

WINDOWS TO WONDER: STORYTELLING IN ART

Grades 6-8

Inspired by the works of Mary Proctor such as My Grandma's Old Blue Window

Time Needed: 3 class periods (45–60 minutes each)

Artist Focus: Mary Proctor

Overview

Mary Proctor is a self-taught visionary artist who began painting in the mid 1990's. Her work combines bright colors, text, collage, and found materials to share deeply personal stories about resilience, healing, and inspiration. She often paints on discarded doors or windows, transforming them into vibrant visual narratives.



In this lesson, students will explore how artists use storytelling and presentation to inspire others. After analyzing Proctor's artwork *My Grandma's Old Blue Window* and engaging with text and video resources, students will create a 6-panel comic book style artwork that shows an inspirational or meaningful moment from their life. Students will use both images and text to share their story and will consider how the presentation of their work impacts the meaning and audience response.

Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Identify how Mary Proctor uses symbolism, text, and found objects to share personal stories in her art.
2. Analyze one of Proctor's artworks and discuss its narrative structure. (Beginning, middle, climax, resolution.)
3. Plan and create a 6-panel comic book style artwork that tells a story of transformation, inspiration, or resilience from their own life.
4. Create an artwork with a variety of art materials to express a personal story or experience with meaning to the student.

Standards Alignment

Maryland State Visual Art Standard – Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Enduring Understanding: Artists and designers explore and invent art-making techniques and approaches. Artists present completed works in a way that enhances audience understanding of the meaning and context.

People gain insight into meanings of artworks by engaging in the process of presenting and viewing.

English Language Arts Connections - W.6.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

W.6.3a-b: Use narrative techniques such as dialogue, pacing, and description to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

Essential Questions

How do artists choose the way their work is presented?

How does the presentation of an artwork influence audience response?

How do conditions of presenting and interpretation influence meaning?

Expectations (Grades 6-8)

- E:6-8.1: Analyze media to compare processes used to interpret and express ideas in the visual arts and other disciplines.
- E:6-8.2: Demonstrate awareness of how presentation and context can influence audience understanding of a work.
- E:6-8.3: Experiment with different approaches to presenting artwork to strength meaning and impact.

Vocabulary

- Self-Portrait - An artwork an artist creates of themselves.
- Reflection - Thinking about one's own experiences, values, or growth.
- Express - To share feelings, ideas, or identity through words or art.
- Community- A group of people connected by shared experiences or support.
- Transformation - A process of growth or change
- Healing - Recovery, resilience, or renewal after changes.

Activities

Day 1: Artists Tell Their Truth

1. Introductions: Display the artwork "My Grandma's Old Blue Willow"
<https://www.seegreatart.art/missionary-mary-proctor-at-the-american-visionary-art-museum/>
 - Ask students at a glance and without reading the text, what they think the narrative is about in the artwork. (Using only visual cues)
2. Next, set students into groups of 3 to 4 and ask them to discuss what they interpret as the beginning, middle, climax, and end of the story within the artwork and why for 3-5 minutes.
 - a. What would you title this work?
 - b. What do you think is the conflict and why?
 - c. What in the artwork indicates conflict? Words? Colors? Facial or body expressions?
 - d. What do you think is the solution?
3. Read, or have your students take turns reading the text in each panel.
 - Panel 1: "Oh How I remember so well my grandma waited while I got off the school bus"
 - Panel 2: "She always cooked or bake something good for me after I got out of school my favorite was tea cakes"
 - Panel 3: "She told me she had baked some tea cakes but they were cooling off in the piesafe but I couldn't wait so I got a chair. The piesafe and all came tumbling down" "bless our home"
 - Panel 4: "She came and picked me up"
 - Panel 5: "She had the look as she was going to whip me"
 - Panel 4: "Instead she held my hands and said I forgive you cause just yesterday God forgave me. He said forgive to be forgive by Missionary Mary Proctor"
4. After reading the panels, did you believe the initial conflict/story your group came up with changed? If so, to what? And if not, why did it stay the same?
 - Allow each group 1-2 minutes to share their answers. Write their responses on the board.
5. Brainstorming activity: Have students begin to brainstorm words, drawings, objects, symbols, and other items that represent who they are. (Family, hobbies, favorites, things that make them strong, positive affirmations, etc.)
6. Next play the video: Tallahassee Inspired - Mary Proctor. Ask students the following questions:
 - What stood out to you in the video?
 - What connections can you make between how Mary Proctor describes her story in the

- video and “My Grandma’s Old Blue Willow”?
- What does inspiration mean to you? How does Mary Proctor describe and express inspiration through her artwork?

