BODY LANGUAGE:
THE ART OF LARRY DAY

EDUCATOR RESOURCE PACKET

DAVID
OWSLEY
MUSEUM
OF
ART
BALL STATE
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Body Language: The Art of Larry Day

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This exhibition celebrates Larry Day (1921–1998) in the wake of his centenary year, exploring his singular contributions to American art and the lasting power of his observations and imagination.

Deeply speculative, Day believed that the ordinary in life is the source of all that is extraordinary. His embrace of everyday subjects was tethered to a curious intellectual engagement with the history of representation. By questioning and reframing prevailing assumptions, he participated in the broad movement in Western thought we now call Postmodernism.

Day was also a dedicated teacher, known as the “dean of Philadelphia painters.” His thousands of students, primarily at the Philadelphia College of Art (now the University of the Arts) and the University of Pennsylvania, have gone on to teach across the globe and inspire their own students to discover and explore their unique artistic identities.

Body Language began as a multipart exhibition divided across three Philadelphia venues. The Woodmere Art Museum offered an overview of Day’s career focused on the artist’s figurative paintings, drawings, and sketches entitled Silent Conversations. The University of the Arts presented Day’s abstractions of the 1950s in an exhibition called Nature Abstracted. And an installation at Arcadia University titled Absent Presence explored Day’s cityscape and architectural subjects.

At the David Owsley Museum of Art, all three themes are folded into a two-part display. On the main floor, Day’s abstract paintings and drawings mix with imagery inspired by the old masters, while the upper floor galleries feature the artist’s realist figural works. Visitors are encouraged to learn more about Day’s art and life by visiting both floors, viewing the documentary video, and consulting copies of the exhibition catalogue in the galleries.

Organized by the Woodmere Art Museum with David Bindman, Guest Curator.
EXHIBITION THEMES

The retrospective exhibition Body Language: The Art of Larry Day documents Day’s extensive artistic career and progression of his style as well as choice of subject matter. Like many artists of his generation, Day began his career as an abstract artist through the 1950s and 60s. This is a period when Day was engaged with the New York School and Abstract Expressionism. Abstract Expressionism is considered a distinct branch of abstract art that appeared from roughly 1940-60, with an emphasis on gestural, painterly expressionism. Throughout the exhibition, the viewer can chart the artist’s trajectory and shift from abstraction to realism.

After an experiment copying an Old Master painting in the early 1960s, Day devoted himself to figurative painting from that point on, deciding that representational work was more challenging and fully engaging. During this time, Day would continue traditional study of historical works by mainly 16th- and 17th-century artists such as Jan Steen, Titian, and Bosch. Through his studies he explored the relationship between figures and their environments which can be easily seen as an influence to works such as The Bridge Game and Narrative: To the Memory of Matteo Giovanetti.

Lastly, an emerging theme of the exhibition is exploring the relationship between artists and their models as well as between an artist and their studio space. Working from live models and photographs, Day’s depictions of figures explore identities, not only of the subjects but also his own, specifically the persona of the artist in the studio. These drawings and paintings represent more than self-portraits but underscore the role of the artist as both an active participant of the scene and simultaneously that of a removed onlooker documenting the moment.
ARTIST BIOGRAPHY:

Born Lorenzo del Giorno in 1921 to an Italian father and a Scottish mother, Day was a lifelong Philadelphian who lived primarily in Cheltenham Township, five miles northeast of Center City, Philadelphia. He was baptized Lawrence James Day in 1922, went by Larry Day thereafter, and petitioned for a legal change of name in 1986.

After attending Cheltenham High School, Day served in the Pacific campaign at Iwo Jima in World War II. He attended college on the GI Bill, graduating from Temple University’s Tyler School of Art with a bachelor of fine arts in painting in 1949 and earning a degree in education there the following year. He taught briefly in Philadelphia public schools but spent most of his career in the painting department of the Philadelphia College of Art (now the University of the Arts) from 1953 to 1988 and the graduate school of the University of Pennsylvania.

Day’s first solo exhibition was held in 1953 at Philadelphia’s Dubin Gallery, an important center for progressive art. He would also exhibit nationally, including at the Parma Gallery in New York (which focused on Abstract Expressionism) and the Stanford University Art Gallery. In 1959, he participated in a group show at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, writing an essay for the exhibition’s catalogue, and showed his work at the Brooklyn Museum. In 1961, he took part in a panel discussion about the future of contemporary art with figures no less eminent than Marcel Duchamp, Louise Nevelson, and Theodoros Stamos.

