

How Art Can Help You...

Show Not Tell





# Show Not Tell

- Creates a picture in the reader's mind
- Uses vivid description and powerful words
- Example:
  - **Telling:** The girls were excited.
  - **Showing:** Giggles and screams filled the arena. The soft curls were now damp with perspiration and the anticipation of the event. They held tight to each other in a mock effort to contain themselves. Arms flailed upward, and voices echoed in varying tones. The moment was here.
- “...as is painting, so is poetry...”—Horace

# Landscape with the Fall of Icarus

## by Pieter Bruegel the Elder



**Telling:** Icarus fell from the sky.

But what do we observe in this painting?

- Man pushing a cart that's being pulled by a cow
- Sun setting
- Ship's sails billowing in the wind
- Man tending his flock of sheep
- Icarus' legs flailing in the sea
- Man by ocean, oblivious to Icarus and his splashing

# Landscape with the Fall of Icarus

## by Pieter Bruegel the Elder



### Showing:

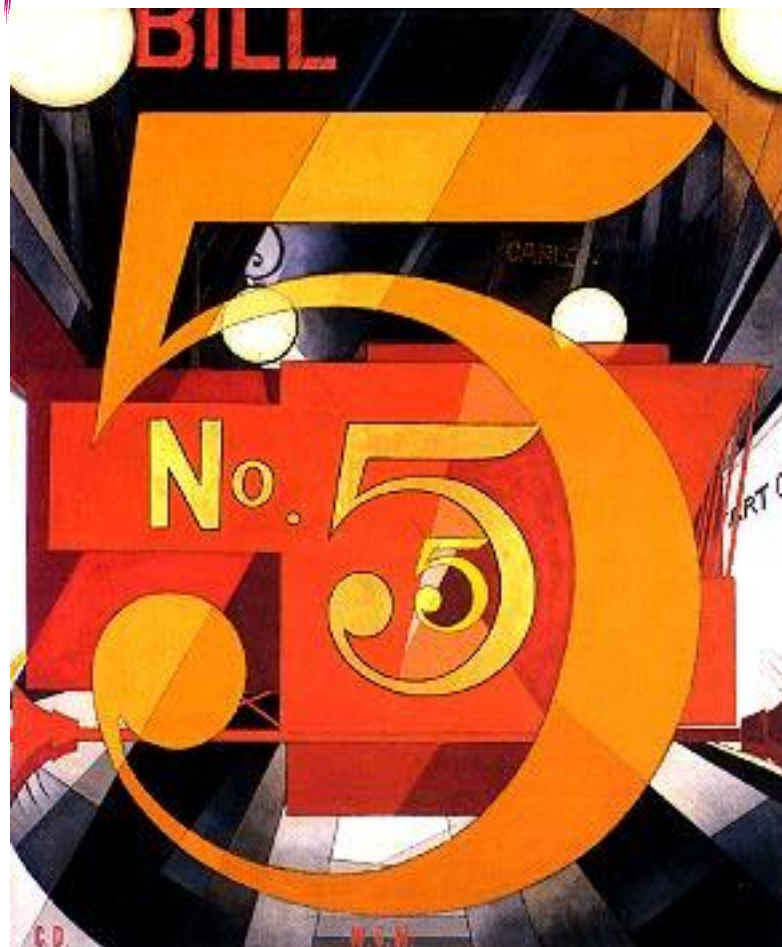
...the ploughman may  
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,  
But for him it was not an important failure;  
the sun shone  
As it had to on the white legs disappearing  
into the green  
Water, and the expensive delicate ship that  
must have seen  
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the  
sky,  
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly  
on.  
--from "Musee de Beaux Arts" by W.C. Auden

# Saw the Figure Five in Gold by Charles Henry Demuth

**Telling:** The #5 truck drove by on the street.

What do you see??

- Colors
- Number
- Movement
- Inferences?

