



*Advanced Placement Summer Institute*  
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# Resources for Teaching Ekphrastic Poetry

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## Web Sites

Rusche, Harry. Emory University. The Poet Speaks of Art.  
<http://www.english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/titlepage.html>

Morrison, Valerie. University of Georgia. Ekphrastic Poetry.  
<http://valerie6.myweb.uga.edu/ekphrasticpoetry.html>

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## Books & Video

Rowden, Justine. *Paint Me a Poem: Poems Inspired by Masterpieces of Art*. Honesdale, Pa.: Wordsong/Boyd's Mills Press, 2005. Print.

Krakora, Joseph, dir. *Vermeer: Master of Light*. Microcinema, 2009. DVD.

Greenberg, Jan, ed.. *Heart to heart : new poems inspired by twentieth century American art*. New York: Harry N Abrams, 2001. Print.

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## Lesson and Unit Plans

Cox, Ann Kelly. "Ekphrasis: Using Art to Inspire Poetry," a plan for a unit of 8 50-minute periods. NCTE/IRA Read Write Think. <  
<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/ekphrasis-using-inspire-poetry-1093.html>>

Smithsonian American Art Museum. "Ekphrastic Poetry Lesson," a one-period lesson.  
<[http://americanart.si.edu/education/pdf/Ekphrastic\\_Poetry\\_Lesson.pdf](http://americanart.si.edu/education/pdf/Ekphrastic_Poetry_Lesson.pdf)>  
Suitable for grades 7-12; students produce a 10-line poem.

Moorman, Honor. "Backing into Ekphrasis: Reading and Writing Poetry about Visual Art." *English Journal*, Sep. 2006: 47-53. Print. Available online at <<http://www.tnellen.com/cybereng/ekphrasis.pdf>>  
Includes a lesson plan and much more

Marisco, Lynn Rogers. "Ekphrastic Poetry: Exploring the visual Arts with a Poet's Eye." Chatham University, Pa.  
<[www.chatham.edu/pti/curriculum/units/2005/Marsico.pdf](http://www.chatham.edu/pti/curriculum/units/2005/Marsico.pdf)>  
A lengthy discussion and an 8-day lesson plan. Suitable for all secondary grades.

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## Museums

*Artcyclopedia* presents an extensive list of museum web sites accessible from a clickable world map. But it also includes a search engine for finding words by title, by artist, or by museum. It's an extensive data base, easy to navigate.  
<<http://www.artcyclopedia.com/museums.html>>

Here are a few major museums outside North America that students can mine with profit.

China National Museum of Fine Art—  
[http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en\\_museum/2003-09/24/content\\_30094.htm](http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en_museum/2003-09/24/content_30094.htm)

Le Musée des Beaux-Arts, Brussels—  
[www.fine-arts-museum.be](http://www.fine-arts-museum.be)

Musée d'Orsay, Paris—<http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/home.html>

Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, Rio de Janeiro—  
<http://www.mnba.gov.br/>

National Archaeological Museum of Athens—  
[www.namuseum.gr](http://www.namuseum.gr)

National Museum, New Delhi—  
<http://www.nationalmuseumindia.gov.in/collection.html>

The British Museum, London—[www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org)

The Hermitage, St Petersburg—  
<http://www.heritagemuseum.org>

The Louvre, Paris—[www.louvre.fr](http://www.louvre.fr)

The National Gallery, London—  
[www.nationalgallery.org.uk](http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk)

The National Museum of Korea, Seoul—  
<http://www.museum.go.kr/main/index/index002.jsp>

The Prado, Madrid—[www.museodelprado.es](http://www.museodelprado.es)

The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam—[www.rijksmuseum.nl](http://www.rijksmuseum.nl)

The Uffizi Gallery, Florence—[www.uffizi.com](http://www.uffizi.com)

The Vatican Museums—Vatican City  
[http://mv.vatican.va/3\\_EN/pages/MV\\_Home.html](http://mv.vatican.va/3_EN/pages/MV_Home.html)

