

## LESSON PLAN: LANGUAGE ARTS POETIC FORMS



Not marble nor the  
gilded monuments  
Of princes, shall outlive this  
powerful rhyme...

From William Shakespeare,  
Sonnet 55, 1609

### GRADE LEVEL

Elementary through High School

A number of Renaissance poetic forms lend themselves to exploring the imagery and meaning behind works of art. The following lesson plans suggest ways in which close looking can lead to a writing activity based on one of the poetic forms. In most cases, a simplified version for younger students is included, as well as an expanded, more comprehensive version for older students.

### OBJECTIVES

- Students will look at and discuss works of art from the Renaissance.
- Students will discuss a Renaissance literary form.
- Students will create an original written work based on one of the works of art.

### ACROSTIC

The word “acrostic” comes from the Greek *acros* (outermost) and *stichos* (line of poetry).

### WORKS OF ART

SLIDE 17 *Erasmus of Rotterdam* by Hans Holbein the Younger

SLIDE 21 *Portrait of a Young Man* by Bronzino

### BACKGROUND AND LITERARY SOURCES

The poetic form of the acrostic originated in ancient times and was used in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin literature. The English poets Geoffrey Chaucer (1342–1400) and Ben Jonson (1572–1637), and the Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio (1312–1375) all wrote acrostics. In England especially, acrostics often were written on the name Eliza, referring to Queen Elizabeth I.

Following are a few quotes from Baldassare Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier* on the behavior and appearance of elegant young men at court. These quotes may be read aloud or distributed to inspire questions and reactions for the class discussion.

A man should . . . always be a little more humble than his rank requires.

Another person replies, “For myself, I know none who have risen through modesty . . .”

“I am . . . always pleased when clothes tend to be sober and restrained rather than foppish; so it seems to me that the most agreeable color is black. . . I would add that [a young man] should decide for himself what appearance he wants to have and what sort of man he wants to seem . . .”

### MOTIVATION AND LITERARY SOURCES

FOR THE TEACHER: Select one portrait and read the slide entry. If you choose Erasmus, there is additional material in Lesson Plan: Erasmus of Rotterdam, p. 179.

Project SLIDE 21, the Bronzino portrait of an unknown young man. (The young man is thought to have been a poet and perhaps a friend of the painter.) Give students five minutes to look and write down a one-word reaction to the person in the portrait. Ask students to share their one-word reactions. How many of these reactions are in response to the young man's attitude? Discuss attitude and how it is conveyed in the portrait through posture, facial expression, clothing, and other details.

Ask students what they think about the young man. Does he have many friends? Why or why not? Do we know what he likes to do? How would you describe his clothes? What about the colors? Why might Bronzino have placed the young man in such a narrow space? What do you think Bronzino's opinion of the young man might be? Why do you think so? A helpful clue is to have students compare the young man's face to the grotesques carved on the table and chair.

### WRITING ACTIVITY

Ask each student to write vertically on a piece of paper the word selected to define the young man. If they chose the word ALOOF, they would write it like this:

A  
L  
O  
O  
F

Explain the poetic form of the acrostic and read some examples. Writing a collaborative version on the board may help students visualize this form. The subject of the students' poems should be the young man, and each phrase or sentence of the poem should relate to him. For example, A is the first letter, so the first word and line of the poem must start with A; the second, L, and so on.

A quiet young man,  
L ooking at me, at my  
O rdinary clothes.  
O bviously he  
F inds me boring.

Older students may want to figure out an *abab* rhyme scheme, but younger students can just fill out the lines, using as many words as they like. When students have finished, ask them to read their poems to the class. Make sure the portrait is displayed so that students can compare their reactions to the visual image. Discuss how individual perceptions of the young man vary.

Two days after this lesson ask students to return to look at the portrait and see if their reactions or ideas have changed.

## EXTENSIONS

**VISUAL ARTS:** Students may wish to transfer their acrostics to special drawing paper, embellishing and enlarging the first letter of each line by adding color or decoration to make it stand out. This could be part of a calligraphy lesson. Students can type their acrostic into a word processing or paint program, then manipulate fonts, colors, and backgrounds to create an electronic version of their acrostic. Students may wish to import the portrait image from the CD-ROM into PhotoShop, then into HyperStudio, and create links to their electronic acrostics.

