

**Title of Lesson:** Character Traits in Paintings and Stories

**Topic or Theme of Unit that Lesson is Part of:** Character Traits and Inferences

**Subject Areas:** Language Arts

**Schedule:** 5 class periods

**American Artwork on Which Lesson is Based:**



Emanuel Leutze (1816-1868)  
*Washington Crossing the Delaware*  
(1851)  
Oil on canvas, 149 x 255 in.  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
Gift of John S. Kennedy, 1897 (97.34)

**Big or Main Ideas Students Will Understand:**

- *An artist is like the writer of a story—the artist uses details to show the traits of the characters.*
- *An inference is an educated guess—you make an inference based on what you know.*
- *You can infer the traits of a person from the actions of the person.*
- *You can predict what a person will do based on that person's traits.*

**National Standards:**

ENG K12.3 Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features.

**Illinois Learning Standards:**

2.A.2b Describe how literary elements (e.g., theme, character, setting, plot, tone, conflict) are used in literature to create meaning.

1.C. 3a: Use information to form, explain and support questions and predictions.

**3.C.2a** Write for a variety of purposes and for specified audiences in a variety of forms including narrative (e.g., fiction, autobiography), expository (e.g., reports, essays) and persuasive writings (e.g., editorials, advertisements).

**Chicago Reading Initiative Correlation:**

X word knowledge    X comprehension    X writing    X fluency

**Student Objectives: Students will...**

- Identify features of each person portrayed in an American artwork..
- Make a chart in which they list features and then infer traits of persons presented in an American artwork.
- Write about what they infer about feelings of a person presented in an American artwork.
- Chart actions and characteristics literally stated for characters in a story, then infer traits.
- Draw a picture that shows the characters in a story, making their traits clear.

**Vocabulary Students Will Learn:**

infer, predict, interpret, character trait, historic, event, artist, artwork, context, challenge, symbol

**Assessments:**

Students produce and explain their own artwork that communicates character traits.  
Students write an explanation of how they learned to “read” a painting.  
Students write to explain how to infer the traits of a character from a story.  
Students will write extended response comparing persons in painting to persons in story.

**Information about the Artwork that is Important to Students’ Understanding:****Relevant Information about the Time Period**

- The painting was made after the event, but it shows a time when it was not certain when the United States would become a free country.
- When it was painted, there were people in the United States who wanted to divide it. This painting was done before the Civil War.

Source: *Washington’s Crossing* by David Hackett Fischer, New York Times 2004

**Relevant Information about the Artist**

- Emanuel Leutze (1816–1868)
- Of German heritage, but grew up in the U.S.
- Leutze was a strong abolitionist.

Source: *The Life and Works of Emanuel Leutze*, Raymond L. Stehle

**Relevant Information about the Artwork**

- The 13 men in Washington’s boat signify the unity of the 13 colonies in a fight against a common enemy.
- One passenger is a New England seaman of African descent. The inclusion of this figure—not actually on the boat--reflects Leutze’s Abolitionist sympathies.
- Other passengers are recognizable as western riflemen, farmers, a member of a Delaware regiment, a prosperous Baltimore merchant—representing different regions.
- Washington holds a brass telescope and wears a heavy saber, symbolic of a strong statesman, and—like a great leader—rises above everything but the flag.
- The painting is a monumental 12’ x 20’, intended by Leutze to be purchased by the government and publicly displayed. The figures are life-sized..

Source: *Framing America* by Frances Pohl, Thames and Hudson, 2008

## Student Activities:

Day	Emphasis of this Lesson Idea/Outcome	Activities
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify features of each person portrayed in an American artwork.</li> </ul>	<p><i>“Close read” of the Crossing the Delaware—students tell what they see; Teacher asks:</i>  <i>What do you notice-let’s make a list</i>  <i>How does the artist tell us what kind of day it is?</i>  <i>What colors does the artist use for each person?</i>  <i>What else do you notice about each person—what makes each one different?</i>  <i>The artist uses symbols—what is a symbol? Which ones do you see?</i></p> <p><i>Teacher gives students some background information after they do initial viewing.</i></p>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make a chart in which they list features and then infer traits persons in an American artwork.</li> <li>Write about what they infer feelings of person in an American artwork.</li> </ul>	<p>USE BIG QUESTION to guide student interpretation of the painting: <b>WHAT ARE THE TRAITS OF THE PEOPLE ON THE BOAT?</b></p> <p>Make a chart: person, observation, inference            Guide students to complete it for different people in the painting.            Each student chooses one person on the boat and writes what that person might have said about the situation—how he felt, why he was on the boat.</p>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chart actions and characteristics literally stated for characters in a story, then infer traits.</li> </ul>	<p>Use BIG question to guide student reading story: <b>WHAT ARE THE TRAITS OF THE PEOPLE IN THIS STORY?</b></p> <p>Make four column chart:            Person    Description    Actions    Traits</p>
4-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draw a picture that shows the characters in a story, making their traits clear.</li> </ul>	<p>Teacher reviews use of symbolism in the painting.</p> <p>Students draw pictures of one of the characters in the story, including symbols.</p> <p>Students write extended response: How are the characters in the story like or different from the people in the painting?</p>

## Assessment:

- Students write captions for their character drawings telling how their pictures show the traits.
- Students write an explanation of how they learned to “read” a painting.
- Students write to explain how to infer the traits of a character from a story.