Tokyo National Museum—<http://www.tnm.jp/?lang=en>

## THE FALL OF ICARUS



— Pieter Bruegel the Elder

### Musee des Beaux Arts W.H. Auden

About suffering they were never wrong,  
The Old Masters; how well, they understood  
Its human position; how it takes place  
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking  
dully along;  
5 How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting  
For the miraculous birth, there always must be  
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating  
On a pond at the edge of the wood:  
They never forgot  
10 That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course  
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot  
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse  
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.  
In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away  
15 Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may  
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,  
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone  
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green  
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen  
20 Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,  
had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

### Landscape With The Fall Of Icarus William Carlos Williams

According to Brueghel  
when Icarus fell  
it was spring  
a farmer was ploughing  
5 his field  
the whole pageantry  
of the year was  
awake tingling  
near  
10 the edge of the sea  
concerned  
with itself  
sweating in the sun  
that melted  
15 the wings' wax  
unsignificantly  
off the coast  
there was  
a splash quite unnoticed  
20 this was  
Icarus drowning

Icarus  
Edward Field

Only the feathers floating around the hat  
Showed that anything more spectacular had occurred  
Than the usual drowning. The police preferred to ignore  
The confusing aspects of the case,  
5 And the witnesses ran off to a gang war.  
So the report filed and forgotten in the archives read simply  
Drowned, but it was wrong: Icarus  
Had swum away, coming at last to the city  
Where he rented a house and tended the garden.  
10 That nice Mr. Hicks the neighbors called him,  
Never dreaming that the gray, respectable suit  
Concealed arms that had controlled huge wings  
Nor that those sad, defeated eyes had once  
Compelled the sun. And had he told them  
15 They would have answered with a shocked, uncomprehending stare.  
No, he could not disturb their neat front yards;  
Yet all his books insisted that this was a horrible mistake:  
What was he doing aging in a suburb?  
Can the genius of the hero fall  
20 To the middling stature of the merely talented?  
And nightly Icarus probes his wound  
And daily in his workshop, curtains carefully drawn,  
Constructs small wings and tries to fly  
To the lighting fixture on the ceiling:  
25 Fails every time and hates himself for trying.  
He had thought himself a hero, had acted heroically,  
And now dreamt of his fall, the tragic fall of the hero;  
But now rides commuter trains,  
Serves on various committees,  
30 And wishes he had drowned.

To A Friend Whose Work Has Come To Triumph  
Anne Sexton

Consider Icarus, pasting those sticky wings on,  
testing this strange little tug at his shoulder blade,  
and think of that first flawless moment over the lawn  
of the labyrinth. Think of the difference it made!  
5 There below are the trees, as awkward as camels;  
and here are the shocked starlings pumping past  
and think of innocent Icarus who is doing quite well:  
larger than a sail, over the fog and the blast  
of the plushy ocean, he goes. Admire his wings!  
10 Feel the fire at his neck and see how casually  
he glances up and is caught, wondrously tunneling  
into that hot eye. Who cares that he fell back to the sea?  
See him acclaiming the sun and come plunging down  
while his sensible daddy goes straight into town.



*The Lament for Icarus*  
Herbert Draper

Icarus  
By Tony Curtis

Out of an English summer morning's sky  
drops an Indian who failed in flight  
miles short of heaven. This frozen Icarus  
thrown from the wheel-bay of a 747,  
5 splashes into a Surrey reservoir,  
cracking the water like a whip.  
This poor man stowed away  
in the Delhi heat, curled  
himself into an oven of rubber and oil,  
10 and dreamed as he rose in the deafening take-off  
of food and rain and Coca-Cola  
and television where the colour never ends.  
The waitress at the Granada stop  
tapping in two coffees and a Danish  
15 at the till, for no reason at all,  
looked up, saw a bird, or an engine,  
or a man, and then nothing  
but blue sky again.

