

Print Lesson Plan



## Media as Artistic Expression

### Lesson Summary

- Locate and discuss stories within still images.
- See ways that other mediums can be expression of self.
- Express personal responses to still images.

## Lesson Plan and Procedure

### Invitation to Learn

Share Carmen Lomas Garza's painting *Tamales* with the students.



### Lesson Key Facts

**Grade(s):** 3, 4, 5, 6

**Subject(s):** Drama, Media Arts, Visual Arts

**Duration of lesson:** 2 sessions, 45 minutes each

**Author(s):** Amy Peterson Jensen, PhD, Erika Hill

Teacher: *Chicana artist Carmen Lomas Garza's paintings tell stories about everyday life for Mexican Americans and are based on her own memories and experiences growing up in South Texas. What do you think the possible story being told in the painting is?*

Have the students read biographical information about Garza and an artist statement. You can print the information provided at <https://clgauthorstudy.weebly.com/biography.html> or ask the students to locate the website on classroom computers. An interview done by Garza gives a wonderful view into her artwork: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PtTDGMck3Ns>.

Teacher: *How might the story told in Tamales change based on the biographical information we just read?*

If time allows, you and the students might explore several websites and information guides that reflect on Garza's life and work. Here are a few possible websites or readers' guides. Allow students to return to *Tamales* or other works by Garza to consider how her unique perspective is evident in her paintings.

<http://www.carmenlomasgarza.com/>

[http://mati.eas.asu.edu:8421/ChicanArte/html\\_pages/garza17.lrgest.html](http://mati.eas.asu.edu:8421/ChicanArte/html_pages/garza17.lrgest.html)

Teacher: *Like Garza, media makers create stories based on their own experience, interests, and aesthetic values. Media stories often intentionally reflect the social and emotional circumstances of the individual or group that made them.*

### Instructional Procedures

Have the students view the film *The Sari* made by Manju Varghese. The film depicts East Indian women's traditional clothing known as the sari. Share with the students the following interview with the filmmaker that describes the aesthetic and personal choices that she made in the film as well as the message she hopes the film sends to others.

**Q: Why did you choose this particular subject? How is it important to you personally?**

**A:** As a child I would remember how beautiful my mom would look when she would put on a sari, and she would say to me, "Manju, one day I will teach you how to wear a sari because a women should know how to wear it correctly and wear it proudly." So as I got older and she taught me the many different ways to wear it, I became interested in the history of the sari. So when I got the opportunity to make a film on whatever topic I wanted, I decided to make a film on something that would mean a lot to me that would not only remind me of my culture, but also of my mother, who is very important figure in my life. So this piece is important to me two-fold, because it represents not only my culture, but also how my culture was shared and taught to me by my mother.

**Q: Why did you choose to film a simple, daily ritual (dressing)?**

**A:** When most people think of culture, they think of food, language or clothes. But for me culture can be found even in the simplest of practices like getting dressed for the day. Since the clothing would show something different, I thought it would be important to look at the act of putting the clothe on. The ritual of it and the routine of it can share part of the culture that many people may not think of which is found in the simple practice of putting it on.

**Q: Why did you film this simple ritual in the way you did?**

**A:** I filmed it the way that I did to show the simplicity of it. Yet, by doing so, I wanted to show how special it was as well. I incorporated a poem that captures the magic of the sari in words and I tried to bring that magic to life through my visuals of my mother getting dressed. So really, I filmed it in this way to show its magic. I used wide shots to give you an idea of what the process entails, but I would incorporate close-up to show the intricate details that draw you in to the process of putting on the sari.

**Q: What message do you hope that viewers take from your film?**

**A:** I hope that my viewers will watch this film and experience the beauty that can be found not only in wearing the sari, but the magic in being a woman. I hope they experience that pride in your culture can be found in the simplest of practices, like putting on your clothes.

Have the students consider the following questions:

- What do we know about the storyteller?
- What is the message the storyteller is sending in this film?
- Whose reality does this film represent?
- Why did this storyteller create this message?
- Who does the storyteller think the film is made for?

Teacher: *Other media like photographs, television, internet, popular music, and movies also attempt to tell us unique stories about individuals and groups. People see media through the lens of their own experience, so different people experience the same message differently. Let's examine several (at least five or six) professional photographs of people. As we examine the photographs, ask yourself the following questions about the photograph:*

- *What story is this photograph telling?*
- *Who is the story about?*
- *Who is telling the story?*

Choose the work of any photographer, but you might consider examples that inherently attempt to tell a story about an individual. Photographs by the fashion/advertising photographer Rodney Smith portfolio and blog are available at <https://blog.rodneysmith.com/>.

