

Sketching & Sculpture

Drawing is like making an expressive gesture with the advantage of permanence.

— HENRI MATISSE

Introduction: Try this!

Looking for ways to encourage students to closely examine works of art? Try sketching in the galleries! This resource offers ideas and activities for using sketching to engage students grades 5 through 9 as they explore the National Gallery's sculpture collection; however, the exercises can be modified for use with different ages and for paintings or works at other museums.

Why Sketching?

For centuries artists have drawn in front of works of art as a way to learn from them, understand their form, and capture their essential qualities. Sketching can help viewers even without formal art training connect with a work of art and see it in new ways, by:

- encouraging longer and more careful observation
- prompting examination of different art elements (color, line, shape, form, texture) and understanding of how materials affect an object's appearance
- providing a setting for creative response

Why Sculpture?

Because the National Gallery's sculpture installations provide an excellent environment for group sketching experiences. The West Building (WB) sculpture galleries, located on the ground floor, are filled with open space and natural light. They display a range of sculptural styles, media, and techniques—from Renaissance portrait medallions to early twentieth-century figures. The East Building (EB) and Sculpture Garden (SG) provide a rich selection of large-scale, modern sculptures to fuel the imagination.

Preparation

What's the big idea?

The most successful museum visits focus on a few big ideas and a limited number of objects, emphasizing the quality of students' experiences instead of the number of objects seen. Would you like to focus your visit on abstract or figurative sculpture, the work of a particular artist, or the elements of art? The possible themes are endless.

Plan your tour.

Visiting the museum yourself is the best way to plan a tour. If that is not possible, you can preview National Gallery collections online at www.nga.gov. There, you can learn which works are currently on view and get information about them.

Click on "The Collection" to start your search. There are also several online resources specifically associated with our sculpture collection, including:

- A virtual tour of the West Building sculpture galleries: www.nga.gov/collection/sculpture/flash/index.htm
- A virtual tour of the Sculpture Garden: www.nga.gov/feature/sgvr/frameset1.htm
- A musical adventure for children about the Sculpture Garden: www.nga.gov/kids/lizzy/lizzy.html
- Look for other online resources at NGA Classroom: www.nga.gov/education/classroom/index.htm

Try it yourself

To select sketching exercises that are most effective for your students, first try them yourself. Generally, activities should have clearly defined directions and expected outcomes, so that students stay focused and participate fully. Allowing students to sketch anything they want may not elicit desired outcomes and may confuse students; however, you know your students best. Perhaps you will want to experiment with a combination of directed and free-form activities, using selected exercises here.

Above: Auguste Rodin, *The Thinker* (*Le Penseur*), model 1880, cast 1901, bronze, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Mrs. John W. Simpson



Share these museum rules with your students.

- Please do not touch works of art. A helpful guideline is to remain at least twelve inches away from any work of art.
- Do not lean drawing materials on walls, display cases, or pedestals.
- Do not block doorways or aisles.

Please review these guidelines for self-guided groups

- All self-guided groups must register prior to their visit by calling (202) 789-4623 or check in at the Art Information Desk upon arrival.
- Yield to tours organized by the National Gallery; only one group may be in a gallery at a time.
- Self-guided groups must be accompanied by at least one adult chaperone for every ten students.
- Museum rules are strictly enforced; please inform chaperones of our policies to ensure a safe and enjoyable visit for all.

Tips for reticent sketchers

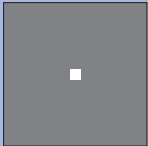
- Keep activities focused and give clear directions.
- Remind students that these sketching activities are about looking and exploring works of art and not about how well they draw.
- Reassure students that their sketches are personal and that they are not obligated to share them with the class.

Gather your supplies.

The National Gallery allows sketching on paper with pencil or charcoal only. If you are using these activities in other museums, please call ahead to learn their policies.

You will need...

- Sketching pencils (4B) or regular number 2 pencils
- Sheets of paper or sketchpads
- Chipboard or another firm drawing surface for each student
- Optional: viewfinders, either a square or circle with a small interior opening, can help students focus on details



Try sketching in the classroom.

To familiarize students with sketching from objects in the museum, try it first in the classroom. Preparing students in the classroom will help them focus on their sketching more quickly in the galleries.

