



An Introduction to Primary Sources: Art in the Archives

TARGET GRADE RANGE: 6-12

OVERVIEW

By looking closely at artworks from the City of Savannah Municipal Archives' collections, students will learn the basic tools for analyzing artistic images using description and reflection in order to improve visual literacy, as well as to identify the strengths and weaknesses of using art as a historical tool. Students will create a brief story, journal entry, or art piece reflecting on the subjects of the images.

What is a Primary Source?

A primary source is a first-hand, original account or record about a person, place, object, or an event. Oral histories, objects, photographs, and documents such as newspapers, census records, diaries, and journals are primary sources. Secondary sources are accounts, records, or evidence derived from original or primary sources. Textbooks are secondary sources.

Objectives:

After completing this learning activity, students will be able to:

- Describe the subjects of artworks and place them in a historical context
- Understand the components of an in-depth visual analysis

Time Required: 1 hour

Topic/s: Social Studies, Art, Creative Writing

Standards:

- VA6.RE.1 VA7.RE.1 VA8.RE.1 Reflect on the context of personal works of art in relation to community, culture, and the world. a. Identify how the issues of time, place, and culture are reflected in selected works of art. b. Interpret works or art considering themes, ideas, moods, and/or intentions. c. Define where and how we encounter images in our daily lives and how images influence our view of the world.
- VA6.CN.3 VA7.CN.3 VA7.CN.3 Utilize a variety of resources to understand how artistic learning extends beyond the walls of the classroom. a. Recognize the presence and meaning of visual art in the community. b. Explore the connection between personal artistic creation and one's relationship to local and global learning communities. c. Make interdisciplinary connections, expanding upon and applying art skills and knowledge to enhance other areas of learning.
- VAHSDR.RE.1 Reflect on the context of personal works of art in relation to community, culture, and the world. a. Consider the influences on works of art from a wide range of contemporary and traditional art through discussion and/or written response. b. Investigate and discuss how the issues of time, place, and/or culture are reflected in works of art
- VAHSDR.RE.3 Engage in the process of art criticism to make meaning and increase visual literacy. a. Formulate written and/or oral response to works of art through various approaches.

**Materials:**

Materials may be original or reproduction, at the discretion of the Archivist and Municipal Archives Director.

- 5 – 10 works of art from the Municipal Archives' collections
 - Teachers conducting the program in the classroom may use the [Sample Artwork Packet](#) provided. Municipal Archives staff can provide additional images on-demand based on subject needs, as available.
- [Art Analysis Worksheets](#) (1 per student per station)
- Paper, pencils, markers to create reflective responses

PROGRAM:**Introduction: (10-15 minutes total)**

- Introduction to concepts of archives and archival work, and the City of Savannah Municipal Archives
- Introduction to the City's art collection
- Talk through the process of analyzing a picture together for the first station

Rotating Stations: (30 minutes)

- Break students into 5-10 groups (depending on the number of students – groups should be between 3-5 students) and assign them a station to start. Each station will take 10 minutes, then rotate to the next station.
- Have a piece of artwork that students can pick up, hold, pass around etc. Have the Art Analysis Worksheets available at the station.
- Have students closely analyze the piece of artwork, describing what it is, what the perspective is, who or what is pictured, how they think the subjects feel, what we can learn from the item, etc.
- After 7-10 minutes, switch to a new station, repeat the process 3-4 times. Depending on the size of the group, there may need to be a period where the students can go around and look at each of the remaining pieces of artwork briefly.

Creative Reflection (15 minutes)*:

Have students decide on a favorite piece of art and create a reflective response to it.

Examples:

- A journal entry written as if you were a subject of the artwork
- A poem about the piece of artwork or the artist who created it
- Write a newspaper article about the event that is the subject of the artwork (who, what, when, where, why)
- A drawing of a detail of the artwork that catches your attention
- A drawing of what happened right before or right after the artwork was created

Have students stand by the artwork they chose and ask for volunteers to share their reflection.

**Alternatively, teachers may assign this as a take-away reflection or journaling assignment.*