

Kimbell Educator Packet

Picturing Plot: Protagonists' Predicaments



Kimbell Art Museum

Jacob van Ruisdael, *Rough Sea at a Jetty* (detail), c. 1650, oil on canvas. Kimbell Art Museum

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Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

ART

<p>§117.111. Art, Grade 3</p>	<p>§117.111.b.3.B. The student is expected to compare and contrast artworks created by historical and contemporary men and women, making connections to various cultures.</p> <p>§117.111.b.3.D. The student is expected to investigate the connections of visual art concepts to other disciplines.</p> <p>§117.111.b.4.B. The student is expected to use methods such as oral response or artist statements to identify main ideas found in collections of artworks created by self, peers, and major historical or contemporary artists in real or virtual portfolios, galleries, or art museums.</p>
<p>§117.203. Art, Middle School 2</p>	<p>117.117.b.1.D. The student is expected to understand and apply the expressive properties of artworks such as appropriation, meaning, narrative, message, and symbol using art vocabulary accurately.</p> <p>117.117.b.3.B. The student is expected to analyze selected artworks to determine contemporary relevance in relationship to universal themes such as belief, cultural narrative, life cycles, the passage of time, identity, conflict, and cooperation.</p> <p>117.117.b.4.B. The student is expected to analyze original artworks using a method of critique such as describing the artwork, analyzing the way it is organized, interpreting the artist’s intention, and evaluating the success of the artwork.</p>
<p>§117.303. Art, Level II</p>	<p>117.117.c.2.D. The student is expected to create original artwork to communicate thoughts, feelings, ideas, or impressions.</p> <p>117.117.c.3.B. The student is expected to analyze specific characteristics in artwork from a variety of cultures.</p> <p>117.117.b.4.A. The student is expected to interpret, evaluate, and justify artistic decisions in artwork by self, peers, and other artists such as that in museums, local galleries, art exhibits, and websites.</p>

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

ENGLISH

<p>§110.5. English Language Arts and Reading, Grade 3</p>	<p>§110.23.b.8. The student is expected to infer the theme of a work, distinguishing theme from topic; explain the relationships among the major and minor characters; analyze plot elements, including the sequence of events, the conflict, and the resolution; and explain the influence of the setting on the plot.</p> <p>§110.23.b.10.A–B. The student is expected to explain the author’s purpose and message within a text; explain how the use of text structure contributes to the author’s purpose.</p> <p>§110.23.b.12.A. The student is expected to compose literary texts, including personal narratives and poetry, using genre characteristics and craft.</p>
<p>§110.23. English Language Arts and Reading, Grade 7</p>	<p>§110.23.b.7.B–D. The student is expected to analyze how characters’ qualities influence events and resolution of the conflict; analyze plot elements, including the use of foreshadowing and suspense, to advance the plot; and analyze how the setting influences character and plot development.</p> <p>§110.23.b.9.A–B. The student is expected to explain the author’s purpose and message within a text; analyze how the use of text structure contributes to the author’s purpose.</p> <p>§110.23.b.11.A. The student is expected to compose literary texts such as personal narratives, fiction, and poetry using genre characteristics and craft.</p>
<p>§110.35. English Language Arts and Reading, English II</p>	<p>§110.35.c.1.D. The student is expected to participate collaboratively, building on the ideas of others, contributing relevant information, developing a plan for consensus building, and setting ground rules for decision making.</p> <p>§110.35.c.6. The student is expected to analyze how themes are developed through characterization and plot, including comparing similar themes in a variety of literary texts representing different cultures; analyze how authors develop complex yet believable characters, including archetypes, through historical and cultural settings and events; analyze isolated scenes and their contribution to the success of the plot as a whole; and analyze how historical and cultural settings influence characterization, plot, and theme across texts.</p> <p>§110.35.c.6. The student is expected to compose literary texts such as fiction and poetry using genre characteristics and craft.</p>

Character vs. Character

A common example of external conflict, **character versus character** refers to the interactions of individuals or entities with differing outlooks/motives. The struggle between the protagonist and antagonist can be mental, emotional, spiritual, and/or physical.

EXAMPLES

One Hundred and One Dalmatians, by Walt Disney Productions (1961)

The Giving Tree, by Shel Silverstein (1964)

The Karate Kid, by Delphi II Productions and Columbia Pictures (1984)

The Princess Bride, by Act III Communications and 20th Century Fox (1987)

Holes, by Louis Sachar (1998)

Tangled, by Walt Disney Animation Studios (2010)

Black Panther, by Marvel Studios (2018)

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

How would you describe the protagonist's and antagonist's personality, desires, and flaws? How do the characters compare?