Pictures and picture essays by Henri Cartier Bresson would also be ideal for this activity. Bresson's work is widely available online; one portfolio available at <https://www.magnumphotos.com/photographer/henri-cartier-bresson/>.

Invite the students to share their ideas and responses with the class.

Teachers: *Stories can be aural (auditory), visual, and sometimes a combination. Media storytellers use a variety of techniques to tell their stories. Using the photographs, let's identify some specific techniques that the photographers use to tell their story.*



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Consider discussing the formal elements of the photograph like light, line, color, space, or texture. You might also focus on the content of the photograph. For example, you might discuss the placement, facial expressions, or body expression of the individuals depicted.

Teacher: *Understanding who the media storyteller is helps us to understand their stories better.*

Teachers should select and share biographical and aesthetic information about the photographer and his/her work. You might consider reading what the photographer had to say about one of the photographs or about photography in general. Then ask the students to discuss how this information changes or enhances what they see in the photograph.

Teacher: *We also use individual and unique perceptions when we attempt to interpret or understand the media artist's techniques. Our background determines how we view and understand an artist's work. A photograph can say many things without talking.*



Show the students a picture from a newspaper article that reflects an important issue in your community. Ask them to identify that issue and write their emotional responses to that issue. Then tell them to examine the news photo again.

Teacher: *This time instead of writing, demonstrate your response to the photograph by creating a visceral/physical response. You need to use your body to demonstrate a personal reaction to the photograph. Your response should be still and must incorporate your whole physical body. Remember that facial expressions and body gestures will help the class to understand your unique emotional response to the work of art.*

Show the students the photograph and then give them a moment to prepare their physical response. Students can share their physical response in pairs or groups. Select one or two to demonstrate their emotional response in front of the class. Ask the students to explain their own visceral/physical choices.

Teacher: *Just like our physical responses to the work of art were alike in some ways and unique in others, media stories often represent people as alike and unique.*

Refer back to the professional photographs that you shared earlier in the class. Ask the students to look for and identify ways that the artist depicts similarities and differences in the people and things they represent.

Remind the students that they can explore ways in which media stories represent people as alike and unique in other media forms and that media makers intentionally represent individuals and their unique stories from a particular perspective.

## Assessment Suggestions

- Any of the discussion questions and evaluations in response to photographs can be turned into an individual writing activity where students write a personal response to a photograph.
- Have students write a short story based on a photograph you assign.
- Assign a photo-essay that tells a story.

## Extensions and Connections

- For an integrated dance lesson, the exercise in step seven could be expanded to include physical responses to several photographs.
- To expand the discussion to other forms of media, consider evaluating children's picture books. (The *Curious George* books, combined with biographical information about Margaret and H.A. Rey or *Fanny's Dream*, with information about Caralyn and Mark Buehner are good examples.)
- Have students think of an author, musician, artist, or actor that they admire. Invite them to research the person's biographical information online with their parents; encourage them to discuss with their parents the influence that the person's background has on their work.

## Learning Objectives

- Recognize ways in which people experience media stories differently.
- Respond to media stories using gesture and body movement.
- Discuss, compare, and evaluate meaning of still images for the observer and the artist.

## Utah State Board of Education Standards

This lesson can be used to meet standards in many grades and subject areas. We will highlight one grade's standards to give an example of application.

## Grade K-5 Media Literacy

- **Standard 3:** Recognize that people experience the same message differently.

## Grade 5 Drama

- **Standard 5.T.CR.5:** Create character through physical movement, gesture, sound and/or speech and facial expression with age-appropriate outcomes.

## Grade 5 Visual Arts

- **Strand: RESPOND (5.V.R.):** Students will understand, evaluate, and articulate how works of art convey meaning for the observer as well as the creator (**Standards 5.V.R.1–2**).
  - **Standard 5.V.R.1:**  
Compare one's own interpretation of a work of art with the interpretation of others, and identify and analyze cultural associations suggested by visual imagery.
  - **Standard 5.V.R.2:**  
Identify and analyze cultural associations suggested by visual imagery.

## Equipment and Materials Needed

- Several photographs taken by a well-respected photographer
- Photograph from a newspaper article
- Computer or projector to show professional photography

## Additional Resources

- <https://gobeyond.blog/2011/12/10/la-tamalada/>
- <https://www.biography.com/people/henri-cartier-bresson-9240139>

## Reference List

Image 1: "Children Walking in Prairie Sunflowers" by Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve is marked with CC PDM 1.0

Image 2: *Tamales* by Carmen Lamos Garza <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/tamalada-35507>

Image 3: Kelsey Balancing on Tightrope, Amenia, New York, 2013, *Archival print*, <https://rodneysmith.com/storytelling/>

Image 4: "Henri Cartier Bresson-Stairs" by Sebastian J. is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0