?
  - ❖ How did the body language demonstrate the emotion of the painting?

#### Next Steps on Day One

- Form groups or allow students to work alone or in pairs.
- Give students time to find a painting on Google Art Project from the Cincinnati Art Museum.
- Allow students time to meet in the groups (or work alone). Students should identify scene in the painting, significance, characters, props needed, etc. Students should discuss roles within the tableau

## CLASS EXPERIENCE

and how to form the tableau with the group members. Students should also decide what items they will need to perform this tableau vivant on the next day and make commitments as to who brings what. [Note: you can also merely provide items in the classroom and students have to use whatever is available. You can also limit props to no more than two or three.]

- Students then should receive time to practice.

### Day Two

- Allow groups to meet for five-seven minutes to work out last details of the tableau vivant.
- Present tableaus in class and allow time for audience reaction to the scene
- Once all groups/individuals/pairs have completed presentations, debrief as a class.

### Follow-Up

- Ask students to write a self-reflection of the activity. Consider: What did you like about participating in the activity? What went well? What didn't work? IN what ways did the activity help you to understand the painting?

## ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed based on:

- Observations of the figures and settings in the selected painting.
- Written reflection and verbal discussion of the characters in the painting.
- Participation in the tableau vivant inspired by the painting selected.
- Group Reflection
- Self-Reflection

Possible Feedback Questions for Students:

- Did the point of the work of art come across?
- What techniques were effective in getting the point across?
- How did the students' expressions show emotion?
- How did the body language demonstrate the emotion of the painting?

Possible Questions for Self-Reflection:

- Were you happy with the role you played in the tableau vivant?
- Why did you select the work of art? Would you change your selection? Why?
- Did you learn something new? What was something that surprised you?
- Did this remind you of anything you have read or watched before?
- What was confusing? Did you need more information?

## NATIONAL STANDARDS

### Arts Connections

Standard 1. Understands connections among the various art forms and other disciplines.

### Visual Arts

Standard 3. Knows a range of subject matter, symbols, and potential ideas in the visual arts.

Standard 5. Understands the characteristics and merits of one's own artwork and the artwork of others.

### Language Arts

Standard 9. Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

### Technology

Standard 6. Understands the nature and uses of different forms of technology.

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

**Language Arts Extension:** Assign a chapter from a novel or short story. Take a significant scene from the chapter or short story and create an original tableau vivant.

**Social Studies Extension:** Students could find paintings that reflect historical or cultural events and create a tableau vivant to create a living history museum in the social studies classroom. Students could be directed to locate a painting or other work of art that correlates with a specific lesson being taught in class.

## RESOURCES

Background/Context of Tableau Vivant

<http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/tableau-vivant/>

Classroom Activity for 5<sup>th</sup> Graders

<http://hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu/docs/0109teachclassacteuo.pdf>

Classroom Activity for High School

[http://www.flogris.org/learning/resources/pdf/lesson\\_plans/hs\\_vivant.pdf](http://www.flogris.org/learning/resources/pdf/lesson_plans/hs_vivant.pdf)

Classroom Activity Related to Shakespeare

<http://www.folger.edu/eduLesPlanDtl.cfm?lpid=850>  
<http://bmoreteach.blogspot.com/2008/10/tableau-vivants.html>

The Getty – Stories in Art

[http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom\\_resources/curricula/stories\\_in\\_art/sia\\_lesson\\_plan\\_index.html](http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom_resources/curricula/stories_in_art/sia_lesson_plan_index.html)

Frederick Douglass Project (Social Studies Tableau Vivant)

<https://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=2921>

Tableau Vivants in the Literature Classroom

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1598/RT.58.2.8/abstract>



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