**LANGUAGE ARTS:** Additional acrostics, some from students around the country, are posted on the World Wide Web. Students may wish to read some of these acrostics, or perhaps submit their own acrostics on this site.

**SOCIAL STUDIES:** Students can use their one-word reaction to identify objects or features of the twentieth century that the person in the portrait might like to know about. For example, Erasmus might want *e-mail*, he would be surprised by a *radio*, an *airplane* ride, and *subways*. He wouldn't know that *Mazda* is a kind of car, he would find out about *uranium*, and he might be shocked by the *Spice Girls*.

## ECLOGUE AND PASTORAL

The word *eclogue* comes from an ancient Greek word meaning “select piece.” The word *pastoral* comes from *pastor*, the Latin word for “shepherd.”

### WORKS OF ART

SLIDE 25      *The Harvesters* by Pieter Bruegel the Elder

SLIDE 29      *View of Toledo* by El Greco

### BACKGROUND AND LITERARY SOURCES

An eclogue is a poem written in the style of a monologue or dialogue, and persuasive in character. Writers of eclogues set forth particular themes, explaining how they feel about the subject, why they feel the way they do, and why others should feel the same way. Usually the setting is pastoral, or rural.

Examples from classical antiquity may be used—Theocritus (Greek, ca. 310–250 B.C.) and Virgil (Roman, 70–19 B.C.). The English poet Edmund Spenser (1552/53–1599) wrote a calendar of twelve pastoral eclogues, one for each month of the year; when it was published, it was illustrated with the signs of the zodiac.

Pastoral poems depict an imaginary and ideal life in the country, sometimes filled with shepherds, shepherdesses, and nymphs. One of the most famous pastoral poems of the Renaissance is Christopher Marlowe's (1564–1593) *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love*. Sir Walter Raleigh's (1554–1618) answer to this poem, *The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd*, takes the same form as Marlowe's poem, but mocks its romantic subject matter.

## MOTIVATION AND DISCUSSION

Display one of the slides and ask students to describe what they see. Ask students to pretend to be one of the people in the painting, or a particular passerby—a townsman, a traveler, a visitor from another country, a wealthy patron or member of a court, or a peasant, a monk or nun, a child, etc. They may pretend to be an artist or Bruegel himself who was supposed to have dressed as a peasant in order to observe their festivities.

## WRITING ACTIVITY

**ELEMENTARY:** Ask students to write a description of the scene from a particular point of view; for example, their accounts can be written as if they were foreign travelers writing in a diary or journal. Refer to the Dürer journal entry in Source Material, p. 83, and to the Lesson Plan: Aerial or Atmospheric Perspective, p. 131.

**JUNIOR HIGH AND HIGH SCHOOL:** Introduce the literary forms of eclogue and pastoral, then ask students to write their own version of one of these poems based on their observations of one of the paintings. An eclogue can take the form of social commentary, a conversation between two people, or a satire. For example, one of the workers may boast about the year's harvest. A merchant or housewife might speculate about the price of grain. A churchman might praise the virtues of hard work in his parishioners. A wealthy man or woman who has servants might be amused or repelled by the hard physical life of the peasants. Read the following quote to illustrate how peasant life was viewed by two young courtiers.

From *The Book of the Courtier*:

Pallavicino: Many of our young gentlemen are to be found, on holidays, dancing all day in the open air with the peasants, and taking part with them in sports such as throwing the bar, wrestling, running and jumping. And I'm sure there is no harm in this, for the contest is not one of nobility but of strength and agility, regarding which ordinary villagers are often just as good as nobles; and I think this kind of familiar behaviour has a certain charming open-mindedness about it.

Federico: If anyone is anxious to wrestle, to run or to jump with peasants, then he ought, in my opinion, to do it casually, out of noblesse oblige, so to say, and certainly not in competition with them; and he should be almost certain of winning, or else not take part at all, for it is too sad and shocking, and quite undignified, when a gentleman is seen to be beaten by a peasant.

