Lesson Overview
Students will enhance their visual literacy skills by using works of art in the High’s collection to make inferences and practice re-creating the basic elements of story.

Learning Objectives

Essential Questions
- How can I read a work of art just like a book?
- How can I use inferences and close looking to create a story inspired by a work of art?

Students will be able to . . .
- Apply literary concepts (inference, plot, setting, character) to looking at a work of art
- Use close looking and inference skills to create a unique character and plot based on a setting they are given

Performance Tasks
- Close looking, making inferences, cutting, gluing, drawing, collage

Mini Glossary
- Character: a person, creature, or personified object portrayed in a novel, short story, or play
- Embellishment: a decorative feature that can be added to something else
- Inference: a conclusion reached when someone uses clues in a text or an image along with their knowledge, to better understand the meaning of a text or artwork
- Plot: the main events of a story presented as an interrelated sequence
- Setting: the place or type of surrounding where something is positioned or where an event takes place
- Visual literacy: the ability to interpret, negotiate, and make meaning from information presented in the form of an image

Materials
- Printed landscape photographs from museum’s collection for each student
- Blank character template
- Collage materials (fabric scraps, patterned paper, doilies, cupcake liners, etc.)
- Crayons/colored pencils
- Markers/sharpies
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Pencils
- Stapler

Additional Needs per Classroom
- Large, laminated images of artwork on display in museum (to be arranged into impromptu narratives)
- Large image of Choumali artwork
- Lesson sample
- Visual timer
- Visual schedule
Procedures

Introduction (5 mins)
Introduce the idea of “reading” an artwork like a text—art can tell a story! Ask students about books they’re reading in class or for fun. Explain that today they’re going to be using images to tell a story, just like one they might read in a book.

Select three random works from the High’s collection (printed and laminated) to hang on the wall at the front of the classroom. Invite students to look closely and imagine that these three works tell a story. Begin by using visual thinking strategies:

- What’s going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? Emphasize elements of a story: character, setting, plot. For more of a challenge, discuss conflict or problem. Are there characters in any of these artworks? What about a setting? Could these three works all be part of the same story? Encourage students to draw inferences, use their imaginations, and make connections!

Art Prompt (10 mins)
Show students Joana Choumali’s THE DREAM THAT STAYED WITH YOU WHEN YOU WOKE UP. Explain the process behind this photograph. Choumali takes photos, sometimes with her phone, of things she sees. Afterward, she adds figures to these photos and a story starts to emerge. What do you think about the two characters here?

For our activity, we will take inspiration from photography and the work of Joana Choumali. Students will receive a landscape photograph from the High’s collection. There is no visible person in this image, but if we use our imagination, who would live in this scene? What is their name? What is their backstory? Why are they here? What do they want? Share a general story template with students: (Character) wants to (motivation), but (challenge), so they (response), and then (resolution). In a story, characters always want something, which creates plot. What does this character want? Why can’t they have it? What will they do to get it?

After asking these questions, introduce the lesson prompt to students and show an example of the finished project. Then hand out character writing prompts and a blank character template along with the printed photos. Using inferences based on what they observe, students will create a character and a plot that fit into their photograph setting.
Art Making (25 mins)

Students will draw directly on their character template to create their unique character. Share visual prompts for the following: name, age, backstory, personality, motivator. While students continue working on their story, introduce collage materials, which students may use as embellishments or to add meaning or additional content to their narrative. As students finish, they can cut out and glue their character to the background they received.

For a challenge: Create an additional character! How does that change your story? Is your new character driven by a similar goal to your first, or are they at odds with each other? For multiple students who may finish early, ask them to find a way to connect their two stories.

For support: As needed, slow down and work with students step by step. It’s not crucial they write complete sentences for the prompts. This is to help them brainstorm and can also be done verbally!

Conclusion (10 mins)

Invite students to volunteer to share their character and photograph with the group and briefly summarize why their character is in this setting. After a few students have shared, invite the class to discuss the following:

- How is visual art like a written story? How is it different?

Cleanup (5 mins)

At the end of the workshop, students will return supplies to the bins on the tables and discard scrap material that cannot be reused. Help staple each student’s characters to their background and collect their works as a class to travel back to school.