

Dear Miss Florence . . .

Writing Letters to the Boardinghouse for Artists

Grades: K-4

Time: over the course of several days

Grouping: whole class, small groups, individual

Materials: access to the Museum's website, example of historic letter to Miss Florence from Childe Hassam ([downloadable as PDF](#)), ink pen, writing paper, matching envelope, and scrap paper

Description

The Lyme Art Colony was a group of artists who were drawn to Old Lyme, Connecticut, as early as 1900. They stayed at the Griswold boardinghouse that was owned and operated by Florence Griswold. Many would reserve their place at the boardinghouse by writing Miss Florence a letter.

This lesson introduces students to Miss Florence Griswold and the Lyme Art Colony by having them imagine being one of the painters and writing letters to Miss Florence and a packing list of what they will need for their stay at the boardinghouse in 1910. Students use the Museum's on-line resources to gather information (both in words and pictures) about the daily life of artists at the boardinghouse before writing letters and lists using a historic voice.

Objectives

- To learn about Miss Florence and the Lyme Art Colony
- To read a historic letter from an artist
- To use the Museum's website as a source of information
- To view historic photographs and paintings of people
- To adopt a historic persona and imagine what life was like in the early 1900s
- To write letters and lists using a historic voice

Curriculum Connections

Social Studies educational experiences in grades K-4 will ensure that students:

- Gather historical data from multiple sources
- Engage in reading challenging primary and secondary historical source materials, some of which is contradictory and requires questioning of validity
- Describe sources of historical information
- Write short narratives and statements of historical ideas and create other appropriate presentations from investigations of source materials
- Exhibit curiosity and pose questions about the past when presented with artifacts, records or other evidence of the past
- Seek historical background when confronted with problems and issues of the past, as well as of today's world and their own lives
- Be active learners at cultural institutions, such as museums and historical exhibitions
- Display empathy for people who have lived in the past
- Recognize relationships between events and people of the past and present circumstances, concerns, and developments

Visual Art educational experiences in grades K-4 will ensure that students:

- Differentiate between a variety of media, techniques and processes
- Describe how different media, techniques and processes cause different effects and personal responses
- Discuss a variety of sources for art content
- Select and use subject matter, symbols and ideas to communicate meaning

Language Arts educational experiences in grades K-4 will ensure that students:

- Will speak, write, or draw in a variety of modes (narrative, "all-about" nonfiction pieces, poetry) to tell stories that their audience understands
- Will generate questions for gathering data from appropriate first-hand, visual and print sources, and categorize the data to produce a product
- Will compose a piece of writing based on ideas generated through any of a variety of ways (writing, drawing, talking, webbing, listing, brainstorming), revise and proofread it, and present it to an audience

The above goals align with this lesson and were selected from *The Connecticut Framework: K-12 Curricular Goals and Standards* (adopted in March 1998, published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, Division of Teaching and Learning). Go to: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/site/default.asp> to download a copy of the entire publication *The Connecticut Framework: K-12 Curricular Goals and Standards*.

Inclusion Activity (Engaging Prior Knowledge)

Begin the lesson with a Student Grouping Activity that places students into unique pairs or trios to discuss a question designed to stimulate their prior knowledge on a subject or idea related to the lesson. Several activities that will help organize students into unexpected groups are listed below. Of course, other methods of pairing up students may be substituted for these activities.

Student Grouping Activities

Musical Pairs

Use a portable CD player or simple instrument to play music/sound. Explain to the students that when the music/sound starts they are to walk around the room silently in a safe but random pattern (nodding friendly hellos to their fellow students). When the music stops, the students should pair up with the nearest person to discuss the question read aloud. After each question is discussed, start the music again. Repeat until all three questions have been discussed.

A Circle of Friends

Ask your students to get into a circle facing the center. Ask every other student to step into the circle facing out. Have the inner circle rotate to the right until they are face to face with a partner. Ask the first question. After the question is discussed, have the outer circle move three or four people to the right to line up with a new partner. After the question is discussed, have both the inner circle and outer circle move three to four people to the right to line up with a final partner.

Enjoying a Little Tete-A-Tete

The term “tete-a-tete” refers to a private conversation between two people (as well as a short sofa intended to accommodate two persons). Ask your students to put their chairs

into pairs (side by side, but facing in opposite directions) and take a seat. After each question is discussed, have students move to another seat and partner up with a new person.