Copies of *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love* by Christopher Marlowe and *The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd* by Sir Walter Raleigh may be distributed to students as examples of persuasive writing and a rebuttal. Students may work in pairs to create opposing views in their eclogues.

## EXTENSIONS

**THEATER ARTS:** Paint a large mural or backdrop of one of the paintings, omitting the foreground figures. Actors representing these figures could perform dialogues, or they could read their eclogues or pastorals. Various other characters (Bruegel himself, the courtier, etc.) could pass the group and present their journal entries or poems, commenting on the scene.

**SOCIAL STUDIES:** Find the Netherlands on a globe or world map and look at a time line of major political events during the time of Bruegel. Discuss the significance of the harvest in general and especially during the Spanish embargo.

**MUSIC:** During the Renaissance, folk music was collected and arranged for the skilled amateur to perform. Listen to recordings of Michael Praetorius's *Terpsichore*, Thoinot Arbeau's *Orchesography*, or Tielman Susato's *Danseyre*, or music for the virginal or clavichord by William Byrd.

**WORLD LITERATURE:** In literature, the peasant was often a comic figure, especially in the work of François Rabelais, Miguel de Cervantes, and William Shakespeare. Students might wish to read these writers and identify similarities in the ways peasants were depicted. For example, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the peasant actors present an inadvertent parody, or a humorous version, of the tragic story of Pyramus and Thisbe.

**VISUAL ARTS/LITERATURE:** *The Harvesters* is part of a series of paintings by Pieter Bruegel depicting the seasons. Students may wish to research and identify the other paintings of this series, then create their own artworks of people in landscape settings engaging in seasonal activities. For literature extensions, younger students can read poems connected with the labors of the months. Older students can read Virgil's *Georgics*, which link the labors of the months with specific constellations and their rotations; this poem has been linked with the subject matter of *The Harvesters* as well as with El Greco's *View of Toledo*.

## EPITHALAMIUM

An *epithalamium* or *epithalamion* (plural: *epithalamia*), a Greek word meaning “upon the bridal chamber,” is a kind of poem originally performed at weddings in honor of the bride and groom.

### WORKS OF ART

- SLIDE 4      *Portrait of Man and Woman at a Casement* by Fra Filippo Lippi
- SLIDE 6      *Saint Eligius* by Petrus Christus
- SLIDE 7      *The Story of Esther* by Marco del Buono and Apollonio di Giovanni

### BACKGROUND AND LITERARY SOURCE

Although marriage songs and poems exist in many cultures, the epithalamium as a literary form is identified with the Greek poet Sappho, who lived around 600 B.C. Catullus, a Roman poet, also wrote epithalamia, both in an elevated, ceremonial style and a private, lyrical style. The English poet Edward Spenser (1552–1599) wrote *Epithalamion*, a long poem that can be read as an example for students.

There is no fixed form for an epithalamium; it may have rhyme and meter, but not necessarily. In general, it is a long poem that describes a specific marriage. It details the events of the wedding day, including preparations, processions, and music; it may praise the bride and groom and tell about their individual virtues and the status of their families. It usually ends with good wishes and blessings for the couple.

## MOTIVATION AND DISCUSSION

Project the three slides, one at a time, and ask students to describe what they see. After each slide has been discussed, ask students what these works of art have in common. Guide the observations to couples and marriage. (One interpretation of the two paintings of couples is that they were created to document and celebrate marriages. *The Story of Esther* not only depicts a wedding, but at one time it decorated a *cassone*, or chest, that was often a wedding gift in itself.)

What did marriage mean in the Renaissance? Despite all the poems and songs about love, important marriages between powerful families were largely business transactions, a merger of two dynasties. Dowries, gifts of money, commemorative gifts like musical instruments, *cassoni*, and jewelry, as well as elaborate and costly ceremonies celebrated such a wedding.

