



# NASHVILLE PARTHENON EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES



# Cowan Challenge

## **Cowan Challenge**

**Mission:** To educate the public concerning the Parthenon and the civilization that built it, both in Athens, Greece, in the fifth century BCE and in Nashville, Tennessee, from 1897 to the present. To exhibit, collect, and care for objects and information related to: fifth century BCE Athens, the Tennessee Centennial Exposition, and the rebuilding of the Nashville Parthenon. To exhibit, collect, and care for visual art and to educate the public concerning its various forms.

**Program Title:** Cowan Challenge

**Target Audience:** Ages 5 - adult

**Exhibit/Gallery:** Cowan Gallery or Gallery Lobby

**Author:** Jennifer Richardson, Education and Curatorial Assistant, Parthenon

**Updated By:** Jennifer Richardson, Education and Curatorial Assistant, June 2020

**Activity Time:** Approximately 15-30 minutes

**Implementation Date:** June 2020

**Staff/Docents Needed:** 1

**Overview:** During this program visitors will be given the opportunity of selecting a card with a detail from a painting in the Cowan Collection and then going on a search to find the matching painting. This program is designed to get visitors to closely examine the paintings in the Cowan Collection and interact with them in a new way, perhaps even sharing art and inspiring looking, talking, and thinking with their group.

**Big Idea:** The Cowan Collection paintings are full of details if you look closely.

### **Goals:**

- Visitors will spend time looking at the paintings in the Cowan Collection.
- Visitors will connect with the artwork through their curiosity.

### **Objectives:**

- Visitors will acquire information about the permanent art collection at the Parthenon.
- Visitors will see paintings in the Cowan Collection.

### **Family Learning Behaviors:**

A. Family members actively join in on-going/starting program together.

*Example: "I'm going to try advanced! What are you going to choose?"*

N. Family member designs or assigns roles, responsibilities.

*Example: "You hold the card. You look for a painting with a boat."*

Q. Member/s give encouragement to continue or try again.

*Example: "Is that the same boat as on our card? Count how many sails it has. Let's keep looking."*

Y. Child asks or tells member to begin or repeat play.

*Example: "I found the beginner painting. Can I try an advanced one now?"*

**Education Standards:** This informal learning program connects to Tennessee Academic Standards for Fine Arts Education in Visual Arts (VA) for grades K-6. Depending on how the facilitator's conversation flows with museum visitors, various education standards can be met and serve as a beneficial visual arts experience for all ages.

### **DOMAIN: Respond: Foundation R1: Perceive and analyze artistic work.**

Enduring Understandings: Visual literacy is an essential life skill that can be developed through the close examination of artwork and becomes a system by which viewers understand and interpret the world. Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness,

developed through engagement with art, can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, the natural world, and constructed environments.

Essential Questions: What is an image? Where and how do we encounter images in our world? How do images convey meaning? How do images influence our views of the world? How can the viewer "read" a work of art as text? How do life experiences influence the way we relate to art? How does learning about art impact how we perceive the world? What can we learn from our responses to art?

Standard VA.R1.A & VA.R1.B:

- K.VA.R1.A Describe what an image represents.
- 2.VA.R1.A Categorize images based on determined key information and relevant details.
- 4.VA.R1.A Determine the main idea of an image, and explain how it is supported by key details.
- 1.VA.R1.B Select and describe works of art that illustrate daily life experiences.
- 3.VA.R1.B Speculate about processes an artist uses to create a work of art.
- 5.VA.R1.B Compare one's own interpretation of a work of art with the interpretation of others.
- 6.VA.R1.B Identify and interpret works of art that reveal a variety of world cultures and values.

**DOMAIN: Respond: Foundation: R2 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.**

Enduring Understandings: People gain insights into meanings of artworks by engaging in the process of interpreting art.

Essential Questions: What is the value of engaging in the process of interpreting art? How does knowing and using visual art vocabularies help us understand and interpret works of art? How do artists use expressive properties to communicate meaning?

