

LESSON PLAN: “CONNECTIONS”

1. Standards:

3.1 Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language. (Art history)

3.2 Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures. (museum materials)

In this lesson I plan to use a technique to introduce art appreciation in conjunction with language learning that was developed by the Museum of Modern Art. This technique emphasizes a personal, emotional reaction to a piece of art instead of factual knowledge about the art. The language goals can be adjusted for any level: beginners can work on basic vocabulary and description; intermediate can add interpretation to description, and advanced can provide detailed hypothetical interpretation and more sophisticated vocabulary. After this activity, the professor can follow up with factual and contextual knowledge if desired, thus leading to a more ‘cultural’ focus.

2. Procedure:

The professor can either project the image of the art (from a slide or from the internet) and / or pass out copies of the artwork to students. Vocabulary is elicited from the class, or provided by the teacher, to describe the objects and activities in the picture. These words are written on the board and serve as a reminder throughout the lesson.

Description: If the purpose is to teach descriptive language, the teacher can pass out a handout that explains language that can be used to describe positions: foreground, background, focus, center, to the right, to the left, above, below, etc. This can be combined with a discussion of ‘composition’ of art—ask the students why the artist placed the objects in the picture that way? Where does the artist focus the attention? What feeling does this give?

Description can also be used for adjectives and colors to describe the objects or people in the picture individually. After describing the picture thoroughly in class and introducing any linguistic structures necessary, the task of the student is to write a detailed description of the picture.

Interpretation: For more advanced students, the purpose of the lesson is to encourage interpretation of the picture without being given any contextual knowledge. The purpose is to use hypothetical language and evidentiary reasoning. So, for example, the teacher can say “What is happening in the picture?” A student may respond, “A man and a woman are in love and they are spending time together.” The teacher asks, “How do you

know they are in love? What do you see in the picture that is evidence for that?" Encourage the students to use more complex constructions like, "It could be..." or "The man might..." if they are guessing. This pushes the students to start to notice small details and challenges the assumptions they are making if the art is unfamiliar. The teachers job at this point is to solicit responses, not to confirm or deny their validity. If necessary, the teacher can review the necessary grammatical structures to talk about interpretation and giving opinions. After the discussion, students can work individually or in pairs or small groups to produce a paragraph where they give their interpretation and describe the visual evidence that supports their assumptions.

Personal Reaction: The picture can also be used to elicit feelings from the students. How does the picture make them feel? What does the artist do to convey that feeling? Does the picture inspire any memories or ideas about the world or human existence? Students can write about the picture on this level after a discussion.

The writing can serve as both grammar and vocabulary enforcement and can be re-written for correction. This activity is an excellent pre-task to a visit to a museum where students can see the work of art or similar works of art, and also to further reading or lecture on the factual knowledge about the style of art and its history and connection to culture.