## WRITING ACTIVITY

ELEMENTARY: Project SLIDE 7, *The Story of Esther*, and ask for volunteers to pretend they are the people in the painting. Ask them to talk to each other, creating a dialogue that might be suggested by the narrative of the panel, the details of the painting, and the postures and facial expressions of the people. Other students may suggest dialogue to the “actors” based on their observations. After this exercise, either have students write short dialogues based on their observations, or project one of the other slides and ask students to create a written dialogue for it. What might the man and woman in the double portrait be saying to each other? What are the three people in *Saint Eligius* discussing? Rings and prices?

JUNIOR HIGH AND HIGH SCHOOL: Introduce students to the literary form of the epithalamium, the wedding poem, using one of the examples listed in Background and Source.

Project the slides again and have students identify certain features of each that might be included in an epithalamium. Would they describe the rich clothes, the jewels, and the coats of arms in the *Portrait of Man and Woman at a Casement*? Would they speculate on the personalities or identities of the couple? In *Saint Eligius*, how would they describe the bridal girdle and the ring, symbols of the couple’s relationship to each other? *The Story of Esther* provides a narrative of the arrival of the bride that can be elaborated on.

Have students write their own epithalamium based on one of the artworks. They should have access to the image for further study, and they may wish to work collaboratively in small groups. Specific features of the work of art should provide imagery for the epithalamium, but students can also use their imaginations.

## EXTENSIONS

SOCIAL STUDIES: To learn more about marriage and wedding customs in Renaissance Europe, read aloud or provide copies to students of the letter from Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi to her son in Source Material, p. 92.

VISUAL ART: Students may wish to create a *cassone* panel, a narrative composition, or a mural to accompany their epithalamium.

## SONNET

The word “sonnet” is from the Italian word *sonetto*, meaning “a little sound” or “a little song.” The Italian word derives from the Latin *sonus*, which means “a sound.”

### WORKS OF ART

- SLIDE 15      *A Hunting Scene* by Piero di Cosimo  
SLIDE 18      *The Judgment of Paris* by Lucas Cranach the Elder  
SLIDE 20      *Broth Bowl and Cover* by Baldassare Manara  
SLIDE 26      *Celestial Globe with Clockwork*

### BACKGROUND AND LITERARY SOURCES

A sonnet is a structured poetic form in which a thought about a subject is developed thoroughly. There are many variations on the basic sixteen-line sonnet, and a number of Renaissance poets utilized this form. The Italian poet Petrarch is credited with the first sonnets, and Renaissance poets Sir Thomas Wyatt, Sir Philip Sidney, and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, translated his sonnets and used them as models for their own. William Shakespeare and Michelangelo wrote sonnets. Sonnets were created as entertainment, as presentation gifts, and to show off one’s ability to extemporize. In *The Book of the Courtier*, Aretino is represented as having done just that:

Aretino stayed silent for a little while, and then, when he was again asked to speak, he eventually recited a sonnet on the subject he had raised, describing what was the meaning of the letter ‘S’ (an ornament that the Duchess was wearing on her forehead), which many of those present thought he had made up on the spot but which others decided must have been composed beforehand since it was more ingenious and polished than seemed possible in the time.

### MOTIVATION AND DISCUSSION

Choose one or more of the works above to display and to discuss with students, using the information in each entry to guide the discussion. What are the classical references in each of these works of art? Have students research the myths associated with these artworks independently or during class, then present their findings.

### WRITING ACTIVITY

**ELEMENTARY:** Ask students to write a poem based on their own version of a myth represented in one of the artworks, using imagery drawn from their own observation, research, and the class discussion.

**JUNIOR HIGH AND HIGH SCHOOL:** Identify the metaphors in the myths represented in the artworks—Pegasus as the inspiration for poetry, fire as a cleansing or civilizing force, the attributes of the goddesses, or the Apple of Discord. Ask students to write sonnets based on a myth as represented in the works of art, using a metaphor to connect the myth with some event from their own experience. The final couplet should effectively provide a conclusion.

## LYRIC

The word “lyric” comes from *lyre*, an ancient Greek instrument used to provide musical accompaniment to sung or recited poems.