At the Museum

Observe/Discuss

Before sketching, discuss with students the purpose of their visit and review museum rules.

In front of each work of art, invite student observations. Query them to encourage careful looking. Some possible prompts are:

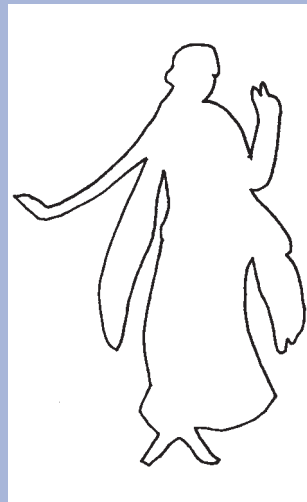
- What do you see? Encourage students to support their responses with visual evidence from the sculpture.

- What more can you tell by looking again?
- How does the sculpture's scale/size affect your impressions of it?
- Does the sculpture tell a story? Does it relate in some way to the students' lives? If so, how?
- Discuss the work's materials and surfaces. Do these have qualities that affect what the work communicates, or your response to it?

Students may practice using their viewfinders to focus on a particular detail of the sculpture.

Draw/Sketch

Describe the sketching activity. Make sure students understand the assignment and which object they are to sketch. Allow students at least ten to fifteen minutes to work on each activity.



Discuss Again

Are there any more questions? Did students notice anything new during sketching? Encourage students to share what they now see or understand about the sculpture.

Above, center: Paul Manship, *Dancer and Gazelles*, 1916, bronze, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Mrs. Houghton P. Metcalf

Above, right: Attributed to Francesco Righetti after Giovanni Bologna, *Mercury*, c. 1780/1800, bronze, National Gallery of Art, Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Sketching Exercises

Warm-Up with Contour Drawing

A contour drawing shows the outline (or silhouette) of a form. First, encourage students to think about which view works best for a contour drawing, and why. Then, ask students to use their eyes to follow the contour of the sculpture. Then, just using their fingers, they should slowly draw its outline in the air. Finally, without lifting their pencils from the paper, have them draw the contour using one continuous line.

For a challenging twist, have students draw without looking at the paper. This is called blind contour drawing. Explain that their drawings may look strange at first but that they should not be discouraged. This activity helps coordinate hand and eye movements and develops the ability to record what they see.

SUGGESTED WORKS OF ART

Giovanni Antonio Amadeo, *Kneeling Angel* (WB)

Edgar Degas, *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* (WB)

Florentine 16th Century, *Farnese Hercules* (WB)

Paul Manship, *Dancer and Gazelles* (WB)

Andrea del Verrocchio, *Putto Poised on a Globe* (WB)

Movement and Balance

Balance is an equilibrium in the arrangement of elements in a work of art. Like the human body, sculpture must be physically balanced to stand upright. Our bodies have muscles to help balance our stance; however, sculpture relies on engineering—the distribution of weight and force of gravity, and sometimes internal or external supports—to achieve balance. Such engineering also allows sculptors to represent figures in motion. Ask students to sketch the contour of a sculpture and consider how its weight is balanced. Have them draw a line through the axis of balance. How are the parts distributed to achieve balance? Does a sculptor ever try to suggest his work is off balance, and why?

SUGGESTED WORKS OF ART

Edgar Degas, *Grande Arabesque, Second Time* (WB)

Attributed to Francesco Righetti after Giovanni Bologna, *Mercury* (WB)

Augustus Saint-Gaudens, *Diana of the Tower* (WB)

Andrea del Verrocchio, *Putto Poised on a Globe* (WB)

Martin Puryear, *Lever No. 3* (EB)

Richard Serra, *Five Plates, Two Poles* (EB) (has multiple axes)



Positive and Negative Space

Sculpture consists of what is there and what is not—positive space is the material itself; negative space refers to the background shapes surrounding it or surrounded by it. Both are fundamental to a composition. A sculptor makes deliberate decisions about how solid forms and the space they shape will look.

Ask your students to draw a line down the middle of their paper. On the left side, instruct them to draw a simple shape from a sculpture. Repeat the same shape on the right side. Next, they should shade in the object on one side and the background



on the other side. They have just created positive and negative space. Looking again at the sculpture, are they more aware of the positive and negative space?