Icarus' Diatribe  
By Aaron Pastula

How we have wasted the years here, Father;  
Grounded in the shadow of Talus, whom you envied  
Too much, and murdered. We might be free  
If  
5 Ariadne had not received a precious ball of thread  
With which to save her lover, yet you would rescue  
Another even though we are trapped, and only  
Two left.  
I've watched your shadows sleep against stone walls  
10 While I ran our labyrinth, the sun above  
Driving me as if I should call for my final repose  
Alone.  
Do you remember the torrid wind maneuvering  
Around the angles of our useless garrison,  
15 Filling empty mouths with surrogate conversation?  
We  
Seldom spoke, you and I, roaming like languid souls  
When the Minotaur's threat was dead.  
And yet I felt the lyre singing in my breast,  
20 Always  
Crying out background noise for the construction  
Of my cunningly wrought wings; my only means to rise  
Above these steadfast fortress walls, lest I  
Surrender  
25 To your silence. I know the gulls were wailing  
When I robbed them, but they had flown too close:  
I am not to blame for the necessity of my purpose.  
To you  
I am as your own divided heart - double-sexed  
30 And beating as a thief's in the falling hours of twilight,  
Awaiting my time to retire. Instead I take flight,  
The sun  
Drawing me as an opiate away from our  
Etherized utopia, leaving you puzzled; compelling  
35 You to follow me out above the open,  
Beguiling sea

Icarus  
By Christine Hemp

It was his idea, this flying thing.  
We collected feathers at night, stuffing  
our pockets with mourning dove down. By day,  
we'd weave and glue them with the wax  
5 I stole after we'd shooed the bees away.  
Oh, how it felt, finally, to blow off Crete  
leaving a labyrinth of dead-ends:  
my clumsiness with figures, father's calm  
impatience, cool logic, interminable devising.  
10 The sea wind touched my face like balm.  
He thought I'd tag along as usual,  
in the wake of his careful scheme  
bound by the string connecting father and son,  
invisible thread I tried for years to untie.  
15 I ached to be a good-for-something on my own.  
I didn't know I'd get drunk with the heat,  
flying high, too much a son to return.  
Poor Daedalus, his mouth an O below,  
his hands outstretched to catch the rain  
20 of wax. He still doesn't know.  
My wings fell, yes - I saw him hover  
over the tiny splash - but by then I'd been  
swallowed into love's eye, the light I've come to see  
as home, drowning in the yes, this swirling  
25 white-hot where night will never find me.  
And now when my father wakes  
each morning, his bones still sore  
from his one-time flight, his confidence undone  
because the master plan fell through,  
30 he rises to a light he never knew, his son.

The Fall of Icarus (Metamorphosis, VIII: 183-235)  
By Ovid, Translated by Sir Samuel Garth

These, as the angler at the silent brook,  
Or mountain-shepherd leaning on his crook,  
Or gaping plowman, from the vale describes,  
They stare, and view 'em with religious eyes,  
5 And strait conclude 'em Gods; since none, but they,  
Thro' their own azure skies cou'd find a way.  
When now the boy, whose childish thoughts aspire  
To loftier aims, and make him ramble high'r,  
Grown wild, and wanton, more embolden'd flies  
10 Far from his guide, and soars among the skies.  
The soft'ning wax, that felt a nearer sun,  
Dissolv'd apace, and soon began to run.  
The youth in vain his melting pinions shakes,  
His feathers gone, no longer air he takes:  
15 Oh! Father, father, as he strove to cry,  
Down to the sea he tumbled from on high,  
And found his Fate; yet still subsists by fame,  
Among those waters that retain his name.



