

El Greco's "Agony in the Garden"

Exaggeration and Non-realism



A. Starter: when was the last time you exaggerated something? Tell your partner about it. **Feedback** some examples. Why do we exaggerate? To what purpose?

B. Class Impression of Painting: gather first impressions from the class, , the emotions it evokes in students. Is this painting telling a story in a realistic way ie. the way a camera would? Why didn't the artist paint it like that? If not, then what is the artist trying to do?

C. Narrative (Class Activity):

- first group to find a reference in the bible for this scene.
- Read out as a class.
- If you were painting this, what would be the main thing you would want to put across to your audience? Do you think El Greco has done this?

D. Analysis (Pair Activity): Look at the painting with your partner. Discuss and make notes about: (see pair activity)

1. Story – what is the story behind the painting? Is the painting showing a single event?
2. Composition – How are the space and the objects organised? Is there a sense of space or not ? What feeling does this give to the painting as a whole?
3. Realism:
 - a. Scenery: is nature painted in a realistic way? If not, what can you say about the way particular landscape features are painted? Could any of the landscape features symbolise something else?
 - b. Characters: Identify all the human figures in the painting. How are their bodies exaggerated? The gesture/ movement of their bodies? What kind of movement do the bodies have? Are they convincing as real human bodies or what are they like?
 - c. Colour: Is the colour a natural kind of colour? If not, how is it unnatural? What does it suggest?

- d. Light :
- What kind of light is it?
 - Is there one light source or many? Identify the sources.
 - Is the light source coming from outside (ie. is it external) or from within
 - the characters/ objects themselves (internal) ? What does this suggest?
 - Do the light sources shine in the same directions, or do the sources of light compete with each other? What effect does this have on the painting as a whole?

Overall Effect: Mood

Think back to what you said about the composition, the characters and the exaggerated, non-realism. How would you summarise the mood of the painting? What kind of feelings is the artist trying to create in you? What aspect of the story is he emphasising? Is he focussed on telling you the story, or on something else? What....?

E. Feedback and summarise some of the class findings. Did doing the analysis change your view of the painting?

F. Homework/ Project Work: to write up this painting, using what you have found out this lesson to make a conclusion about whether this painting works for you as a depiction of the agony.

G. Final Reflection

Have you ever felt the fear of an approaching event -an exam you were unprepared for, a person you didn't want to meet. Recall how your heart beat faster, how your nerves were wrecked, how you trembled a little, the ache in your heart, sickness in your stomach, the exhaustion from trying to keep on top of it all, facing this on your own.

Jesus knew that within an hour, He would be arrested, beaten, tortured and crucified. That God himself, who had been closer to him than his own heart and mind, would abandon him, and leave Him to suffer completely alone, and alone enter the darkness of death. This was the price God was asking His Son to pay, so that the evil deeds of humanity could be forgiven, and we ourselves could be freed from the death that is the consequence of sin.