Standard VA.R2.A:

- K.VA.R2.A Interpret art by identifying subject matter and describing relevant details while using appropriate art vocabulary.
- 1.VA.R2.A Interpret art by categorizing subject matter and describing relevant details while using appropriate art vocabulary.
- 2.VA.R2.A Interpret art by identifying the suggested mood and describing relevant subject matter while using appropriate art vocabulary.
- 3.VA.R2.A Interpret art by analyzing how use of media, mood, and subject matter shape meaning while using appropriate art vocabulary.

**DOMAIN: Respond: Foundation R3: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.**

Enduring Understandings: People evaluate art based on various criteria.

Essential Questions: What is the value of engaging in the process of art criticism? How does one determine criteria to evaluate a work of art? How and why might criteria vary? How is a personal preference different from an evaluation?

Standard VA.R3.A:

- K.VA.R3.A Explain reasons for selecting a preferred artwork.
- 1.VA.R3.A Classify artwork based on different reasons for preferences.

**Background information:**

## Cowan Collection

- What is the Cowan Collection?
  - James M. Cowan spent some of his childhood in Tennessee and considered the state his ancestral home. In 1897 he came to the Tennessee Centennial Exposition and was so impressed with the people that he met during his stay that his fondness for the state grew. James M. Cowan donated 63 paintings to Nashville. Towards the end of his life he wrote:
    - "Tennessee was my boyhood home, also the home of my forefathers... The remains of all these ancestors rest in the soil of Tennessee. Being a lover of art, having spent many years in collecting paintings, having found great pleasure in possessing and living with them, it has occurred to me that through these paintings and the gift of them to the city of Nashville, I might in my humble way express to the citizens of that State, to some extent at least, the love and reverence that I entertain for Tennessee."
  - While most of the artists were members of the National Academy of Design and well known, American art and landscapes were not especially esteemed by most art collectors. The Cowan Collection paintings were all created between 1765-1923 and form one of the best collections of American art in Middle Tennessee.
  - Due to space restrictions, only two-thirds of the collection is on display.

**How does this program tie to your gallery content and museum?** This program uses small details from paintings in the collection engage the viewer in a quest for the painting that matches their detail. Visitors often feel a sense of connection and accomplishment and tend to identify with the painting that they have discovered.

### **Ideas for Initiating Interaction:**

- This program will take place in the gallery lobby or at the entrance to the Cowan Collection.
- Times for this program will be displayed at the front desk.

### **Props:**

- Art Cart
- Stool
- The Cowan Challenge program sign in acrylic T-style holder (for Front Desk)
- The Cowan Challenge program sign in acrylic T-style holder (for Art Cart)
- The Cowan Challenge cards
- Rubber band or box for cards
- Answer sheet
- The Cowan Collection Catalog
- Cleaning supplies
- Clicker counter
- Program tracking sheet with pencil

### **Advance Preparation:**

- Gather props.
- Bring card to the Gallery Lobby or Gallery.
- Bring program sign to Front Desk, and let staff know how long you will be at the Art Cart.
- Set up program sign on Art Cart.
- Set up Beginner and Advance card stacks on Art Cart.
- Open the catalog to Ernest Lawson's *Hill and Valley* and lay the matching cards beside it.
- Set up cleaning supplies and place clicker counter in an accessible location to help track visitor interactions.

**Gathering:** How will you announce your invitation for visitors to come join you?

"Hello! Welcome to the Parthenon. Today we are doing The Cowan Challenge, come on up!"