From the early 1960s onward, Day participated in a constant stream of exhibitions in museums and galleries, while also teaching and writing about art. Among the important group shows that featured Day’s work were Realism Now, curated by Linda Nochlin at Vassar College in 1968, and The Realist Revival, organized in 1972 by the American Federation of Arts, which traveled to seven museums across the country. These and other exhibitions placed Day firmly in the national conversation about new approaches to representational art.

Through most of the 1960s he showed with Gallery 1015 in Philadelphia and, by the late 1970s, his primary commercial gallery was Gross McCleaf. Through the 1980s and until his death in 1998, he remained an active figure in American art. To this day, his work is sought by collectors and museums internationally.

(left to right) Jimmy Lueders, Larry Day, and Armand Mednick pose with the only royal flush in the fifty years of the poker game, © 1973
Throughout history, for every great work of art, there are dozens of artworks that are either inspired or derived from it. Despite the negative connotations the word “copying” carries with it in the modern day, copying and imitating the artwork of great artists allows you to further inform and broaden your own personal style, while simultaneously understanding and appreciating the complexities and differences of other styles.

Modern artists such as Larry Day imitated works by the masters as a means of rediscovering meaning in traditional forms and practice. Following the exhaustion of Abstract Expressionism in the 1960s, many artists throughout history that are often thought of as master painters in their own right, opted to imitate the works of previous masters as well. This practice of copying allows an artist to both pay homage to those before them while also broadening and expanding upon their skillset.
ABSTRACTING OLD MASTERS
Art Lesson Plan

This lesson can be adjusted and adapted for varying grade levels and abilities.

LESSON OVERVIEW:
Students will explore Larry Day’s process of studying paintings by the old masters as inspiration for his abstract work. Students will draw from historically significant works of art to combine, adapt, and transform images into their own abstract representations.

OBJECTIVES:
Students will:

• be able to understand and describe the term “abstract art”
• identify and differentiate between abstract and realistic artwork
• create an abstract drawing using a painting by the old masters as a reference

GUIDING QUESTIONS:
How does knowing the contexts, histories, and traditions of specific art forms help us create works of art and design?

Why do artists follow or break from established traditions?

INDIANA ACADEMIC STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

• Anchor Standard 1a: Creativity and innovative thinking are essential life skills that can be developed.
• Anchor Standard 1b: Artists and designers shape artistic investigations, following or breaking with traditions in pursuit of creative artmaking goals.
• Anchor Standard 7b: Visual imagery influences understanding of and responses to the world.
**VOCABULARY:**

**Abstract art:** art that does not attempt to represent external reality, but seeks to achieve its effect using shapes, forms, colors, and textures

**Contour lines:** a line which defines a form or an edge

**Old Masters:** the term “Old Masters” generally refers to the most recognized European artists—mostly painters—working between the Renaissance and 1800

**Realistic art:** art that aims to imitate what we can see and the world around us

**Shading:** the process of adding value to create the illusion of form, space, and most importantly - light and shadow in a drawing

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**MATERIALS:**

- 9x12 drawing paper
- pencils
- erasers

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**REFERENCE IMAGES:**

- *Pergamon Altar*, c. 250-150 B.C.E (Battle between the Gods and Giants on the Altar of Zeus from Pergamon)
- *To Pergamon*, 1958-1959, Larry Day
- *The Bull*, 1945-1946, Pablo Picasso, series of eleven lithographs

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**Lesson Steps**

1. **Look closely at the image of the Pergamon Altar and Larry Day's painting To Pergamon.** As a group, discuss the following questions:

   a. What do you think is happening in the Pergamon Altar scene? What do you see that makes you think that?

   b. What do you think is happening in Day’s painting To Pergamon?

   c. How are the two artworks different?

   d. How are they the same?

   e. Day’s painting is influenced by the stone relief sculpture at the Pergamon Altar. Do you think the artworks are telling similar stories? Why or why not?
Share an example of transforming realistic art into abstract art. Show an image of Picasso’s bull series. Ask students:

a. Do the first few images look realistic to you?

b. When does the bull start to look more abstract?

c. Looking only at the last image, would you be able to tell what the subject of the image is?

