

SEEN ART?

by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith



Summary

Seen Art? is a book about our interpretations of what art is, and how we often do not know what we are looking for until we find it. This book explores a young boy's journey through the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. His adventure begins when he is supposed to meet his friend named Art, and instead enters the MOMA. He tells people that he is "looking for Art" (his friend) and is then guided throughout the gallery by various characters who appreciate different types of art. Throughout his journey, readers get to see that art, indeed, comes in many forms, textures and ideas; art can be photographs, paintings, sculpture and video. Art evokes much emotion, allows us to see things differently and individually. In the end, the boy discovers that yes; he has found "Art" after all.

Rationale

We chose this book because we believe that there is a serious lack of true art books for children in our school system. Art is often not a subject that is considered to be an important part of the curriculum and is therefore condensed into spaces where it can fit in the week's schedule. Art is often taken away or missed because of other "more important" school activities. Through the use of this book, teachers can integrate language, social studies, math and science into the study of art. The book begs to be studied in depth and journeyed well. The index itself is an incredibly rich source of information on the different genres, artists and time periods of the art featured in the book.

Although we believe that this book could be easily adapted for most P/J grades, the most specific audience range would be grade 2-3.

Links to the Curriculum (Grade 3 Reading)

Students will:

- read a variety of non-fiction materials for different purposes;
- identify and describe some elements of stories;
- begin to make inferences while reading;
- use familiar vocabulary and the context to determine the meaning of a passage containing unfamiliar words;
- read aloud, speaking clearly and with expression.

Pre-Reading Activity

Prior to reading the story, the class could look at slides of works of art and talk about what they think, how it makes them feel and what they enjoy most. What are their favourite types of art? Have they been to art galleries? Are there any artists in their families? Another idea is to talk about freaky things that artists do: Vincent Van Gogh's missing ear, or Salvador Dali's self-induced insomnia. Why did artists do things like this? A concept map could be generated from the discussion introducing and broadening words related to art and feelings surrounding art. Children often have many strong opinions about what art is. This is sure to be a lively discussion.

Reading

There are several activities that can be done during the reading of this book:

- Have the class sit in a circle and each student could take turns reading a line or two.
- Do Reader's Theatre with the book. This book has a lot of conversation and many characters with much chance for vocal expression. The text could easily be adapted into a classroom script.
- As you read the book, have students make lists of art vocabulary they hear (i.e. constellations, shapes, photographs). After the reading, the class could make a class dictionary of art vocabulary, with illustrations.
- From the reading, encourage your students to decide on an artist featured in the book to do a project on. (This would require in-depth reading using other resources.)
- Talk about what the main idea of the story is. Do all students understand what the word "art" means? Do they understand that the boy is looking for his *friend* Art and the people in the gallery misunderstand and think he is looking for *art*? This is a good opportunity to discuss the possibilities of different interpretations when we read, and also the different uses of the same words.





Additional Reading Resources



- *Yesterday I Had the Blues* (Jeron Ashford Frame)
- *Discovering Great Artists* (M. Kohl and K. Solga)
- *The A-Z of Art* (N. Hodge and L. Anson)
- *Children in Art* (National Gallery, London)
- *Mouse Paint* (E. Walsh)
- *I Spy Shapes in Art* (L. Micklethwait)
- *Can you find it?* (J. Cressy, Metropolitan Museum of Art)
- *Lips in Art* (Bridgeman Art Library Series)
- *Hands in Art* (Bridgeman Art Library Series)
- *Noses in Art* (Bridgeman Art Library Series)
- *Feet in Art* (Bridgeman Art Library Series)

Multimedia Resources

- The Museum Of Modern Art – Destination Modern Art: <http://www.moma.org/destination/>
The Museum of Modern Arts website takes kids through the gallery in a completely interactive way. Kids can click on various paintings to find out more about the artist, create their own art, and learn about different techniques.
- Princeton On-line: <http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/links/artgames.html>
This is an incredible website that offers lesson plans, activities, websites and more for the teaching of arts.



Author Study: About Jon Scieszka

Jon Scieszka was born in Flint, Michigan in 1954. He came from a large family of five brothers. He attended military school, studied pre-med at Albion College for four years as his undergrad, then changed careers and went to Columbia University and received his Master of Fine Arts degree. He worked as a lifeguard and a house painter, and taught as a classroom teacher for ten years (including everything from grade 1-8). For the past twenty years he has been living in Brooklyn, New York. He is married and has two children. He got started writing books when he took a year off from teaching to work with Lane Smith (an illustrator) to come up with ideas for children's books.

He has won numerous awards for his books including *The Stinky Cheese Man* (1994 Rhode Island Children's Book Award, 1997 Georgia's Children's Choice Award, Wisconsin's The Golden Archer Award) and *Math Curse* (1996 American Library Association Notable Book, 1995 Blue Ribbon Book from the Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, 1995 Publisher's Weekly Best Children's Book, Maine's Student Book Award, Texas Bluebonnet Award, 1997 New Hampshire's The Great Stone Face Book Award).



