

Calming the Storm

The point of this book is to help you use art to  
Where have you ever noticed the natural world  
Adam and Eve of the body of Christ to supper  
Often times of our lives we are set in a storm  
The Bible is a story of faith and hope  
Christ the Son of God who came to save the world  
Calming the Storm is a collection of creative  
Not that we are not in a storm  
of Calming the Storm is a collection of creative  
artistic expressions  
lead through the storm  
through Calming the Storm  
words that you have  
Bible stories  
work with the storm  
the storm  
if this book  
meet Jesus  
community  
find the storm  
Calming the Storm  
is the storm  
you long for  
easy to read  
Matthew 8:23-27  
Calming the Storm  
leaves the storm  
of the storm  
For example  
s possible  
wind storm  
Calming the Storm  
painter  
The Pentecost  
his own  
The Good Samaritan  
Peter began  
doctrine through art  
shows him with one leg that the other  
the Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes  
still on the water  
The Good Samaritan (after Delacroix)  
artist cannot include one of the words  
Christ on the Cross  
spoke to the disciples and their responses  
Wise Men from the East  
Ladder of Ascent  
best the artist can do is to convey the story  
so on.  
Peter Walks on Water  
The Holy Spirit  
through the storm  
Detail of the Moone Cross  
expressions and postures of the people depicted.

**Teaching Guide for**  
**Beyond the Written Word**  
**Exploring Faith Through**  
**Christian Art**

Teaching Guide for  
*Beyond the Written Word*



Teaching Guide for  
***Beyond the Written Word***  
*Exploring Faith Through Christian Art*

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# Exploring Faith Through Christian Art

Only in the past few hundred years has reading been the primary way of teaching religion. For centuries, religious education relied on hearing and seeing. Religious education can benefit from a return to the ages-old methods of hearing and seeing to complement reading. *Beyond the Written Word: Exploring Faith Through Christian Art* and this teaching guide enable you to make one of the old ways—seeing—available to twenty-first-century students. This introduction offers a brief history of Christian art, an explanation of the value of art in religious education today, a survey of this book, and some hints for starting out.

## How the Old Ways Grew the Faith

In the earliest days of Christian art, the stonemasons and jewelers who made art for people of all faiths and cultures also made sarcophagi and signet rings for Christians. By the end of the fourth century, monks were making Christian images, better known as icons. Monks also illuminated the bibles and prayer books of the Middle Ages. In western Europe, religious people conceived the decorative parts of the design and architecture of the great Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals, and members of the artisan guilds executed their ideas.

*Artists*, as we understand that word today, first emerged as the Middle Ages ended and the Renaissance began. By the end of the fifteenth century, artists were the heroes and stars of the day. Some artists—Michelangelo, for one—were committed to their faith, theological study, and living a good life. Other artists lived less-faithful lives but were renowned for the religious paintings they made for the Church.

As Europeans conquered other parts of the world, they brought the Catholic faith with them, often in the form of art. The missionaries thought art would circumvent the language barriers and help communicate the faith to the people of the Americas, Asia, and Africa. Artists all over the globe in turn learned to blend the content and styles of the Christian art from Europe with their own styles and media. Today, Christian artists are working all over the world. The student book contains art from various cultures.

# Why Use Art in Religious Education Today?

High school religious educators seek additional ways to work with religious art in their classrooms. Using religious art in teaching is not only effective but also a great way to include learning skills other than those used in reading, lecture, and discussion. Two challenges, however, can deter teachers from regularly using art. First, finding enough good reproductions of a painting to distribute to each student in a class is difficult. Second, many religion teachers feel that teaching art is beyond their expertise.

*Beyond the Written Word's* student resource and this teacher's guide solve both those problems. Because the student resource contains the images, you will not have to find ways to make the art visible to everyone in the class. In addition, the teaching guide leads you through the process of using art in class with the students.

Educational and psychological theories support the use of art in education. Church history and solid theology support the incorporation of art into religious education. This manual does not have enough space to expound on this theory. The manual does offer an introduction to teaching with art in the religion classroom so that you can increase your visual literacy and comfort level with reading and interpreting art in the context of the school's religious education curriculum.

To increase visual literacy, I recommend basic books such as *Art for Beginners*, by Dani Cavallaro, and *A Primer of Visual Literacy*, by Donis A. Dondis, for learning the language of art. Appendix 2 lists publication information for these and other resources. Ask a colleague who teaches art to recommend a basic art history book you can use as a general reference.

