

EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY

PEOPLE

**JUST AS AUTHORS TELL TALES
WITH WORDS, ARTISTS USE PAINT
TO DESCRIBE SCENES, CHARACTERS,
ACTION, AND CONVERSATIONS.**

Use this guide to explore
*American Stories: Paintings of
Everyday Life, 1765–1915*,
on view October 12, 2009–
January 24, 2010.

After you've seen the exhibition, you can
examine other paintings in the Museum
with this guide!

ACTION

Some paintings represent stories that have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Others are puzzling, with details that might require more thought.

Use this guide to decode the story told by an artist. Imagine your own story based on what you see. While looking closely at ANY painting depicting people, answer the questions inside to help you “read” the story.

MOOD

ELEMENTS

Artists shape a story by creating and arranging elements in their compositions.

Using your own words or sketches, describe the element(s) in the painting you chose that...

1 Create(s) a **mood** or **atmosphere**:

2 Tell(s) that the story **occurred in the past**?

3 Indicate(s) the **time of day**:

Now imagine **CHANGING** one of the elements you described above.
How would this change the story?

Arti

Tit

Da

Hint: find this
in the lab
the pa

Glossary

Atmosphere: t
or feeling

Character: a p
or play

Composition:
which parts ar
arrangement

Depict: to sho
in a picture

Element: one
which someth

Mood: feeling

Narrative: tells

Scene: a view,
setting of an e

SCENES

Artist:

Title:

Theme:

Write information
about the scene next to
the painting

Describe the main mood

Identify the person in a story

Explain the way in
which the scene is put together;

Describe how, or represent,

Explain how the parts of
the scene are made up

Describe the color or atmosphere

Explain how the scene is a story

Describe the scene, picture, or
event

In making a narrative painting, the artist might describe one or more events from a story. Use the following questions to examine the scene in the painting you chose.

1 What do you think is **the most important part of the story**? Why?

2 Describe what you think is **happening in this scene**.

3 What happened just **before** the action in the painting?

4 What will happen just **after** the action in the painting?

5 Sketch your **favorite part of this story**.

Narrative paintings often show what people say and how they act, just like characters in a story or a play. Look at the painting and choose A or B below:

A DID YOU CHOOSE A PAINTING WITH ONE PERSON?

- 1** Why do you think he or she is alone?

- 2** Describe in words or pictures what you think this person is doing and thinking:

- 3** Circle the words that might describe the character's mood(s):

quiet excited funny serious relaxed
anxious proud surprised other: _____
(describe)

- 4** Sketch or describe a detail from the painting that suggests one of these moods:

B DID YOU CHOOSE A PAINTING WITH TWO OR MORE PEOPLE?

- 1** Who is/are the main character(s)?
How do you know?

- 2** Sketch or describe what you think they are saying and doing:



Education
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