



THOMAS EAKINS: SCENES FROM MODERN LIFE

Lesson 3: On Being Different

Estimated Time: 3 sessions (Within 45 minutes)

Introduction

“He was defiant. He was inflexible. He was self-righteous. He was undiplomatic and inconsiderate. He was *never* boring.”

Opening narration from Thomas Eakins: Scenes From Modern Life

This lesson plan explores the life of Thomas Eakins who was considered “an original in a conventional society.” By observing and reflecting on the life and art of Thomas Eakins, students will draw correlations between their own ideas of being different, their school environment, the determination to pursue goals and Thomas Eakins’ life. The lesson utilizes the entire documentary film *Thomas Eakins: Scenes From Modern Life*, and is shown in three separate sessions.

Grade Level

9-12

Please Note: The video program contains several scenes featuring black and white archival photographs of nude male and female models, including some photographs of Eakins himself. These scenes are noted in the lesson plan.

Subject Area(s)

American History

Art History

Social Studies

Language Arts

Objectives

- Students will synthesize ideas about societal norms in the 1880s and current day
- Students will demonstrate understanding of Thomas Eakins art and life events through verbal discussion
- Students will compile and present ideas in written form
- Students will engage in a writing process of note taking, 1st drafts and final editing

Estimated Time

3 sessions (Within 45 minutes)

Materials

- VHS or DVD-*Thomas Eakins: Scenes From Modern Life*
- VHS or DVD Player and TV monitor
- Student file folders for writing assignments

Procedure

Session 1-Introducing Thomas Eakins (45 minutes)

In this session you will introduce the project and Thomas Eakins as an artist.

1. Prepare the discussion questions below before class by either providing a handout or writing the questions on the board.
2. Prepare the writing assignment questions as a handout.
3. Begin the class by telling students the theme of the project: On Being Different
4. Tell students:
 - They are beginning a 3-part discussion and writing project about people who are considered outsiders in their societies or communities
 - They will be graded/assessed on completion and quality of final writing assignment
 - The project will focus on an American artist who was considered “an original in a conventional society.” Thomas Eakins
 - The class will watch a video program on Thomas Eakins’ life over the course of 3 sessions
 - In this first session the class will be introduced to Thomas Eakins and then discuss what they saw. At the end of the class, they will be assigned a writing task
 - During the video, students should take notes on these questions for discussion:

Questions for Discussion and Understanding

- What was his relationship with his father like?
- What frustrated Eakins about the art curriculum at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts?
- How did Thomas Eakins feel when he first arrived in Paris?
- What was the first place he visited in Paris and what were his impressions?
- What was different about art and artists in Paris versus Philadelphia?
- What experience gave Eakins courage and influenced his painting in Spain?
- What challenges and failures did Eakins face in Spain?

5. Play video-Scenes 1-6 (22 minutes)

6. Facilitate the discussion with the following questions and answers:

Questions for Discussion and Understanding

What was his relationship with his father like?

(Answers: his father had an interest in art and would have discussions about art with Thomas Eakins. He provided stability and support for Eakins and paid a substitute to go to the Civil War instead of his son so he could become an artist.)

What frustrated Eakins about the art curriculum at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts? (Answer: Emphasis on drawing from the so-called antique, plaster cast and its very limited application of paint)

How did Thomas Eakins feel when he first arrived in Paris?

(Answers: Fear, trepidation, homesick, travel sick, brave, courageous, excited)

What was the first place he visited in Paris and what were his impressions?

(Answers: The Louvre. The statues were made of real marble not plaster imitations, they were cold, they were naked. English women did not view statues)

What was different about art and artists in Paris versus Philadelphia?

(Answers: Art was in the public eye in Paris and not so much in Philadelphia. Nude statuary was common in Paris. There were thousands of artists working in Paris at the time.

What experience gave Eakins courage and influenced his painting in Spain?

(Answers: The Spanish paintings. Valasquez painting of the spinners-the most beautiful painting he had ever seen. He wanted to paint like that. "...to see the good Spanish work has given me more courage than anything else ever could.

What challenges and failures did Eakins face in Spain?

(Answer: Painting outdoors for the first time was very difficult-the light's very strong, it's changing quickly, and Eakins had a terrible time.