Before working on their abstraction, explain to students how artists combine shapes to form complex images.
EXAMPLE:

- Have students select an image of historical significance. Images that include multiple figures or objects work well for this activity. Using a sheet of tracing paper, have students identify basic shapes in their chosen image and trace them to practice identifying simple shapes.

- Ask students to draw four equal boxes on a 9x12 inch drawing paper.

- In the top box, ask the students to draw their chosen image as accurately as they can. Show them some of the contour lines, point out how to add shading, and encourage them to draw as many details as they can. In the remaining three boxes, have students continue to simplify the image with each consecutive box. The last box should contain just the basic shapes of the object.

- Afterwards, explain that what they are doing is the process of abstraction. Give the definition for abstraction and ask students to brainstorm a list of other ways they can abstract an image.
RETELLING THE STORY
Art Lesson Plan

This lesson can be adjusted and adapted for varying grade levels and abilities.

LESSON OVERVIEW:

Larry Day combines imagery from the past and the present, as seen in (Factory), (Masquerade), and more.

Examples of this are evident in the furniture, clothing, and setting in Day’s figurative works. By taking this imagery and repurposing it he retells a new version of a story that’s already been told.

In this lesson students will explore Larry Day’s process of borrowing past and present imagery. Students will examine ancient and contemporary artworks and evaluate the historical context of the objects/subjects. Students will then select and use these objects/subjects from a variety of time periods to adapt them into their own drawing.
OBJECTIVES:
Students will:

• be able to analyze the setting and context clues to determine the time period depicted in a work of art
• be able to identify ideas, objects, and/or subjects with symbolic meanings in art
• evaluate the purpose of objects/subjects in Day’s drawings
• create a figurative drawing using objects and subjects from artwork of various time periods

GUIDING QUESTIONS:
How does knowing the contexts, histories, and traditions of specific works help us create new works of art and design?

Why might artists use objects or subjects as symbols in their work?

Why is knowing the period in which an artwork is created important?

INDIANA ACADEMIC STANDARDS Addressed:

• Anchor Standard 1a: Creativity and innovative thinking are essential life skills that can be developed.

• Anchor Standard 1b: Artists and designers shape artistic investigations, following or breaking with traditions in pursuit of creative artmaking goals.

• Anchor Standard 7b: Visual imagery influences understanding of and responses to the world.

VOCABULARY:

Abstract art: art that does not attempt to represent external reality, but seeks to achieve its effect using shapes, forms, colors, and textures

Figurative art: art that is representational of real object sources

Contour lines: a line which defines a form or an edge

Realistic art: art that aims to imitate what we can see and the world around us

Shading: the process of adding value to create the illusion of form, space, and most importantly – light and shadow in a drawing

MATERIALS:

• 9x12 drawing paper
• pencils
• erasers

REFERENCE IMAGES:

• (Factory), c. 1995, Larry Day
• (Masquerade), c. 1955, Larry Day
• The Death of the Dauphin, c. 1767, Louis Jean François Lagrenée
Lesson Steps

1. Look closely at Larry Day's drawing (*Factory*) and (*Masquerade*). As a group, discuss the following questions:
   
   a. What do you think is happening in this scene? What do you see that makes you think that?
   
   b. What are some things that you see in this drawing that you wouldn’t normally see today?
   
   c. Which figures appear to be from present day, and which ones do not?
   
   d. Do the buildings and landscapes have any significance to the time period? If so, what time period is being shown in this way?

2. Show an image of Louis Jean François Lagrenée’s *The Death of the Dauphin*. Ask students:

   a. Compare and contrast the appearance of these figures with those around you. What differences and similarities do you see?

   b. What objects do you see in these works? Do you believe they are symbolic in any way? If so, how?

   c. Based on context clues, when do you think this piece was created?

*The Death of the Dauphin*, c. 1767, Louis Jean François Lagrenée
3 Have students select at least two works from different time periods. Those that include multiple figures or objects work well for this activity.

4 Ask students to choose at least three total ideas, objects, or subjects from the artwork that they would like to incorporate into their own drawing. Remind students that some objects are symbolic or have importance from the time period that they are from, and that they could use this information to decide a new or original purpose of the object in their own drawing.

   a. Students can find multiple examples on the David Owsley Museum of Art’s website collection page.

5 Have students draw a scene of their choice using the works selected in step three as inspiration. Remind students to create a drawing that tells a story, and that the objects should support their story.

