



Storytelling Through Art

FOCUS QUESTION

How do people tell stories through the arts?

NOTICE AND WONDER

Look at the three texts you will read in this lesson. What do you notice? What do you wonder? Discuss your ideas with a partner.

DISCUSS ART AND TRADITIONS

What types of art, music, and dance are traditions in your family or community? Talk with a partner about what you know about them.

The art form ___ is a tradition in my family/community.

This art is important because ___.



Hula: Keeping a Tradition Fresh

by the staff of the
Smithsonian Museum

The Roots of Rap

by Alicia Williams



Cy Thao: Story Painter


by Missy McDonald



Hula

Keeping a Tradition Fresh

by the staff of the Smithsonian Museum

- 1 Aloha! Welcome to Hawaii (also spelled Hawai'i), the home of a special dance called the Hawaiian hula. Some might think it's just a dance performance for tourists, with grass skirts and swaying hands. But the hula is actually a kind of storytelling that helps keep the original Hawaiian language alive.
- 2 Hula has been a part of Hawaiian culture since ancient times. The oldest form of hula involves chanting, drumming, and dance, including hand motions. The chants have been passed down for generations. Hula was a way for Hawaiians to share stories about their history and culture before they had written records. Each chant tells a story about the people's beliefs, values, and history.
- 3 When Christian missionaries from New England arrived in Hawaii in the 1820s, the Hawaiian language existed only in spoken form. Throughout most of the 19th century, the missionaries made Hawaiians speak English in schools, and they **banned** hula. Over time, fewer and fewer native Hawaiian speakers remained. 

banned = refused to allow

Stop & Discuss

What is the purpose of the Hawaiian hula?

Underline two sentences that explain why Hawaiian people hula.

The Hawaiian people use hula to ____.

4 Thankfully, the Hawaiian language and hula were not lost. In the 1960s, the Hawaiian culture **preservation** movement began with people like Edith Kanaka'ole who work to keep Hawaiian traditions alive. The hula school that Kanaka'ole's family opened is one example of this effort to save the culture. Students at the school spend years learning hula in its many forms.



Learning hula is an important part of Hawaiian tradition.

5 Even though hula has very old roots, the dance is continually **renewed** with fresh ideas. For example, one newer style of hula uses stringed instruments. Some people believe that new music and new chants help keep the tradition alive.

preservation = to help keep something from being lost

renewed = given new strength

6 George Na'ope, a master hula teacher, believed that learning hula was very important. He said, "I tell the young people to learn the culture and learn it well, preserve it, so their children and their children's children can continue ... and that our culture will live forever."

Stop & Discuss

How does Edith Kanaka'ole's school help keep Hawaiian traditions alive?

Underline two sentences in the text that answer this question.

Hula Hand Motions and Meanings

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| | | | |
| Nana: see, look—one hand by the side of your eyes and the other outstretched | Hale: house—two hands making the peak of a roof | Pua: flower—palm with hand cupped and fingers together | Ua: rain—both arms raised and then brought down with fingers fluttering |





Describe Text Structure

- **Text structure** is the way an author organizes information in a text.
- A text organized by **chronology**, a type of sequence, lists important events in order of when they happened. Look for signal words such as time-order phrases and dates.
- A **compare-contrast text structure** is a text organization that describes how two or more things are alike and different. Look for signal words such as *however, both, similarly, different, and in contrast*.

Reread/Think

Reread “Hula: Keeping a Tradition Fresh.” Review the key events in the chart. Fill in the chart with signal words that help you know how the information is organized. Then write the text structure.

| Key Event | When |
|--|--|
| Hula has been a part of Hawaiian culture since ancient times. The oldest form of hula involves chanting, drumming, and dance, including hand motions. (paragraph 2) | This event happened FIRST because of the signal words... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ancient times • oldest |
| In the 1820s, missionaries came to Hawaii. Throughout most of the 19th century, they made Hawaiians speak English in schools, and banned hula. (paragraph 3) | This event happened NEXT because of the signal words... |
| In the 1960s, a Hawaiian culture preservation movement began with people like Edith Kanaka’ole, whose family opened a hula school to save the culture. (paragraph 4) | This event happened LAST because of the signal words... |

TEXT STRUCTURE: _____

THE ROOTS

by Alicia Williams

colonized = took control of a region

influenced = affected

Stop & Discuss

How is rap connected to griots?