## Vincent (Starry Starry Night)

Song lyrics by Don McLean

Starry starry night, paint your palette blue and grey  
Look out on a summer's day with eyes that know the darkness in my soul  
Shadows on the hills, sketch the trees and the daffodils  
Catch the breeze and the winter chills, in colors on the snowy linen land

5 Now I understand what you tried to say to me  
How you suffered for your sanity How you tried to set them free  
They would not listen they did not know how, perhaps they'll listen now  
Starry starry night, flaming flowers that brightly blaze  
Swirling clouds in violet haze reflect in Vincent's eyes of china blue  
10 Colors changing hue, morning fields of amber grain  
Weathered faces lined in pain are soothed beneath the artist's loving hand

### *Refrain:*

For they could not love you, but still your love was true  
And when no hope was left in sight, on that starry starry night  
You took your life as lovers often do,  
15 But I could have told you, Vincent,  
This world was never meant for one as beautiful as you

Starry, starry night, portraits hung in empty halls  
Frameless heads on nameless walls with eyes that watch the world and can't forget.  
Like the stranger that you've met, the ragged man in ragged clothes  
20 The silver thorn of bloody rose, lie crushed and broken on the virgin snow

Now I think I know what you tried to say to me  
How you suffered for your sanity How you tried to set them free  
They would not listen they're not listening still  
Perhaps they never will.



*Starry Night*  
Vincent van Gogh, 1889  
Museum of Modern Art, New York

# The Shield of Achilles

W. H. Auden

5 She looked over his shoulder  
For vines and olive trees,  
Marble well-governed cities  
And ships upon untamed seas,  
But there on the shining metal  
His hands had put instead  
An artificial wilderness  
And a sky like lead.

10 A plain without a feature, bare and brown,  
No blade of grass, no sign of neighborhood,  
Nothing to eat and nowhere to sit down,  
Yet, congregated on its blankness, stood  
An unintelligible multitude,  
A million eyes, a million boots in line,  
15 Without expression, waiting for a sign.

Out of the air a voice without a face  
Proved by statistics that some cause was just  
In tones as dry and level as the place:  
No one was cheered and nothing was discussed;  
20 Column by column in a cloud of dust  
They marched away enduring a belief  
Whose logic brought them, somewhere else, to grief.

25 She looked over his shoulder  
For ritual pieties,  
White flower-garlanded heifers,  
Libation and sacrifice,  
But there on the shining metal  
Where the altar should have been,  
She saw by his flickering forge-light  
30 Quite another scene.

Barbed wire enclosed an arbitrary spot  
Where bored officials lounged (one cracked a joke)  
And sentries sweated for the day was hot:  
A crowd of ordinary decent folk  
35 Watched from without and neither moved nor spoke  
As three pale figures were led forth and bound  
To three posts driven upright in the ground.

40 The mass and majesty of this world, all  
That carries weight and always weighs the same  
Lay in the hands of others; they were small  
And could not hope for help and no help came:  
What their foes like to do was done, their shame  
Was all the worst could wish; they lost their pride  
And died as men before their bodies died.

45 She looked over his shoulder  
For athletes at their games,  
Men and women in a dance  
Moving their sweet limbs  
Quick, quick, to music,  
50 But there on the shining shield  
His hands had set no dancing-floor  
But a weed-choked field.

A ragged urchin, aimless and alone,  
Loitered about that vacancy; a bird  
55 Flew up to safety from his well-aimed stone:  
That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,  
Were axioms to him, who'd never heard  
Of any world where promises were kept,  
Or one could weep because another wept.

60 The thin-lipped armorer,  
Hephaestos, hobbled away,  
Thetis of the shining breasts  
Cried out in dismay  
At what the god had wrought  
65 To please her son, the strong  
Iron-hearted man-slaying Achilles  
Who would not live long.