### WORKS OF ART

- SLIDE 5        *Birth Tray: The Triumph of Fame* by Scheggia  
SLIDE 18      *The Judgment of Paris* by Lucas Cranach the Elder  
SLIDE 20      *Broth Bowl and Cover* by Baldassare Manara  
SLIDE 26      *Celestial Globe with Clockwork*

### BACKGROUND AND LITERARY SOURCES

In the Renaissance, poets looked to the ancient Greeks for inspiration. Although no examples of music survived from ancient times, they could read in classical literature that poems were recited to music and see depictions of this in ancient artworks.

Renaissance lyric poets substituted the lute or viol, popular stringed instruments, for the lyre of ancient Greece, and they created poems that could be read or sung to music. In Italy, this literary development led to the invention of the opera. Read the quote below from *The Book of the Courtier*:

But above all, singing poetry accompanied by the viola seems especially pleasurable, for the instrument gives the words a really marvellous charm and effectiveness.

Lorenzo de' Medici wrote lyric poems that were set to carnival and dance tunes. They were performed in Florence during the carnival, or pre-Lenten period, and also during the *Calendimaggio*, which began on May 1 and ended with the Feast of Saint John the Baptist on June 24. During the festivities, floats and wagons were decorated to represent particular trades or allegorical or mythological subjects. As the procession traveled through the streets masked musicians sang and enacted the songs. See Albrecht Dürer's journal entry in Source Material, p. 83.

### MOTIVATION AND DISCUSSION

Discuss the word “lyric” and ask students for examples of lyrics from songs they listen to in recordings and on the radio. Many of these songs will be about love, but other themes such as fame, time, or beauty probably will be identified as well. Listen to some of these examples, if possible.

Introduce the history and concept of lyric poetry to the students, using the information in Background and Literary Sources.

ELEMENTARY: Choose one or more of the works of art above and project it for the class. Students should discuss what they see in the work of art and its possible meaning. Does each of these artworks have a central theme? Can it be identified? It might be love, fame, beauty, or time. What are some of the features of this theme? Ask students to make lists of words that reflect their observations of or responses to the work of art. Using these words, they should be able to compose a lyric poem about the work.

For example, lyric poems could

- tell a story (*Pyramus and Thisbe*, *Judgment of Paris*)
- describe feelings (how it feels to be famous, how it feels to be Juno or Minerva or Venus)
- describe the imagery of the clock

Students can work alone or in small groups to construct sentences and brainstorm rhyming words. These poems can be recited to the accompaniment of a guitar or other stringed instrument.

#### EXTENSIONS

**MUSIC:** Students may compose a simple tune for their lyric poem, or they may choose a tune to play in the background as the poem is read. Invite a musician/songwriter to collaborate on this project, then have students perform their lyric poem for parents or at a school assembly.

**THEATER ARTS:** Following the example of Lorenzo, students can construct floats to represent the theme chosen for their lyric poem. For a school-wide Renaissance festival, each class may wish to design and construct a float and write a corresponding lyric poem. During a procession, the floats can parade by a center stage or area marked off for nobility, with each float stopping while the lyric poem is recited.

## MADRIGAL

The word “madrigal” comes from a Latin word meaning “something simple.”

#### WORKS OF ART

- SLIDE 4 *Portrait of Man and Woman at a Casement* by Fra Filippo Lippi  
SLIDE 5 *Birth Tray: The Triumph of Fame* by Scheggia  
SLIDE 18 *The Judgment of Paris* by Lucas Cranach the Elder  
SLIDE 20 *Broth Bowl and Cover* by Baldassare Manara  
SLIDE 25 *The Harvesters* by Pieter Bruegel the Elder  
SLIDE 26 *Celestial Globe with Clockwork*

#### BACKGROUND AND LITERARY SOURCES

Early madrigals followed a strict form. In northern Italy, they were composed of two or three tercets (three-line rhyming passages) followed by one or two rhyming couplets (two-line passages). All the lines were made up of seven or eight syllables. While this form became less rigid in the Renaissance, the madrigal kept the rhyming couplet at the end.

