

Curriculum Materials: Visual Art and Poetry

Curriculum Summary	
Title	Visual Art and Poetry
Photo/Images of Art to Use	William Penhallow Henderson, <i>When Lilacs Last in the Door Yard Bloom'd</i> , circa 1909, pastel on brown wove paper, 8 1/2 x 25 1/2 in. Collection of the New Mexico Museum of Art. Gift of Mrs. Edgar L. Rossin, 1969 (2571.23P).
Content Areas	Literacy (visual, reading, and writing), historical event, artwork
Subjects	William Penhallow Henderson, Walt Whitman, Abraham Lincoln, drawing, poetry, literature
Period	Lincoln 1809-1865, Whitman 1819-1892, Henderson 1877-1943
Grade Level/Age	Middle School +
Resource Materials (Downloadable)	Poem recording, resource links, handouts, lesson plan, suggested readings, images
Objectives	<p>Objective (s) for younger students: focus on the idea of the artist creating a visual image inspired by a poem, which was, in turn, inspired by an event; establish a basic awareness of the artist, poet, and historical connection to Abraham Lincoln/Civil War.</p> <p>Objective (s) for older students: explore the connections between the drawing and the poem; consider the historical foundations of the subject material, poet, and artist; discuss themes relevant to contemporary issues.</p>
Key Skills	N/A
Lesson Plan or Activities	See below for classroom activities.
Cross-Curricular Connections	Literature, history, literacies (visual, reading, writing)
Classroom Materials Needed for Lesson Plan	No additional materials needed.

Summary:

This guided exploration investigates the links between poetry and visual art, through deep looking and study of information surrounding William Penhallow Henderson's drawing and Walt Whitman's poem of the same name: *When Lilacs Last in the Door Yard Bloom'd*, as well as the historical event that inspired Whitman's work.

Content:

William Penhallow Henderson: Overview & Background

William Penhallow Henderson was an American artist, architect, and furniture-maker. He was born in 1877 in Medford, Massachusetts to parents who valued the consumption of and participation in the arts. From a young age, Henderson's artistic pursuits were encouraged, and, as his talents developed, he was led to seek ways to provide financial support with his skills (e.g. scholarships, commissions, teaching, etc.).

Henderson attended the Museum of Fine Arts School, Boston, where he mastered the technical skills of academic drawing and painting. During his trip to Europe to study the great masters, Henderson showed a great reverence for Velazquez and the straightforward way he depicted his subjects. Though he tended to stick closely to more traditional artistic expressions, Henderson was strongly impacted by James Abbot McNeill Whistler, particularly his use of color and the influence of Japanese woodblock prints.

After his European travels, Henderson moved to Chicago in 1904 to teach at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts. He married poet Alice Corbin in 1905. She was co-editor of *Poetry* magazine and introduced Henderson to a new social circle of poets and other free thinking, creative minds.

During his time in Chicago, Henderson was regularly exhibiting his pastels and oils in exhibitions both locally and in New York and Boston. In addition to this work, he also illustrated an edition of *Anderson's Best Fairy Tales* translated by Alice Corbin (from the German), using wood-block prints. He also designed and painted the scenery for a production of *Alice in Wonderland*. Before their move to the Southwest, Henderson was commissioned by architect Frank Lloyd Wright to create murals for Midway Gardens. These murals were eventually painted over but were considered a prestigious success.



LEFT: *He Stood Up on His Hind Legs* (From the book *Anderson Fairy Tales*), William Penhallow Henderson, circa 1910, ink on paper cardboard. Gift of Nathaniel O. and Paige Allen Owings, 1999.

RIGHT: *March Hare's Garden* (set design for *Alice in Wonderland*), William Penhallow Henderson, c. 1914-1915, pastel on paper. Gift of Nathaniel O. and Paige Allen Owings, 1999.

In 1916 the Henderson, his wife, and daughter were forced to move to Santa Fe because of Alice's poor health. She contracted tuberculosis and needed to relocate to a dryer climate at a higher elevation. In Santa Fe, they found a supportive community of archaeologists, artists, writers, and other creative minds. Henderson began drawing and painting the subjects his new home provided. He even designed and produced scenery and costumes for a production of *The Daughter of Heaven* performed at the Alhambresque Scottish Rite Temple.

In order to supplement his income, Henderson co-founded the Pueblo-Spanish Building Company, which built homes in Santa Fe and other parts of New Mexico. Those homes went on to inspire designs for buildings in other parts of the country, such as Colorado, Arizona, and Oklahoma. He also collaborated to design and construct the House of Navajo Religion, which is now the Wheelwright Museum of American Indian Art in Santa Fe. Henderson also began designing and carving handmade furniture to sell, distributing works as far as New York and Boston.