## Homer's description of the shield of Achilles, *The Iliad*, Book 18

[490] Therein fashioned he also two cities of mortal men exceeding fair. In the one there were marriages and feasting, and by the light of the blazing torches they were leading the brides from their bowers through the city, and loud rose the bridal song. And young men were whirling in the dance, and in their midst [495] flutes and lyres sounded continually; and there the women stood each before her door and marvelled. But the folk were gathered in the place of assembly; for there a strife had arisen, and two men were striving about the blood-price of a man slain; the one avowed that he had paid all, [500] declaring his cause to the people, but the other refused to accept aught; and each was fain to win the issue on the word of a daysman. Moreover, the folk were cheering both, shewing favour to this side and to that. And heralds held back the folk, and the elders were sitting upon polished stones in the sacred circle, [505] holding in their hands the staves of the loud-voiced heralds. Therewith then would they spring up and give judgment, each in turn. And in the midst lay two talents of gold, to be given to him whoso among them should utter the most righteous judgment. But around the other city lay in leaguer two hosts of warriors [510] gleaming in armour. And twofold plans found favour with them, either to lay waste

the town or to divide in portions twain all the substance that the lovely city contained within. Howbeit the besieged would nowise hearken thereto, but were arming to meet the foe in an ambush. The wall were their dear wives and little children guarding, [515] as they stood thereon, and therewithal the men that were holden of old age; but the rest were faring forth, led of Ares and Pallas Athene, both fashioned in gold, and of gold was the raiment wherewith they were clad. Goodly were they and tall in their harness, as beseemeth gods, clear to view amid the rest, and the folk at their feet were smaller. [520] But when they were come to the place where it seemed good unto them to set their ambush, in a river-bed where was a watering-place for all herds alike, there they sate them down, clothed about with flaming bronze. Thereafter were two scouts set by them apart from the host, waiting till they should have sight of the sheep and sleek cattle. [525] And these came presently, and two herdsmen followed with them playing upon pipes; and of the guile wist they not at all.

Homer. *The Iliad with an English Translation by A.T. Murray, Ph.D. in two volumes.* Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann, Ltd. 1924.



Replications of Achilles's shield, made from the description in *The Iliad*.

## Courtyards in Delft

Derek Mahon  
(for Gordon Woods)

Oblique light on the trite, on brick and tile—  
Immaculate masonry, and everywhere that  
Water tap, that broom and wooden pail  
To keep it so. House-proud, the wives  
5 Of artisans pursue their thrifty lives  
Among scrubbed yards, modest but adequate.  
Foliage is sparse, and clings. No breeze  
Ruffles the trim composure of those trees.

No spinet-playing emblematic of  
10 The harmonies and disharmonies of love;  
No lewd fish, no fruit, no wide-eyed bird  
About to fly its cage while a virgin  
Listens to her seducer, mars the chaste  
Perfection of the thing and the thing made.  
15 Nothing is random, nothing goes to waste.  
We miss the dirty dog, the fiery gin.

That girl with her back to us who waits  
For her man to come home for his tea  
Will wait till the paint disintegrates  
20 And ruined dikes admit the esurient sea;  
Yet this is life too, and the cracked  
Out-house door a verifiable fact  
As vividly mnemonic as the sunlit  
Railings that front the houses opposite.

25 I lived there as a boy and know the coal  
Glittering in its shed, late-afternoon  
Lambency informing the deal table,  
The ceiling cradled in a radiant spoon.  
I must be lying low in a room there,  
30 A strange child with a taste for verse,  
While my hard-nosed companions dream of fire  
And sword upon parched veldt and fields of rain-swept gorse.



*Courtyards in Delft*  
Pieter de Hooch, 1659

National Gallery, London  
approx. 29 x 23.5 inches



# The Great Wave: Hokusai

Donald Finkel

## The Great Wave: Hokusai

But we will take the problem in its most obscure manifestation, and suppose that our spectator is an average Englishman. A trained observer, carefully hidden behind a screen, might notice a dilation in his eyes, even an intake of his breath, perhaps a grunt. (Herbert Read, *The Meaning of Art*)

It is because the sea is blue,  
Because Fuji is blue, because the bent blue  
Men have white faces, like the snow  
On Fuji, like the crest of the wave in the sky the color of their  
5 Boats. It is because the air  
Is full of writing, because the wave is still: that nothing  
Will harm these frail strangers,  
That high over Fuji in an earthcolored sky the fingers  
Will not fall; and the blue men  
10 Lean on the sea like snow, and the wave like a mountain leans  
Against the sky.

