

A Guide to Curatorial Practice As Education

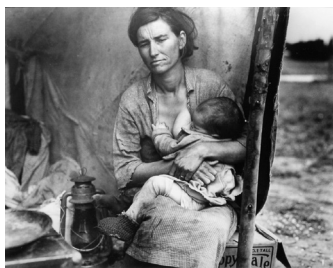
What story is told in these images?



1



2



3

How does the narrative change when the center image is placed into a new context?



4



2



5

ADDISON

Addison Gallery of American Art

All images from the collection of the Addison Gallery of American Art.

1. Ken Heyman, *Newark (mother and two children on steps)*, 1968, gelatin silver print, gift of Claudia and Steven Schwartz (PA 1977), 2009.35

2. Sally Mann, *The New Mothers*, 1989, gelatin silver print, museum purchase, 1990.58

3. Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California*, neg. 1936, gelatin silver print, museum purchase, 2005.8

4. Kenneth Kelly Wise, *Centre Street, Hyde Square*, from series *City Limits*, no date, gelatin silver print, Sybil and Kelly Wise Photo Collection, gift of Sybil and Kelly Wise, 1992.19.97

5. Bill Owens, *Suburbia*, from series *Suburbia*, neg. 1972, print 1998, gelatin silver print, gift of Katherine D. and Stephen C. Sherrill (PA 1971, and P 2005, 2007, 2010), 2006.77.27

What Is Curatorial Practice As Education?

Museum curators connect objects and viewers. Through care of objects and collections, research and study of art and artists, organization of exhibitions, and writing for publications, they provide visual and historical information and insight that contribute meaning and context, provoke questions, encourage responses, and reveal the power of art to inform and inspire.

Applying these practices to education invites students to:

- Select
- Compare
- Classify
- Sequence
- Connect
- Research
- Develop theories
- Identify themes
- Create narratives
- Write descriptions
- Design viewing experiences

Analyzing, interpreting, and thinking critically about images deepens visual and historical literacy and analysis skills while enhancing understanding of our world. As educational practice, curatorial activities empower students to create their own narratives with their own messages and become both critical consumers and producers of media.

Assignment Options

The power to convey narrative through thoughtful image selection, sequencing, and placement can be used as an exploratory activity or as an in-depth assignment, in connection with a museum visit or using museum resources digitally in the classroom.

Curatorial Project Option 1: Single Visit



During a Museum Learning Center visit to discuss artworks selected by faculty and museum staff to complement course topics, students will work in groups to experiment with different juxtapositions and sequences to explore emerging themes.

- 1. Experiment:** What happens when you begin to rearrange, compare, and contrast artworks? What additional details and interpretations emerge as you discuss works as a group? How do themes shift as you view the works in varying contexts and sequences?
- 2. Select and Sequence:** Focus on one theme and one arrangement using three to five artworks, omitting any works that do not fit the narrative. What perspective on your theme does your group's final arrangement convey?
- 3. Summarize:** Title your exhibition. What title might best communicate your exhibition's perspective while leaving room for viewer's interpretation?
- 4. Present:** Prepare to present your exhibition to the larger group, explaining your curatorial decisions and the ways each work relates to the next to construct the narrative.

Curatorial Project Option 2: Extended Assignment with Presentation



After a Museum Learning Center visit, students will work outside of class time individually or in groups to curate using printouts of works explored at the museum, printed from the museum's online database.

The final product can take the form of:

- a digital presentation in the classroom
- a submitted digital assignment
- an online exhibition
- a presentation in the Museum Learning Center with the artworks from the preliminary museum visit to be sequenced by museum staff as dictated by students curators

- 1. Experiment:** Print artworks that you are considering: www.addisongallery.org, click on *collection*, click on *search the collection*, and click on *browse the collection* for themes and time periods.
- 2. Identify Themes:** What happens when you begin to compare and contrast artworks? What themes begin to emerge? How do these themes shift as you view the works in varying contexts?
- 3. Research:** Using reliable sources, including the Addison's non-circulating library as well as other libraries and digital sources, double-check the historical context of the artworks that you are considering. What new perspectives and ideas does your research introduce? Cite your sources.
- 4. Complement:** What additional images, objects, or primary source documents could enrich your narrative? If you were curating a physical exhibition in a museum, what would you want to borrow from other institutions? Search available online databases, such as the Library of Congress (www.loc.gov/) or the Smithsonian Institution (www.collections.si.edu/search/). Cite your sources.
- 5. Select and Sequence:** Focus on one theme and one arrangement using three to five images, objects, or documents, omitting any works that do not fit the narrative. What perspective on your theme does your group's final arrangement convey?
- 6. Summarize:** Title your exhibition. What title might best communicate your exhibition's perspective while leaving room for viewer's interpretation?
- 7. Write:** Introduce and explain the theme of your exhibition in wall text, one to two paragraphs printed on the wall for viewers to read upon entering your gallery space.
- 8. Design:** Design your ideal exhibition layout digitally using JPEGs and blank gallery layout documents. How will your audience experience your exhibition? How can installation decisions influence perception?
- 9. Present:** Write text for a gallery talk in which, as the curator, you will speak to your audience about the works in your exhibition, explaining your curatorial decisions and the ways each work relates to the next to construct the narrative.

Suggested Classroom Connections

English

- American Identity
- Race and Otherness
- The Immigrant Experience
- The American Dream
- Power and Hierarchy
- Definitions of Family
- Gender Roles and Identity
- Setting as Character
- Home and Community
- Visualizing Poetry

Science

- Humans and Nature
- Urban Development and Environmental Impact
- Ecosystems
- Perspectives on Natural Resources
- Animals and Taxonomy
- Physics of Motion, Light, and Sight
- Chemistry of Photography

History

- What is America
- Images and the Media
- Exploration and Migration
- The American Civil War
- The American West and Manifest Destiny
- The Great Depression
- The Civil Rights Movement
- The Vietnam War
- Sacred Spaces

Math

- Symmetry and Transformation
- Area and Perimeter
- Ratio and Scale
- Probability
- Perspective and Similarity
- Combinations and Permutations
- The Golden Ratio and Fibonacci Sequences

Arranging a Visit to the Museum Learning Center

At least three weeks in advance or preferably more, contact:

Jamie Gibbons
(978) 749-4037
jgibbons@andover.edu

to schedule your visit and discuss possible themes, applicable portfolios of works, and related activities.

Addison Gallery of American Art
Phillips Academy, Andover, MA
Education Department

Jamie Gibbons
Head of Education

Christine Jee
Manager of School and
Community Collaborations
www.addisongallery.org



What is the Museum Learning Center?

The Museum Learning Center (MLC) is a multi-purpose space designed to foster myriad ways of learning in and through the museum and its collection of almost 18,000 objects. The MLC provides unprecedented access to the Addison's paintings, sculpture, photographs, drawings, prints, and decorative arts while it reinforces the Addison's educational mission to support teaching and learning through visual education. Students, teachers, scholars, and the public are invited to work with museum staff in selecting works of art from the Addison's collection for temporary viewing in the MLC.

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