



Neuberger Museum of Art



Let's Create Ekphrastic Poetry



The word “ekphrasis” comes from the Greek word for “description.”

EKPHRASTIC POETRY is a creative way to express in vivid detail what you see happening in an artwork and how that drawing, painting, or sculpture makes you feel. In this project, you'll write poems that describe your response to artwork from the Neuberger Museum's collection.

For inspiration, we've included an example below by Anne Sexton who wrote about Vincent van Gogh's painting *The Starry Night*. You can search for other Ekphrastic Poems on the internet to read more examples of poems that have been written about famous artworks.

THE STARRY NIGHT by Anne Sexton

That does not keep me from having a terrible need
of — shall I say the word — religion. Then I go out at
night to paint the stars.

—Vincent Van Gogh in a letter to his brother

The town does not exist
except where one black-haired tree slips
up like a drowned woman into the hot sky.
The town is silent. The night boils with eleven stars.
Oh starry starry night! This is how
I want to die.

It moves. They are all alive.
Even the moon bulges in its orange irons
to push children, like a god, from its eye.
The old unseen serpent swallows up the stars.
Oh starry starry night! This is how
I want to die:

into that rushing beast of the night,
sucked up by that great dragon, to split
from my life with no flag,
no belly,
no cry.



Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889, Oil on canvas, 73.7 cm × 92.1 cm (28.7 in × 36 1/4 in).

Location: Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

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The painting is a scene at night with ten swirly stars, Venus, and a bright yellow crescent Moon.
In the background are hills, in the foreground a cypress tree and houses.

This project was created by the Neuberger Museum of Art Education team.

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THIS PROJECT IS BEST FOR AGES 10+

ACTIVITY

There are three paintings from the Neuberger Museum of Art collection that you can choose from below. On the pages that follow you'll find a larger version of each image along with a few questions to get you started. Carefully observe the works then use your imagination to create a poem or story that describes what the painting is telling you. You can describe what you see and feel ... or maybe you want to create a dialogue between characters ... the choice is up to you!

MATERIALS

You'll need a pen or pencil and some paper or a computer to write your poem.

LET'S BEGIN!

Select one of the artworks below that you'd like to write about then go to the page with that image to continue:



Grace Hartigan
Giftwares, 1955
Oil on canvas
63 x 81 1/8 inches
Signed and dated in black paint,
lower right: "Hartigan '55"
Collection Neuberger Museum of Art
Purchase College, SUNY
Gift of Roy R. Neuberger
1975.16.15



Edward Hopper
Barber Shop, 1931
Oil on canvas
78 1/2 x 60 1/8 inches (199.4 x 152.7 cm)
Signed, lower left: Edward Hopper
Collection Neuberger Museum of Art,
Purchase College, SUNY
Gift of Roy R. Neuberger
1976.26.54



Marsden Hartley
Fishermen's Last Supper, Nova Scotia, 1940-41
Oil on canvas
30 1/8 x 41 1/8 inches (76.5 x 194.5 cm)
Signed and dated lower right: M.H 40-41
Collection Friends of the Neuberger
useum of Art,
Purchase College, SUNY
Gift from the Estate of Roy R. Neuberger
EL 02.2011.67



Create a poem or story about Grace Hartigan's painting, *Giftwares*.

- Ask yourself: Who? What? When? Where? Why?
- What objects are in the painting?
- Where do you think the objects are? What kind of place is this?
- Why are the objects there?
- Who might be looking at these objects? Why are they looking at them?
- What colors do you see? How would you describe these colors? How do they make you feel?
- What other questions does this painting make you ask yourself?



Create a poem or story about Edward Hopper's painting, *Barber Shop*.

- Ask yourself: Who? What? When? Where? Why?
- What do you see in the painting?
- What colors do you see? How would you describe these colors? How do they make you feel?
- What time is it?
- What setting are the people in?
- How many people are there in the painting? What are they doing?
- How do you think they may interact with one another if the painting came to life?
- What would you be doing if you were one of the people in this painting?

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Create a poem or story about Marsden Hartley's painting, *Fishermen's Last Supper, Nova Scotia*.

- Ask yourself: Who? What? When? Where? Why?
- What and who do you see in the painting?
- What setting are the people in?
- How many people are there in the painting? What are they doing?
- How do you think they may interact with one another if the painting came to life?
- What would you be doing if you were one of the people in this painting?
- What colors do you see? How would you describe these colors? How do they make you feel?
- What other questions does this painting make you ask yourself?