

# KEY CONVERSATIONS: DIALOGUES AND COLOR

Inspired by Jean François Pierre Peyron, *The Death of Socrates*

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Grade Level 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades (adaptable for lower elementary)

## OVERVIEW

In this workshop, you will focus on the colors and the compositional details in Jean François Pierre Peyron's *The Death of Socrates* (1788). Then, you will apply basic principles to scenes from your own life by laying out your own narrative. The challenge will be portraying dynamic expressions with paper using minimal shapes and colors.

## ANTICIPATORY SET

The death scene from *Phaedo* (a dialogue written by Socrates' student Plato), which we are examining, is full of emotions expressed broadly. Socrates is surrounded by his most faithful students as he sits on a bed in a jail cell philosophizing and contemplating a goblet full of poison. He was given the choice to renounce his teachings or drink from a poisoned cup. What would you do? What are some meaningful or consequential moments of dialogue from your life? In what ways does Peyron use color and composition to heighten the drama of his image?



Jean-François-Pierre Peyron (French, 1744-1814), *The Death of Socrates*, 1788, oil on canvas, 39 x 53 1/2 in. (99.1 x 135.9 cm), Museum purchase with additional funds from The Robert H. and Mildred T. Storz Trust; E. James and Norma Fuller; Joseph and Lenore Polack; First National Bank of Omaha; The Ethel S. Abbott Charitable Foundation; Jacqueline Vrana; and Thomas and Cynthia McGowan, 1999.55

## STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will recreate a dramatic moment of dialogue
- Students will use composition and color to communicate emotion and attitude
- Students will design a multilayered composition with construction paper

## RESOURCES:

- Narrative: *The Death of Socrates* by Jacques-Louis David and Related Works, Honors Art at the Met
  - Information about David's version of the death scene in *Phaedo*: <http://bit.ly/2DcZewj>
- Peyron's biography, Peyron Teaching Poster, Joslyn Art Museum\* <http://bit.ly/2xBlxEL>  
\*available through the Nelson Teacher Resource Center at Joslyn Art Museum

## VOCABULARY:

- Eye leading
- Chiaroscuro
- Composition
- Dialogue
- Contrast

## **MATERIALS:**

- Lots of different colors of colored construction paper
- Scissors
- X-Acto knives
- Glue sticks
- School glue
- Hot glue and gun
- Matte board cut to a manageable size
- Sawtooth picture hangers

## **LESSON OUTLINE**

1. Share the story of Socrates' dramatic final hours. Briefly discuss what students would do in the philosopher's position.
2. Share a story about an important conversation from your life with your students. Ask students about important dialogues that they have had themselves.
3. As a group, isolate the elements of Peyron's image that communicate intense emotion.
4. On the board, begin to sketch the basic geometric forms that are created by the blocks of color in the piece. Have students come to the board and add more shapes to the composition.
5. Assembling the pieces is uncomplicated and getting started is easy. Simply cut a background layer of construction paper to fit the same dimensions as your matte board support.
6. Students will lightly sketch their design on their background layer in graphite and then they will begin to add layers starting with the largest areas and working down to small details. I recommend glue stick to hold everything together because it creates less rippling than hot glue or school glue, though a little bit of either can be used to reinforce thick sections.
7. To get the piece ready to hang, attach the sawtooth hanger to the back of the matte board with hot glue or school glue.
8. Students may choose to add a final border layer to create a frame for their competition.

## **EXTENSIONS**

- Geometry: Find the area of the shape that students isolate in the composition.
- Theater: Improvise a dialogue between the figures in *The Death of Socrates*.

## **CONTENT STANDARDS**

[NEBRASKA CONTENT AREA STANDARDS](#)

[IOWA CORE STANDARDS](#)