Discuss your response with a partner.

- 1 You may have *heard* rap, but what *is* rap? It's like poetry, using rhythm and rhyme. But rap is spoken over music.
- 2 Rap developed in the 1970s, but its roots are much older than that. In fact, rap can be traced back to the griots, or storytellers, of West Africa in the 13th century.
- 3 How is rap related to griots of long ago? In the 1700s and 1800s, Europeans **colonized** West Africa. They enslaved millions of West Africans, including griots, and brought them to the Americas, including the United States. Griots took their storytelling tradition with them. This tradition later **influenced** Black musical styles, including rap. 🖐️




Griots often used music to tell their stories.



OF RAP

A Storytelling Tradition

4 In West Africa, griots had an important place in their society. Their main job was to memorize stories and share them with the people of their villages. Griots shared stories with more than their words, though. They used songs, drums, stringed instruments, and dance to **enhance** their stories and entertain their audience. Like griots, the rappers of today tell stories through their words and music. However, most rappers don't play their own musical instruments. They need **DJs**, a band, or sound experts in a recording studio to provide the background of sounds for their rhythmic, rhyming, and repetitive lyrics.

5 Rhythm and repetition were also important parts of griot storytelling. Griots would repeat important words and sentences in their stories, and the audience would repeat them back. Why? Repetition helped both griots and villagers remember information more easily. 

enhance = improve

DJs = disc jockeys; people who introduce and play music on the radio or at dance clubs

Stop & Discuss

In what ways are griots and rappers alike?

Discuss your response with a partner.



**WEST
AFRICA**

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Rappers work with DJs and use technology to tell stories through words and music.





Modern-day griots continue to share current events as well as historical and political information.

politics = actions or beliefs related to government

Stop & Discuss

What are rappers trying to do with their music?


Discuss with a partner the different purposes and goals behind rap performances.

Rappers use their music as a way to ____.

Entertainment with a Purpose

- 6 Griots' stories were entertaining, but they often included a moral, or message, that showed a village's social beliefs. Griots also told the history of important people of the past, such as kings and queens. They memorized and kept track of villagers' birthdays, marriages, and other important family events. They informed people about **politics** and problems in their village.
- 7 Similarly, many rappers educate their listeners about social problems. Black and Latinx youth from New York City created rap as part of the art, music, and dance of hip-hop culture. Rap allowed them to communicate their stories in creative ways. Rap was also a way to share their struggles with others. Rappers have spoken about serious subjects such as crime, poverty, and politics. They have expressed the importance of taking care of people in the community and staying strong in difficult times. But rappers can be playful, too, and create songs that are simply entertaining.

More Alike than Different?

- 8 There are important differences between griots and rappers. While griots shared their stories by traveling from village to village, rap artists perform both in their local communities and at concerts for larger crowds. Rappers also use radio, television, and social media to communicate with audiences.
- 9 Still, griots and rappers have a lot in common. They are storytellers and artists who pass down stories, knowledge, and history from one generation to the next. 



Describe Text Structure

- Remember, text structure is the way an author organizes information in a text.
- A text organized by chronology describes events in the order they happened.
- A text organized by compare-contrast text structure describes how things are alike and different.

