

NARRATIVE



Essential Question

How do artists provoke narratives through works of art?



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How do artists provoke narratives through works of art? Explore this question with students using the artwork reproductions, art historical descriptions, and student discussion prompts provided. Then, transition from talking about art to writing about it using the following student reflection prompts:

1. What is a narrative?
2. What are the basic components of a narrative?
3. How do narrative devices, such as dialogue and pacing, help authors tell stories?
4. How do artists use symbols, images, and visual metaphors to tell stories?
5. How do artists also employ narrative devices?

Classroom Activity

Imagine that one of these works of art is the climax or the resolution of a story. Write a narrative to accompany the work—a prelude describing what happened before and what will happen after this scene.

First, who is your main character and what is his or her point of view? What problem or situation does your main character find him- or herself in?

Next, what is the plot of the narrative and how will you use devices such as dialogue, pacing, and description to develop (or disrupt) the plot? Think about how your choice of device will enhance the storyline and climax, communicating the same tone and feeling evoked by the work of art.

Then, add detail to convey a sensory experience for your reader, adding descriptive language to the characters, setting, and plot to enhance your use of visual imagery.

After writing your narrative, create a presentation that incorporates the work of art into a reading, performance, or demonstration of your story.

Vocabulary List

Narrative, narrative device, symbol, image, visual metaphor, perspective

California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts

Text Types and Purposes

Grade 8	Standard 8.3	Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
Grade 12	Standard 12.3	Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.



Mariana Castillo Deball (Mexico, b. 1975)
El dónde estoy va desapareciendo (The where I am is vanishing; fragment), 2011
Drawing, Indian ink on cotton paper
Courtesy of the artist



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Teacher Resource Guide English Language Arts Theme

El donde estoy va desapareciendo (The where I am is vanishing; fragment),
Mariana Castillo Deball

The earliest written accounts of pre-Columbian or Mesoamerican history are found in codices. Composed of *amatl* (tree bark) paper and folded in an accordion style, codices allowed writers and readers to compare and contrast pages across the entire book. The hand-painted pictograms, written and read from right to left, reveal indigenous points of view, describing life before, during, and after contact with Europeans.

Mariana Castillo Deball works as an artist-archaeologist, researching primary sources such as codices and using them as inspiration for her multimedia practice. In the film *El dónde estoy ya desapareciendo* (The where I am is vanishing), Castillo Deball uses the format of the codex and the pictographic language as a narrative device. Accompanied by captions in English, native Nahuatl, Spanish, Italian, and German, the film recounts a personal journey through a series of drawings, projected onto the wall using HD video. Not only does the narrative approach reference the format of the codex but the film's installation references the traditional presentation of codices, which were hung on walls and recited by court poets for their original audiences.

Castillo Deball's film is on display at 18th Street Art Center, alongside a facsimile of the *Tira de la Peregrinación*, a sixteenth-century codex from LACMA's permanent collection, as part of a joint research and exhibition project entitled *A Universal History of Infamy*. The exhibition, which takes its name from a collection of short stories written by Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges, whose work has come to define the literary genre of magical realism, explores interdisciplinary experiments across art, writing, theater, and film.

Discussion Prompts for Students

- What do you see?
- Who might this main character be and where might she be going?
- How do the atmospheric details describe the setting and the nature of her journey?
- If this were the beginning or middle scene of a story, how might her journey end?

See this artwork in the exhibition ***A Universal History of Infamy: Virtues of Disparity*** at 18th Street Arts Center

As part of its collaboration with LACMA on *A Universal History of Infamy*—an exhibition focused on alternative artistic practices in Latin America and the United States—18th Street Arts Center presents *A Universal History of Infamy: Virtues of Disparity*, a companion exhibition that presents smaller-scale works that offer different perspectives on globalized contemporary art practice today. *Virtues of Disparity* is structured around themes of reproduction and deception. The works featured investigate the shortcomings of different systems of writing and transcriptions and their contested relation to authenticity. 18th Street Arts Center is also hosting a series of residencies for artists and collectives—including Dolores Zinny and Juan Maidagan, Mapa Teatro, Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa, and NuMu—that serve as the foundation for the larger *A Universal History of Infamy* project. The artists and collectives in residence interact with local artists, schools, museums, and community-based organizations, in some cases giving rise to new site-specific works.



