

Social & Emotional Learning in Visual Arts:  
Expressing Emotions



Andy Warhol (American, 1928–1987), *Martha Graham (Lamentation)*, 1986. Screen print on Lenox Museum Board, 36 x 36". Gift of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc., 2014 © The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will interpret a work of visual art, considering how body language, facial expression, and formal elements of art convey emotion.
- Students will interpret modern dance, considering how meaning and emotion are communicated through the use of the body.
- Students will reflect on how challenging experiences can lead to personal growth and on the role of support systems.

### *Martha Graham (Lamentation)*

The American artist Andy Warhol (1928–1987) frequently used recognizable images of famous people as the basis for his art. This screen print from 1986 titled *Martha Graham (Lamentation)* is part of a series of prints Warhol made depicting the renowned dancer and choreographer Martha Graham (1894–1991) for the 60th anniversary of her founding of New York's Martha Graham Dance Company in 1926. Martha Graham was known for conveying strong emotions through dance, creating a language of movement based on the expressive capacity of the human body. The screen print is based on a photograph of Graham performing her dance solo "Lamentation," taken by the artist Barbara Morgan in 1935.



"Lamentation" is performed almost entirely from a seated position, with the dancer wrapped in a tube of stretchy purple fabric. The vibrant blue lines in this print emphasize the tension created by Graham's body moving within the flexible fabric as she danced. Graham noted that she chose this costume to indicate "the ability to stretch inside your own skin." The word "lamentation" means a passionate expression of grief, the emotional response to losing something or someone important. With this dance, Graham wanted to "witness and test the perimeters and boundaries of grief, which is honorable and universal."

Experiences of loss and expressions of grief may include many different—even seemingly contradictory—emotions, and people respond to loss in different ways. Warhol's print and Graham's dance emphasize both the pain and struggle of loss and the strength, resilience, and growth people demonstrate in response to difficult, life-changing events.

# MISSOURI LEARNING STANDARDS

## Visual Arts

VA:Re7A: Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed through engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, the natural world, and constructed environments.

VA:Re7B: Visual imagery influences understanding of and responses to the world.

VA:Re8A: People gain insights into meanings of artworks by engaging in the process of art criticism.

## Dance

DA:Re7A: Dance is perceived and analyzed to comprehend its meaning.

DA:Re8A: Dance is interpreted by considering intent, meaning, and artistic expression as communicated through the use of the body, elements of dance, dance technique, dance structure, and context.

# SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING COMPETENCIES\*

Self-awareness:

- Identifying one's emotions
- Linking feelings, values, and thoughts
- Having a growth mindset

Responsible decision-making:

- Reflecting on one's role to promote personal, family, and community well-being

Relationship skills:

- Communicating effectively
- Practicing teamwork
- Seeking or offering support and help when needed

Social awareness:

- Showing concern for the feelings of others

\*Adapted from CASEL's SEL framework: <https://casel.org/sel-framework/>

## ART TALK\*

### Look

- Invite students to spend one minute silently looking at *Martha Graham (Lamentation)*, letting their eyes wander and be drawn to details that stand out to them. Encourage students to consider their first impressions and what thoughts and feelings arise as they practice close looking.

### Describe

- Invite students to share their observations and thoughts about the artwork.
- Paraphrase and synthesize students' comments, noting similarities and differences, and point to corresponding details in the artwork. Share relevant information about the artist and artwork in response to student questions and comments.
- The open-ended questions below can guide students to construct their own interpretations of *Martha Graham (Lamentation)* grounded in visual evidence:
  - What do you notice or wonder about?
  - What is going on here?
  - What do you see that makes you say that?
  - What do you notice about how the artist uses such elements of art as color, shadow, and line?
  - How would you describe the facial expression of the figure depicted in the artwork?
  - How would you describe their body language?
  - What emotions do you see expressed in the artwork?

### Analyze

- Share these video recordings of the dance "Lamentation" with your students:
  - Martha Graham performing "Lamentation" when it premiered in 1930: <https://youtu.be/gM2dciiUUcA>
  - The contemporary dancer Natasha Diamond-Walker rehearsing for a performance of "Lamentation" in 2020: <https://youtu.be/UdaWdn0-eA>
- Ask students to respond to the following prompt in writing, with a partner, or in group discussion:
  - What do you notice about how the dancers convey emotions through the movement and positioning of their bodies?

### Reflect and Connect

- Discuss with students how *Martha Graham (Lamentation)* invites us to think about how we can grow in difficult times, what Graham called "the ability to stretch inside your

own skin." Invite students to reflect on a challenging time in their lives when they experienced personal growth and demonstrated resilience.

- Ask students to journal in response to the following prompt:
  - How did you care for yourself or seek support from others at that time?

*\*If you are facilitating online, students can share their responses through chat, whiteboard, or a feedback tool such as Padlet or Answer Garden, and the instructor can read them aloud to honor each contribution. The Expressing Emotions worksheet may be used to complement this lesson in the classroom or online.*

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

The following activities may be used together or individually to extend Art Talk into creative responses to the artwork.

### Model Making

- Following **Art Talk**, create a word cloud of emotions that students saw expressed in the artwork.
- Ask students to brainstorm symbols that represent an emotion named in the word cloud.
- Have students create a physical model of their symbol out of foil, clay, or pipe cleaners. Brainstorm ways to sculpt the material (e.g., fold, tear, twist). Students may title or write about their model.
- Share in small groups or ask students to place their models in a designated “gallery space” of the classroom and lead a **Gallery Tour** to view and share what they created.

### Gallery Tour

- Brainstorm with students ways to interact respectfully with each other's artworks before moving around the classroom to view each model. Students should take note of anything that draws their attention or prompts a question.
- Students may take turns showing their work to the class and explaining how they modeled their chosen emotion. Encourage students to ask questions or share respectful comments about their classmates' models.

### Movement Exploration

- Following **Art Talk**, create a word cloud of emotions that students saw expressed in the artwork.
- Ask students to pick an emotion from the word cloud that they would like to explore through movement. Encourage them to think about how experiencing that emotion might change the way they carry themselves and how they could use body language and facial expressions to communicate that emotion to others.

- Have students work in small groups to experiment with different ways of moving and shaping their bodies and faces to express different emotions and have their partners guess the emotions.

### **Create a Narrative\***

- Ask students to look again at the print *Martha Graham (Lamentation)* by Andy Warhol and imagine a story for the figure in the artwork. Have students journal in response to the following prompts as they develop their narratives:
  - Who is this person? (For the purpose of this activity the figure in the artwork need not be Martha Graham. Ask students to imagine this figure as a character in the story of their creation).
  - What are they lamenting?
  - How will they process and heal from their loss?
- Invite students to draw another scene from their character's story that takes place before or after the moment depicted in *Martha Graham (Lamentation)*.

\* This activity is included in the *Expressing Emotions worksheet*.

## VOCABULARY

**grief:** the response to losing something or someone important

**image:** a picture of something or someone

**lamentation:** a passionate expression of grief

**resilience:** the process of adapting well in the face of adversity

**screen print:** a print made by transferring ink through a finely woven fabric stretched in a frame onto a surface such as paper

**symbol:** something representing something else by association; objects, characters, or other concrete representations of abstract ideas, concepts, or events

## RESOURCES

The Andy Warhol Museum: <https://www.warhol.org/andy-warhols-life/>

Martha Graham Dance Company: <https://marthagraham.org/history/>

National Alliance for Children's Grief: <https://childrengrieve.org/>

Coalition to Support Grieving Students: <https://grievingstudents.org/>

