READ A WORK OF ART AS YOU WOULD READ A BOOK

Art is a powerful pathway into the Hawai'i Common Core

Observe
Look closely and quietly.

Describe
What do you see?

Interpret
What do you think this painting is about and what makes you say that?

Connect
What does this remind you of? Why? What more do you want to know? Why?

Learn more at HawaiPublicSchools.org
Theodore Wores
American (1859-1939)
The Lei Maker, 1901
Oil on canvas
35 5/8 x 29 in.

The Artist:
Theodore Wores
BORN IN SAN FRANCISCO IN 1859, to Hungarian-German parents, Theodore Wores went on to become a well-known California Impressionist painter. When he was 16, he attended the Royal Academy in Munich, Germany, then spent the next six years painting and traveling in Europe with his mentor, the American painter Frank Duveneck. By the time Wores returned to San Francisco in 1881, he had adopted Duveneck’s method of using color to represent sunlight and shadow in paintings. Preferring bright colors, similar to the work of Impressionist artists in France at the time, Wores chose to paint outdoors—a practice called plein air painting—in addition to working on studio commissions.

Wores was the first artist to seriously depict scenes and portraits from San Francisco’s Chinatown. Over the next decade, he also lived and painted in Japan. On his way to Japan in 1892, his ship stopped for one day in Honolulu, which he captured with quick oil sketches. Wores vowed to return, and did in 1901. During Wores’s 18-month stay in Hawaii, he painted what is considered one of his best works—The Lei Maker, which was donated to the Honolulu Museum of Art in 1986.

The Artwork:
The Lei Maker
After only two days on Oahu, the painter was quoted by the Evening Bulletin newspaper as saying, “…The flower girls on the street corners afford an abundance of material for paintings of originality and with wealth of local color…I think a series of pictures representing Hawaiian life would be looked upon in the art circles as an innovation.” As he had done in Japan, Wores hoped to capture the daily life and spirit of the islands before it gave way to Western influence.

While Wores observed people making lei in downtown Honolulu, this painting was actually painted in a studio. The previous owners of this work have a photograph that shows the girl in the painting posing for Wores, holding an ‘ilima lei. Wores’ widow identified the girl in the portrait as Lizzie Victor. How might Lizzie Victor have felt while having her portrait painted?

The Honolulu Museum of Art has several portraits by artists who tried to capture Hawaii at a particular time and place. The previous two posters in the Common Core Poster Series (Hawaiian Troubadour and Study of Hawaiian Fish) were done by Hubert Vos. Ask students to compare and contrast two of the works using the six elements of portraiture (facial expression, eyes, gesture, clothing, setting, objects) as you discuss/write about or create your portrait.

Connecting to Standards
Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build more knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Sample prompts for writing and/or discussion:
• Why do you think Wores choose to do this particular portrait? What might you infer from the clothing, objects and setting?
• If you were going to paint a portrait that would capture Hawaii today, what might you paint and why? What objects would you include? Where would the setting be? What type of clothing would be worn? Consider the six elements of portraiture (facial expression, eyes, gesture, clothing, setting, objects) as you discuss/write about or create your portrait.
• Wores wanted to “immortalize the vanishing spirit of Hawaii.” Explain what this means and whether you think Wores was successful in doing this. Use specific details from the magazine article “Lizzie” (found on the Honolulu Museum of Art website) and the painting in your response.

Visit honolulumuseum.org, click on Learn in the menu and go to Teacher Resources.

Honolulu Museum of Art
The museum offers:
Free guided school tours
Teacher resources
Lending Collection
Outreach programs
Art School classes
To learn more, go to honolulumuseum.org and click on Learn.