

TOUCHING THE ART

At the LACMA

American Wing

Find each painting in the gallery (each image is an excerpt from a larger work). As you answer the following questions, keep asking yourself (or your companions): **“How do I know this?”**

“What do I see that makes me say this?”

Afterward, turn to page 2 to learn the background story.



Room 314

READING:

- What kind of place is this? A barn or a shop? Does it belong to the boy?
- How are the two main boys dressed differently? Does the older boy look like he belongs in this place?
- What does this “customer” want?

IMMERSION:

- Pose: (young boy sitting) Feel how relaxed he is?
- Quote: What are the two boys saying to each other?
- Film Clip: Rewind the scene. What was the seated boy doing right before the “customers” came in?

SITUATION: (from the seated boy’s perspective)

- What kind of visitors is he receiving?

READING:

- Where is this scene taking place?
A sun-drenched park?
- What are the lions doing? (What would you expect them to be doing?)
- What is the man’s attitude towards the lions?

IMMERSION:

- Pose: Hands crossed, head down. Feel how calm he is?
- Quote: What could he be thinking? How about the lion closest to him?
- What mood does this place put you in? (When have you been in a place with a similar atmosphere?)

SITUATION:

- Does it look like he can do anything about his circumstances?



Room 313

READING:

- What kind of place is she in? A tidy drawing room?
- What is she absorbed by?
- Compare her expression to that of the girl (in blue) in the painting opposite this one. (Hint: Look at hands, eyes, shoulders.)

IMMERSION:

- Pose: Notice her left shoulder thrown back; her right hand loosely held open.
- Sensations? Sounds?

SITUATION:

- It’s important to know whom she’s in the presence of. (Check the background story.)



Room 313

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Room 314

BACKGROUND STORIES

READING:

- Who is in the wheat fields? Do they look like field workers?
- What is the woman in blue holding in her hand?
- What is the girl in the background throwing?
- Where did they come from? (Hints: plantation, carriage)

IMMERSION:

- Sounds? Smells?
- Quote: What is she saying to the man in brown?
- Film Clip: What happens when the action unfolds?

SITUATION: (from the woman in blue's perspective)

- Does she have time to do what she needs to do?

BACKGROUND: *The Young Mechanic*. This scene is not an illustration of any particular story.

SITUATION: Receiving important people into your realm. When have you received "important customers" into your "workshop"?

REACTION: The young carpenter is utterly at home in his shop.

CONNECTIONS? The Secret Garden (Dickon?).

BACKGROUND: *Daniel in the Lion's Den*. Daniel was a Hebrew favored by the Persian Emperor for his ability to interpret dreams. However, when he was asked to worship the king instead of his God, Daniel refused and was placed in a lions' den for the night.

SITUATION: In the middle of a dire situation with no possibility of leaving. When have you been "surrounded by lions" with no escape?

REACTION: Serenity.

CONNECTIONS? Star Wars (Obi Wan Kenobi?).

BACKGROUND: *Portrait of Mrs. John White Alexander*. The woman in the portrait, aka Elizabeth Alexander (1856-1915), was the wife of John White Alexander—the artist who painted this portrait.

SITUATION: Being in the presence of someone dear to you who is looking at you.

REACTION: Unselfconscious adoration.

CONNECTIONS? Shakespeare in Love, Cyrano de Bergerac.

BACKGROUND: *Mrs. Schuyler Burning Her Wheat fields on the Approach of the British*. While her husband, a general in the American Revolution, is out fighting the British, Catherine Schuyler sees the approach of the British soldiers near her home and farms in Saratoga, NY. Before she and her family make their escape, she decides to do one more thing to inflict harm on the enemy.

SITUATION: The frenzy of trying to get so much done at the last minute. When have you tried "rallying the troops" under stressful circumstances?

REACTION: Taking charge.

CONNECTIONS? Indiana Jones, Gone With the Wind.

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Find each painting in the gallery (each image is an excerpt from a larger work). As you answer the following questions, keep asking yourself (or your companions):

“How do I know this?”

“What do I see that makes me say this?”

Afterward, turn to page 3 to learn the background story.



Room 305

READING:

- What kind of person is lying on the rocks?
- Is he dead? Is he sleeping?
- What kind of woman is this? A peasant? A goddess?
- Does she want to wake him? What is she doing?

IMMERSION:

- Pose: (young woman) Press your hand to your shoulder; caress your forearm with your hand.
- Film Clip: Will she move from her perch? Will she pay attention to the little boy?
- Quote: What is Cupid saying to her?

SITUATION:

- Whom is she in the presence of?

READING:

- What has happened to the woman collapsing? Has she died? Fainted?
- What is the woman kneeling doing? (Does that seem like a reaction you'd expect from seeing someone collapse?)
- What could have happened to make her collapse? (Hint: see the “Film clip” below.)

IMMERSION:

- Pose: (young woman) Make the hand and head gesture of the woman kneeling.
- Film Clip: Rewind to a few moments before. How were the two main characters interacting with each other? Why was the younger woman kneeling before the older one?
- Quote: What could the young woman be thinking as she turns away?

SITUATION: (from the young woman's point of view)

- What kind of news has she just delivered?
- (Hints: The note on the ground tells of Achilles, an enemy warrior, making a demand. The vase could be a funerary urn.)



Room 304

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Room 308

READING:

- Why is everyone gathered around? What has just happened? What kind of man could be lying there?
- Where is this scene taking place? Their palace?
- Which is the queen? The oldest son?
- Why is the young man in red turned away? What do you read in his expression?

IMMERSION:

- Pose: Take the young man's pose. How do you feel?
- Quote: What is he thinking?

SITUATION:

- What has now changed in the young man's life?