5. At the conclusion of the discussion, hand out the writing assignment and file folders so students can keep their writing assignments in one place.

Writing Assignment #1 and Student File Folder

This writing assignment requires that you give your opinion and thoughts about the following questions. Do not worry about spelling, punctuation or grammar at this point. Just get your ideas down on paper. Please write your responses on this handout. I will

check to see you have completed this assignment and return the handout to you to keep in your file folder for the final writing assignment. This assignment is due_____.

1. How does the relationship with your parent (s) support you?
2. How or what would you like to learn in school that you are not being taught now?
3. If you have ever traveled to a foreign country, how did it feel when you first arrived?
4. If you have never traveled to a foreign country, how do you imagine you would feel when you first arrived?
5. What country would you like to visit and why?
6. What experience have you had that gave you courage and influenced you?
7. What challenges and failures have you experienced?

Session 2-The Courage to be Different (45 minutes)

This session features the story of how and why Eakins created his famous painting, *The Gross Clinic*. Students will discuss the reception the painting received in the context of the Centennial Exhibition of 1876. The second writing task will also be assigned. Please note that if you have the DVD of the documentary there is a bonus mini-documentary on the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 that runs 5:35 minutes. You may want to show this first to help students with the context of Eakins contribution of the *Gross Clinic* painting to the exhibition. **Prepare the discussion questions** below before class by either providing a handout or writing the questions on the board. **Prepare the writing assignment** questions as a handout. **Prepare** the video program by cueing up the tape or DVD.

1. Begin the class by reminding students about the theme of the project: On Being Different
2. Tell students
 - In this session they will learn more about Thomas Eakins and why he was considered “an original in a conventional society.”
 - The class will view part 2 of the documentary and then discuss what they saw.
 - At the end of the class, they will be assigned a writing task.
 - During the video, students should take notes on these questions for discussion:
 - What unusual subjects did Eakins paint when he returned to Philadelphia from Europe?
 - Why was The Centennial Exhibition of 1876 important to the city of Philadelphia?
 - What topic did the centennial artist’s jury ask artists to display in their work for the exhibition?
 - Why did Eakins choose to do a portrait of Dr. Gross?
 - How did the centennial artist’s jury and the public receive The Gross Clinic painting?

- How did Eakins use the new technology of the day in his painting?

3. Play video

Optional-DVD Bonus Mini-documentary- The Centennial Exhibition of 1876- (5:35 minutes)

Scenes 7-14 (16:45)

Note: Scene 13 (30:58-35:18) includes black and white archival photographs of nude male and female models.

- ### 4. Facilitate the discussion with the following questions and answers:

Questions for Discussion and Understanding

What unusual subjects did Eakins paint when he returned to Philadelphia from Europe?

(Answers: Oarsman and boxers)

Why was The Centennial Exhibition of 1876 important to the city of Philadelphia?

(Answers: First true world's fair held in the United States. Celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Marked the city's own history. Marked the city of Philadelphia as a progressive city with industry and technology, of invention and science.)

What topic did the centennial artist's jury ask artists to display in their pictures for the exhibition?

(Answer: Pictures that would show the best of American life)

Why did Eakins choose to do a portrait of Dr. Gross in surgery?

(Answers: Dr. Gross was a locally and internationally renowned surgeon. Eakins saw surgery as a magnificent combination of the skill with one's hands and the knowledge of the human body and the power of the intellect to understand and to teach.

How did the centennial artist's jury and the public receive The Gross Clinic painting?

(Answers: It was rejected by the jury of the exhibition and shown only in the medical display. The blood offended people; they were shocked by the nude figure of the patient.)

How did Eakins use the new technology of the day in his painting?

(Answers: Photography captured a single instant. The forces of time and nature could be stopped and examined, providing artists with a new scientific, frame-accurate, record of the world around them. **Stop action photographs** were taken of horses and Eakins

wanted to create a painting that would record, for the first time in the history of art, **how horses really move**. He made his own **sequential photographs** of moving humans and animals to improve his students' understanding of locomotion. He recorded **multiple images on a single negative**. His **photographs replaced drawing** and every other method except for oil sketches used as color studies as means to make paintings.)