Find Two Like You

Ask your students to find two other students who match a certain criterion like: *Find two other students with your hair color*; or *Find two other students with birthdays close to yours*; or *Find two other students who have same kinds of pets*; or *Find two other students who like your favorite ice cream flavor*. Students usually begin to call out their answers and cluster with those whose answers match. Once they have three people, their group is complete. Teachers may have to make a cluster of non-matching students.

Once the students are in their pairs or trios, have them discuss one of the following questions read aloud by the teacher. After a minute of discussion passes, remix the groups and continue with next question. Repeat until all questions have been discussed.

Discussion Questions

- Describe the last card or letter you received.
- What is the difference between a house and a hotel?
- What makes you comfortable when you are in a strange place?

Instructions

1. Begin by reading aloud *The Story of Miss Florence and the Lyme Art Colony* to introduce students to the Lyme Art Colony.

2. Introduce the assignment of pretending to be an artist in 1910 who wants to stay at Miss Florence's boardinghouse and make paintings as part of the art colony. For this assignment, they will 1. write a letter to Miss Florence announcing their intentions to stay at her house; 2. make a list of all the things they will need to bring with them to Old Lyme; and 3. write a thank you note to Miss Florence outlining what they accomplished during their stay. Tell the students that they can learn more about Miss Florence and the Lyme Art Colony via their computer by going to *The Fox Chase* section of the Museum's on-line learning site. They should surf the pages looking for information they will want to include in their letters and lists.

3. Divide the class into working groups of three or four and give each one a copy of the letter from Childe Hassam to Miss Florence. Ask the groups to decipher, read, and discuss the letter. What questions do they have now? What more would they like to know? What did the letter make them think about? Do they have any pictures in their heads after reading the letter? How would they change the letter? Have the groups report out their discussion.
4. Ask the students to imagine that they are an up-and-coming painter in New York a hundred years ago and they've been invited to join the Lyme Art Colony by Childe Hassam. They need to write to Miss Florence and introduce themselves and ask for a room and a studio. They are going at a very busy time and must convince Miss Florence to let them stay. After they finish the letter, they will make a list of everything they will need to pack for a two-week stay in the country (as an artist!). Lastly, after imagining their stay at the boardinghouse, they will write a thank you letter to Miss Florence, reminding her of all the things that went on during their visit. Have students use a computer to explore *The Fox Chase* and *In Situ: The Painted Panels*. They should surf the pages looking for interesting facts and artists' traits that can be incorporated into their letters and list.

Where to start on The Fox Chase to find information:

[Imagine Yourself as an Artist from The Griswold House Icon](#)

[Who's Who in the Boardinghouse from The Griswold House Icon](#)

[Inside the House from The Griswold House Icon](#)

[Outside the House from The Griswold House Icon](#)

[Painting Tools](#)

[School of Lyme](#)

5. Gather the learning groups together after the students have had time to visit the website. Have the groups brainstorm about the kinds of things an artist might say in a letter introducing themselves to Miss Florence and asking her to reserve a room for them. Allow them time to work independently on the draft of their letter. Repeat the group brainstorming and independent writing for a list of what to pack as well as the follow-up thank you note.

6. During the draft stages, have students get together to compare ideas and approaches to their letters and list. Encourage students to make suggestions to enhance each other's thinking and writing.

7. For the final presentation, encourage students to prepare a creative final draft of their letters and list. Let the students share their final products with their learning group. Ask groups to report out what they learned as a group. Arrange the final projects around the room and let the students explore the other letters and lists individually.

A Time for Reflection

Have students reflect on the following questions in their own journals.

Content/Thinking:

- Why did the artists write letters to Miss Florence?
- What determined what the artists would pack for their stay?

Social:

- How did your group help you to write a better letter?
- What were your best suggestions for the group?

Personal:

- What else could you include in your letter to Miss Florence that would tell her a little bit more about who you are?
- What do you think you would have liked best if you stayed at the Miss Florence's boardinghouse?

Appreciations

Before concluding the lesson, be sure to invite appreciations from the group (i.e. thank group partners for good brainstorming or suggestions for better writing). To help students begin making statements of appreciation, use such sentence starters as these:

- I liked it when ... (describe the situation)
- I was amazed when ...

Follow-Up Activity

Consider planning a field trip to the Museum in Old Lyme with your students. Information about a visit can be found on the [Planning A Visit](#) page.

Feedback

Please share your suggestions for making this lesson better. Let the Museum know how this lesson worked for you and your students by sending your comments and suggestions to david@flogris.org. Educators are encouraged to submit copies of final products and/or digital images to be shared on our website.