Regina Silveira (Brazil, b. 1939)
Biscoito arte (Art biscuit), 1976/1997
C-print
Courtesy of the artist



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Teacher Resource Guide English Language Arts Theme

Biscoito arte (Art biscuit) Regina Silveira

Visual metaphor characterizes the work of Brazilian artist Regina Silveira. Her practice, which has spanned five decades and almost every medium from printmaking to video and installation, plays on the ironic and poetic possibilities of words, images, and meaning.

Biscoito arte (Art biscuit) is, at once, both a sculpture and a photograph. A biscuit or cake in the shape of the word *arte*, Silveira's handheld sculpture plays with the word art, the meaning of art, and whether or not you can consume it. She produced miniature *arte* cakes using a mold or cookie cutter and photographed the cakes in different ironic or humorous situations, such as this mysterious dinner table setting. She even reproduced multiples of the cake for visitors to eat or keep as an original work of art. The sculpture, photograph, and series present a layered play on image, meaning, and context.

Inspired by the Fluxus and Dada Movements of the 1960s and '70s, Silveira finds inspiration in the practices of artists, poets, and filmmakers, whose works have come to define the provocative anti-art movement.

Discussion Prompts for Students

- What do you see?
- Is this art biscuit, in fact, art? What might the artist's definition of art be?
- How do the choices made in this artwork reveal the artist's point of view?
- If this were the end of a story, what might have happened before this scene?

See this artwork in the exhibition ***Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985*** at the Hammer Museum

The Hammer Museum brings to light the extraordinary contributions of women artists from Latin America and those of Latina and Chicana descent in the United States working between 1960 and the mid-1980s, years of radical aesthetic experimentation in art and explosive activism in the women's rights movement. During this key period, women of the region produced pioneering artworks that, in many cases, were realized in harsh political and social conditions. The exhibition features works in a range of media, including photography, video, and installation. Among the women included are emblematic figures such as Lygia Clark and Ana Mendieta, alongside lesser-known artists such as Colombian sculptor Feliza Bursztyn and the United States-based photographer Isabel Castro. With an expanded view of Latin America that includes Latina and Chicana artists working in the U.S., *Radical Women* explores how the different social, cultural, and political contexts in which these artists worked informed their practices. Featuring works by more than 100 artists from fifteen countries, *Radical Women* constitutes the first genealogy of feminist and radical women's art practices in Latin America and their influence internationally.



Ana Serrano (United States, b. 1983)
Cartonlandia, 2008
Cardboard, paper, acrylic paint
Photo: Julie Klima
Courtesy of the artist



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Teacher Resource Guide English Language Arts Theme

Cartonlandia

Ana Serrano

Cartonlandia—it is a land of imagination, fantasy, creativity, and cardboard.

Created from pieces of cardboard and found materials, such as greeting cards and photographs, this five foot tall sculpture captures the energy and vibrancy of a bustling city. Inspired by her travels to Guanajuato, Mexico, sculptor Ana Serrano used an instinctive and spontaneous building process to re-create the feeling of an unplanned city. Starting from the bottom and working her way up, she had no plan for the structure and, instead, allowed the placement of one house to determine the next. She dotted the houses with moments of narrative detail and character perspectives—a girl gazing from a balcony in mid thought or a woman lounging on a rooftop terrace. She also added a vivid color palette reminiscent of many Mexican neighborhoods or shantytowns. Serrano’s transformation of simple and accessible materials honors the resourcefulness of the people who call these modest dwellings home.

A three-dimensional collage of twisting roads, teetering structures, and pockets of people, every angle of the sculpture reveals a potential story.

Discussion Prompts for Students

- What do you see?
- What do you think inspired the setting of this artwork?
- What details communicate to the energy and spirit of this place?
- What character, setting, and story line could be generated from this work of art?

See this artwork in the exhibition *The U.S.–Mexico Border: Place, Imagination, and Possibility* at the Craft & Folk Art Museum

Since the 1990s, the U.S.–Mexico border has become an important site for creative exploration of issues related to emigration, immigration, labor conditions, hybrid identities, and transformation. *The U.S.–Mexico Border: Place, Imagination, and Possibility* presents the work of contemporary artists who explore the border as a physical reality (place), as a subject (imagination), and as a site for production and solution (possibility). The inclusion of artists from various disciplines, including design, architecture, sculpture, painting, and photography, reflects the ways in which contemporary artists and designers themselves cross disciplinary borders. Many of the artists featured in the exhibition pursue a creative problem-solving process sometimes described as “design thinking,” which involves invention, social engagement, and the task of making. The exhibition includes work by artists and designers such as Teddy Cruz, Adrian Esparza, Consuelo Jimenez Underwood, and Ana Serrano, who have engaged with the border region in their work.