



EXPLORING 'RED BRIDGE' BY MARIE PAPIER

Key topics: Paintings and ekphrasis · Imagination · Individual writing

Resource written by Rachel Piercey

Getting to know the painting

Before you read the poem, display the painting *Red Bridge* by Paul Klee (1879-1940) on the board, without revealing the title: <https://www.waterstreetgallery.co.uk/en/red-bridge-detail-by-paul-klee-140-x-180mm-card.html>

Discuss the painting with your class. Is it night or day? What can they see in the picture – do they see the buildings and structures of a town or city? Do the shapes remind them of anything else, e.g. crayons, cups, beaks? Is it an accurate depiction of objects in real life? How does the painting make them feel? What would they call this painting if they were giving it a title?

Explain that the artist, Paul Klee, was interested in painting emotions, senses, and the imagination, rather than accurate copies of the world. This painting is called 'Red Bridge' and we will be looking at a poem inspired by it, by Marie Papier. Poets have been writing poems inspired by works of art for thousands of years; this is called 'ekphrasis' (more below).

Ask your pupils to sit with their eyes closed and read the poem out loud to them. When you have finished, ask them which parts stuck in their minds and why – there are no wrong answers! Then display the poem (see below) or hand out individual copies and read it again.

Getting to know the poem

Marie's poem is rather mysterious, like the picture. She leaves a lot to the reader's imagination.

Marie's speaker "almost fell off / the red bridge". What does this detail suggest to us about the speaker? Why might she have nearly fallen off the bridge? How might she be feeling – unsteady, giddy, excited?

For Marie, the painting is set at night. Does the moon seem friendly or unfriendly, and why?

Can they see a human in the painting, or has Marie used her imagination? Who do they think "old uncle Paul" might be?

Do they think the speaker will knock on the door as instructed?



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Ekphrasis

“From the Greek, meaning ‘description’ – a literary device in which a painting, sculpture, or other work of visual art is described in detail.” (www.oed.com)

Ekphrasis is thousands of years old. One of the earliest and most famous examples is in Homer’s *Iliad*, a long poem written around the eighth century BCE in Ancient Greece. The poet describes in detail the pictures forged in gold, silver and other metals on the shield of the warrior Achilles.

Ever since then, poets have regularly turned to works of art to inspire their poems. They often try to bring to life the emotions they feel on looking at the work of art, as well as the details of what they can see in front of them.

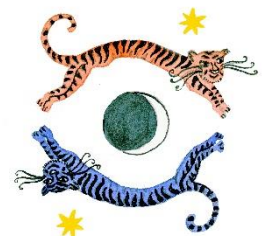
Gathering ideas

Choose a new work of art by Paul Klee to display on the board; here are some examples with links:

- [Black Columns in a Landscape](#)
- [Tale à la Hoffmann](#)
- [Abstract Trio](#)
- [Comedians’ Handbill](#)
- [Clarification](#)

Ask the class to imagine they are standing inside the picture. Then ask each pupil to jot down their own thoughts in response to these questions:

- What time of day is it?
- What is the weather like?
- What can they see, hear, touch?
- How do they feel, emotionally?
- How are they moving about – are they standing still, running, tiptoeing, leaping, hiding? Think about how movement can give us clues about mood and emotion.
- Choose part of the painting and imagine it can speak. What would it say? What instructions would it give?
- Is there anyone or anything else living inside this picture, just out of sight? [continued overleaf]



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- Is there something surprising, magical or creative they could learn in this world? For example, Marie's speaker learns "how to transform dull greys / into a rainbow".

Everyone will have different ideas and reactions; it's one of the reasons why works of art and poems are so special. They give us some information, but they also give us the space to think and feel in our own way.

Individual writing

Using the notes they have made, invite your pupils to shape their ideas into poems. Marie hasn't used a formal rhyme scheme and I would encourage them not to use rhyme either, so they have more freedom with word choice and how they end their lines.

They could follow Marie's structure: "I almost... but the... said..."

They could turn their rough ideas into sentences and decide where to add line breaks.

Or they could choose their own way of describing the experience of being inside the picture.

Anything goes, it's their poem!

When they're ready to write it up neatly, you may like to use the print-out template below. What will they choose as their title?

Explain that if you have written a poem inspired by someone else, it's important to acknowledge them – and the easiest way to do this is with a short line underneath the title (see below). This is also important if you've been inspired by a work of art – it means that the person reading your poem can find the painting and look at it themselves.

We would love to see what your pupils come up with! Tag us on Twitter @tygertygermag with a picture or email us on tygertygermagazine@gmail.com for some personalised feedback.



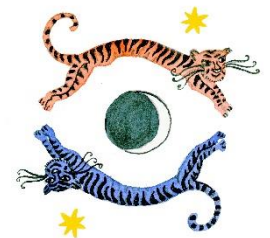
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Inspired by the poem 'Red Bridge' by Marie Papier
and the painting





RED BRIDGE

by Marie Papier

after Paul Klee

I almost fell off
the red bridge

but the yellow moon
shining in the blue night

said: see that pink tower
with a black roof?

There lives old Uncle Paul
a smart painter who can make

any old thing into a bright
new toy. Knock on the door

he'll let you in and show you how
to transform dull greys

into a rainbow.