5 Afterwards have the students present their work to each other (either in small groups or as a class). Ask students who are viewing the work to interpret what the story is. Remind the viewers to seek out what the presenter borrowed from other artworks. Then, have the students present their own drawing, explaining the story and the significance of the borrowed objects.
ENGLISH AND LANGUAGE ARTS ACTIVITIES

“A culture is made up on bodies of assumptions. There are interactions, available options such as what we can buy to eat, clothe ourselves with, to amuse ourselves and so forth. There are sub-cultures within any culture, either by choice or by force (i.e., rock culture, prison culture). There are also sets of common experiences that influence assumptions and options. Uncommon experiences become important to a culture when expressed in one of the ways open in the culture for expression.”

- “Excerpts from a Notebook”

In this excerpt from one of Larry Day’s notebooks, he speaks about elements of culture that are chosen, forced upon us, and influenced by assumptions.

- What components of American culture can be seen in the art of Larry Day?
- What common experiences influence American culture?
- What specific cultures do you consider yourself belonging to? Which ones have you chosen?
- What other works of art reflect distinctly American culture?
- Can works of art portray multiple cultures?

“If the world cannot be defined nor seen whole, it can be imagined by inventing small worlds that have definition which in turn make the world’s presence bearable. Not to know, never to know, only to make up stories—this is our lot.”

“Only fiction can breathe in that space between what we know and what we will never know.”

- “Poussin, August 1989”

- Why do you think people have a need for stories?
- Do you think making stories about art can help to better understand the artwork? Why or why not?

Activity:

Have students choose a Larry Day painting and write a story for the characters depicted.
BODY LANGUAGE: THE ART OF LARRY DAY
CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Review the Questions (pg 18) and the Glossary (pg 19) and complete the puzzle.

QUESTIONS ON NEXT PAGE
# BODY LANGUAGE: THE ART OF LARRY DAY

## CROSSWORD PUZZLE

**Review the Glossary (pg 19) and complete the puzzle.**

### ACROSS

2. a closely woven, sturdy cloth stretched over a frame and used as a surface for painting  
4. a room where an artist works  
5. a popular game that involves acting out scenes to provide clues; the subject of a Larry Day painting  
8. a group of objects displayed in a museum  
9. a graphite-filled tool used for drawing  
14. a bristled tool used for painting  
15. a style in which the artist depicts objects or scenes exactly as they are seen.

### DOWN

1. a painting depicting a scene from nature in which the place or the land itself becomes the main subject  
3. a style of artwork focused on simplified forms and depicting objects unrealistically  
6. a work of art in which the artist creates an image representing themself  
7. the largest city in Pennsylvania and Larry Day’s home for several decades  
10. a popular card game that involves chips; the subject of a Larry Day painting  
11. a person dedicated to creating as a profession; could be a painter, writer, or musician  
12. the material or technique used to create a work of art  
13. type of drawing that depicts the human body

**KEY ON NEXT PAGE**
CROSSWORD ANSWER KEY

ACROSS

2. canvas
4. studio
5. charades
8. exhibit
9. pencil
14. paintbrush
15. realism

DOWN

1. landscape
3. abstract
6. self-portrait
7. Philadelphia
10. poker
11. artist
12. medium
13. figure
GLOSSARY

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM
the dominant artistic movement in the 1940s and 1950s, this style of art does not depict scenes or objects in the world or have discernable subject matter and often includes simplified or exaggerated shapes and colors

CLASSICISM
a formal and restrained style in which the artist follows the Greek and Roman standards of form and craftsmanship

FIGURE DRAWING
the depiction of the human body in art

GENRE PAINTING
scenes of everyday life

LANDSCAPE
a painting depicting a scene from nature in which the place or the land itself becomes the main subject

MEDIUM
the material or technique used to create a work of art

PORTRAIT
a likeness made of a person created by an artist

REALISM
style in which (as opposed to abstract art) the artist tries to depict objects exactly as seen by the eye

RESOURCES


✓ Woodmere Art Museum – *Body Language: The Art of Larry Day*
https://woodmereartmuseum.org/experience/exhibitions/the-art-of-larry-day

✓ The Art Story – *American Realism*
https://www.theartstory.org/movement/american-realism/

✓ The Art Story – *Abstract Expressionism*
https://www.theartstory.org/movement/abstract-expressionism/#nav