What is the cause of the conflict? How does this disagreement develop over the course of the story?

How do secondary characters react? Does their engagement help or hurt?

What actions or events lead to the conflict's resolution?

ACTIVITY

Choose a character versus character conflict from one of the artworks reproduced on the next page. Break the students into small groups and assign each a character (protagonist, antagonist, or secondary character). Ask each group to write possible conflict resolutions facilitated by their character.

Character vs. Character

Wherein the protagonist is challenged by another character



Maya, *Codex-Style Vessel with Two Scenes of Itzam Instructing Young Pupils*, c. 700–750, ceramic with monochrome decoration



Maya, *Presentation of Captives to a Maya Ruler*, c. AD 785, limestone with traces of paint



Caravaggio, *The Cardsharps*, c. 1596–97, oil on canvas



Georges de La Tour, *The Cheat with the Ace of Clubs*, c. 1630–34, oil on canvas

See the next page for a featured artwork from this section.

Character vs. Character



Georges de La Tour, *The Cheat with the Ace of Clubs*
Oil on canvas, c. 1630–34

Georges de La Tour
French, 1593–1652

The Cheat with the Ace of Clubs

Oil on canvas, c. 1630–34
Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth

For most of his life, Georges de La Tour remained in his native duchy of Lorraine, remote from the art center of Paris. Although he created some of the most visually compelling images of his age, soon after his death he fell into obscurity. It was only in the early twentieth century that La Tour's oeuvre began to be rediscovered.

One of the greatest masterpieces of seventeenth-century French art, *Cheat with the Ace of Clubs* takes as its subject the danger of indulgence in wine, women, and gambling. While the theme harks back to Caravaggio's influential *Cardsharps*, also in the Kimbell, the roots of this engaging morality play can be traced to earlier representations of the biblical subject of the prodigal son.

La Tour's dazzling colors and elaborate costumes create a brilliant decorative tableau. His characters enact a psychological drama that unfolds through the cues of their sidelong gazes and the measured gestures that signal their next moves. The cheat tips his cards toward the viewer, who thereby becomes complicit in the scheme, knowing that in the next moment, the conniving trio of cheat, maidservant, and courtesan (identified by her low-cut bodice) will prevail. Another autograph version of this subject, *Cheat with the Ace of Diamonds* (Musée du Louvre, Paris), displays abundant variations in details of color, clothing, and accessories.

FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION / ACTIVITY

What is going on here? Who is cheating, and who is being cheated? How can you tell?

Who do you notice first? How does the artist focus our attention? How does your eye move through the picture? What other clues does the artist use to guide you?

Where is everyone in the picture looking? Who seems unaware?

Where is the cheat looking? How is the viewer involved in this scene? What would you do or say if you encountered this scene?

Describe the costumes. What colors do you see? What can you tell about these individuals based on their costumes? Who is the most elaborately dressed?

With your classmates, **POSE** like a character in this scene. **ACT** out what might happen next.

Character vs. Society

In this external conflict, the protagonist disagrees with their government, cultural traditions, or societal constructs. The character might be motivated by their sense of right and wrong, a need to survive, or a desire for freedom or justice.

EXAMPLES

The Great Gatsby, by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925)
1984, by George Orwell (1949)
To Kill a Mockingbird, by Harper Lee (1960)
Robin Hood, by Walt Disney Productions (1973)
Aladdin, by Walt Disney Feature Animation (1992)
Mulan, by Walt Disney Feature Animation (1998)
The Hunger Games, series by Suzanne Collins (2008–2025)
The Maze Runner, series by James Dashner (2009–2020)
Zootopia, by Walt Disney Animation Studios (2016)
Coco, by Pixar Animation Studios (2017)
Encanto, by Walt Disney Animation Studios (2021)

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

What are the values, norms, and behavioral expectations that the main character opposes?

Describe the protagonist's personality and background. What is their motivation for pushing back?

What message or moral is taught through the resolution of this conflict?

ACTIVITY

Select an artwork reproduced on the next page. Decide who the protagonist is within the painting and write a manifesto from their perspective. What would they want to say to their society?

