

Writing on the Mirror

Goal or objective of the lesson plan:

To prepare students to visit the Picturing Women exhibition by creating an opportunity for students to respond to a piece of art actively, creatively, and critically;

To raise questions about the relationships between mirrors, self-image, and the construction of gender identities;

To show students that art-making and art-viewing can be processes of dialogue;

To show that a piece of art can be experienced, interpreted, and challenged in a range of ways.

If it is part of a larger unit, please describe briefly:

This lesson could be incorporated into a larger unit on using expressive writing to respond to images in a range of disciplines. It could also be part of a media literacy unit, or one concerning gender identities.

This lesson could be used with students of a variety of ages and grade levels, with corresponding changes in focus and assessment.

Projected length of time needed to complete it:

45 – 60 minutes

Materials needed:

Along with the CD showing the piece of art, photocopies for each student of the Meryl Mason piece showing the cast or iron mirror. (If resources are limited, this activity could be done without photocopies.) If possible, consider enlarging the image. Masking tape. Several red lipsticks, red cray-pas, or, again, if resources are limited, pencils or pens will serve. Each student will need a pencil or pen and a piece of paper, as a minimum.

If your school or district requires the listing of standards in your lesson plans, please include:

The **standards** will vary with age and grade level, subject, and context.

Suggested pre-lesson activities:

Ask students the following brief, warm-up questions, asking for a show of hands:

- How many of you have ever written on a mirror using a bar of soap?
- “Written” on a fogged up car or home window with your finger?
- Seen graffiti?
- Drawn a moustache on a magazine image?
- Heard the story of Snow White, whose step-mother’s mirror (“mirror, mirror on the wall”) speaks to her about her beauty and, later, her lack of it compared with Snow White?
- Other examples the students can think of?

Ask one or two students to come to the mirror you've brought in and use soap to write a brief message to the class.

Introduce the lesson by saying that today we are going to use writing a bit mischievously to think about a piece of art and about how mirrors work in our lives.

Please outline the lesson:

Look at Mason image online or on slide. Tell title, year, something about the artist.

Emphasize that this mirror does not show a typical reflection.

Possible prompts to use (choose depending on your students and context): What could you write on this mirror to give an idea of what it might say to you?

What would you write on it to show what you have to say to your mirror at home?

What would you write on it to show what a character (from history or fiction) under study by the class would see in his/her mirror?

Give students 10 minutes to write to one or two of these prompts (chosen as you see fit – don't give them all to the students as this could prove overwhelming or confusing).

Have some students read their responses aloud.

Ask each student to pick one and write/revise it for display (in color if the materials are there). As they finish, ask them to tape their papers to the wall and once all of the images/writings are posted they may tour the gallery.

Assessment:

As they return to their seats, ask the students to complete a five-minute freewrite about what they learned from the activity and the questions they now have. Hold a class discussion in which you explore with students the implications of their experiments. Use class comments and writings to understand more about your students' understandings and where they need further challenge or support.

Suggestions for follow-up lessons:

Students could bring in images for their classmates to "write on" and thus critically intervene in.

Students could practice building an argument for an essay by comparing and contrasting different approaches taken to the Mason image.