In the painter's sea  
All fishermen are safe. All anger bends under his unity.  
But the innocent bystander, he merely  
15 'Walks round a corner, thinking of nothing': hidden  
Behind a screen we hear his cry.  
He stands half in and half out of the world; he is the men,  
But he cannot see below Fuji  
The shore the color of sky; he is the wave, he stretches  
20 His claws against strangers. He is  
Not safe, not even from himself. His world is flat.  
He fishes a sea full of serpents, he rides his boat  
Blindly from wave to wave toward Ararat.



*The Great Wave at Kamagawa*

Katsushika Hokusai, 1831

woodblock print

# Not my Best Side

U. A. Fanthorpe

I

Not my best side, I'm afraid.  
The artist didn't give me a chance to  
Pose properly, and as you can see,  
Poor chap, he had this obsession with  
5 Triangles, so he left off two of my  
Feet. I didn't comment at the time  
(What, after all, are two feet  
To a monster?) but afterwards  
I was sorry for the bad publicity.  
10 Why, I said to myself, should my conqueror  
Be so ostentatiously beardless, and ride  
A horse with a deformed neck and square hoofs?  
Why should my victim be so  
Unattractive as to be inedible,  
15 And why should she have me literally  
On a string? I don't mind dying  
Ritually, since I always rise again,  
But I should have liked a little more blood  
To show they were taking me seriously.

II

20 It's hard for a girl to be sure if  
She wants to be rescued. I mean, I quite  
Took to the dragon. It's nice to be  
Liked, if you know what I mean. He was  
So nicely physical, with his claws  
25 And lovely green skin, and that sexy tail,  
And the way he looked at me,  
He made me feel he was all ready to  
Eat me. And any girl enjoys that.  
So when this boy turned up, wearing machinery,  
30 On a really dangerous horse, to be honest  
I didn't much fancy him. I mean,

What was he like underneath the hardware?  
He might have acne, blackheads or even  
Bad breath for all I could tell, but the dragon--  
35 Well, you could see all his equipment  
At a glance. Still, what could I do?  
The dragon got himself beaten by the boy,  
And a girl's got to think of her future.

III

I have diplomas in Dragon  
Management and Virgin Reclamation.  
40 My horse is the latest model, with  
Automatic transmission and built-in  
Obsolescence. My spear is custom-built,  
And my prototype armour  
45 Still on the secret list. You can't  
Do better than me at the moment.  
I'm qualified and equipped to the  
Eyebrow. So why be difficult?  
Don't you want to be killed and/or rescued  
50 In the most contemporary way? Don't  
You want to carry out the roles  
That sociology and myth have designed for you?  
Don't you realize that, by being choosy,  
You are endangering job prospects  
55 In the spear- and horse-building industries?  
What, in any case, does it matter what  
You want? You're in my way.





## St George and the Dragon

Uccello (1397-1435)  
National Gallery, London

### Looking at Point-of-View: Three Perspectives for One Poem

1. Look at the painting closely. Based on your knowledge of myth and legend, what are some initial inferences you can draw concerning the figures depicted in the painting? In other words, what are some of the characteristics you assume each character embodies?  
The Maiden / The Dragon / The Knight?
  2. In what ways does your speaker reinforce or affirm the assumptions you made about him/her/it?
  3. In what ways does your speaker reject or go against the assumptions you made about him/her/it?
  4. Once you have heard the responses from the other groups, please answer the following question: Why is the knight interested most in maintaining the paradigm represented in the painting?
- Homework: Taking all of "Not My Best Side" into consideration, along with the comments of your peers, write a short response (½-1 page) in which you discuss what you believe to be one of the main ideas in this poem. Specifically discuss how the different points of view are significant in expressing this idea. For this assignment, your first sentence needs to be your thesis statement.

Lance Bala