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putting literature and art on the streets

Title: Workshop: Intro to Ekphrasis Poetry

Lesson plan by [Kerry Folan](#)

Audience: Any intro-level secondary/adult creative writing cohort—high school, college, continuing education, etc.

Objectives:

- To understand the concept of *ekphrasis*
- To analyze the relationship between image and text in ekphrastic artwork
- To create an ekphrastic poem in response to an original work of art in *Broadsided* Issue 20.1

In-Class Time: 45-60 minutes

Prior to class: Students read the poems in Issue 20.1 and consider the corresponding art, speculating on the relationship between each. (If preferably, this can also be done as an individual activity during the first 10 minutes of class/workshop.)

In-class warm-up: Noticing activity (~15 min)

1. Distribute printed broadsides of “1987” (poet: Stacey Boe Miller; artist: Zehra Kahn); if classroom technology permits, also project onto a screen
2. Invite one student to read the poem aloud
3. Then, invite all students to call out things they notice in Kahn’s photograph (objects, colors, associations, narratives, etc.) keeping a running list on the board
4. Class discussion:
 1. How do you think Zehra’s photograph goes with Miller’s poem—or not?
 2. Takeaway: Students should consider the difference between an artistic response or interpretation and a literal illustration

Understanding ekphrasis (~10 min)

Definition to be adapted by the instructor:

1. *Ekphrasis* can be defined as art that responds to or interprets another piece of art. While it’s probably most common to see ekphrastic poetry responding to visual art, the opposite can be done as well, as we see in broadside images that respond to poems
2. See [Broadsided’s about page](#) for information on their process and the [Poetry Foundation](#) for a formal definition of ekphrasis, along with some examples
3. Class discussion:

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1. What do you think the ekphrastic form or process offers poets?
2. How might you use it in your own writing process?

Creating an ekphrastic poem (~20-30 min)

1. **Instructions:** Write your own ekphrastic poem in any form or length. You may use the observations of the “1987” broadside art we noted on the board as a jumping-off point, or you can respond to another image in the issue that speaks to you. Your poem can be as closely or as loosely connected to the art as you like; consider the image as a starting point for your interpretation and exploration. Some ways you might approach your response include (but are not limited to):
 1. Imagine a character not shown in the image/scene and describe their relationship to the image
 2. Imaging the artist creating the work and describe the process
 3. Describe your own experience encountering the art
 4. Create a story about the scene or subject of the artwork
 5. Invent a conversation between two people or elements in the artwork
2. If time permits at the end of class, students can share their poems and discuss their process.