## How to Use *Beyond the Written Word*

### The Student Book

The student book contains reproductions of twenty-two works of art from many corners of the Christian world. The artworks are large enough for students to see the details of the images. Each piece of art is used in at least one activity in the teaching guide. Much of the art is used in several activities because most paintings can be viewed from several perspectives. For example, a painting of the Wise Men's visit to the infant Jesus can be viewed for what it says about Jesus, for what it says about Mary and Joseph, and for what it says about the Wise Men.

### The Teaching Guide

This teacher's resource guides and supports you as you teach concepts using the art in the student book. In addition, it will show you how to continue to use art in religious education with art that is not in the student book.



- **Chapter 1.** This first chapter has five models for using art in the classroom. These models help you determine what questions to ask and which processes to use with students, depending on the way you want to approach a piece of art. Read through these models carefully. Not only will you learn skills for using these activities, but you will also recognize some of the same approaches throughout the teaching guide. The models will also help you create your own activities, using art and subject matter you choose.
- **Chapters 2 through 5.** These four chapters roughly follow the structure of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Each chapter offers activities about specific concepts based on the artwork in the student component of *Beyond the Written Word*.
- **Appendix 1: More About the Art.** This appendix provides background for the twenty-two pieces of art in the student book. The background pieces present information to help analyze an artwork for its theological, moral, and social relevance, and in a style young people might connect with. This breadth should spark creativity and curiosity in you and the students so that they will want to research the artworks or the artists more fully.
 

The background information does not have to be shared with the students for many of the exercises. The material is in the appendix so you can prepare by familiarizing yourself with the art, and pursue suggested leads for finding more information if the students are interested in knowing more. In a few activities, the preparation step alerts you to the importance of reading the background information in order to prepare for the class.
- **Appendix 2: Additional Resources.** This appendix provides a bibliography and suggestions for more resources for your classroom or for your own enrichment.

## How Does This Book Fit into Your Curriculum?

Although the activities in this teaching guide relate to the catechetical material you present to your students, the book is not catechetical. Instead, it is a resource that offers supplementary activities to enhance the students' learning of the concepts you are teaching them as part of the regular curriculum. The activities in this manual will make sense to the students only if they have a good grasp of the concepts referenced in the activities. In most cases, you will need to present the concept before supplementing your presentation with the art.

Because this resource might also be used in an art class, each activity provides references to relevant material in *The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth (CFH)*. Published by Saint Mary's Press, the *CFH* presents catechism material in a teen-friendly way. Should you want to look up some background material for an activity, the *CFH* is a good place to start.

## Getting Started

The first step toward using these resources is to read the introduction in the student book. It offers a quick example of the way art can augment religious education lessons. If you are protesting that "I don't know anything about art," be assured that you do not need to know anything about art to make

this process work. By disclosing your ignorance of art to the students, you make the activities a joint exploration of the artwork rather than a question-and-answer exercise. Images that provide only answers are not art. Good art always asks us questions.

The second step is to experiment with a few of the activities in chapters 2 through 5. These activities are geared toward concepts that are part of a standard religion curriculum and offer step-by-step instructions. A number of these activities are structured so they can be easily adapted for additional lessons with other works of art.

Finally, chapter 1, “Models for Teaching with Art,” offers five templates that contain everything you need to let your creative side loose. If you were to analyze the activities in chapters 2 through 5, you would find that most of them are variations on these general approaches.

## **Words of Encouragement**

Enjoy and trust this process that has been done with depth and insight by millions of Christians—who may or may not have been able to read and write—throughout Christian history.

You know the elements of the faith, you know the moral teachings of the Church, you know the Bible. You just have to learn to read them in the language of art.

You are invited to discover the life Christians through the ages have found in art.

## Models for Teaching with Art

### Overview

This chapter offers you material at three levels. First are the basic activity models that give you skills for teaching the other activities in the book. Second, these are real activities that offer concrete ways of using art in the classroom. Last, the activities are templates that help you shape and create your own activities. All but the fourth model activity can be done with either the paintings in the student book or with images you or the students gather.

### Activities

- Reading a Painting
- Archaeology and Art
- Art and Spiritual Growth
- Breaking Open the Scriptures with Art
- Becoming the Religious Artist

### Reading a Painting

In this activity, students use art to recognize the depth and the many facets of any particular Christian concept or Scripture story.

#### Preparation

- Choose a painting from *Beyond the Written Word* or from another source according to the recommendations under “Art.”
- To prepare for step 3 of the activity, look up symbols depicted in the painting in a dictionary of Christian symbolism (see app. 2), or make the dictionary available to the students and have them research the symbols.
- Go through the following exercise yourself first.