Room 309

READING:

- What kind of day is this? Rainy and dreary?
- How are the two girls different?
- Is the older girl reading along or listening?
- What kind of book is she reading? Textbook? Fairytale?

IMMERSION:

- Pose: Older girl's tilted head and soft smile.
- Quote: Imagine what the young girl is saying at this moment.

SITUATION: (from the older girl's perspective)

- Is this a teaching moment or taking pleasure in what someone is doing?



Room 320

READING:

- Where is she? A sunlit park?
- What is on her table? Is this a vanity?
- How is she dressed? Is she going out tonight?

IMMERSION:

- Quote: What could she be thinking? (Hint: skull)
- Film clip: How long has she been here?
- Sounds? Smells?

SITUATION?

- Read the background. What has she just gone through in her life?

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BACKGROUND STORIES

BACKGROUND: *Selene and Endymion*. One night the moon goddess, Selene, saw a handsome young shepherd sleeping near his cave. She fell in love. She would watch over him while he slept. Thinking that he might become old, and lose his youthful beauty, Selene asked Zeus, the king of the gods, to put him into an eternal sleep that would also keep him eternally youthful. She wished to gaze on him forever.

SITUATION: Being in the presence of someone you adore who is not aware of you.

REACTION: Total enjoyment of gazing upon them.

CONNECTIONS? Little Mermaid, Hunchback of Notre Dame.

BACKGROUND: *Polyxena and Hecuba*. Troy and Greece are at war, and Greece is winning. Polyxena, the daughter of the Trojan queen Hecuba, has just been visited by the ghost of the dead Greek warrior, Achilles. She has been told that if she sacrifices herself, the Greek ships will sail away and leave Troy. Polyxena must tell her mother, who has already buried many of her children, what she has decided to do.

SITUATION: Polyxena has just told her mother that she has chosen to sacrifice herself to save her country. Seeing the devastated reaction of a loved one to difficult news. When have you had to inform someone close of a tough choice that might hurt them?

REACTION: (of Polyxena) She turns, resolved to fulfill what she has set out to do.

CONNECTIONS? Shane.

BACKGROUND: *The Death of St. Louis*. Louis IX was beloved and renowned for his saintly deeds (including retrieving the crown of thorns from the Holy Land). On a later Crusade, he would die while in Tunis, in North Africa. How would his son Philippe handle his father's death?

SITUATION: Receiving news of a heavy burden of responsibility. When have you learned that your life is filled with new responsibilities?

REACTION? Philippe turns away, envisioning the responsibilities he now has to fill.

CONNECTIONS? The King's Speech, Gone With the Wind, Star Wars.

BACKGROUND: *Two Girls Reading*. There is no particular background story.

SITUATION: (From the older girl's perspective) Witnessing a performance from someone dear to you.

REACTION: Quiet satisfaction.

CONNECTIONS?

BACKGROUND: *Mary Magdalene*. Mary was a prostitute. She lived a life of luxury and pleasure—a hedonist's life. One day she was introduced to the teachings of a young man who made her think about what would come later in her life. She was intrigued by this Jesus's teachings, and she decided she was going to rethink her life.

SITUATION: You've just changed your whole approach to life.

REACTION: She is in serious, quiet contemplation, in solitude.

CONNECTIONS? Les Misérables.

TOUCHING THE ART

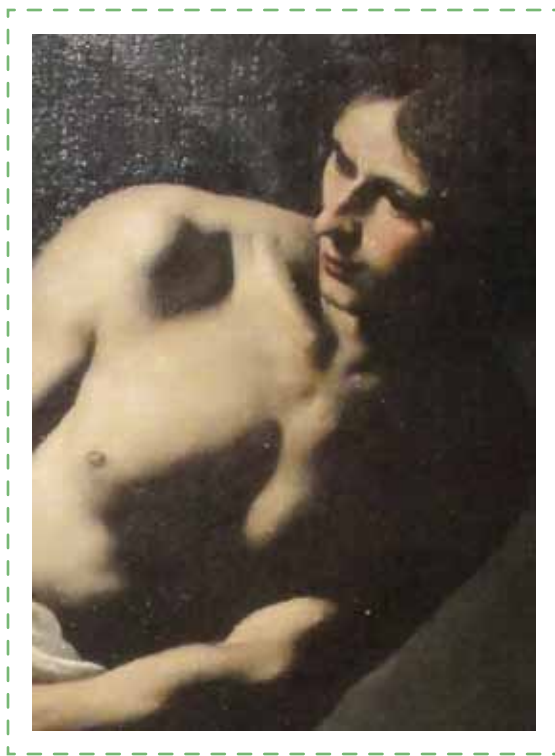
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OTHER RECOMMENDED WORKS:



Room 305



Room 318



Room 312



Room 303

Here is a brief explanation of the process. For a more in-depth discussion of the ideas, please refer to the book.

I. PREVIEWING: Be selective!

- › Come up with a quick “title”
- › Which works intrigue you most?

II. READING: Describe what you see!

- › Who are the characters?
- › What’s happening?
- › “Shuttle” between details and generalizations.

III. IMMERSION: Bring the image to life!

- › “Sounds” and “Sensations”: Notice the details in the scene that can be imagined to affect your senses.
- › Pose: Take the pose of the character to get a better “feel” for what his body is expressing.
- › Quote: Imagine what the character could be saying or thinking.
- › Film Clip: Imagine that the image is a movie clip on pause. Imagine the “action” that came before and after the scene in the artwork.

IV. SITUATION AND REACTION:

- › The “situation” is the circumstance the main character finds himself in. Try to relate personally to the situation!
- › The “reaction” is how the main character responds to his situation.

V. CONNECTIONS:

- › Relate the moment depicted to scenes from movies, literature, and your own life.

Enjoy!