5. At the conclusion of the discussion, hand out the writing assignment

Writing Assignment #2

This writing assignment requires that you give your opinion and thoughts about the following questions. Do not worry about spelling, punctuation or grammar at this point. Just get your ideas down on paper. Please write your responses on this handout. I will check to see you have completed this assignment and return the handout to you to keep in your file folder for the final writing assignment. This assignment is due_____.

1. What would be considered unusual subjects for artist's images today?
2. What important US events or venues recognize visual or performing artists?
3. How would you deal with the rejection of something you were proud of creating?
4. What images would you show in an exhibition that depict the best in American life today?
5. Whose portrait would you paint if you wanted to show a living person who had accomplished great things?
6. What subjects in art or music stir up controversy in today's American society? Why?
7. What new technology would you use today to create artwork? Briefly describe your process and result.

Session 3- Perceptions of Humanity (45 minutes)

This session concludes the story of Thomas Eakins life and art.

1. Prepare the discussion questions below before class by either providing a handout or writing the questions on the board.
2. Prepare the final writing assignment handout.
 - In the final writing assignment students will compile their previous two assignments and present a completed, edited document for grading/assessment
 - Please note the extension activity about student artistic expression included in this lesson plan that could serve as an alternative to a final writing assignment.
3. Prepare the video program by cueing up the tape or DVD.
4. Begin the class by reminding students about the theme of the project: On Being Different
5. Tell students:
 - In this session they will learn more about Thomas Eakins and why he was considered “an original in a conventional society.”
 - The class will view the final part of the documentary and then discuss what they saw. At the end of the class, they will be assigned a writing task
 - During the video, students should take notes on these questions for discussion:
 - What was Eakins’ solution to finding models for his classes?
 - What problems arose out of this solution?
 - Why did Eakins teach dissection and anatomy?
 - What was Eakins’ attitude towards nudity?
 - What was the controversy and result at his school?
 - Why do you think Eakins called “these follies” dangerous?
 - What did Eakins admire about the people he met out west?
 - What tragic event happened with his family and what was the result?
 - What did Eakins paint during the last years of his life? Why?
6. Play video

Scenes 15- 21 (15:38)

Note: Scenes 15-16 (36:48-40:06) include black and white archival photographs of nude male and female models.

4. Facilitate the discussion with the following questions and answers:

Questions for Discussion and Understanding

What was Eakins solution to finding female models for his classes?

(Answers: Advertise in the newspaper for women models. Use his own students as models.)

What problems arose out of this solution?

(Answer: Not acceptable to the parents or the board.)

Why did Eakins teach dissection and anatomy?

(Answer: To increase knowledge of how beautiful objects are put together so that students may be able to imitate them.)

What was Eakins' attitude towards nudity?

(Answers: He viewed it with scientific objectivity. Nude models serve the purposes of higher art.

What was the controversy and result at his school?

(Answers: Parents were very concerned with the women art students seeing so much nudity in class. He had been forbidden from using total nudity in lectures. Rumors. Controversy divided the art students in the school. Students marched out and protested in the streets. Eakins "resigned".

Why do you think Eakins called "these follies" dangerous?

(Answers: Censorship. Challenges freedom of expression. Other student opinions)

What did Eakins admire about the people he met out west?

(Answers: They had the capacity to manipulate the world, to do things that were hard, to carry out task that were very difficult and to be strong throughout. Cowboys: able to sustain themselves with hope through challenging moments, had emotional stamina, good for the long hall.)

What tragic event happened with his family and what was the result?

(Answers: His niece, Eleanor "Ella" Crowell shot herself at Avondale. Ella's father and Eakins sister blamed Eakins for corrupting, disturbing and perhaps molesting their daughter. Eakins was banished from the farm at Avondale. His nine other nieces and nephews were forbidden to speak his name.)

What did Eakins paint during the last years of his life? Why?

(Answers: Portraits of people he admired or thought were interesting or beautiful. Why- He fell more and more in love with humanity...student opinions)

5. At the conclusion of the discussion, hand out the final writing assignment

Writing Assignment #3

This final writing assignment requires that you compile your thoughts from the previous two writing assignments, answer the following questions and present a final edited document.

