

A Place-Based Approach to Art History

Author	Marisa Ptak
Duration of Unit	4 weeks
School	Rich East High School
City & State	Park Forest, Illinois
Number of Unit Lessons	5
Subject	Art History
Related Subjects	Literature, Drama, Philosophy, History
Grade Level	10
Date	July 25, 2013

Short Abstract of the Curriculum Unit: The Art History unit in my Honors Humanities Seminar is a looped unit that stretches throughout the school year, rather than a stand-alone unit of four weeks. Traditionally, Art History instruction tends toward rote memorization; my goal is to help students conduct visual analysis and also to connect visual art across different times, places, and cultures. Because the course is a survey of western civilization, beginning with Mesopotamia and the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and ending with the Fall of Berlin’s Wall in 1989 and Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, it is sometimes difficult to help students engage with distant times and places, archaic thought, and challenging texts; in the class’s Art History component, the challenge is primarily moving students from reacting to art—“that’s so pretty”—to actually analyzing form and function. In these unit plans, I hope students not only develop visual analysis skills, but also begin to view the “art scape” around them in a more mindful, critical way.

List of Reading Materials:

Hugo, Victor. *Les Miserables*.

Klein, Fred S. *Gardner’s Art Through the Ages*, 13th Edition. London: Wadsworth Cengage

Learning, 2011.

Sandars, N.K. Trans. *Epic of Gilgamesh*. *Classics in World Literature*. Glenview, Illinois: Scott,

Foresman, 1989.

List of Equipment: Class set of clipboards

Introduction:

This unit is designed for my school's Honors Humanities Seminar, ironically entitled History and Thought of Western Man (HTWM). HTWM at Rich East has long been the foundational course in our Pre-AP sequence, preparing students for AP Literature, European History, and World History. It is a survey course designed to give students the broad intellectual base and tools needed to be successful in rigorous humanities courses. The course is team taught by a History teacher and an English teacher and, as such, is interdisciplinary, exploring the history of western civilization, European literature, major philosophy movements, music history and art history. Ultimately, it is my hope that students leave HTWM with the ability to make connections across places, times, and cultures, thus answering essential questions such as: "What is art and why are humans endowed with a creative impulse?" "What essential human qualities endure over time?" etc.

While I have extensive training in English Education, my knowledge of Art History was largely extracurricular until my department chair approached me about teaching HTWM. Teaching this content, therefore, has been challenging and is constantly a work in progress. One of the challenges lies in bridging the gap between the historical context in which an artwork was created and the modern context in which we as viewers meet the artwork today. Fred S. Kleiner, editor of *Gardner's Art Through the Ages*, explains that, "Most think of art, quite correctly, as part of the present—as something people can see and touch" (2). While art was made by a certain person in a specific context, we encounter and experience it as art in our own modern, 21st century context. Too often, however, art history is taught in a classroom using textbooks, handouts, and technology. Certainly, new technologies available in the 21st century are a marvelous resource; nevertheless, my students see art as something in a European museum, rather than appreciating the rich artistic community that is all around them in the Chicago metropolitan region.

Therefore, I have created a series of lesson plans that get my students out and into their immediate community, Park Forest, as well as into downtown Chicago, a 40-minute, \$8 roundtrip journey by commuter train; these lesson plans help students develop the habits of mind necessary as they move forward in their humanities studies, as well as in preparing for our Visual Analysis Research Paper (included in the Appendix). Unifying these explorations will be a bi-monthly field journal in which students learn to become more mindful of detail.

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Lesson #1
"Field Journals Introduction"
Bi-monthly assignment, introduced in a 52-minute class period

Abstract: When this lesson is conducted, students will have read several ancient texts such as the poems *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and "Hymn to the Aten." These poems are deeply infused with natural imagery. In one excerpt that we read, Gilgamesh hears the story of an ancient, apocryphal flood that changed life on earth forever; the transitory nature of life on earth is a lesson in humility for Gilgamesh. In "Hymn to the Aten," the speaker worships the sun god "Aten," giver of life through bountiful harvest. One of the essential questions students must analyze at the end of our Ancient Civilizations Unit is the role the land plays in daily Mesopotamian life. As much as nature factors into the literature we read, too often it is ignored in our own lives. The Field Journals, based on Janet Burne's String Journals, require students to observe the natural world closely, attending to fine detail. They will also provide a jumping-off point for several Art History lessons throughout the year.

