

# CONVERSATION PIECES

## A Room with a View



Pierre Bonnard, *The Open Window*, 1921



Richard Diebenkorn, *Girl with Plant*, 1960

### CLOSE LOOKING

Use the suggested prompts when you look out a window and observe the two artworks.

#### Explore

- Stand in front of a window. Close your eyes and take a deep breath.
- Now open your eyes. What do you notice first?
- Find 5 more things.
- Close your eyes again and take a deep breath.
- Open your eyes. Find 5 things you didn't notice the first time.

#### Examine

- Now spend time with Richard Diebenkorn's *Girl with Plant*. Close your eyes and take a deep breath.
- Open your eyes. Where do your eyes go first? Then where do they go? Pay attention to how your eyes travel around the painting.
- Think about Diebenkorn's use of color and line. What has he done to get your eyes to move around the artwork?
- Why do you think he chose to show the woman from behind?

#### Sense

- Now look at Pierre Bonnard's *The Open Window*. Imagine you are sitting in this room looking out the window. What do you see? Hear? Smell? Taste? Feel?
- What else do you notice in the painting? Bonnard included two things that you might miss if you don't look closely!

### MAKE CONNECTIONS

- How are these artworks similar? How are they different?
- Compare each artist's use of line and color.
- What adjectives would you use to describe each painting?
- Compare each artist's inclusion of a woman. How are they similar? How are they different?

## ART + LANGUAGE ARTS

Pick the painting to which you're most drawn. Write a haiku describing what the woman in the painting might be thinking. A haiku has 3 lines containing 5 syllables, 7 syllables, and 5 syllables.

Now let's imagine the two women are communicating with each other. Create a text conversation they might be having.

## EXTENDED ACTIVITY: WINDOW INTO YOUR WORLD

We are spending so much time inside looking out at the world. Create a card to mail to someone to let them know you are thinking about them.

### 1. Prepare the Card

Pick a window in your home. Fold a piece of paper in half. Cut it to the size you want your card to be.

### 2. Draw the Window

On the front of the card, draw the window panes so they become a grid.

### 3. Color the Window

- Think about how Diebenkorn and Bonnard used color, shape, and line. How can you simplify and abstract your view into basic shapes and a limited color palette?
- Pick 3 colors. Focus on each pane and what you see in it to create the scene from your window.
- Option 1: Use color pencils, watercolors, or markers.
- Option 2: Create a collage, cutting out the shapes and gluing them to the paper.
- Decide if you want to redraw the grid on top of your scene or if you only want it to help you in constructing your artwork.

### 4. Write the Letter



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

**Pierre Bonnard, *The Open Window*, 1921, Oil on canvas, 46 1/2 x 37 3/4 in., The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1930**

- Pierre Bonnard painted from memory rather than life, which accounts for the dreamlike quality of his pictures.
- In *The Open Window*, we see a room in the artist's house in Normandy, France.
- Notice Bonnard's use of complementary colors—the blue and greens outside juxtaposed with the red and oranges inside. Complementary colors are two colors that are on opposite sides of the color wheel (e.g. red and green, orange and blue). Think about it like opposites attract! These color combinations are pleasing to our eyes and when put next to each other, make the colors appear even more intense. Therefore, other elements in this painting, like the cat and woman in the lower right, may not be the first things we notice.
- The blonde woman in this painting may be Renee Monchaty, the artist's mistress with whom he fell in love around 1917.

**Richard Diebenkorn, *Girl with Plant*, 1960, Oil on canvas, 80 x 69 1/2 in., The Phillips Collection, Acquired 1961**

- Richard Diebenkorn was interested in exploring form and color and the tension between reality and abstraction.
- The landscape and light of the western United States permeate his work. Even in his most abstract paintings, he still evokes a sense of place. *Girl with Plant* comes from the artist's figurative period when he was living in the Bay Area from 1955 to 1966.
- The woman is de-emphasized, and instead seems embedded in the painting's surface like the inanimate objects in the composition, including the potted plant, chair, and window.