1. Was being different a positive or negative influence on Eakins work and life?
2. What is the price an individual pays to be different? Is it worth it?
3. What is the price of conformity? Is it worth it?
4. In school, how are people deemed “different” treated?
5. What in your social circle(s) are the codes of what is acceptable and what is not?

You will be graded/assessed on the following:

- Completion of previous two assignments
- Correct grammar and spelling
- Quality of sentence structure (Run-ons, fragments, redundancy of word usage etc.)
- Quality of expressing opinion and thought (Depth, word usage, sequence of ideas)

This assignment is due_____.

Extension Ideas

Artistic Expression- A Students' Perception of Humanity

- Students create a photo collage or original drawing or painting of their perception of humanity
- Students present their finished piece to the class and verbally explain how their artistic expression represents their perception of humanity

A Thought Provoking Question

How did Eakins' contemporaries depict people and in what contexts would the average Philadelphian have encountered images of the human form?

Present and compare Eakins to other American artists of his day.

- Winslow Homer
- James M. Whistler
- John Singer Sargent
- William Merritt Chase

Assessment Recommendations

- Completion of assignments
- Correct grammar and spelling
- Quality of sentence structure (Run-ons, fragments, redundancy of word usage etc.)
- Quality of expressing opinion and thought (Depth, word usage, sequence of ideas)

Recommended Resources

Thomas Eakins

By Darrel Sewell, Thomas Eakins, Kathleen A. Foster
Philadelphia Museum of Art; ISBN: 0876331428; (September 2001)

The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870

By Walter Edwards, Houghton
Yale Univ Pr; ISBN: 0300001223; (December 1963)

Essential Handbook of Victorian Etiquette

By Thomas E. Hill, William P. Yenne (Editor)
Bluewood Books; ISBN: 0912517123; (November 1994)

The Gentleman's Guide: A Practical Guide for the 19th Century American Man
<http://www.lahacal.org/gentleman/>

The Victorian Web: Political and social history, gender matters, philosophy, religion, science, technology, visual arts, theatre, entertainment and more.
<http://65.107.211.206/victov.html>

Related National Standards

Social Studies

- Students understand concepts such as the function and interactions of language, literature, and the arts in terms of traditions, beliefs, and values; and the transmitting of culture in the face of environmental, technical, and social change.
- Students comprehend and apply specific discipline-based concepts, theories, and principles of human memory, thinking, learning, development, and behavior to analyzing, interpreting, and explaining their own self and identities as well as their own behavior and the behavior of others.
- Students analyze, interpret, and assess personality and individual differences and commonalities, and consider possible influences of biological, social, cultural, economic, peer, and family conditions on personality, thinking, and behavior.

Source:

National Standards for Social Studies Teachers • Volume I

Developed by a task force of National Council for the Social Studies and approved by the NCSS Board of Directors in April, 1997.

<http://www.ncss.org/standards/teachers/vol1/culture.shtml>

History

- The student engages in historical analysis and interpretation

- The student considers multiple perspectives of various peoples in the past by demonstrating their differing motives, beliefs, interests, hopes, and fears
- The student hypothesizes the influence of the past, including both the limitations and the opportunities made possible by past decisions

Source:

The development of the History Standards was administered by the National Center for History in the Schools at the University of California, Los Angeles under the guidance of the National Council for History Standards.

<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs/standards/thinking5-12-3.html>

Art History

Content Standard #4: Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

- Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art
- Students describe the function and explore the meaning of specific art objects within varied cultures, times, and places

Source:

National Art Education Association and the National Committee For Standards in the Arts

http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/professional_resources/standards/natstandards/standards_912.html

Language Arts

- Synthesizes information from multiple research studies to draw conclusions that go beyond those found in any of the individual studies
- Uses systematic strategies (e.g., anecdotal scripting, annotated bibliographies, graphics, conceptual maps, learning logs, notes, outlines) to organize and record information
- Adjusts message wording and delivery to particular audiences and for particular purposes (e.g., to defend a position, to entertain, to inform, to persuade)

Source:

McREL, research and evaluation of policy and practice in standards, curriculum, and instruction.

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/Standard.asp?SubjectID=7>