

**ArtWords: Writing about Art**  
**Then and Now**

**Grades:** any age/ intermediate writer  
(I use this lesson with 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders)

**Length of time:** Two 55 minutes class periods with art work done at school

**Objectives:** To increase students' observation skills  
To develop skills in comparing and contrasting  
To develop thinking skills  
To develop descriptive writing

Teachers Note: In my classroom I set up learning experiences that will take the students through the five stages of learning. When you look at how we learn, you find, there are five stages that we use as we develop new skills in any area: inquiry, knowledge acquisition, problem solving, communication and reflection. I have found for all students, but especially those who are struggling to understand the academic world, using this process in art helps them refine their thinking with concrete materials. Over time I have noticed an increase in both reading and writing skills in my classroom. (This finding was based on a research project funded with a grant from the Perpich Center for the Arts.)

**Materials:**

James Rosenquist's mural titled *World's Fair Mural* at the Weisman Art gallery (You could use a picture in your classroom of this or another art work that reflects a specific culture and/or time period.)

Writing journals

Glue sticks

Old magazines

Scissors

Poster board

**Brief summary/Outline:**

1. Have students begin by looking closely at the artwork for 30 seconds. They are to try and remember as many things as they can. Then turn away from the art piece or turn the picture over. Without looking again, make list in your **journal** of everything you remember seeing in the painting. After you have written as much as you can remember, turn back to the artwork and add

anything you missed. (You could at this point have students share with a partner to compare, adding any thing they forgot then look back to the painting to fill in missing parts.)

2. Read or share the background information about the art piece and the artist. (The information on Rosenquist is included on the next page)
3. Discuss with the class this artwork: What do we know about the 1960's by looking at this painting? Then have students describe in their **journal** how the objects in this painting reflect 1960's culture in America. (Depending on the age or skill of your writers, this quick journal writing might be a part of the verbal class discussion or a whole-class journal writing to model how to do reflections.)
4. Have the students make a collage that updates this mural to reflect current culture. They will need to cut out magazine pictures and/or use personal photos to create this artwork. Be sure they include a personal reference, such as Rosenquist did with the words *Atwater, Minn.*  
Note: Here is where students do their inquiry and problem solving.  
(This can be an in-class project or homework assignment. It can take longer than you expect if students are really planning and thinking about their culture today.)
5. On day two, have the students describe in their journals their updated collage. They should tell why they chose their pictures and what their collage tells about American culture today. I then have them share both their reflections and their collage. (This can also be a piece of writing that they "publish" by making a final copy to hang beside the collage in the classroom.)  
James Rosenquist

*World's Fair Mural, 1964*  
Oil on Masonite  
240x240 in.  
Collection of the Weisman Art Museum

**About the artwork:**

The World's Fair Mural was one of 10 paintings especially created for the 1964 World's Fair in New York City. This painting is very large because it was made to go on the outside of the New York State pavilion at the World's State Fair. James Rosenquist included overlapping sections from billboard advertisements in this mural. Each image has its own meaning, with references to consumerism, the space race, technology and patriotism, and Atwater, Minnesota (where Rosenquist lived while growing up). Rosenquist wanted to show how these elements combine to create an energized picture of American Life. He said, "I'm interested in contemporary vision — the flash of chrome, reflection, rapid association, quick flashes of light. Bing, Bang! Bing, Bang!..."

**About the artist:**

James Rosenquist was born in Grand Forks, North Dakota in 1933 and had an early interest in art. At age 15, he was awarded an art school scholarship and later went to the University of Minnesota to study painting. He supported himself by painting advertisements on outdoor billboards and grain silos. In the 1950's he began to make paintings that combined images from advertisements with personal references and themes related to politics and American culture. He was one of a group of young artists in the 1960's that worked in a style called Pop Art because they used images from popular culture such as advertising, television, cartoons and everyday life. He became interested in political and antiwar imagery after John F. Kennedy, the 35<sup>th</sup> president, was assassinated in 1963. Rosenquist was arrested as a Vietnam protester in 1972 in Washington D.C. He continues to work with personal and political issues while creating energetic, large-scale paintings and prints.