Day 2: Telling Your Story

1. Show the Video:  [How to Create a Comic Strip](#)
 - a. Discussion: What things might an artist need to consider when planning to tell a story through their artwork?
2. Have students reflect on an inspirational or meaningful moment in their own life. Allow them to outline their story on a planning sheet.  [6-panel comic book Mary Proctor Worksheet.pdf](#)
3. Have students share their plan with other students in pairs or small group in order to get feedback that will help them refine their plan for clarity.
4. Ask students to demonstrate their use of Science of Writing:
 - Structure-I can structure my writing to communicate a main idea and supporting details.
 - Topic-I can write a piece that is clear and focused on a central theme or idea.
 - Introduction-I can write a clear introduction to my essay.
 - Evidence-I can identify and organize evidence from the text to support my argument.
 - Style-I can develop my unique voice.
 - Tone-I can select words that develop a tone of inspiration.
 - Emphasis-I can emphasize the impacts of the story through specific word choice.
 - Elaboration-I can use details to elaborate on the main idea.

Days 3 & 4: Creating the Final Artwork

1. Introduction and demonstration: Show students how to use their planning worksheet and various writing and compositional elements to illustrate their story. (Close-up’s, wide scenes, dialogue, placement, composition.)
2. Student independent work time: Students begin creating their 6 panel comics with text and images.
 - a. Students can trade drafts and answer- How do the layout and presentation choices effect how you understand the story? Are there any scenes or elements that are unclear?
3. Instruct students to place completed comic books on the desk and begin a gallery walk for 5 minutes (adjust time accordingly). Or collect 6 panel comic books and display them in designated areas in your classroom. Ask following reflection questions:
 - What examples of techniques in writing and artmaking does Mary Proctor use to convey the theme inspiration in her artwork “Grandma’s Old Blue Willow”? What other themes do you notice?
 - What techniques did you use in your comic book panel to depict the theme inspiration? (Through color, texture, figures, text poetic language, onomatopoeia.)

Materials

- Worksheets/brainstorming templates
- 8 in. X 11 in construction paper
- Magazines and other collage materials
- Markers
- Fabric
- Colored pencils
- Pencils
- Scissors

- Glue or Modge Podge
 - **Additional supplies for flip book extension:**
 - Index cards
 - Small Binder clips or stapler
 - Ink pen

Extensions

1. Flip Book Activity: Turn the 6-panel story into a flip book to explore pacing and sequencing further. <https://www.icaboston.org/articles/moving-image-diy-flip-book/>
2. Narrative Writing: Write a one-page short story version of their comic, connecting to ELA narrative writing standards.
3. Collect student artworks and hang them in areas of the school where they can be displayed collaboratively as 'Windows Into Our Class.'

Assessment

Formative Assessments:

- Student participation in group discussion and artwork analysis.
- Completed story outlines and planning worksheets.
- Peer feedback on panel drafts.

Summative Assessments:

Artwork Rubric (criteria may include):

- Creativity: Creative integration of text and images together to enhance story meaning.
- Connection to Self: Students have made choices in their work that reflect who they are and the message of their artwork.
- Craftsmanship: Careful use of materials (neatness, color, and effort).
- Completeness: Student presentation of artwork shows evidence of thoughtful planning that shapes meaning in their work. (Panel layout, sequencing, materials, composition)
- Written Reflection: Student clearly explains how their presentation choices influenced audience understanding of their artwork.

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Resources

- Video: [Tallahassee Inspired - Mary Proctor](#)
- Images: <https://www.seegreatart.art/missionary-mary-proctor-at-the-american-visionary-art-museum/>
- Worksheet: [6-Panel Comic book Mary Proctor Worksheet](#)
- [Moving Image: DIY Flip Book - ICA Boston](#)