Goals: As a result of this activity, students should:

- Develop finer powers of observation
- Identify natural forces influencing writers and artists
- Make connections between our modern natural world and those of other Western Civilizations
- Develop writing skills that pay attention to detail and express those observations concisely.

Procedure:

1. **Anticipatory Set:**

- a. Show students a complex scene on the Smart Board projector for 1 minute (I use Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon on La Grand Jatte*, because we will eventually study it during our Impressionist lessons)
- b. Take down the picture and ask students to write down every detail they saw in the scene. After students have written for about five minutes, discuss what they wrote down. Then, put the picture back up again and discuss what details they missed.
- c. Segue way Question: Why do we miss the details? How can we become more "detail oriented"?

2. **Central Activity:**

- a. Move outside to the lagoon on school grounds and circle up to Introduce Field Journaling.

- b. Handout the Field Journal Overview (Appendix A) and discuss. Share my example, if the class needs a model.
 - c. Go over Grading Rubric (Appendix B) and answer any questions.
 - d. Finally, time to get started with a simulation Field Journal—students will spread out, with a piece of paper and a clipboard, to do the following: *Begin by looking at Nature in your spot—what do you see? Do you see different things up close, versus far away? After awhile, close your eyes. Listen, breath, smell and record those sensations. How is the space different with your eyes closed, versus open? Remember, this is a silent reflective activity—there will be time to share and interact in 15 minutes!*
3. **Closure:**
- a. Return to the classroom, asking some students along the way if they'd feel comfortable sharing.
 - b. In class, read aloud entries as time allows, noting thoughtful observations, careful attention to detail, and strong writerly moments.
 - c. **Exit Ticket:** *I think my Field Journal "spot" is going to be...*

Link to Common Core Standards (CCS)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

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Lesson #2
"Medieval Architecture: Discovering the Gothic Style in Rockefeller Cathedral"
1 hour activity

Abstract: This activity will take place during a day-long visit to University of Chicago; the students take a tour of the campus first. The primary goal of the field trip is for students to begin considering their college search. Many of our students will be the first generation in their families to attend college; exploring one of America's elite universities inspires many students to take rigorous courses and get more involved in school and community in anticipation of applying for college. However, the activity that today's lesson focuses on could be conducted in a Gothic cathedral in any city—Rockefeller Cathedral, centrally located on U of C's campus, is an ideal location for our learners, who will conduct an on-site scavenger hunt.

Goals: As a result of this activity, students should be able to:

- Identify the following terms related to Gothic architecture: barrel vault, groin vault, post and lintel, arch, flying buttress, nave, ambulatory
- Describe the architect's style and how the style fits his purpose.
- Connect patterns they notice in formal architecture to patterns they notice in Nature, via their Field Journals.

Procedure:

1. Anticipatory Set

- a. (Half of the class will be touring the campus with a current student and partner teacher; half of the class will be with me, to reduce numbers)
- b. Outside the Cathedral, review with students the goal of Gothic architects in the Medieval period, which (to some extent) holds true today. Ask students to enter silently and focus on their first impression/reaction to the space.
- c. Enter, take some time to reflect, and then discuss student responses.

2. Central Activity

- a. Divide students into pairs or trios, depending on the group, and give each student a manila envelope with a checklist pasted on the front (Appendix C).
- b. Explain to students that they are conducting a scavenger hunt for different concepts as related to Gothic architecture. When they find each item on the list, there will be a check-point with a ticket to pick up. Students must have all tickets in order to successfully complete the scavenger hunt. (Teacher Key provided in Appendix D) There will be opportunities to win prizes!
- c. As students conduct scavenger hunt, teacher and chaperone(s) should circulate to make sure students are on task.

- d. When all students have finished the scavenger hunt, regroup and discuss where the students saw different Gothic elements in action. What was their effect?
- e. Then, shift to discuss form and function, keeping in mind Rockefeller Cathedral's 21st century mission, 150 years after the university's founding (Appendix E).
 - i. Based on your knowledge of Gothic style architecture, what do you expect this space is used for and why?
 - ii. Share some information from Appendix E about the building's many uses—why is the space conducive to activities like drum circles *and* sacred church services? How has the space been transformed by the U of C community in the 21st century?
 - iii. Can the students think of any other spaces in their daily lives whose uses have changed because of changing culture? (some teacher examples—Liberty Square downtown and vacated storefronts; changing use of Co-Op homes)

