

Finding Drama in Art

FIRST SECTION (ON SDMA @ PLAY PAGE):

Just because the people and objects in a work of art don't move doesn't mean you can't bring them to life with your imagination! Artwork can be a great source of inspiration to help you create your own dramatic scene or play, which you can then perform in front of an audience. At the Museum, for example, actors from the San Diego Shakespeare Society choose works from our collection, pair them with poems or short sections of plays, and then act those scenes out for our visitors. You can see some of their videos here: [SDMA + SDSS](#). Is this something you would like to try to do, too? Here's how!

DIRECTIONS: LINKED to SDMA @ PLAY PAGE

1. Find a painting that inspires you! It could be one of the fascinating faces in our portrait gallery, a landscape painting depicting a faraway place and time, or an action painting showing mythological creatures or legends.

2. Let your imagination run wild:

- If you are inspired by a portrait, imagine yourself as that person—or maybe even the person they are looking at! Is the subject of the portrait happy? Sad? Angry? Serious? Why do you think that is? You don't have to know the "right" answer—whatever you make up in your mind is a great jumping off point for a good story. (If you have already used our "SDMA @ Play: Creative Writing Prompt" to write a story, that can be a great place to start!)

- If you are inspired by a landscape painting, you can look at the image and start to create the world of your dramatic scene. Is it summer? Winter? Are there only a few people living in this place, or a great many? Is the setting long ago? Is this a mythological land, or somewhere that actually exists? What kind of characters would live in this landscape? What kind of story could take place here?

- Sometimes artwork can depict a scene from an already existing story. For example, many works in the Edwin Binney III collection depict scenes from adventures like the *Ramayana*, and are filled with magical armies, fantastic creatures, and daring heroes. Is there one of these paintings you like best? How is the artist able to convey the action of the story through the figures in the painting? Who would you be if you were a character in the painting's story?

3. Now you are ready to create your scene. Remember, you don't have to write your own scene! Maybe you want to use the story depicted in the painting, like one of the Greek myths or the *Ramayana*. Maybe there is a scene from one of your favorite movies that reminds you of the painting you are looking at. Or maybe you have read a play by Shakespeare, and one of the characters looks like the subject of a portrait you have chosen. All of these are great options for your dramatic scene.

4. If you choose to write the scene yourself, it can help to yourself in the shoes of one of the characters you've imagined. Perhaps your piece only has one character (a monologue) or maybe there are other characters. If you have friends or family members who would like to be in your play, too, what characters would they be?

- Use the story you've imagined in your head to come up with things for the characters to say aloud or to other people. Would your character have an accent? Would they speak loudly? Quietly? How would they move? Would they be fast and graceful? Strong and intimidating? Weak and feeble? Try moving your body like you think your character would.

- In this scene, what is your character's **main goal**? It can be as big as becoming King or Queen of the land or as small as finding a missing shoe. How do they hope to achieve this goal? Are they the type of character to be tricky? Brave? If there are other characters in the scene, do they share the same goal as your character? Or do they want something different—is there a **conflict** between them?

- What is the **beginning, middle, and end** of your scene? Remember, the end of the scene doesn't have to mean the end of the entire story! Maybe your character was just trying to escape from their room and go outside—the scene could end with your character escaping, or maybe with another character coming in and stopping them at the last minute!

5. Costuming and Set Design:

- Now that you have imagined and written out the scene and the characters, you can start to work on the visual elements of your play. Perhaps your character wears a long dress—you can create your own costume out of a borrowed item of clothing, a sheet, or even a bath towel. You can use your painting as inspiration for how you'd like your characters to dress or look.

- The “set” of a play helps to create a sense of space and location—again, you can look to your painting to see what the world is like there! If the scene takes place in a forest, for example, you could create trees out of construction paper or paper towel tubes.

- If you don't feel like you have enough materials to make a costume or a set, don't worry! Did you know that even professional plays sometimes don't use any special costumes or sets at all? They rely on their audience's **imagination**s to create the world around the actors. To help your audience imagine a costume, you can pretend your character is pulling on boots or putting on a hat. Or, if the day is very hot in your scene, you can have your character wipe sweat from their forehead, and the audience will imagine the burning sun. That is the magic of theater!

6. Time to perform: If you are using sets or costumes, put on the costume and create the set on a stage with room for your audience to sit and watch. Gather your audience (this can be friends and family members, a row of stuffed animals or toys, a camera or computer, or even a big group of imaginary people!) Set the scene for them, and maybe even show them a picture of the painting that inspired you so that they can imagine it, too. Then perform the scene! You can either read the words off of a paper, or you can try and memorize them yourself. It's okay if you mess up—professional actors do, too. Just keep going! Remember to imagine yourself moving as you think your character would move, and speak as you think your character would speak.

7. Once the performance is done, take a bow! If you want to continue, you can think about other places your story and your characters could go--maybe your characters could continue on to another adventure. If you are using the script of one of your favorite movies, maybe you want to change the ending or imagine a new character joining the ones that already exist. Try writing and performing another scene, and another—after you've written enough scenes, you may find yourself with an entire play!