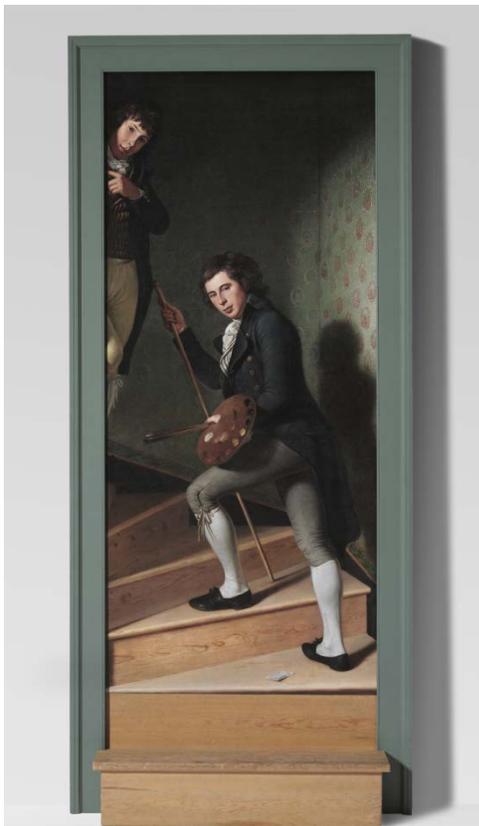


STEPPING INTO A PAINTING

Artists often invite us into their paintings so that we might imagine ourselves stepping inside the picture and experiencing it firsthand. Some painters take this invitation to another level by painting details with such precision that viewers are tricked into believing the objects, people, and setting are real. These highly realistic paintings, known as trompe l'oeil, provide an ideal opportunity for students to respond to art by assuming the roles and voices of the painted figures. Use Charles Willson Peale's *Staircase Group* as inspiration to imagine the characters and setting as real, and add to the experience with a poem allowing the student to become part of the work.



Staircase Group (Portrait of Raphaëlle Peale and Titian Ramsay Peale I), 1795
Charles Willson Peale, American
Oil on canvas
89 1/2 x 39 3/8 inches (227.3 x 100 cm)
The George W. Elkins Collection, 1945
E1945-1-1

Curricular Areas

English – Language Arts

Grade Level

For grades 4–8

Common Core Academic Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.1](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.2](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.6](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.4](#)

Art Images Required

Click on the title below to view high-resolution photographs on the Philadelphia Museum of Art website. Images that are available in the ARTstor Digital Library are indicated by an ID number or search phrase. Entering that number or phrase into the ARTstor search bar will direct you to the corresponding image in that database.

- [Staircase Group \(Portrait of Raphaëlle Peale and Titian Ramsay Peale I\)](#), 1795, by Charles Willson Peale
ARTstor search: PMA E1945-1-1

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

Lesson Process

1. Ask if any students can remember looking at a photograph or painting and being fooled for a moment into thinking it was a real object. Discuss these examples briefly.
2. Why might artists and photographers be interested in “fooling” their audience in this way? (Answers may include: as a means of showcasing their talents, to explore the limits of how we perceive things, or just for fun.)
3. Extend this discussion by asking for examples of how poets and fiction writers also work to create a sense that their stories are real events. (Responses may be more common, as most fiction tries to present itself as actual events, with characters as realistically drawn people.) For the middle school student: this is typically referred to as a “willing suspension of disbelief.” Discuss this phrase as the partnership between writer and reader.
4. Show the class the painting *Staircase Group (Portrait of Raphaele Peale and Titian Ramsay Peale I)* by Charles Willson Peale.
5. Discuss student observations and reactions to the painting using as many of the following discussion questions as appropriate for your class:
 - o Where are these young men standing? How can you tell?
 - o What do you think they are doing? Where could they be going? What might happen next?
 - o Where are the brightest parts of the painting? Where are the shadows? What did you notice first? Then where did you look? What do you think drew your eye there?
 - o Imagine you could walk into the painting and follow the brothers upstairs. What do you think you might discover beyond the picture frame?
 - o Why do you think Peale painted his son Raphaele walking up the steps, instead of down? What could the stairs symbolize?
6. Notice the small piece of paper lying on the step. That is a detailed and exact painting of a ticket used to enter Peale’s Philadelphia museum. How does this detail add to Peale’s use of trompe l’oeil? (You can see one of Peale’s tickets [here](#).)
7. If Peale had been a poet rather than a painter, he would have drawn us into his reality with words rather than brushstrokes and colors. The following poetry exercise offers students a chance to use Peale’s sons to create their own sense of reality:

A POEM FOR TWO VOICES (ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL)

Working in pairs, complete the phrases below for Raphaele and Titian. For the “we” statements, find a word that describes both of them. Look at the painting for inspiration. Once the poem is finished, have two students read aloud—one person reading Raphaele’s side, and the other person reading Titian’s side. After each set of “I” statements, have students read the “we” statements together in unison.

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

(Raphaelle)

(Titian)

I am _____.

I am _____.

We are _____.

I feel _____.

I feel _____.

We feel _____.

I think _____.

I think _____.

We think _____.

I will _____.

I will _____.

We will _____.

Assessment

The *Poem for Two Voices* may serve as an assessment.

Enrichment

1. Research the style/technique known as trompe l'oeil. Find another example of this kind of painting and discuss how the artist succeeds in "fooling" the audience.
2. Think of any television shows or movies that violate the sense of a "false reality" by having a character turn to the camera and address the audience directly. Are these examples comedies or dramas, and why?
3. Read the poem *This is a Photograph of Me* by Margaret Atwood. It is included in many anthologies, and can be found easily on the web, including at this site:
http://www.math.buffalo.edu/~sww/poetry2/atwood_margaret.html. How does the poet play with your sense of reality in this very serious poem?