

INSPIRED BY EMOTION

by Jimena Hernandez

PMA CLASSROOM
BEST FOR
High
School



THEMES

- Narrative and storytelling
- Mood and emotion exploration

Collaborator note: this lesson was created in collaboration with Jimena Hernandez and the Portland Museum of Art.

Benjamin Paul Akers (United States, 1825–1861), *The Dead Pearl Diver*, 1858, marble, 27 x 67 x 28 inches. Portland Museum of Art, Maine. Museum purchase with support from Mrs. Elizabeth Akers Allen, John M. Adams, F. R. Barrett, John M. Brown, Philip H. Brown, Abba H. Burnham, A. W. H. Clapp, Nathan Cleaves, Francis Cushing, William G. Davis, Henry Deering, John E. DeWitt, Mark P. Emery, Francis Fessenden, S. C. Gordon, Charles M. Gore, J. H. Hamlin, George S. Hunt, James H. McMullan, W. F. Milliken, Edward A. Noyes, Lewis Pierce, William L. Putnam, Thomas B. Reed, H. W. Richardson, Henry St. John Smith, A. A. Strout, L. D. M. Sweat, W. W. Thomas, Payson Tucker, and George P. Wescott, 1888.1. Image courtesy Luc Demers

CONTENT AREAS AND STANDARDS MET

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VISUAL AND PERFORMING ART

Perceive and Analyze Artwork D.C1.b

Evaluate the effectiveness of an image to influence the ideas, feelings, and behaviors of various audiences.

WRITING

Process and Production W.2.a

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, composing, revising, editing, rewriting, reflecting and/or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

Composing for Audience and Purpose W.3.b

Develop and support the topic with a variety of relevant techniques and by purposefully embedding the most significant details.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING COMPETENCIES

SELF-AWARENESS

Linking thoughts and feelings, identifying and recognizing emotions.

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Managing emotions and exhibiting self-motivation.

SOCIAL AWARENESS

Demonstrating empathy and compassion.

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Communicating effectively.

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

Evaluating, reflecting.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Connect to what they observe in the artwork through their emotions.
- Gain awareness of positive outcomes during difficulties.
- Use their creativity to write a story utilizing new approaches.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How do artists influence the emotions of the observer?
- What is the importance of acknowledging how we feel?
- In what ways can opposite emotions coexist?
- How do sensory stimuli change the way we perceive a moment in our life?

MATERIALS NEEDED

WRITING OR DRAWING UTENSILS
(pencil, pen, marker, etc.)

PAPER

SMARTPHONE OR OTHER DEVICE
to to play 'River Flows In You'
by Yiruma (linked below)

INSTRUCTIONS

LOOK

Take some time to observe this sculpture.

What do you feel most curious about regarding this character?

Where do you think this figure is?

RESPOND

Think about and respond to these questions:

What details do I notice?

What differences do I notice by
looking from different angles?

What is happening in this sculpture?

Write down your responses, share them with
someone in your house or group, and discuss them.



LEARN

Use this section to learn more about the subject and context of this artwork.

THE DEAD PEARL DIVER IS A ROMANTICIZED PORTRAYAL OF THE DEATH OF A PEARL FISHERMAN BY ARTIST BENJAMIN PAUL AKERS.

The figure lies back with his arms stretched succumbing to the power of nature. His nude body arcs and twists subtly atop a massive, roughly textured rock dotted with seashells. An exquisitely rendered mesh net, heavy with the weight of gathered oyster shells, covers the hero's lap for modesty, demonstrating Akers's skillful handling of the marble. The texture of the net contrasts with the idealized smooth elegance of the skin, from the sculpture's feet up through the swelling chest and the arms reaching overhead to the face. It looks like he is asleep, even though we know from the title that he is dead, now washed up on shore or perhaps, given how the shells bear down on the net and his own body, he is at the bottom of the ocean. The exact situation is not clear, but this mid-19th-century artist's intention is: at the height of the Romantic movement, this work can only be a rendering of the final sleep of a "beautiful death."

Renewed interest in human psychology, the expression of personal feelings, and the mysteries of the natural world distinguished the Romantic movement. It elevated experiences of emotion and sympathy, awe, wonder, and terror, partly by legitimizing them as responses to the "beautiful" and the "sublime."

Among Romanticism's characteristic attitudes were a deepened appreciation of the beauties of nature, a general preference for emotion over reason and the senses over the intellect, a cultivation of the inward gaze and the heightened examination of the passions and inner struggles, and an emphasis upon imagination as a gateway to transcendent experience.

Benjamin Paul Akers was from Westbrook, Maine. Like many American sculptors, he traveled to Italy to access its world-famous marble quarries, skilled studio assistants, and examples of the greatest sculptural work in Europe. He also tragically died in his thirties of tuberculosis, suggesting certain parallels between this young diver, who seeks pearls at the bottom of the ocean, and the work's young artist, who seeks beauty in the depths of the human soul.

Throughout his years abroad, Akers remained closely connected to his home in the Portland area. In 1888, the Portland Society of Art, the forerunner of the Portland Museum of Art, acquired *The Dead Pearl Diver* as the first work to enter its permanent collection.



ACT

CONNECTING EMOTIONS

Describe what you feel by looking at the sculpture.

What emotions do you perceive when looking at the face?

How do you think this figure is feeling?

If you didn't know the title, **what** would you think this figure is doing?

If you think this figure might be sleeping, **do you think he is dreaming too?**

Look at his expression.

This figure is a pearl diver. **What** could you think this work might be like? **What** sorts of things do you think he encountered during his work as a pearl diver?



REIMAGINING THE STORY

Listen to the song "River Flows in You" by the South Korean pianist and composer Yiruma while looking at The Dead Pearl Diver. What story does the sculpture tell you while listening to the music?

After listening to the song, write a story.

Give a different twist to the story of the pearl diver.

BEAUTY AFTER THE STORM

Normalizing "negative feelings."

The death of the pearl diver has been idealized for the aesthetic purposes of the artist.

He looks almost as though he is asleep, but we know by the title that he is dead. It is a picture of a "beautiful death." The Romantic movement elevated emotion over reason and found beauty even in dark settings and events. **They named this feeling "the sublime."**

Do you think it is possible to find beauty in difficult times?

While experiencing the strength of a storm, for example, **have you ever felt scared and exhilarated at the same time?**

Have you ever watched a movie that is **sad and beautiful at the same time?**

Why do you think it is important to acknowledge our emotions?

Do you feel better after allowing yourself to recognize your anger or sadness?

Think about how to release your emotions in expressive or creative ways. **What could you do? How might making art or moving your body help?**

REFLECT AND SHARE

Let's reflect on what we just did and the experience we just had engaging with this artwork.

Did your initial thoughts about the sculpture change after you connected to it through your emotions?

If you could create an artwork about a sublime moment in your life, **what would it look like?**

What moment would you choose?

Which emotions would you like to convey?

Would the story you wrote change if you chose different music to write with?

The last step in interacting with art is to share your experience with others.

Share your experience, ideas, or writing with the PMA! Or share your experience, ideas, or writing with others in your home or class.

RESOURCES

[River Flows in You - YouTube](#)

[River Flows In You - music and lyrics by Yiruma | Spotify](#)

[River Flows in You - Apple Music](#)

[The Romantic Movement](#)