

Let Heaven & Nature Sing

*Advent Art & Poetry
Lesson Plans for All Ages*

SAMPLE

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INTRODUCTION

The word “advent” comes from the Latin *adventus* meaning “arrival” or “coming,” which is itself a translation of the Greek *παρουσία* (*parousia*). During the Advent season, Christians prepare themselves to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. To some, Advent is associated with the first twenty-four days of December, as can be seen through the typical Advent calendar and the abundance of Christmas decorations that emerge during this time. The observance of the season of Advent varies between different liturgical calendars. In the West, Advent begins four Sundays before December 25th, or on the Sunday closest to St. Andrew’s Day (November 30th). In the East, the Nativity Fast begins on November 15th, forty days before Christmas.

To make preparing for Christmas as accessible as possible for those from any tradition, this Advent curriculum has been written for the weekdays of the first three weeks of December, with one bonus day added in case you want to continue closer to Christmas Day. Additional lesson plans to supplement for the longer Nativity Fast can be found in the back of the book.

These art and poetry lesson plans have been designed to fit any age, with each set of questions beginning with the simplest and progressing to the most challenging. Since the questions get harder as they go, you can simply ask the first one or two questions if your students aren’t ready for the third. Please use them according to your needs by either stopping at what is appropriate for your level or by gearing the later questions to your older students. Some of the poems may seem too challenging for young students at first, but we encourage you to give it a try! It’s okay if they don’t fully understand the poem. You may be surprised by what they see!

Each day contemplates a poem first and then a painting. Depending on your students, you may want to mix the order up sometimes and do the painting first and then the poem. Again, feel free to adapt to your circumstances and needs.



First Tuesday of December

John Donne & Peter Paul Rubens
(seventeenth century)

“Holy Sonnets X” by John Donne

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou are not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou'art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy'or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

Virgin in Adoration before the Christ Child by Peter Paul Rubens



Peter Paul Rubens, *Virgin in Adoration before the Christ Child*, 1615, Oil on Panel, Museum Nicolaas Rockox.

Discussion



First, read the poem aloud three times. The first time through read it as though you're Jesus, the second time Mary, and the third time Eve.

Then consider the following questions about the poem:

- * Who is Donne speaking to in this poem?
- * Note how the metering sounds like marching or walking. What might the poet be marching toward?
- * What does the poem say is more powerful than death?

Second, contemplate the painting by setting a timer (1–5 minutes, depending on the students' ability to focus). During this time, silently observe the painting. After the timer goes off, have each student describe what they saw in as much detail as possible.

- * What draws your eye? Why?
- * Where does the light shine from?
- * How does your eye move through the painting? What type of energy does this create?

Now, compare the poem and the painting. Consider the following prompts:

- * Both are x.
- * Both have x.
- * Both do x.

Response Activity (choose one):

- * Imagine the prayer that Mary might be praying in this painting. Say or write the prayer.
- * Write a poem speaking to death, sleep, or life. For older students, identify two schemes or tropes he uses well and imitate them in your own poem.
- * Find a song that you think fits the painting well. Play it while contemplating the painting. Record your thoughts in a journal.