Madrigals are written to be sung, so the music must relate to the text. For example, when a question is asked in the text, the music might go up the scale in order to sound like a question. If the madrigal is sad, the music is slow, in a minor key, and the notes go down the scale. When references are made to birds singing or crickets chirping, the words and music imitate these sounds.

Madrigals may incorporate stories from legends like Robin Hood or from classical or biblical sources. A popular subject matter of the madrigal is love. Sometimes this theme is cleverly disguised with puns and plays on words.

Listen to madrigals by John Dowland, Thomas Weelkes, Thomas Morley in English, or Italian madrigalists like Claudio Monteverdi.

## MOTIVATION AND DISCUSSION

Discuss familiar song lyrics from popular songs, Broadway musicals, or music that students are learning in choir or music classes. Have students read, sing, or play recorded examples and discuss how a song lyric must fit a particular tune or arrangement. How do words and music fit together to tell a story or convey an emotion?

Music, tunes, and lyrics were just as important in the Renaissance as they are today. Introduce the form of the Renaissance madrigal to students, playing recorded examples from Italian and English madrigalists. Read some of the texts and talk about how the tune and words fit together. When nonsense syllables or repeated words are sung, what could be their purpose? Can you really concentrate and hear two different lyrics at the same time?

Truly beautiful music consists, in my opinion, in fine singing, in reading accurately from the score and in an attractive personal style, and still more in singing to the accompaniment of the viola. I say this because the solo voice contains all the purity of music, and style and melody are studied and appreciated more carefully when our ears are not distracted by more than one voice, and every little fault, too, is more clearly apparent, something which does not happen when a group is singing, because then one singer covers up for the other.

From *The Book of the Courtier*

## WRITING ACTIVITY

JUNIOR HIGH AND HIGH SCHOOL: Choose one or more of the artworks above. Have students write their own madrigal text using descriptive words derived from the discussion or study of the artwork. This can take one of the following forms:

- The joys or hardships of country life (Bruegel, *The Harvesters*).
- Love (from the perspective of one of the people in *Saint Eligius* or the *Portrait of Man and Woman at a Casement*).
- A story from mythology (*Broth Bowl and Cover* with story of Pyramus and Thisbe, *The Judgment of Paris*).
- A theme, such as Time (*Celestial Globe with Clockwork*) or Fame (*The Triumph of Fame*), related to their own experiences.

While madrigal texts stand on their own as poetry, students might wish to set them to music, using a popular tune or round or a piece of their own composition. In the case of part-singing, nonsense words or syllables can be added to the text so that the parts can alternate words and sounds. A mechanical noise (“tick tock, tick tock”) for the *Celestial Globe with Clockwork*, shouts of “hurray” for *The Triumph of Fame* can provide accompaniment for the main lyric without interfering with its being heard and understood.

## EXTENSIONS

MUSIC: This activity may involve the whole class working together to write a single madrigal. In addition, this is a good project for collaborating with the music teacher, or bringing in a guest musician/songwriter to help students with the finer points of writing lyrics. Older students may adapt it as an independent study project in which they individually research a work of art to write their own madrigal.

## RESOURCES

- Abrams, M. H., general editor, et al. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 4th ed., Volume 1. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979.
- Brewer, Ebenezer Cobham, revised by Ivor H. Evans. *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1993.
- D'Aulaire, Ingri, and Edgar Parin. *Book of Greek Myths*. New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1962.
- Lass, Abraham H., David Kiremidjian, and Ruth M. Goldstein. *The Facts On File Dictionary of Classical, Biblical and Literary Allusions*. New York and Oxford: Facts on File Publications, 1987.
- Padgett, Ron. *The Teachers and Writers Handbook of Poetic Forms*. New York: Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 1987.

## LESSON PLAN: LANGUAGE ARTS ALLEGORY—WRITE OR DRAW AN ALLEGORY



The word allegory comes from the Greek words *allos* (other) and *agreuin* (to speak).

### GRADE LEVEL

Junior High and High School

### OBJECTIVE

- Students will look at and decipher a visual allegory of fame.
- Students will discuss the concept of fame in the Renaissance and fame today.
- Students will write or draw a personal allegory relating to fame.

