

LESSON PLAN FOR JOSHUA JOHNSON,
GRACE MCCURDY AND HER DAUGHTERS,
MARY JANE, AND LETITIA GRACE, C. 1804

TITLE: THE STORY BEHIND THE PAINTING

GRADE LEVEL: SIXTH

ACADEMIC SUBJECT: LANGUAGE ARTS

GOAL/DESCRIPTION:

After reading *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott and learning about Alcott's life, the students will look at Joshua Johnson's *Grace Allison McCurdy (Mrs. Hugh McCurdy) and Her Daughters, Mary Jane and Letitia Grace*. They will also learn about Johnson's life. The students will be given a choice to write a short story focusing on the setting, mood, and **tone*** using the figures in the painting as the characters or Johnson himself as the character.

Tone: An expression of a writer's attitude toward a subject. Unlike mood, which is intended to shape the reader's emotional response, tone reflects the feelings of the writer. Tone can be serious, humorous, sarcastic, ironic, bitter, or objective.

BIG IDEA:

Fictional* Short stories can be loosely based on the lives of real people.

Fictional: Imaginative works of prose, primarily the novel and short story. Although fiction can draw on actual events and real people, it springs mainly from the author's imagination. The purpose is to entertain as well as enlighten the reader by providing a deeper understanding of the human condition.

OBJECTIVES/OUTCOMES:

After reading *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, students will discuss how the story was loosely based on the author's life. Students will also examine Johnson's life. They will then discuss possible similarities between the characters in Johnson's painting and the characters in the book (the book takes place about 50 years before the painting was completed; both took place in the North East). They can also compare the life of Alcott with the life of Johnson. Students will discuss how artists use visual clues such as props, clothing, and setting to give the viewer a glimpse into the patron's lives in the same way that authors use setting, mood, and tone to give a glimpse into the character's lives. Students will write their own short story focusing on the setting, mood, and tone using the figures in the painting as the characters.

TEACHING PROCEDURE/TIME ALLOTTED: ONE WEEK

MONDAY

The teacher will begin by reviewing the story of *Little Women* (which they will have already read) and the life of Louisa May Alcott. The teacher will then introduce Joshua Johnson's *Grace Allison McCurdy (Mrs. Hugh McCurdy) and Her Daughters, Mary Jane and Letitia Grace*. Johnson's life will also be summarized. The students will learn about the McCurdys' background and discuss the painting. The class will talk about similarities and differences between the book and the painting as well as similarities and differences between Alcott and Johnson's lives through both class and small group discussion.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

Which parts of Louisa May Alcott's life are used in *Little Women*?

How is Joshua Johnson's life similar to and different from Louisa May Alcott's?

If Johnson were to write a book, what and who would it include?

If Louisa May Alcott were to paint a portrait, who would she have portrayed?

Do you think anything that she experienced in her life could have also been experienced by Mrs. McCurdy and her daughters?

How do you think the lives of the characters in *Little Women* are different from the lives of the characters in the painting?

How does the topic of death affect both the characters in the book and the characters in the painting?

What **literary elements*** do Louisa May Alcott use to help readers get to know the characters in the story?

What visual tools do Joshua Johnson use to help the viewers understand something about the lives of Mrs. McCurdy and her daughters?

How can you use the literary elements that Louisa May Alcott uses and the visual tools used by Joshua Johnson to develop personalities for your own short story?

Literary Element: Aspects or characteristics of text, including characters, plot, setting, theme, style, point of view, and tone.

TUESDAY

Students will be told that they will be writing their own short stories focusing on the setting, mood, and tone using the figures in the painting as the characters. They will be told to think about how Alcott used various literary elements to help them get to know the characters in her book, and to try and apply her techniques to their own character descriptions. The remainder of the class time will be spent brainstorming ideas for their stories.

HOMEWORK:

Be ready to begin writing the text. Have a good idea of who your characters are and how the story will play out.

WEDNESDAY

Using their brainstorming notes, students will spend class in the computer lab working on the rough draft of their stories.

THURSDAY

Students will be instructed to proofread their papers, or have the option of trading with a partner for proof reading and continue to polish their stories.

HOMEWORK:

Final drafts of the story should be completed.

FRIDAY

Students will each present a [summary*](#) (about two to three minutes) of their story to their classmates.

[Summary:](#) Creating a short description of a document or informational object that includes its most salient features for a purpose.

PLANS FOR DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION:

If students struggle with writing an entire story, they can instead give character descriptions. Students can work in groups of four to brainstorm, and each write a story based on one character. Students can have the option to write a story about the family's life in general, or create a story about a specific event that could have happened in their lives (a birthday, holiday, vacation, etc). If students have a hard time getting started, they can think of a story from their own lives and apply it to the characters in a way that would be appropriate to the time period.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

Some authors, like Louisa May Alcott, write stories based on their own lives or the real lives of others. Portrait artists, like Joshua Johnson, use aspects of the patron's real lives to make their paintings unique and personal. Artists use visual clues such as props, clothing, and setting to give the viewer a glimpse into the patron's lives in the same way that authors use setting, mood, and tone to give a glimpse into the character's lives.

KEY KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS:

(Declarative) Some authors, like Alcott, use their own lives and the lives of others they knew as the starting point for a story. (Procedural) Using what they know about the background of Mrs. McCurdy and her daughters, the students will work to write their own short story about what their lives could have been like.

EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT:

(Summative) The teacher grades the students based on a teacher created [rubric*](#) (given out at the start of the project) for creativity as well as grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors in their story. (Formative) As students work in class, the teacher will walk around, stopping to ask them about their ideas and offer suggestions on improving sentence structure, etc.

[Rubric: An authentic assessment tool for making scoring decisions; a printed set of guidelines that distinguishes performances or products of different quality.](#)

MATERIALS/TEACHER RESOURCES:

Large scale reproduction of Joshua Johnson's *Grace Allison McCurdy (Mrs. Hugh McCurdy) and Her Daughters, Mary Jane and Letitia Grace* (A projected digital image would work fine, so that all groups can see it as they work on their stories). Access to a computer lab so that students can work on writing their stories during class time.

http://www.corcoran.org/collection/highlights_main_results.asp?ID=11

TEACHER REFLECTION:

This assignment gives students the opportunity to put themselves into the character's shoes in the painting and the artist and imagine what their lives may have been like. It also allows students to take creative liberties with their writing. It brings their attention to how an audience perceives their work while working to improve writing skills.

DEVELOPMENT RATIONALE:

Most 6th grade students are in the emerging expertise stage of artistic development. In this stage, students become aware of the difference between themselves and their peers and look to separate themselves from adults. They are drawn to art that can be connected to a specific situation or person rather than something more general. There is a greater possibility for student's to be self critical and compare their work to that of other student's so it is important for teachers to be sensitive to the students and stress individual achievement.

STANDARDS:

- **6.W-I.1.** Write stories that demonstrate careful placement of descriptive details about setting, characters, and events.
- **6.LT-C.1.** Analyze the relevance of the setting (e.g., time, place, and situation) to the mood and tone of the text.
- **6.LT-F.5.** Provide examples of all the aspects of the setting (time, place, situation) in a story or novel.