Henderson's academic background can be seen in the careful planning and organization of his drawings and paintings. His sketchbooks demonstrate an interest in Dynamic Symmetry, which is a theory of composition that uses specific geometric frameworks to make sure a work has flow, rhythm, and balance. Henderson's exploration of color and its expressive quality may seem contrary to this systematic approach to painting. Many link this development in Henderson's artistic practice to his earlier affinity for Whistler and Japanese prints. Color theory was very important to Henderson, and his journals also reflect his mission to create rhythmic and ideal color patterns. Henderson's artistic style is described as falling between Realism and Romanticism, as well as being in-line with the Romantic-Modern tradition.

Henderson lived the rest of his life in New Mexico, until his death in 1943.

Classroom Activities:

Objective (s) for younger students: focus on the idea of the artist creating a visual image inspired by a poem, which was, in turn, inspired by an event; establish a basic awareness of the artist, poet, and historical connection to Abraham Lincoln/Civil War.

Objective (s) for older students: explore the connections between the drawing and the poem; consider the historical foundations of the subject material, poet, and artist; discuss themes relevant to contemporary issues.

Part 01: Visual Literacy

Have students look at the drawing, *When Lilacs Last in the Door Yard Bloom'd* by William Penhallow Henderson, and share their observations. We recommend using questions like the following to ensure the students' guide the discussion:

- What's going on in this picture?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can we find?



When Lilacs Last in the Door Yard Bloom'd, secondary title: *Walt Whitman at President Lincoln's Funeral*, William Penhallow Henderson, circa 1909, pastel on brown wove paper. Gift of Mrs. Edgar L. Rossin, 1969.

Part 02: Context and Historical Connections

Depending on how far you want to go, this next step is where you introduce the information about the drawing (artist, title, dates, etc.) as well as its connection to the poem of the same name by Walt Whitman. You can decide if you want to spend time discussing the historical element of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War and/or the biography and other poems by Whitman.

- Overview of William Penhallow Henderson *See Overview on Henderson above*

NEW MEXICO
MUSEUM OF ART
The Humanities Project

- Walt Whitman:
 - [Poetry Foundation bio](#)
 - [Walt Whitman archives](#)
- Abraham Lincoln (Presidency, assassination, memorial)
- The Civil War (specifically New Mexico's involvement):
 - Waldrip, William I.. "New Mexico During the Civil War." *New Mexico Historical Review* 28, 3 (1953). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol28/iss3/2>

List of books in the Museum Library (or link to search): *See Bibliography & Suggested Reading Handout*

- William Penhallow Henderson: master colorist of Santa Fe. Bell, David. Deeds, Daphne Anderson. Phoenix Art Museum. Museum of Western Art (Denver, Colo.)

Part 03: Poetry

If you are emphasizing poetry, then you can likely give just a brief overview for the context and historical connections. If you need resources to help teach your students the basics of poetry, we will have a couple suggestions:

- [Britannica definition of poetry](#)
- [Poetry 101: Learn About Poetry, Different Types of Poems, and Poetic Devices With Examples, MasterClass](#)

Henderson was also married to the poet Alice Corbin, and that may be an interesting thread to follow with your students.

Read Whitman's poem out loud to your students and have them sketch notes/images while you recite. It may be helpful to give each student a copy of the poem and the drawing to take notes on. Next, discuss what the students could find in the visual imagery. You may need to read the poem more than once.

- [When Lilacs... poem](#): *See recording produced by the New Mexico Museum of Art – available for download*

For criticism/analysis on the poem:

- Title: 'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd' [1865] Author: French, R.W. Print source: J.R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings, eds., *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), reproduced by permission.
https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/current/encyclopedia/entry_67.html
- *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* <http://ir.uiowa.edu/wwqr> Violence in Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" Patricia Lee Yongue Volume 1, Number 4 (1984) pps. 12-20
Stable URL: <http://ir.uiowa.edu/wwqr/vol1/iss4/3> ISSN 0737-0679
<https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/wwqr/pdf/anc.00382.pdf>

Part 04: Drawing Activity

Ask the students to illustrate a poem. We've provided three options based on amount of difficulty, but feel free to choose your own. Read the selected poem out loud at least once so the students can hear and sketch at the same time.

- Beginner: [*The Red Wheelbarrow*, William Carlos Williams](#)
- Intermediate: [*Dream Variations*, Langston Hughes](#)
- Advanced: [*A Noiseless Patient Spider*, Walt Whitman](#)

Part 05: Writing Activity – Now you will ask the students to choose one (or both) of the images below and write a poem.



Noon (Mural for the Santa Fe Country Club), William Penhallow Henderson, 1920, oil on canvas



Landscape (Cerro Gordo Before the Sangre de Cristo Mountains), William Penhallow Henderson, circa 1930, oil on board