### WORK OF ART

SLIDE 5      Birth Tray, *The Triumph of Fame* by Scheggia

### DISCUSSION

Project the slide of the birth tray without identifying its subject. Ask the students to look at the image closely and describe what they see. Who are all the figures on horseback, and what are they doing? Ask students what they know about knights and knighthood. Can they name any famous knights? How do we remember these knights? Is it by their family name, their virtues, their deeds, their physical appearance? Why are the knights saluting the central figure?

Who is the focal point of the composition? Have students describe the figure's appearance and posture. What is she holding? The excerpted quote from *The Book of the Courtier* (below) may help to explain the presence of the cupid and the sword, the relationship between love and war. It also may explain why Fame is depicted as a woman.

Certainly, once the flame of love is burning in a man's heart, cowardice can never possess it. For a lover always wishes to make himself as lovable as possible, and he always fears lest some disgrace befall him which can make him less esteemed by the woman whose esteem he craves; neither does he flinch from risking his life a thousand times a day in order to deserve her love.

[In the army of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain] there were many noble knights who were in love, and who, before they came in sight of the enemy, would always go along conversing with their ladies; and then each one would take his leave and, before his lady's eyes, go to challenge the enemy with the proud courage that sprang from love and the ambition to let the women see that they were served by men of valour.

From the *Book of the Courtier*, on love and war.

Using the materials in the slide entry, discuss the significance of birth trays. To whom were birth trays given? Were they simply a gift on the birth of a baby, or did their imagery and subject matter convey a message? Explain the word *triumph* to the students, its double reference to victory and to ancient Roman processional floats. Why is there a coat of arms on the back?

## FURTHER DISCUSSION OF FAME

Ask students to name some famous people of today, including celebrities, politicians, sports figures, and rock stars. Why are these people famous, and how have they become famous? How do they ensure that their fame will survive? Do they give money to charities, donate their time, make commercials, let their name be associated with products or causes, or do they do other things that they know will put them in the spotlight? Most people want to be recognized in some way for their knowledge, service, or talents. Do we all pursue fame to a certain degree? Do we try to excel at sports, make good grades, or win scholarships or awards?

Ask students to think of some of the differences between the way fame was pursued and valued in the Renaissance and the way it is today. Does it carry a responsibility with it, or is it entirely personal? Some fame is long-lasting and far-reaching, and some fame is fleeting. Ask students to think of people who they think will be famous ten years from now, and who will not.

Following are some thoughts that will help further the discussion of fame. An ideal Renaissance man, according to Alberti,

. . . was assiduous in the science and skill of dealing with arms and horses and musical instruments, as well as in the pursuit of letters and the fine arts, he was devoted to the knowledge of the most strange and difficult things. And finally he embraced with zeal and forethought everything which pertained to fame. . .

The Duke Federico da Montefeltro's *studiolo* at Gubbio, represented in SLIDE 9, contains a number of references to fame. The intarsia panel showing a garter hanging in a cupboard draws our attention to the skillful use of perspective. It is the symbol of the English Order of the Garter to which Federico da Montefeltro had been named, and it represents the extent to which his name and prestige had traveled. Another intarsia panel depicts a lectern on which a volume of Virgil's *Aeneid* is opened to the passage:

Lifetimes are brief and not to be regained,  
For all mankind. But by their deeds to make  
Their fame last: that is labor for the brave.

Above the lectern is a mirror whose frame is decorated with one of Federico's symbols, tongues of fire, alternating with the initials of his son Guidobaldo and the title *dux*. This detail, along with the quote from Virgil, may refer to the fact that Federico died assisting the duke of Ferrara in battle before the *studiolo* was completed.

Erasmus (SLIDE 17), a northerner, takes a completely different view of fame. In *The Praise of Folly*, he satirizes those who wish to pursue fame:

Men who really are among the most foolish have thought that by nights without sleep, and by their sweat, they could purchase fame—I know not what sort of fame, but certainly nothing could be more empty. Yet at any rate you owe these choice blessings of life to Folly, and—what is the cream of the jest—you reap the fruits of a madness you need not share.