Character vs. Society

Wherein the protagonist struggles against the status of their culture/government



Japanese, *En no Gyoja*, c. 1300–1375, polychromed wood



Zhu Derun, *Returning from a Visit*, c. mid-14th century, handscroll; ink on paper



Japanese, *Genji in Exile at Suma*, late 16th century, six-fold screen; ink, gold, silver, and pigments on paper



Louis (or Antoine?) Le Nain, *Peasant Interior with an Old Flute Player*, c. 1642, oil on canvas



Thomas Gainsborough, *Going to Market, Early Morning*, c. 1773, oil on canvas



Salvator Rosa, *Pythagoras Emerging from the Underworld*, 1662, oil on canvas

See the next page for a featured artwork from this section.

Character vs. Society



Japanese, *Genji in Exile at Suma*

Six-fold screen; ink, gold, silver, and pigments on paper, late 16th century

Japanese
Japan; Momoyama period

Genji in Exile at Suma

Six-fold screen; ink, gold, silver, and pigments on paper, late 16th century
Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth

In this melancholy scene, the large sea of rough, billowing waves, the lone nobleman seated in a rustic hut with only his books and *koto* as companions, and the dusky tones of ink and silver and gold suggest a remote locale. A windblown visitor dressed in a straw cape, who appears to have arrived in a small boat moored at the left, trudges along the shore to the hut. The green of the *tatami* mats and the white and pink of the blossoming cherry trees (indicating springtime) provide the only brightness in an otherwise somber composition reflecting the sense of isolation and the forlorn state of mind of the nobleman.

The subject of the screen is from the classic masterpiece of Japanese literature *The Tale of Genji*, written in the early eleventh century by Lady Murasaki Shikibu. The epic novel, comprised of fifty-four chapters, recounts the tumultuous romantic life of Hikaru Genji, the son of a Japanese emperor. The dramatic yet somber scene is based on chapters 12 and 13, *Suma* and *Akashi*, in which Genji is exiled to the rural coastal town of Suma after he is discovered having an affair with the emperor's consort. The mysterious visitor may represent a messenger sent by Genji's lover to retrieve him, or he may be the Akashi Novitiate, who wishes to bring Genji to Akashi to marry his daughter. Both are described as arriving in Suma by boat in the midst of a raging storm.

FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION / ACTIVITY

Where do you think this scene takes place? What takes up most of the picture? Describe the movement of the ocean waves and the sounds you might hear.

Would you like to visit? What colors do you notice? How would you describe the weather?

Who is in this picture? What are they doing? How might they be feeling? What will happen next?

The Japanese term for a folding screen is *byōbu*, meaning "protection from the wind." How did it earn that name? How was it used and where?

CREATE a list of items you would bring with you if you needed to isolate from society.

Character vs. Nature

In this external conflict, the protagonist is challenged by the weather, the wilderness (sometimes dangerous animals), a natural disaster, or disease.

EXAMPLES

Moby-Dick, by Herman Melville (1851)

The Old Man and the Sea, by Ernest Hemingway (1952)

Life of Pi, by Yann Martel (2001)

Ice Age, franchise by Blue Sky Studios and 20th Century Fox (2002–2026)

Wolf in the Snow, by Matthew Cordell (2018)

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

What is the setting for this conflict and how is the protagonist impacted by it?

How does nature become its own character in the story? Describe its goals and challenges.

How does the main character's personality develop through their experience with the conflict?

How would you react in this situation? What decisions would you need to make to persevere?

ACTIVITY

Choose an artwork reproduced on the next page. Ask your students to sit in a circle. While looking at the same artwork, go around the circle and invite each student to add a sentence, creating a collaborative story.

Character vs. Nature

Wherein the protagonist is challenged by a natural disaster or the wilderness



Jacob van Ruisdael, *Rough Sea at a Jetty*, 1650s, oil on canvas



Yosa Buson, *Landscape with a Solitary Traveler*, c. 1780, hanging scroll; ink and light colors on silk



Claude Monet, *La Pointe de la Hève at Low Tide*, 1865, oil on canvas

See the next page for a featured artwork from this section.

