

## Tips for Creating a Poem or a Story from a Painting

Often, when people write from visual art they feel they should describe the work accurately, taking account of all of its parts, and intricacies. Someone who is trying to describe a painting accurately might write of Kate's first painting: *The young girl is in the middle of the painting, floating in greenish blue water. Her lips are slightly parted, her hair billows out over her head.* This description is just fine, but what does it tell us that we can't already see, feel, or know by looking at the painting?

Written description becomes interesting when it shows us what we can't see by looking and accounting objectively. Written description is great when it isn't exactly right, when it shows us what only *you* the writer can see. **Be inventive with your description; let it reveal your own particular way of looking.**

For instance, here's an example of an imaginative, inventive description of Kate's painting:

*The young girl floats on her hair as if on a magic carpet. Her hand is cupped around a small invisible package. Inside the package is the secret that could burn a hole through the center of the earth.*

One trick to opening the imaginative, inventive channels of your mind is to focus down. Try to focus on just one detail of a painting – as if looking through a keyhole. This adds an instant aura of mystery, and might peak your curiosity. You can even try cutting a hole in a black sheet of paper to create your own masking, mystery devise; or you can imagine that you're shining a small spotlight on one area of the painting, lighting it up, infusing it with your imagination.

Here I shined a small spotlight on a subject's smile:

*His smile was plastic. It revealed perfect dental work, a fine set of choppers, peeking, and peaking against a darkness, between lips held in a teeny tiny sneer.*

How would you describe either of these paintings, using your unique imaginations, or your super powered spotlight?

**Step 1:** Choose one painting to write about, and describe it. Make the description your own – invent, or shine your spot light on just one detail.

**Step 2:** Create a voice for the figure in your painting. Think about how this figure would talk. Would the voice be interior or exterior? Would this person talk to themselves inside their own head, or would they be talking out loud, to someone out in the world? Would they talk loudly, or softly, stutter or sing? As you make up the words, also think about the rhythm and sound of the words, give the words personality.

**Step 3:** Create a setting. Where do you want this figure to be? Are they in a place that is comfortable to them? A place that is frightening or mysterious? Are they inside their own dream, or out in public? If you're feeling playful, or just a bit stuck, print out one of the images, cut your figure out of your painting and try placing it inside different settings in a magazine. Or, take a blank sheet of paper, cut and paste a world together from many images! Maybe you want to create a dream scape for your character? Cutting up the image that you're working from and pasting it into a different environment is a great way to make that image your own. It's a great way to generate ideas for inventive writing! Once you have a world assembled on the page, or in you mind, write about it.

**Step 4:** Now you have a bunch of raw material to work with. Start to weave it together into a poem or a story. Feel free to throw away lines you don't like. If you have a pair of scissors, cut lines out. Maybe **step 2** sets you off, or maybe you're really on a roll with **step 1**. Keep going, stick with a particular angle as long as it inspires you!