3. Closure

- a. Whole group reconvenes at Promontory Point on Chicago's lakefront—a striking natural setting. Weather permitting, conduct entire activity outside.
- b. Students should take out their Field Journals for an extension activity. Students can choose to write about one of the following:
 - i. *As we have learned, Gothic Architecture is filled with patterns—symmetry to create balance in a vast space, repeated images important to Christian symbolism, even the pattern of a Gothic church being an imprint of a Christian cross. What patterns do you notice in this natural space? Consider all five senses.*
 - ii. *About ten years ago, the City of Chicago was going to bulldoze Promontory Point—the building as well as the terraced stones leading down to the water—for safety reasons. The Hyde Park neighborhood was outraged and successfully protested to Save Promontory Point. Look around at this natural space and reflect on why it must be important to the people of Hyde Park—students, families, teens, tourists, etc.*

Link to Common Core Standards (CCS)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

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Lesson #3
"Romanticism: Nature Studies with Tall Grass Art Association"
2-hour in-house field trip

Abstract: The Tall Grass Arts Association is a non-for-profit gallery and educational center that promotes art appreciation; the center has art classes, a gallery with new exhibits on a quarterly basis, live music performances in Liberty Square, and an annual Art Fair. Despite all of these activities, most of my students do not even know that the organization exists. Today's lesson will be a cooperative with an instructor from Tall Grass Art Association. Students have been studying European Romanticism, focusing on Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, Goethe's poetry, and Romantic artists. Romantics paint a picture of an ideal life of equality, at peace in pastoral nature. Therefore, today's lesson, co-taught by myself and a TGAA representative, will help students begin to consider how they might idealize a winter landscape, either through a series of images or in writing.

Goals: Students should be able to

- Apply their understanding of Romanticism to their own creative product—visual or linguistic.
- Attend to specific detail to achieve their outcome.

Procedure:

1. **Anticipatory Set:** Begin by taking a winter walk (students have been warned to dress appropriately) around the lagoon, paying attention to where they see life and beauty in the winterscape, despite the harsh conditions.
2. **Central Activity:**
 - a. Begin by discussing what the students saw and their experiences with winter weather.
 - b. Move into the day's activity—Tall Grass will share idealized visions of winter from their gallery collection, eliciting student responses and conversations.
 - c. The students must, then, think about their Field Journal spot—how has winter transformed the space? What is harsh about the wintertime Field Journal entries—either the content of the journal entry and/or the experience of being outside to observe and reflect?
 - d. The student's task: *Using pictures, words, or a combination of the two, create a product that idealizes your "string spot" in wintertime.*
 - e. Students will begin the project in class, and submit a final draft in a week for Group Sharing.

Link to Common Core Standards (CCS)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3d Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

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Lesson #4
"Impressionism: Discovering Monet's Haystacks in our own Field Journals"
1 class period of 52 minutes

Abstract: Yesterday, we visited Chicago's Art Institute museum and visited the Impressionist Wing. One of our focus galleries was the Monet gallery and his haystacks; if you do not have this community resource at hand, numerous e-galleries with digital images of the collection are available. AIC provides this web resource: <http://www.artic.edu/aic/resources/resource/380> In this lesson, we are going to consider how our Field Journal "string spots" have changed over time, and relate changes in nature to changes in our own selves. The end of 3rd Quarter is an appropriate time to conduct such an exploration, as spring is starting to tentatively peek out from under Midwestern snowdrifts.

Goals: Students should be able to

- Identify key details related to change over time.

Procedure:

1. **Anticipatory Set:** Begin by reviewing a slideshow of Monet's haystacks (select images can be found in Appendix F), discussing visual analysis questions such as: *At what time of day do you think Monet painted this haystack and why? During what season was Monet painting and how do you know? What changes about these haystacks over time; what stays the same? Monet originally was going to paint only a single haystack canvas, but ended up displaying fifteen canvases at the Salon — what does this decision suggest about the difficulties of representing time in Nature?*
2. **Central Activity:** Transition into a new Field Journal entry — just as Monet's haystacks change over time, depending on season or time of day, how have your String Spots changed over time? Do you notice a similar change in yourself? What do these phenomena suggest about living beings?