Some Additional Books by Jon Scieszka

- *Math Curse*
- *Science Verse*
- *The Book That Jack Wrote*
- *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*
- *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*
- *Squids Will Be Squids*
- *The Frog Prince, Continued*
- *Time Warp Trio: It's All Greek To Me*
- *Time Warp Trio: Summer Reading is Killing Me*
- *Time Warp Trio: Knights of the Kitchen Table*
- *Time Warp Trio: Viking It and Liking It*
- *Time Warp Trio: Da Wild, Da Crazy, Da Vinci*
- *Time Warp Trio: The Good the Bad and the Goofy*
- *Time Warp Trio: Your Mother Was a Neanderthal*



Class Activities For an Author Study on Jon Scieszka

- Have students complete a KWL chart about the author.
- Have children create a pencil drawing of what they think Jon Scieszka might look like learning about his life.
- Have students create personal dictionaries made up of words from Jon's books that they have read.
- Have children act out *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*.
- Have the children write letters or make a card for Jon Scieszka, responding to his books.
- Have children create a poster about Scieszka including information about his life and books.
- Poll the students and make a bar graph in response to their favourite Scieszka book.



Writing Activities

There are countless possible writing activities, many of which have been outlined elsewhere in this document. A few other ideas...

- After visiting the MoMA - Destination Modern Art website, students might "interview" an artist who interests them.
- *Seen Art?* pivots on a mistake or a misunderstanding. Students could write a story about a misunderstanding.

- *Seen Art?* contains the message that sometimes we are wonderfully surprised by something for which we are not looking.

Students could write a story about an accidental discovery.

- A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words: Students could respond to a piece of art (in the book, on the MoMA website) which captures them. They could write their impressions of it, describe what is happening in the picture, describe the setting, character, mood, etc. They could tell the story of what is happening in the picture. The possibilities are endless!

Other Curricular Areas That Could Be Integrated

Art: Visual Arts

- Have children complete their own artwork and publish a class “*Seen Art?*” collection of their work.
- Have the children complete artwork in the style of one or two of the artists from the story (ex. paint like Pollock).
- Have children complete artwork in the manner of one of the styles from the story (ex., Cubism or Expressionism).
- Challenge children to find out about an artist.

Social Studies – Traditions and Celebrations (grade 2)

- Demonstrate an understanding that Canada is a country of many cultures.
- Explain how the various cultures of individuals and groups contribute to the local community.
- Demonstrate an understanding that the world is made up of countries, continents and regions and that people’s lifestyles may differ from country to country.

Social Studies – Early Settlements in Upper Canada (grade 3)

- Identify the countries of origin of the people who settled in Upper Canada around 1800. The artists represented in *Seen Art?* represent a collection of cultures and nationalities. (Artists’ birthplaces include Holland, France, Switzerland, Belgium, Spain, Norway, Mexico, Finland, Italy, Korea, Latvia, Georgia, Germany and the USA.) Both the museum and the book showcase the endless ways culture affect our ideas, beliefs and inspiration.



Activity 1: In an activity called “Who Am I?” teachers have students bring in objects that represent their family and cultural history: photographs, press clippings, pieces of fabric, etc. From these, the students can create a work of art that will be, in a way, a mirror of their cultural identity.

Activity 2: Unfortunately, Canada is not represented in *Seen Art?* The Group of Seven is a famously important group of Canadian artists. After exposing students to work by the Group of Seven take them outdoors to a natural setting near the school. Ask the students to make a cardboard frame, then divide them into groups of four and ask each group to look at the same setting through the frame and draw or paint what they see. Students will learn that many people perceive the same setting differently. This reflects the way artists respond to their cultural

surroundings through their work and cements the notion that our differences shape how we view the world.

Special Needs Accommodations

- After reading the book, enlarge selected art work of their choice and place on white background to decrease visual distractions and allow for increased attention.
- Incorporate a variety of textile materials in the creation of the student’s own art, appealing to those who have tactile and sensory issues, such as some individuals on the ASD.
- Allow more time for reading the book and provide, in a clear and accessible space, definitions to the more challenging words prior to the lesson, to prevent students from having to seek out assistance. Avoiding the stigmatization of requesting help, students can consume the words at their own pace.

ESL

The art work showcased in this book is European and American in nature. Supplementing the text with more diverse forms of art representative of many cultures, present and historic, will provide a more inclusive lesson into the subjective and varied forms of art. There are many beautiful artistic endeavors beyond the genres presented in this book. Providing definitions for difficult words is helpful for those students for whom English is a second (third...) language.

Family Involvement

A field trip to the local art gallery is an excellent way to involve parents, guardians and friends. While on the trip students will learn how a real museum is run and be exposed to unique ways to display their work. At the end of the year/unit or semester showcase student’s work in an art show! Turn an area of the school (or if possible obtain space at a museum) into a gallery! Invite parents and family members, friends and members of the community to come and view the children’s work. This also acts as a form of student-led conferencing where students can teach their parents about what goes on in the class.