# How to Read a Painting

When the students struggle to engage with a painting, offer the following suggestions and questions:

- Compare the biblical story to the painting, if relevant. What is missing? What has been added?
- Notice facial expressions and what they reveal about the emotions of the people in the painting.
- Notice hands, both what they are doing and how they are depicted.
- Notice postures, gestures, stances, and attitudes reflected in body positioning.

Offer the following additional questions and suggestions and have the students consider their answers with the painting's story in mind:

- Notice the overall mood. For example, how does the mood affect the story being told?
- Notice the use of light and shadow in the painting and how it creates emphasis or drama.
- Notice the use of color in the painting and how it creates harmony or tension between the elements of the paintings.
- Notice the lines of the painting. Are they actual lines or are the figures and objects forming lines? (Actual lines might form the cross while the shape of Christ's body on it might create another crosslike shape.) The lines in garments, in landscapes, in architecture might all come into play, or a painting might not have any evident lines. Are the lines curved or straight? Are they vertical, horizontal, or diagonal? Do they direct the attention toward anything in particular?
- Notice the shapes and the forms in the painting. For example, do any lines form a triangle that might indicate the Trinity? Are the shapes angular or rounded?
- Notice the way time is depicted in the painting. For example, is it a snapshot of a single moment or are many moments depicted at once? Does the scene illustrate busy people or figures moving at a slower pace?
- Notice the texture of the painting. Is it smooth and refined, is it rough and earthy, or is it more subtle than either extreme?
- Notice the objects depicted in the painting, both the ones that seem central and the ones that seem peripheral, or hidden.

## Art

You will want to select art that reflects the concept the students are studying. One approach is to think of a Scripture story that reflects the concept, then find paintings of that story. When you first do exercises like this, you might want to use images that are rich in religious symbolism. European images from AD 1350 to AD 1650 would be good choices.

1. Give each student a copy of the image, or project the image onto a screen using either a computer or a slide projector. Invite the students to examine the art for a few minutes in silence. Ask the students to call out things they noticed about the image from their examination of it. Record their observations on the board. (Have a lot of board space available because the list is likely to be long.)

2. When the students have run out of observations, draw their attention to specific details in the painting. Use the questions in “How to Read a Painting,” on page 11 of this teaching guide, to help the students recognize more elements. Record their additional observations in a new column. The combined lists of details should be substantial. If necessary, try to generate more details by asking the students to consider additional design elements, such as the pairs of qualities found in “How to Help Students Clarify Their Responses to Art,” on page 18 of this guide. Record these new observations in a new column. When you are satisfied that the combined lists contain enough details, ask the students to observe the differences between the list of their initial observations and the subsequent lists of details generated after you asked more questions. This part of the activity helps the students sharpen their observation skills.

3. The next step is to discern whether the painting contains any symbolism that might not be obvious to the average adolescent. Share with the students your list of the symbols and their meanings that you found in the painting during your preparation for this activity. Add your list to the lists on the board. If you did not prepare a list of symbols beforehand, ask the students to research the symbolic meanings of people, objects, colors, and gestures that have particular significance in the Christian context. Have a dictionary of Christian symbols available for the students to facilitate their research.

You might need to guide the students through their research by offering examples of Christian symbols commonly found in art. For example, a palm branch carried in someone’s hand or arm often indicates that the person is a martyr. Add any symbolism they find to the list on the board.

4. Invite the students (in small or large groups) to determine what the painting has to say about the concept they are studying. Suggest that they refer to both the painting and the list of observations on the board. When an interpretation of the concept fails to account for one or more of the observations made, draw the students’ attention to that detail and explore it in greater depth.

## Archaeology and Art

In this activity, students use a painting to learn more about the Christian community of a particular time and place.

This activity is ideal for a Church history course but could also be used in any course about the culture of another time. It also works as part of an interdisciplinary project between the religion and social studies departments. An activity such as this could be used to compare the religious priorities of Catholics with those of Lutherans in the sixteenth century.

### Preparation

- Select one piece of art, or several from the same time period and place. For example, you might choose four or five paintings from mid-fourteenth-century Siena, Italy.
- Do some initial research about the painter, or painters, and the time period:
  - **Artists.** If possible, research the artists' lives and circumstances for information about any of the artists' patrons and their agendas. If you cannot gather specific information, the paintings will provide enough information for speculation. You need only have the time period and the place involved.
  - **Time period.** Familiarize yourself with the general details of the relevant history of the time: the conflicts, the politics, the economics, the social and cultural situation, the Church, the faith of the people, and so on. Find as much information as you can in a thirty-minute Web or library search.