Link to Common Core Standards (CCS)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3d Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

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Lesson #5
“Modernism: Nathan Manilow’s Sculpture Park”
2-hour field trip

Abstract: Today, students will encounter major works by masters of contemporary sculpture at the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park. Established 35 years ago, the park has grown into a major collection of 28 works that is set within the wild prairie swales of the Governors State University campus, which is located a 20-minute walk or 5-minute trolley ride from the high school. Students will participate in a guided tour/hike of the sculpture park, which spans over five miles of prairie. Following our excursion, students will create a Modernist interpretation of their String Spot.

Goals: Students should be able to

- Apply characteristics of Modernist/Postmodernist art to a contemporary, 21st c. subject.
- Interpret their relationship to their String Spot visually.

Procedure:

3. **Anticipatory Set:** Prior to Field Trip, review characteristics of Modernist Art with students, connecting to artists we’ve studied—Picasso, Pollock, O’Keefe, de Koonig, Warhol, Lichtenstein.
 - a. Minimalist
 - b. Abstract
 - c. Multimedia
 - d. Interactive
4. **Central Activity:** As students begin, in small teacher/docent led groups, to tour the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park, they will bring their clipboards along to answer the Key Questions to Ask When Looking at a Sculpture (Appendix G). After hike is complete, regroup to discuss:
 - a. What patterns did you notice in body of work? What idea or style seems to unify the works? Are there any individual sculptures that seemed to disrupt that pattern?
 - b. How did the Sculpture Park’s natural, prairie setting add to your experience of the artwork? Did it detract at all—why? How is the experience different from encountering art in a museum?
 - c. This Sculpture Park cost a great deal of money for GSU to create and maintain—why do you think the Board of Directors considered it a worthwhile expenditure? What role does art play in a community and why do/don’t we need public art? (connect to Millenium Park as well)

5. **Culminating Experience:** *Your final task, connecting our humanities studies to your String Spot and Field Journals, is to create a Modernist work of art representing your String Spot and/or your experience over time “learning” and “knowing” this spot. In this way, your representation may also reflect how you have changed over the course of the year. Your art work must embody the characteristics of Modernist Art (See “Anticipatory Set”), however, you are not limited to a single media—you may film performance art, use sculpture, use assemblage/collage, or use graphic design. Regardless, the final product must be accompanied by a 2-3 page, typed, double-spaced explanation about your artistic choices and how they serve your final product.*

Link to Common Core Standards (CCS)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

Appendix A: Field Journals

You have already observed the vital force of Nature in Gilgamesh's flood and the "Hymn to the Aten." As our learning progresses, you will develop a deeper understanding of Nature's symbolism in many works we read and view; you will also gain a deeper understanding of Nature's inspirational power—her vitality inspired artists to abandon traditional paths for radical, realistic interpretations of the natural world around them. As much as Nature factors into our HTWM learning, it is mostly ignored in our daily lives. Too often, we are too busy, too distracted, too stressed out to observe closely our natural world and to tune into our environment. To remedy this situation, you will become a close observer of Nature this year.

My **goals** for this activity are to:

- Develop finer powers of observation
- Identify natural forces influencing writers and artists
- Make connections between our modern natural world and those of other Western Civilizations
- Develop writing skills that pay attention to detail and express those observations concisely.

Materials:

- Rainbow yarn
- Spiral Notebook (for exclusive Field Journal use)

Procedure:

1. Take the rainbow yarn and tie it into a big circle.
2. Think about a place outside that you can visit easily and often; this may be in your backyard, on school grounds, at the park, or on your walk to/from school. (Be sure to pick a *safe* spot as well).
3. Secure your string to this place, if it is on your property, or bring your string circle with you every time you visit this place if it is public. This is the site of your Field Journal!
4. Every other week, you will visit your string for a minimum of 15 minutes. Keep in mind that you are required to go outside twice a month ALL year. Dress appropriately! The weather may be cool, but whining about it won't be ☺
5. Every other Wednesday, starting _____, you will submit a handwritten journal entry of 2 to 3 pages (standard 8.5 x 11 single subject notebook is required) that is based on reflections made while visiting your string.
6. The string is a device to get you out into the field! If the neighbor's dog eats it or a bird steals it for a nest, go out to your spot and observe Nature without it!

