

# Finding Stories at the Minneapolis Institute of Art

The suggestions below can be used in the classroom with images from Mia’s website, [www.artsmia.org](http://www.artsmia.org), reproductions such as posters and postcards, or in front of the original artworks at the museum.

## Setting the Scene

Use a work of art as a story starter and to encourage a high level of detail in creative writing. Begin this exercise by talking as a group, so that everyone has a chance to notice as much as possible about the work. Then ask students to describe the scene in a paragraph. Later, have the students return to their writing and develop it into a fictional story. Be sure they consider how the passage of time and events affects the details they’ve already described.

## Let Me Introduce Myself

Artworks really come alive when they are allowed to “talk” to each other through comparisons. Let your students practice writing dialogue by imagining a conversation between two objects in the museum. What would a Chinese tomb figure have to say to a Nigerian mask? Ask students to include factual information they learn from the wall label or website (what the object is, where it came from, how old it is) as well as details they can observe by looking. Add some imagination—how might the objects feel about being stared at all day? What might they do together on a day off?

## Where Has It Been?

Don’t forget that the artwork has its own story! What path did it take to get to the museum? Art historians call this the provenance of an object. It’s often difficult to verify a provenance, but why not imagine what might have happened? Talk with your students about the ways art objects change hands—given as gifts, purchased from the artist, sold at auction, inherited from relatives, stolen. Then have them draw a comic book-style sequence that illustrates an imaginary provenance, starting with the work’s creator and ending at the museum.

## Then What Happened?

Artists often choose a particular moment in a story to illustrate. Ask your students to imagine that the artwork is a single frame from a movie. What happened a few moments before? What is about to happen? You may be able to find a work of art that illustrates a story that is the subject of a picture book—myths are good examples. What part of the story has the artist captured? How do the other illustrations in the book compare with the work of art? If no particular story is associated with the work, invite students to make one up and illustrate other moments from the story.