

KEY STAGE	AGE
EYFS	3-5
KS1	5-7
KS2	7-11
KS3	11-14
KS4	14-16 ✓
KS5	16-18 ✓

#### AT A GLANCE

- ART
- DESCRIPTION
- NARRATIVE
- PERSPECTIVE
- IMAGERY
- THE SENSES

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**POETRYCLASS: FRESH IDEAS FOR POETRY LEARNING FROM THE POETRY SOCIETY**

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# FOYLE YOUNG POETS

## POEMS INSPIRED BY WORKS OF ART

OF THE YEAR AWARD

BY ASHLEY SMITH

This lesson plan involves a study of Dominic Hand's 'An Interior Scene', one of the winning poems of the 2013 Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award ([www.poetrysociety.org.uk/content/competitions/fyp](http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk/content/competitions/fyp)) and reprinted here on page 3. By making a close analysis of the inner story of the poem and comparing it with the actual picture that inspired it – Pieter de Hooch's 'Mother Lacing Her Bodice beside a Cradle' (1659-1660), see overleaf – students can consider the complex relationship between an artwork and its audience. They will also be able to look at other poems inspired by artworks, and use these as the basis for cross-comparison work and models for writing their own response to a favourite piece of art.

### Pre-planning

If students can have access to the internet, so they can search for images, this would help with the writing activity. Other options would be to create a slideshow or provide print-outs of a range of interesting artworks. Alternatively, you could ask students to bring their own copy of a favourite piece of art in readiness for the lesson.

### Getting started

Display the text of Dominic's poem, 'An Interior Scene' (you will find this on page 4), on your interactive white board (IWB) or on photocopied handouts, omitting the title. Read the poem aloud to the class, or ask for a volunteer to do so.

Ask for initial responses to the poem, including personal opinions and any observations about style and content. Allow this discussion to unfold naturally for a few minutes, in order to allow time for interesting ideas to emerge. (It may be instantly spotted by somebody that this is a description of a painting, but it may equally be seen as the poet's description of a living scene. Either way, the students are likely to have plenty to say about what scene the poem is presenting to the reader.)



### Next steps

Now introduce the class to the full title of the poem:

*An Interior Scene*  
*Pieter de Hooch, Mother Lacing Her Bodice*  
*Beside a Cradle, 1659-60*

How does this new piece of information affect their interpretation of the poem?

Are there clues that retrospectively point towards this being a description of a painting, rather than one of a scene from the poet's lived experience? Ask students to go through the poem again and find words and phrases that refer to artistic technique and the composition of paintings. They will hopefully be drawn to the following references, which would merit group discussion:

'How lines structure...', 'light fractures', 'apertures', 'every angle strung to a balanced hold', 'fringed with copper light', 'pictures on the walls / withdraw into their muted scenes', 'taken by symmetries, we wait / at the point of movement', 'in the distance', 'in a flood of light'.

Having analysed these more technical aspects of the painting, ask the students to think about the story being told by the painting. Even though they have not actually seen it yet, can they talk about what they see in their mind's eye, through the medium of the poet's description? There is clearly a lot to be explored about who the woman might be. Why is she sitting at an empty cradle, why has the candle burnt out, why is 'her child' 'in the distance' and 'ready to depart'? Is this another child or the one that was/should be in the empty cradle?

Again, allow the discussion to flow naturally without imposing too much fixed interpretation at this stage. Without seeing the picture, some of these references will remain mysterious for the students, but there is still plenty of interesting material to discuss, particularly around the possible symbolism of the various objects described.

Hint: If time allows, this would be a good opportunity to give the students a few minutes to sketch out a rough version of the painting as they imagine it to be, using



*Pieter de Hooch's painting, 'Mother Lacing Her Bodice beside a Cradle' (1659-1660).*

*Image reproduced with kind permission © Gemäldegalerie Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo: Jörg P. Anders*

the text of the poem to guide them. They could do it as a montage of rough shapes and label them so that they can then compare it with the original to see how close their conception and composition of the painting is to that of the original.

By this point, your students will be eager to see the actual painting. It can be found at ([http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter\\_de\\_Hooch\\_-\\_Mother\\_Lacing\\_Her\\_Bodice\\_beside\\_a\\_Cradle\\_-\\_WGA11698.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_de_Hooch_-_Mother_Lacing_Her_Bodice_beside_a_Cradle_-_WGA11698.jpg)) and you could display it on your IWB or pass round photocopies.