## WRITING AN ALLEGORY

In the birth tray, Fame is a woman in classical drapery. One way of explaining abstract concepts is to give them concrete form, for example, a human body with human characteristics and attributes. When ideas like Fame, Love, or Death are explained or elucidated in this way, it is called allegory. Allegories can be visual, as in paintings or works of art, or they can be written descriptions, in poetry, prose, or drama.

Students may wish to brainstorm a list of abstract concepts or write them on the board. The list may include religious principles, virtues and vices, ideals, values, or emotions; for example, Faith, Hope, Charity, Jealousy, Gluttony, Fame, Truth, Rage, Happiness, Patriotism, Revenge, or Folly.

What would be some of the attributes of a character based on one of these concepts? Think about facial or physical characteristics (smooth brow, piercing eyes), colors that might be associated with that character (for example, red for anger or passion), and appropriate speech and actions. Who might be a companion to this character? (Would Rage accompany Jealousy?) What personal property might the character own? (Patriotism may carry a flag.) Place-names represent obstacles, stages, or goals—*The Well of Life* or the *Slough of Despond*. Renaissance allegories drew their inspiration from a variety of sources: folk tales, mythology, biblical stories, paintings, pageants, classical writers, or even books of emblems. Keeping these guidelines in mind, students can write their own allegories. They may wish to portray themselves as a typical human or soul (Everyman) traveling through an invented country, searching for Fame, and meeting other allegorical figures who either help or hinder them.

## PAINTING AN ALLEGORY

Students may wish to draw or paint their allegory, giving their characters the facial characteristics, clothing, and attributes of a particular concept. Again, they may wish to include themselves pursuing Fame, whose visual appearance can vary according to their personal goals and aspirations. Books of symbols may help students choose appropriate iconography for their characters.

## EXTENSIONS

**SOCIAL STUDIES:** Students may wish to read more of the life of Lorenzo de' Medici after hearing about its auspicious start. *A Portrait of Lorenzo de' Medici* by Francesco Guicciardini in *Storie fiorentine* looks back on the life of Lorenzo after his death. Students can judge for themselves how accurately the birth tray was as a prediction of Fame.

**LANGUAGE ARTS/MUSIC/DRAMA:** As an alternative exercise, students may wish to write a lyric poem about fame, researching and reading some of Lorenzo's poetry that he wrote for carnival songs.

**LANGUAGE ARTS:** *The Faerie Queen* by Edmund Spenser (1552–1559), a poet of the English Renaissance, is both an allegory and a book of courtesy, like Castiglione's *The Courtier*. While comparing England to a fairyland inhabited by knights personifying various virtues, he also sets out a pattern of behavior for gentlemen. Students studying English literature may wish to explore this allegory in more detail.

VISUAL ARTS: Explore the allegorical prints by Pieter Bruegel on the virtues and vices or Albrecht Dürer's *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Why might allegorical subjects be popular for mass-produced prints?

CONNECTION: Lesson Plan: Portrait, p. 177

## RESOURCES

Abrams, M. H., general editor, et al. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 4th ed., Volume 1. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979. (Books 1–3 of *The Faerie Queen* with notes on the author and the work itself.)

Castiglione, Baldassare, translated by George Bull. *The Book of the Courtier*. London and New York: Penguin Books, 1967. (Commentaries on love, warfare, and fame.)

Erasmus, Desiderius, trans. by Hoyt Hopewell. *The Praise of Folly*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974.

Klein, H. Arthur. *Graphic Worlds of Pieter Bruegel the Elder*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1963. (Allegorical prints of Pieter Bruegel; the vices and virtues.)

Padgett, Ron. *The Teachers and Writers Handbook of Poetic Forms*. New York: Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 1987.

Ross, James Bruce, and Mary Martin McLaughlin, eds. *The Portable Renaissance Reader*. New York: Penguin Books, 1981. (“A Portrait of Lorenzo de’ Medici,” p. 267; Alberti, “Self-Portrait of a Universal Man,” p. 480.)