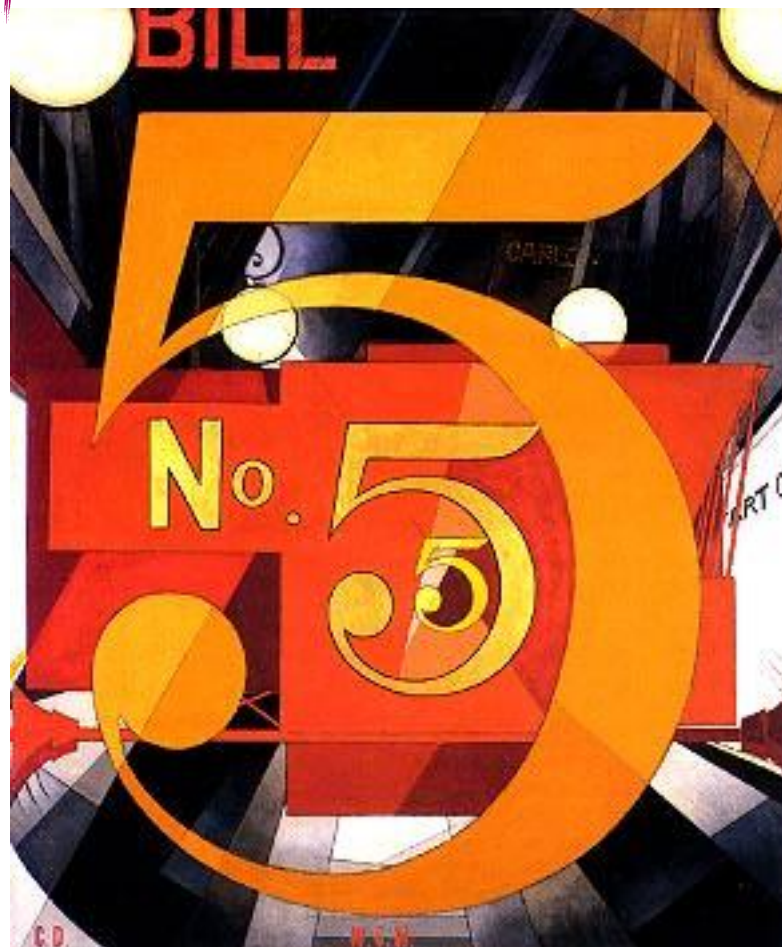


# Saw the Figure Five in Gold by Charles Henry Demuth

## Showing:

Among the rain  
and lights  
I saw the figure 5  
in gold  
on a red  
fire truck  
moving  
tense  
unheeded  
to gong clangs  
siren howls  
and wheels rumbling  
through the dark city

--"The Great Figure" by William Carlos Williams



# Guernica

## by Pablo Picasso

**Telling:** War kills people.

- What do you see?
- What does this say about war?
- Any emotional response to this?



# Guernica by Pablo Picasso

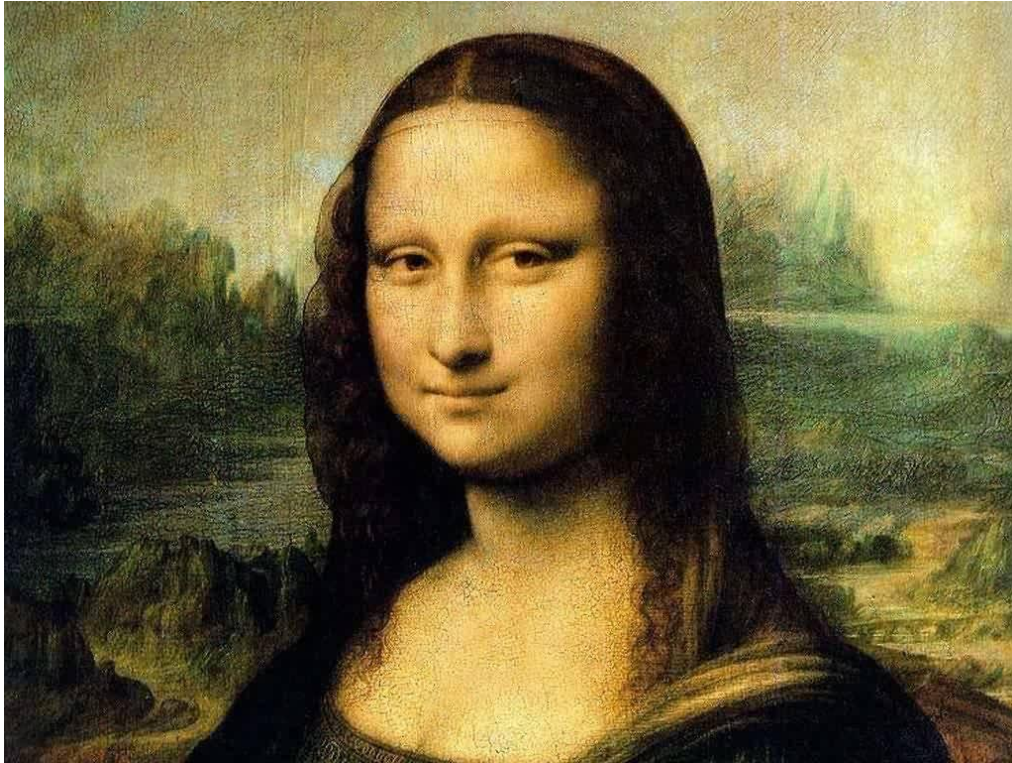
## Showing:

Yesterday, today, or tomorrow  
bombs drop and discombobulated body parts  
hurl through the air, and brown limbs  
burst from horses  
and spin past a still-standing bystander  
dumbstruck  
as infernos smoke and buildings crumble.  
--"A World Without Picasso's Guernica" by Gregg  
Mosson





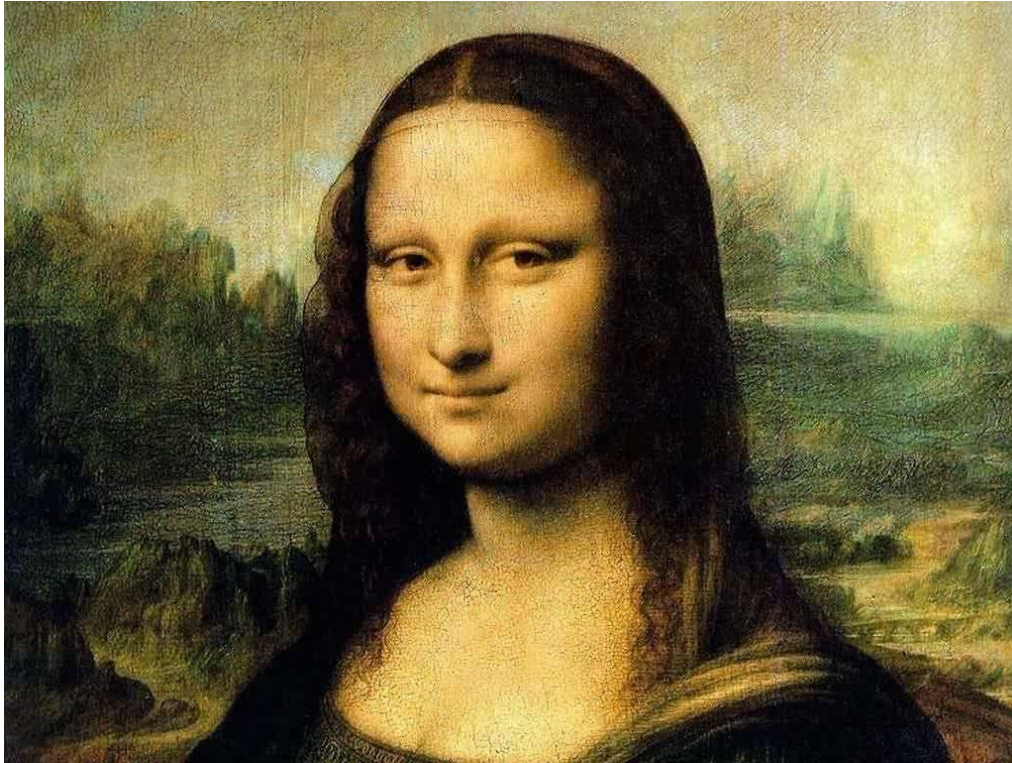
# Mona Lisa by Leonardo Da Vinci



**Telling:** The woman is smiling.

- Why is she smiling?
- What kind of smile is it?
- Where is she?
- What does she know that we don't?

# Mona Lisa by Leonardo Da Vinci



## Showing:

It is not what she did  
at 10 o'clock  
last evening  
accounts for the smile  
It is  
that she plans  
to do it again  
tonight.

--from "Three for the Mona Lisa" by  
John Stone

# The Great Wave at Kamagawa by Katsushika Hokusai

**Telling:** The waves are crashing.

**Showing:**

But he cannot see below Fuji  
The shore the color of sky; he is the wave,  
he stretches  
His claws against strangers. He is  
Not safe, not even from himself. His world  
is flat.  
He fishes a sea full of serpents, he rides his  
boat  
Blindly from wave to wave toward  
Ararat.

-- from "The Great Wave: Hokusai" by  
Donald Finkel



## So remember

- Be descriptive!
- Use metaphors and similes.
- Incorporate imagery (5 senses).
- Help the reader *see* what you are writing about.
- Show, don't tell!!