SUGGESTED WORKS OF ART

Edgar Degas, *Spanish Dance* (WB)

Pierre Puget, *Milo of Croton* (WB)

Alberto Giacometti, *Walking Man II* (EB)

Alexander Calder, *Finny Fish* (EB)

Richard Serra, *Five Plates, Two Poles* (EB)

Louise Bourgeois, *The Winged Figure* (EB) or *Spider* (SG)

Lucas Samaras, *Chair Transformation Number 20B* (SG)

Light, Material, and Texture

To explore the interaction between light and surface, observe, discuss, and sketch sculptures made from different materials or works with a variety of surface texture.

1. How do different materials and degrees of finish affect the ways light plays off the surface of a sculpture? Compare two sculptures in different materials. Which surfaces reflect the light most brightly, and why? Have students sketch a simple contour drawing of the works or select and draw a detail from each. Using the scale below as a guide, ask students to shade in their drawings indicating the various levels of highlight and shadow.

2. Using the same shading exercise, explore how different textures created by the artist affect the ways light is reflected.



SUGGESTED COMPARISONS

Edgar Degas, wax and bronze pairs: *Bathers* and *Horses*—students will notice differences, even between virtually identical forms, because of the relation of museum lighting to position as well as different materials! (WB)

Auguste Rodin, *The Thinker (Le Penseur)* and *The Evil Spirits* (WB)

Antonio Canova, *Winged Victory* and Randolph Rogers, *Nydia, the Blind Girl of Pompeii* (WB)

Isamu Noguchi, *Great Rock of Inner Seeking* and Anthony Caro, *National Gallery Ledge Piece* (EB)



Above, left: Louise Bourgeois, *The Winged Figure*, 1948, cast 1991, bronze, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Louise Bourgeois

Above, right: Edgar Degas, *Spanish Dance*, c. 1883/1885, dark green wax, National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon



Sketching in the Round

A gallery visit allows you to see objects from different perspectives, something that cannot be accomplished by looking at a slide or print. Have students choose any sculpture that can be viewed from at least three sides. Ask them to divide their paper into three sections and to draw their chosen object from three different viewpoints. To make this activity more exciting, you may want to give them a time limit, perhaps rotating views every minute. Discuss how differently the object looks depending on the place from which it is seen. Does it seem as three-dimensional from all views? Does one viewpoint seem primary?

Post-Visit Extension Activity: Descriptive Writing

- While still at the gallery, ask students to choose a sculpture.
- Have them write a thorough description of its shape, color, and scale. Is it on a pedestal or freestanding? What is its subject? How high is the relief (is it very three-dimensional or somewhat flat)? What is it made of? Is the surface smoothly textured or rough? They should include anything else that describes the work.
- Back at school, have students read their description to a classmate, who draws a sketch from it using colored pencils or crayons.
- Find a picture of their work of art on the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov.
- Now, match the sketch to the online image.
- Consider the following questions: How closely did the classmate's drawing resemble the actual object? Did the description include enough details to produce a recognizable sketch of the object? What additional

information would have made a more detailed image possible?

This resource is based on strategies used on two school tours: *National Gallery Treasures—East Building* and *The Sculptor*. If you would like to schedule a docent-led tour, please follow the instructions on page four.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

- Gelb, Michael J. *How to Think like Leonardo da Vinci: Seven Steps to Genius Everyday*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1998.
- Jensen, Eric. *Arts with the Brain in Mind*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Development, 2001.
- Katter, Eldon and Marilyn G. Stewart. *Art, A Personal Journey*. Worcester, Mass.: Davis Publications, Inc., 2002.
- Penny, Nicholas. *The Materials of Sculpture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Ragins, Rosalind. *Art Talk, Teachers' Wraparound Edition*, 2nd edition. New York: Glencoe, 1995.

Above, left: Antonio Canova, after the Antique, *Winged Victory*, c. 1803/1806, bronze, National Gallery of Art, Patrons' Permanent Fund

Above, right: Isamu Noguchi, *Great Rock of Inner Seeking*, 1974, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Arthur M. Sackler, M.D., and Mortimer D. Sackler, M.D.