## **Program Script:**

Hello, come on up. Have you been to the Parthenon before? **(Allow for response.)** Welcome! **(Or Welcome back!)**

The Cowan Challenge is ready for you! James Cowan **(gesture to his portrait on the cards)** donated 63 paintings to our collection. They are in the gallery surrounding our temporary exhibit space. **(Gesture to the gallery.)** You can choose either a Beginner or Advanced card and then go through the gallery to find the painting that matches the detail on your card. The Beginner cards include a detail that is a bit easier to find **(gesture to the house on the detail card and the house in the catalog)** The Advanced cards have details that are harder to spot **(Gesture to the post on the detail card and the post in the catalog)** Are you up for the challenge? Come pick your card, beginner or advanced. **(Gesture to card piles and hand them a card.)** When you come out of the gallery, I'll take your card and you can tell me if you found the match and what other details you noticed! We're reminding everyone that we don't touch the art with our hands or the cards. **(Gesture to the visual rules)** You can hold up the card to the art, but remember to leave some safe space in between. Use your walking feet in the gallery, even when you spot your painting all the way across the room. Good luck!

**(When the visitor leaves the gallery...)** Did you find your painting? **(Allow for response.)** Do you remember the title? **(Allow for response.)** Congratulations! **(Follow up with some questions.)**

- Was it a landscape? Did it remind you of a place you have visited or heard of in a story?
- What else did you see in the painting?
- How do you think the artist...made the dress look so shiny? made the waves look so big? made it look foggy?
- Did you see any people in the painting? What do you think they were doing? How could you tell they were \_\_\_\_? Did anyone else have different ideas?
- Did anyone else notice a different detail about your painting? What other details did you notice as you were searching for your match?
- What was your favorite painting in the whole gallery? Why?

**(Allow for response.)** Good work! Would you like to try again? **(Allow for response.)**

**(If they were unsuccessful...)** That is a hard one! I think you can find this painting **(give a hint as to where they can find it in the gallery)**, or I could show you the painting in our catalog.

Upstairs you will see a different type of art. There is a huge sculpture based on art from ancient Greece. See what differences you can notice! Have fun exploring! **(Be sure to clean the cards and allow them to dry before adding them back to the deck.)**

**Conclusion:** Offer a couple conclusion ideas here. Try to suggest something as a follow up, if possible.

- Did you find your painting? Do you remember what it was called? **(If they didn't see their match you can show it to them in the catalog using the number at the bottom of the card to find the correct page in the catalog.)**
- I'll be here for about 10 more minutes if you would like to try the challenge again. Have fun exploring the Parthenon!

## **Adaptation suggestions for different audiences:**

### One Family/Small program size

- Be sure to include the adults as well as the children. They might need to be reassured that the challenge is for all ages. Encourage taking multiple cards and working together if needed.

### For younger/preschool audiences

- Younger kids can work as a team or pair up with one of the adults. Be mindful that it will be hard for our youngest visitors to see the catalog and cards on the Art Cart, so holding up cards for examples might help include them in the challenge explanation.

### Larger groups (who may wish to participate but have limited time or space)

- Larger groups can team up to find the match quicker. Alternatively, rather than using cards, perhaps give the group a verbal clue such as “see if you can find a dog named Rab” or “see if you can keep count of how many animals are in the Cowan Collection paintings” might be an appropriate alternative.

#### Adults only

- Suggest Advanced cards for the adults. They might need to be reassured that the challenge is for all ages. Adults may want more information on the artist or the painting that matches their card.

#### **Following Up:**

- Self-assessment: What went well? What is one thing that didn’t go well? What is one thing you will try next time?
- Record number of visitors on the program clipboard. Return cart and materials; report any items that need repair or replacement.

#### **Resources:**

- The James M. Cowan Collection: A Catalogue. Nashville, Tenn.: The Parthenon, 1982.
- Cowan Challenge cards location:
  - N: EDUCATION\EDUCATION\GALLERY PROGRAMS\Gallery Program Cowan Challenge
- “Tennessee Academic Standards for Fine Arts.” Tennessee Department of Education. Summer 2018. P. 137-166.
  - [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/standards/art/Fine\\_Arts\\_Standards.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/standards/art/Fine_Arts_Standards.pdf)
- “Curriculum and Standards.” Metro Nashville Public Schools.
  - <https://www.mnps.org/curriculum-and-standards>

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