Character vs. Nature



Jacob van Ruisdael, *A Rough Sea at a Jetty*
Oil on canvas, 1650s

Jacob van Ruisdael
Dutch, 1628/29–1682

A Rough Sea at a Jetty

Oil on canvas, 1650s
Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth

Jacob van Ruisdael, the most influential and inventive landscape painter of the Dutch golden age, endowed the native tradition of realism with a newfound dramatic force. Recording the familiar wooded hills, flat farmlands, and coastal dunes of the Netherlands, his work went beyond the topographic accuracy of earlier generations to achieve a sense of the monumental grandeur of nature.

Among his most highly valued works, Ruisdael's rare marine paintings reveal the scope of his genius, as they convey the transitory and changeable face of nature. *Rough Sea at a Jetty* represents the approach of a violent storm. In the foreground, a jetty extends a considerable distance into the sea. At its end is a rustic beacon to guide distressed ships into harbor. Two men with long poles stand nearby, ready to come to the aid of a vessel striving to make port through the tempestuous winds and waves that threaten its approach. A dramatic light breaks through the clouds beyond the beacon, suggesting the power of nature and perhaps alluding to the salvation that greets those who steer the proper course.

FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION / ACTIVITY

What do you see happening in this scene? How would you describe this weather? How would it feel to be standing on that narrow jetty? Have you ever been in a storm like this? Where would you feel most safe in weather like this?

How does Ruisdael create a sense of drama? What takes up most of the picture? What are the main colors? What lines do you see? Where do they lead your eye?

Where do you see light in this picture? Are there other possible light sources?

Why were boats so important in the seventeenth century? Which nations were especially famous for their explorers and trade routes? What items do you think Dutch trade ships carried? (See Jacques de Gheyn's *Vase of Flowers with a Curtain*.)

WRITE a story describing what will happen next. What clues does the artist include to hint at the next scene? **SKETCH** your idea and share your story with a friend!

Character vs. The Unknown

Sometimes called “Character versus Supernatural,” in this external conflict, the main character faces phenomena such as witches, monsters, ghosts, aliens, vampires, werewolves, or gods.

EXAMPLES

The Chronicles of Narnia, by C.S. Lewis (1950–1956)

Sleeping Beauty, by Walt Disney Productions (1959)

Jumanji, by Chris Van Allsburg (1981)

Ghostbusters, by Columbia-Delphi Productions and Black Rhino (1984)

Ender’s Game, by Tor Books (1985)

The Little Mermaid, by Walt Disney Feature Animation (1989)

Hocus Pocus, by Walt Disney Pictures (1993)

Spirited Away, by Studio Ghibli (2001)

Lilo & Stitch, by Walt Disney Feature Animation (2002)

Coraline, by Neil Gaiman (2002)

Over the Garden Wall, by Cartoon Network Studios (2014)

Stranger Things, by 21 Laps Entertainment and Monkey Massacre Productions (2016)

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

What is the relationship between “the unknown” and the main character?

What are “the unknown’s” objectives and constraints?

Describe the different archetypes present in the story (hero, jester, caregiver, ruler, creator, innocent, sage, explorer, rebel, etc.). How do these characters aid or hinder the main character?

ACTIVITY

Choose an artwork from the next page and create a new painting from the perspective of the unknown entity. What are its goals and fears? How can you illustrate these ideas?

Character vs. The Unknown

An external conflict caused by something outside of human understanding such as supernatural creatures or aliens



Chinese, *Earth Spirit*, first half of the 8th century, gray earthenware with painted polychrome decoration



Michelangelo Buonarroti, *The Torment of Saint Anthony*, 1487, tempera on panel

See the next page for a featured artwork from this section.



Michelangelo Buonarroti, *The Torment of Saint Anthony*

Tempera on panel, 1487

Michelangelo Buonarroti
Italian, 1475–1564

The Torment of Saint Anthony

Tempera on panel, 1487

Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth

This is the first known painting by Michelangelo, believed to have been painted when he was twelve years old. Although Michelangelo considered himself first and foremost a sculptor, he received his early training as a painter, in the workshop of Domenico Ghirlandaio (c. 1449–1494), a leading master in Florence. Michelangelo’s earliest biographers, Giorgio Vasari and Ascanio Condivi, tell us that, aside from some drawings, his first work was a painted copy of the engraving *Saint Anthony Tormented by Demons* by the fifteenth-century German master [Martin Schongauer](#). The rare subject is found in the life of Saint Anthony the Great, written by Athanasius of Alexandria in the fourth century. It describes the Egyptian hermit-saint’s vision, in which he levitated into the air and was attacked by demons, whose torments he withstood.