Appendix B: Field Journal Grading Standards

- Late journal entries are *only* accepted for Excused Absences; in the event that you are sick with an Excused Absence on a Wednesday due date, your Field Journal entry is due immediately when you return to class.
- You have the opportunity to earn either an A (20/20 pts), a B (16/20 pts), or an F (10/20 pts)
 - “A” quality Field Journal entries surpass my expectations. Not only did you “do” the assignment, but you show great insight, creativity, a strong writerly voice, and/or a sophisticated style. The “A” quality Field Journal entry is truly quality, not quantity—writing more will not necessarily earn you a better grade.
 - “B” quality Field Journal entries meet my criteria. You reflect on your spot outdoors and I see your reflections growing and changing as you, and Nature around you, change with the seasons. While your writing may not be sophisticated, it is coherent and focused.
 - “F” quality Field Journal entries do not meet expectations. Possible reasons for failure could include: an entry that is turned in loose, separated from your spiral; careless, incoherent grammar; incomplete or insufficient entries; superficial treatment of your subject matter that suggests you’re “faking it”; lack of connection to being outside.
- When combined together at the end of the quarter, your Field Journal entries comprise a test grade of 80-100 points, depending on the calendar for that term. Therefore, do not slack off—it will catch up with you!

Appendix C: Gothic Architecture Scavenger Hunt Checklist

Goth or not? Scavenger Hunt Checklist

- Groin vault
- Mosaic
- Ribbed vault
- Flying buttress
- Narthex
- Nave
- Ambulatory
- Rose Window

Appendix D: Gothic Architecture Scavenger Hunt Teacher Key



Groin Vault



Mosaic



Ribbing



Rose Window



Nave



Ambulatory

Appendix E: Rockefeller Chapel Mission Statement

<http://rockefeller.uchicago.edu/>

Rockefeller Memorial Chapel, with its Interreligious Center, serves as the hub of spiritual life at the University of Chicago, offering diverse religious events and ceremonies on a daily basis, as well as regular interreligious gatherings. In addition, Rockefeller hosts major performing arts and academic events, and serves as the locus for University-wide gatherings and celebrations of many different kinds, including Convocations. The Chapel was built with a grandeur of scale and intent, and is used today in ways which play to its strengths: speaking to the nobility of the human capacity for awe and profound quest for meaning.

The Dean and Spiritual Life staff take a lead in addressing the complex and often contradictory issues related to practiced religion on campus and in society at large, working with colleagues in the University and wider community to shape a broad and inclusive interreligious life for the 21st century – an engaged pluralism consonant with the values of a proudly secular institution and cognizant of the need to create respectful human religious encounter grounded in rigorous inquiry.

In particular, Rockefeller offers:

- **Interreligious programs** emphasizing integrative spiritual practice and community action; and citywide interreligious events.
- **Sunday morning worship** of the kind uniquely expressed in cathedral-like settings, matching magnificence of stone with beauty of sound, and drawing upon world musical settings of the historic liturgical texts of the Christian tradition; with the Rockefeller Chapel Choir, the magnificent E.M. Skinner organ, and Laura Spelman Rockefeller carillon.
- Dedicated prayer spaces for **Hindu and Muslim** students.
- **Meditation spaces** for Buddhists and others interested in experiencing meditation and contemplative prayer.
- **Restorative yoga** and drumming circles and other programs designed to speak to all the senses.
- Shared meeting space for student religious organizations.
- **Music, theatre, and other arts programs** complementing this great space; choral arts, including the Rockefeller, Motet, and University choirs; carillon and organ lessons and performance.
- **A place simply to be quiet** for a while, or to seek inspiration.

Appendix F: Monet's *Haystacks* Image Gallery

<http://www.artic.edu/aic/resources/resource/380>



Stack of Wheat, 1890/91



Stack of Wheat (Snow Effect, Overcast Day), 1890/91



Stack of Wheat (Thaw, Sunset), 1890/91



KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN LOOKING AT SCULPTURE

Subject

What subject does this sculpture represent?

What was its purpose and function?

What kind of belief does it embody?

How does it express this?

Context

How is this work related to the setting (NMSP) in which we see it?

Would it have been seen from above, below, or from the same level?

How does it relate larger group of works here at the Sculpture Park?

Form

Does this sculpture have a strong frontal presentation?

How does it look from different sides? Angles? Lighting?

Is it self-contained or gesturing outward?

How has the material been used?

How is its design related to the natural landscape around it at the Sculpture Park?

Style

Is the work primarily rounded or angular?

Detailed or Simplified?

Smooth or Rough?

Linear or Volumetric?

Individual or Abstracted?

How is the style related to the work's message?