Choose questions for step 4 from "How to Dig into a Painting," on page 15 of this teaching guide, that seem appropriate for the selected.

### Art

Select at least four pieces of Christian art from any time and any place. Although Renaissance Europe is often the first source that comes to mind, other cultures that have been exposed to the Good News have created art. Finding pre-twentieth-century Asian and African Christian art is difficult, but some Ethiopian Orthodox art is available from as far back as the fifth century. Latin American and North American Christian art can be found at museum Web sites and in books. (See app. 2 for resource ideas.) Especially when you first start using this method, choose paintings that have a recognizable time period.

1. Provide each student with a copy of each image, or project the images on a screen. If necessary, create a slide show of the images. Begin by inviting the students to look at the art for a few minutes.

Tell the students they are going to use these paintings as archaeological evidence to uncover the culture as well as the cultural and religious beliefs and practices of the people of the century the art was created. Set the scene for them by making the following points:

- The community where an artist lives and worships influences that artist. The artist is also affected by family, upbringing, and social, political, and economic factors. If an artist created a painting at the request of a patron, that piece of art will likely reflect something about the patron.



- When an artist makes a painting, she or he includes some details intentionally and others just because they are the way things are done at that time in that place. For example, the artist may be careful about how the people are painted but may use the same bright, muted, or earthy color palette all artists of that time and place used. Therefore, all elements of a piece of art tell us something even if the artist did not intend them to.
- An archaeologist who pulls a ring out of a dig site compares the ring's markings, the material it is made from, the size, the workmanship, and so on, with what is already known about jewelry of that time. The ring then either adds to or challenges what the archaeologist already knows about the civilization being uncovered. We are going to do the same with paintings.
- Getting to know the people or the circumstances of another society is a lot like getting to know someone you've just met and involves asking many questions. We start with questions that are based on what we see. Dark paintings might inspire us to ask, was this a depressed community? A painting of a small room might prompt us to inquire about the living conditions of the time, and so on.

**2.** Invite the students to pose questions about the paintings you have presented. Write their questions on the board.

**3.** Ask the students what they already know about life and religious beliefs in the region and from the time period of the paintings. Invite them to contribute answers to the questions raised in step 2. For the questions they cannot answer, offer answers based on your research of the artists, the time period, and the place. Your answers should provide a background for the students but not give them more information than they requested. Do not feel obligated to have more answers than you do. Conclude by saying:

- We have begun to make the acquaintance of this community, but we will have to dig deeper to get to know it better.

**4.** Continue to guide the students' investigation of the paintings by asking questions you selected from "How to Dig into a Painting" during your preparation. Record their answers on the board.

**5.** Point out to the students that they have been successful in collecting data about the society they are studying. Tell them it is now time to become cultural anthropologists who will construct a description of the culture, beliefs, and practices of the people that created the artifacts. Have the students form small groups. Tell them that each group is to use the information on the board to write a description of the community. If there is a specific religious belief, practice, or cultural trait you wish to emphasize, ask the students to focus their description in that direction. Explain to the students that any feature common to all the paintings probably is a reflection of the community but that a feature found in only one painting might not be. Allow a few minutes for the students to write the descriptions.

# How to Dig into a Painting

## Basic Questions

- Who is represented? Who is left out?
- What topic did the artist consider important enough to make a painting of it?
- When was the artwork made? Does it represent the artist's era or another time? Or is it a combination of the two? Does it depict real time or sacred time (the time of eternity or heaven or prayer)? Or is it a combination of the two?
- Where is the action taking place? Is it inside or outside? Is it in some faraway place or where the painting was made?
- Why was it painted? Why was this topic chosen?

## Religious Questions

- What was this community's relationship with God?
- What was this community afraid of?
- Did this community experience a lot of suffering? How did it understand suffering?
- Did this community experience a lot of evil? How did it understand evil?
- What gave this community joy?
- How did this community express love?
- How did this community understand salvation?
- What was the relationship between this community and Creation?

## Political Questions

- Who was in power at the time and who was not?
- How was political power exercised (money and influence, arms and fighting, and so on)?
- How did the people without power feel about those who had it?
- How did the people with power feel about those without? (Or did they even think about them?)
- How much freedom to speak their minds did average people have?
- Who had basic political rights and who did not?
- Did the Church have political power? In whose favor did it exercise that power?