How does their previous mental image (or rough sketch, if they did one) of the picture compare with the real thing? Invite comments and opinions and consider asking some of these additional questions:

- Is there anything of interest in the painting that did not appear in the poem?
- Was there anything in the poem that you don't see in the picture, or which is not as you imagined it to be?

- Has the poet done a good job of conveying the 'story' as well as the painter?
- How has the poet's use of the present tense helped to bring the scene in the picture to life?
- Can a story be told as effectively in an image as it can in words? How?

In addition to the ones already discussed, are there any objects/aspects with a possible symbolism worthy of discussion (e.g. the needle and thread, the cloak, the dog, the jug, the empty chair, the colour red, the darkness of the bed, the brightness of the light from the open door...).

#### Get writing

Ask students to start planning their own poem in response to a favourite piece of art. There need not be any specific rules about its structure, but ask them to consider the following points in their planning:

- Describe the piece of art and tell its story – think about what you can't see, as well as what you can.
- Try putting yourself in the picture – what do you see, hear, touch, smell, even taste?
- Tell it in the present tense to help bring the scene described to life.

#### Further reading

Any of the following poems could be studied in the classroom or given to the pupils to research in their own time:

'Musée des Beaux Arts' by W. H. Auden, 'Landscape with the Fall of Icarus' by William Carlos Williams and 'Lines on Brueghel's "Icarus"' by Michael Hamburger ([https://www2.bc.edu/~dohertyp/web\\_site/Fa\\_Icarus.htm](https://www2.bc.edu/~dohertyp/web_site/Fa_Icarus.htm)).

Auden's poem is one of the best-known direct responses to a work of art, namely 'Landscape with the Fall of Icarus' by Pieter Brueghel the Elder. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landscape\\_with\\_the\\_Fall\\_of\\_Icarus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landscape_with_the_Fall_of_Icarus)).

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The same painting has been the subject of poems by William Carlos Williams and Michael Hamburger. The students could study the picture and discuss why they think it has provided such a rich source of inspiration for poets. Do they think that Brueghel was thinking the same things 'about suffering' when composing his painting as these three poets have later come to sense in the picture?

#### 'Not my Best Side' by U. A. Fanthorpe

Fanthorpe's response to the little-known painting 'St. George and the Dragon' by Paolo Uccello is a light-hearted exploration of the three subjects of the picture – the dragon, the damsel in distress and St George – in which each of them tells the story from their own perspective. This could provide a good model for the students to follow if they happen to choose a picture with two or more human (or animal) subjects.

You can find the poem and the painting here:

<http://english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/uccello.html>

#### 'Summer 1969' by Seamus Heaney

'Summer 1969' (<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/178022>) is Heaney's autobiographical account of a visit to the Prado museum in Madrid, where he studies some of Goya's most disturbing paintings against the backdrop of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. This poem could provide a particularly good piece of extension work to complement your students' knowledge of British (and European) history. The paintings referred to in the poem can be found here:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Third\\_of\\_May\\_1808](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Third_of_May_1808)  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturn\\_Devouring\\_His\\_Son](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturn_Devouring_His_Son)  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fight\\_with\\_Cudgels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fight_with_Cudgels)

A prize-winning essay by an American student, discussing the poem, can be found here:

[http://www.smith.edu/english/KathyFinnerty\\_1969.php](http://www.smith.edu/english/KathyFinnerty_1969.php)

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***AN INTERIOR SCENE  
PIETER DE HOOCH, MOTHER LACING  
HER BODICE BESIDE A CRADLE, 1659-60***

How lines structure these receding rooms -

their polished floors and divided halls -  
is how light fractures in their passages.  
Apertures divide the corridors:  
every angle strung to a balanced hold.

A mother sits enclosed by the shade,  
before a curtain fringed with copper light:  
her hand poised, threading a lace,  
over an empty cradle. The pictures on the walls  
withdraw into their muted scenes.

She has not seen that the evening  
is arriving, that the candle  
on the table has burnt out.

Taken by symmetries, we wait  
at the point of movement.  
Her child in the distance,  
in a flood of light - already gone  
into the next room - drawn  
by the open door, ready to depart.

**DOMINIC HAND**

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Foyle Young Poets of the Year, 2013