

# Body language

**Lesson Objective:** To investigate how figurative paintings translate meanings and messages to the viewer.



**You will need:** Reproductions of Vermeer paintings (or similar artist)

**Discuss** with the group the meaning and interpretation of body language. How do we use body language to communicate? That it is a powerful, yet often subconscious tool. It helps if you have learned a bit about this beforehand. Try to make your discussion light hearted, entertaining and thought provoking. Show some examples,

get the group involved and having some practice goes and remember; Teachers use body language more than almost anyone!

**Group work:** Give out examples of paintings by Vermeer, pupils to discuss in pairs or table groups.

- **Who are the characters in the painting?**
- **What do you think is happening in the painting?**
- **What do you think their body language is telling you?**
- **What do you think will happen next?**
- **What message do you think the artist is trying to get across to us?**

The teacher should then provide the class with a brief outline of who the artist was and of the times and conditions of the world he painted in. The group should be told that Vermeer's paintings were an attempt to transmit messages of morality and social correctness.

The teacher then shows each painting as a slide/PowerPoint and asks the class which group looked at that painting. The group then feedback their findings to the class in either verbal or written means. This should then prompt further discussion with the whole class. Each painting can then be discussed in turn.

**Activity (This might go into lesson 2):** Show a new

painting on the board and ask the group to study it for 5/10 minutes without discussion. Write an analysis of the painting using the methods just learned. You should provide the questions also, perhaps as a handout.

**Assessment:** Some students prefer just to give oral comments whereas others are confident at detailed written analysis. You should circulate the group during discussion time making assessments as to the quality and depth of the responses. You need to be aware (as always) in group work, who is contributing to the outcome and who isn't.

You are looking for evidence that they can interpret what is happening in a painting, how facial feature, posture and body language were very important to translate meaning. Higher level students might understand further information such as use of colour, tone and shape etc.

The marking of the activity should be done using peer assessment, where the students exchange work and look for evidence that the written answers cover the questions set to them. Ignore poor spelling/handwriting in this instance.

Ask the students to consider the objectives of the activity. Make sure they have the question sheets. Discuss with the group what might be good/average or weak answers. Ask them to mark the work of a fellow student.

Work that answers all/most of the questions might get a B/C grade. Work that answers all the questions AND

provides extra comments might get A/B's. Obviously, work that fails to meet the criteria should be given lower grades accordingly. Can they provide advice to the student as to how they might improve this work?