

Conservation Conversations: Understanding What Conservators Do

Grades: Grades 4, 5, and 6
Subject: Visual Arts, Social Studies
Time Required: 30-45 minutes
Author: Biggs Museum Curator of Education
Featured Biggs
Artwork: *Tench and Elizabeth Francis, Robert Feke, 1740*

<p align="center"><u>ANCHOR STANDARDS:</u></p>	<p>VA: Pr4.1.4a, 5a, 6a</p> <p>VA: Pr5.1.4a</p> <p>History Anchor Standard Three: Students will interpret historical data</p>
<p align="center"><u>ESSENTIAL QUESTION and ENDURING UNDERSTANDING:</u></p>	<p>How art artworks cared for and by whom? Why do people value objects, artifacts, and artworks, and select them for presentation?</p> <p>What methods and processes are considered when preparing artwork for presentation or preservation?</p>
<p align="center"><u>PERFORMANCE STANDARD:</u></p>	<p>Analyze how past, present, and emerging technologies have impacted the preservation and presentation of artwork/Define the roles and responsibilities of a curator (conservator), explaining the skills and knowledge needed in preserving, maintaining, and presenting objects, artifacts, and artwork/Analyze similarities and differences associated with preserving and presenting two-dimensional, three-dimensional, and digital artwork</p> <p>Analyze various considerations for presenting and protecting art in various locations, indoor or outdoor settings, in temporary or permanent forms, and in physical or digital formats</p>
<p align="center"><u>I CAN STATEMENT</u></p>	<p>I CAN analyze how technology is changing the preservation and presentation of artwork/I CAN describe the job of a curator (conservator)/I CAN analyze similarities and differences associated with preserving and presenting two-dimensional, three-dimensional, and digital artwork</p> <p>I CAN prepare my work of art for display in any place</p>
<p align="center"><u>ACTIVATING STRATEGIES:</u></p>	<p>Students will learn what conservators do and the different ways that pieces of art can get damaged, repaired, and preserved.</p> <p>Students will work in groups to use what they learn to assess the damage done to an object and devise a plan to repair and preserve it.</p>

<u>ACCELERATION STRATEGIES:</u>	Vocabulary: Conservation – the process of repairing and preserving a work of damaged art Conservator – a person who repairs and preserves damaged art Museum – at place that collects and displays objects that are important Portrait – a piece of art in any medium that portrays a person
<u>LEARNING STRATEGIES:</u>	Students will apply what they've learned in the lesson to a practical conservation scenario.
<u>SUMMARIZING STRATEGIES:</u>	If time permits, students should be asked to share their findings
<u>EXTENDED THINKING STRATEGIES:</u>	In an extended version of this lesson, students could be asked to design and, potentially build, a storage and/or presentation container for the object they've assessed

Featured Artwork

Tench and Elizabeth Francis, Robert Feke, 1740

Lesson Objectives

At the conclusion of this lesson, students should:

- Understand what a conservator does
- Understand the different ways historical objects and art can be damaged
- Understand the different ways historical objects and art can be repaired and preserved
- Be able to give a basic assessment a damaged object and recommend a way to repair and preserve the object

Materials

Worksheets

Various objects that might need “conservation” (i.e. silverware, ceramic, painting, needlework, textile)

Lesson Steps

1. Introduction
 - a. Ask students what a museum is and what can be found in them
 - b. Ask students why they think museums are important
 - c. Ask students what different jobs there are in museums
 - d. Explain that today they will learn about all the things conservators do by looking at the conservation of these two portraits
2. View *Tench Francis and Elizabeth Francis*, Robert Feke, 1740
 - a. Ask students to define the word portrait

- b. Explain that these portraits have gone through conservation
 - c. Ask students what the word conserve or conservation means
 - d. Once they've defined the word, ask students what they think a conservator does
 - i. Explain that conservators fix damaged art and historical objects and keep them from getting damaged in the future
 - e. Ask students what kinds of places have historical objects that might need repairs
 - i. Examples can include museums, historical homes and buildings, archives, libraries
 - f. Ask students why they think it might be important to repair and preserve historical objects and pieces of art
 - g. Ask students how long they think people have been conserving art
 - i. People have been fixing art for almost as long as they've been making it
 - ii. The first major recorded project was the restoration of da Vinci's *Last Supper* in 1726 – this was before the Revolutionary war
 - iii. The first art restoration/conservation company was formed in America in 1850 – this was during the time of the Civil War
 - iv. Ask students what technology we have now that people didn't have now and how this might help with conserving art
 - h. Ask students what kind of knowledge they think conservators need to keep works of art safe and fix them when they are damaged
 - i. Examples include history, science, and art skills
3. View conservation photos of Feke portraits
- a. Explain that this is what the portraits looked like before they were conserved
 - b. Explain that there are the scientific ways damage can be fixed and prevented, but before they make these changes, conservators have to use history to figure out what these paintings may have looked like originally
 - i. Explain that these paintings were painted in 1740 by a man named Robert Feke
 - 1. Ask students why it might be hard to know what a painting from that long ago originally looked like
 - 2. Explain that there was no photography to compare what the paintings once looked like
 - i. Ask students what a conservator could use as an example of what these paintings should look like
 - 1. Ask students if they think this painter painted other portraits
 - 2. View other versions of the portrait Feke painted of the Francises and explain that the artist not only painted portraits of other people, but he painted different portraits of these two people
 - 3. The Biggs' conservator used these portraits to make corrections to the ones that needed to be fixed
 - a. Ask students to look compare images of the paintings before they were restored and identify what problems they see. With each problem ask them how it could happen and explain or ask them to explain how it could be fixed and how it could be prevented
 - i. Scratches to surfaces
 - 1. Fixed – in painting, buffing
 - 2. Prevented – covers on paintings, keeping objects in cases
 - i. Dirt build up

1. Fixed – chemicals
 2. Prevented – covers and cases, regular maintenance
- ii. Tears and disintegration of materials
 1. Fixed – sewing, recreating new pieces
 2. Prevented – covers and cases, proper handling techniques
- iii. Color change due to light
 1. Fixed – in most cases we can't fix it and can't paint over it – why do people not want to paint new colors on to the old paint
 2. Prevented – UV protection

4. Activity

- a. Divide group into groups of 3-5
- b. Provide each group with an object and have them assess what might need to be done to fix the object and how they would need to display and store it to keep it safe
- c. Save time for each group to share their findings and ideas



This report was completed by: _____

Object Description

Visible Damage to Object

Suggestions for Conservation

Suggestions for Display and Storage