Created when he was informally associated with Ghirlandaio’s workshop and under the guidance of an older friend, the artist Francesco Granacci, Michelangelo’s painting earned him widespread recognition. Writing when Michelangelo was still alive, both Vasari and Condivi recounted that to give the demonic creatures veracity, the artist studied the colorful scales and other parts of specimens from the fish market. Michelangelo subtly revised Schongauer’s composition, making it more compact and giving the monsters more animal-like features, notably adding fish scales to one of them. He also included a landscape that resembles the Arno River Valley around Florence. The work is one of only four easel paintings generally regarded as having come from his hand and the first painting by Michelangelo to enter an American collection.

FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION / ACTIVITY

What is going on here? What do you notice first? What movement do you see? Describe the different creatures. Do they remind you of other “real” animals? What colors, textures, or patterns catch your eye? What are the demons doing?

Who is this man? How is he dressed? How does he react to the demons? What does that tell you about the story? What kind of story is this?

What details do you notice in the landscape? What are the dominant colors?

Why do you think Michelangelo created a painted copy based on an earlier engraving? What do you think he learned while making it?

WRITE speech bubbles to fill in what each character is saying. How does Saint Anthony's reaction during a stressful moment tell us about his character?

Character vs. Fate

During a character versus fate conflict, the protagonist is at odds with their destiny or calling.

EXAMPLES

The Lion King, by Walt Disney Feature Animation (1994)

Hercules, by Walt Disney Feature Animation (1997)

Harry Potter series, by J.K. Rowling (1997–2007)

The Princess Diaries, by Meg Cabot (2000)

Avatar: The Last Airbender, by Nickelodeon Animation Studio (2005–2008)

Percy Jackson series, by Rick Riordan (2005–2024)

Moana, by Walt Disney Animation Studios (2016)

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

How much does the protagonist know about their destiny? How does their disposition toward this calling change throughout the story?

How is the character's fate foreshadowed?

How does the protagonist attempt to alter their destiny?

ACTIVITY

Select an artwork reproduced on the next page and identify symbols that foreshadow the character's destiny. Then, draw additional symbols that help hint at the plot.

Character vs. Fate

Wherein the protagonist is trapped by their inescapable destiny/ultimate fate



Ercole de' Roberti, *Portia and Brutus*, c. 1486–90, tempera, possibly oil, and gold on panel



Giovanni Bellini, *Christ Blessing*, c. 1500, tempera, oil, and gold on panel



Giuseppe Maria Crespi, *Jupiter Among the Corybantes*, c. 1730, oil on copper



Jacques-Louis David, *The Anger of Achilles*, 1819, oil on canvas



Antoine Bourdelle, *Penelope*, 1909, cast bronze, dark green patina

See the next page for a featured artwork from this section.

Character vs. Fate



Jacques-Louis David, *The Anger of Achilles*
Oil on canvas, 1819

Jacques-Louis David, French, 1748–1825

The Anger of Achilles

Oil on canvas, 1819

Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth

The leading Neoclassical painter in Europe during the French Revolution and under Napoleon, David went into exile in Brussels after the Battle of Waterloo, in 1815. There, he painted and exhibited *The Anger of Achilles*, which he prized highly as the culmination of his career-long effort to recapture the perfection of ancient Greek art.

The subject of the painting, from the events that preceded the Trojan War, is drawn from Euripides' ancient play *Iphigenia in Aulis* and Racine's seventeenth-century dramatic version of the same story. Agamemnon, king of the Greeks, has just revealed that his daughter Iphigenia is not to be married to the youthful Achilles but sacrificed in order to appease the goddess Diana and so allow the Greek fleet to set sail for Troy. The complex episode challenged David to render a spectrum of emotions, from stoic courage and heroic resolve to grief and anger.

David's seemingly speechless figures have scarcely enough room to act out the drama. They are observed from close up, vividly cropped at waist level rather than being seen full-length. Achilles angrily reaches for his sword, but Agamemnon's magnetic gaze and his authoritative gesture appear to freeze Achilles's outburst. Dressed as a bride, Iphigenia, who is portrayed like a Renaissance angel, clutches her heart, oblivious to the display of male confrontation. The reaction of her mother, Clytemnestra, mingling disappointment at Achilles' inability to act with grief for her daughter, is apparently intended to mirror the mixed reactions that any spectator must feel as parental, spousal, and civic duties compete with one another.

FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION / ACTIVITY

What is going on in this picture? What story would you make up about these characters? How do they relate to one another?

How long ago do you think this happened? How are these characters dressed? Describe the colors and patterns. What is happening in the background?

Focus on the individual characters. Which figure is Agamemnon? What makes him appear kingly? What do his expression and pose tell you? What do you think he is saying at this moment? Compare him with Achilles. Describe the expressions of the women at center.

DISCUSS the ideas that you associate with heroes from history and those living today, then **DESIGN** a helmet for a (real or made-up) hero who represents ideas that are important to you.

Character vs. Self

An internal conflict, character versus self focuses on opposition an individual faces from within. This conflict often stems from a moral clash of beliefs, feelings, or desires. Sometimes this internal quandary leads to the protagonist needing to make a difficult choice.

EXAMPLES

Hamlet, by William Shakespeare (1599–1601)

A Christmas Carol, by Charles Dickens (1843)

Alice in Wonderland, by Lewis Carroll (1865)

A House for Hermit Crab, by Eric Carle (1987)

The Perks of Being a Wallflower, by Stephen Chbosky (1999)

The Rainbow Fish, by Marcus Pfister (1999)

Frozen, by Walt Disney Animation Studios (2013)

The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend, by Dan Santat (2014)

Bluey, by Ludo Studio (2018–present)

Big, by Vashti Harrison (2024)

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

What is the cause of the main character’s internal conflict?

How does the character’s emotional state change throughout the course of the story?

How do the setting and secondary characters influence the protagonist’s sense of self?

ACTIVITY

Choose a character from an artwork reproduced on the next page and write a diary entry from their perspective. What is the character feeling? What happened to make them feel this way? What will they plan to do next?

Character vs. Self

Wherein a main character is internally at war with their own fears and desires



Tintoretto (Jacopo Robusti), *Portrait of Doge Pietro Loredan*, 1567–70, oil on canvas



Paul Gauguin, *Self-Portrait*, 1885, oil on canvas



Edvard Munch, *Girls on a Bridge*, c. 1904, oil on canvas



Joan Miró, *Portrait of Heriberto Casany*, 1918, oil on canvas



Claude Monet, *Weeping Willow*, 1918–19, oil on canvas

See the next page for a featured artwork from this section.

Character vs. Self



Paul Gauguin, *Self-Portrait*
Oil on canvas, 1885

Paul Gauguin, French, 1848–1903

Self-Portrait

Oil on canvas, 1885

Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth

Gauguin assumed his role as renegade artist in 1885, the year in which he undertook this portrait. Then, rather than remain jobless in Copenhagen with his Danish wife and their five children, the former Parisian stockbroker decided to return to the French capital to follow his restless artistic conscience. Whether painted in Denmark, on the eve of his separation from his family, or in Paris, embarking on a new phase of his career, this painting is the first of many self-portraits in which Gauguin sought to explore his dark inner psyche.

Scientific examination of the painting has revealed that at first Gauguin portrayed himself in profile and included reproductions of his own paintings in the background. Turned to confront the viewer in the final work, he paints his image as if seen in a mirror. He seems to be crowded into an attic space with a slanted beam and cold, with the lapels of his heavy jacket wrapped together. Only his piercing eye escapes the bleak atmosphere.

Gauguin, who regularly assumed roles in his self-portraits, may indeed have intended to present himself here as a prisoner. When he later made a self-portrait for his new friend Vincent van Gogh in 1888, he explained: “It is the face of an outlaw, ill-clad and powerful like Jean Valjean [the criminal hero of Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*], with an inner nobility and gentleness. . . As for this Jean Valjean, whom society has oppressed, cast out—for all his love and vigor—is he not equally a symbol of the contemporary Impressionist painter?”

FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION / ACTIVITY

Who is this person? What is he doing? Where is he? Describe the room. How much space does Gauguin have in his new “studio”? What shapes and lines do you see?

What do you think Gauguin is painting? Where is he looking? What words would you use to describe his expression? What is he thinking?

What season do you think it is? What is he wearing? How else does the artist tell us about the temperature and comfort level of this room? Describe the colors.

What colors does Gauguin use for his face? Can you find warm colors?

Take a close look at the brushwork. What textures do you see? Describe this picture’s surface.

WRITE a daily routine from Gauguin’s point of view. How might he spend his mornings, afternoons, and evenings? How might a change in routine impact him?