Reread/Think

Reread "The Roots of Rap." Add details to each column of the chart. In the last row, write words from the text that signal similarities or differences.

| Griots | Both Griots and Rappers | Rappers |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| From West Africa | Tell stories through words and music | Grew out of hip-hop culture in New York |
| Signal Words: differences, while | Signal Words: | Signal Words: |

TEXT STRUCTURE: _____



Cy Thao

Story Painter

by Missy McDonald

- 1 Cy Thao has a powerful story to tell. Like that of many immigrants coming to America, his experience was full of both **hardship** and hope.
- 2 Born in 1972, Thao was only two when his family had to leave their home in Laos, a country in Southeast Asia. A war had made the country unsafe, and many Hmong people were forced to escape. Thao's family traveled to Thailand, where they spent five difficult years in a Hmong refugee camp. Finally, in 1980, they were able to immigrate to the United States. St. Paul, Minnesota, became their new home.
- 3 At the age of eight, Thao had to adjust to a new life. Everything was different: sounds, smells, tall buildings, technology. Hardest of all, though, was having a new language to learn. Not knowing English made it difficult for Thao at school. But he was determined to communicate. So he drew pictures and gave them to his schoolmates. Slowly, he made friends.
- 4 Years later, as an adult, Cy Thao decided to tell the story of his people's experiences as immigrants in the U.S. But the Hmong people didn't have a written language. He asked himself, "How do you tell a story without words?" Then Thao remembered his childhood drawings. He remembered friendships made without words. And so Thao became a painter.

hardship = a difficult situation



resembles = looks like



Thao's paintings tell stories about the Hmong community in the U.S.

adapt = get used to a new situation

5 Each of Thao's paintings **resembles** a quilt square, and each one tells a story about the Hmong experience. Many of the paintings describe a part of his own journey. Others show bigger ideas about change and hope: business opportunities, fun sports tournaments, and education.

6 Thao's paintings honor an ancient Hmong tradition called *paj ntaub*, or "flowering cloth." Long ago, Hmong women hand-stitched beautiful, colorful designs onto clothing. In the 1970s, Hmong women in refugee camps began to sew other kinds of images onto fabric. The women used needlework to tell stories of their experiences through their craft.

7 Thao uses his paintings in a similar way. Like the story cloths of the past, his artwork includes bright, detailed images that show important experiences. But his paintings focus on more recent Hmong experiences, and his stories are told with a paintbrush instead of a needle and thread.

8 Thao is helping his people by using an old tradition in a new way. As he points out, "To keep the culture alive, we have to **adapt**."



Respond to Text

Reread/Think

Reread "Cy Thao: Story Painter." Choose the best response to each question.

1. PART A

Which **best** describes how paragraph 2 is organized?

- A. It describes events in chronological order.
- B. It describes the most important details first.
- C. It compares two events.
- D. It compares two places.

PART B

Which detail in paragraph 2 **best** supports your answer to Part A?

- A. "his family had to leave their home in Laos"
- B. "A war had made the country unsafe"
- C. "Finally, in 1980, they were able to immigrate"
- D. "St. Paul, Minnesota, became their new home."

2. What is the meaning of the word *determined* as used in paragraph 3?

- A. speaking loudly with others
- B. thinking something is impossible
- C. getting better at an activity
- D. being set on reaching a goal

3. Which sentence from paragraph 3 shows a comparison?

- A. "Everything was different: sounds, smells, tall buildings, technology."
- B. "Not knowing English made it difficult for Thao at school."
- C. "So he drew pictures and gave them to his schoolmates."
- D. "Slowly, he made friends."



Reread/Think

4. How does the author organize the information in paragraph 7?
- A. by explaining why Thao's artwork is better than story cloths
 - B. by describing recent Hmong experiences
 - C. by explaining when the Hmong began sewing to tell stories
 - D. by comparing Thao's artwork to story cloths

Write

The author uses both chronology and comparison to organize information in the text. Explain how these text structures help the author describe Cy Thao's experiences and his artwork. Use details from the text to support your response.

The cartoon tells
Thao's story and
describe his
artwork.

☐ I used details from
the text to support
my response.

☐ I used complete
sentences.

☐ I used correct
spelling, punctuation
and capitalization

WRITING CHECKLIST

- ☐ I explained how chronology and comparison helped the author tell Thao's story and describe his artwork.
- ☐ I used details from the text to support my response.
- ☐ I used complete sentences.
- ☐ I used correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.



Respond to the Focus Question

How do people tell stories through the arts?

Reread/Think

In this lesson, you have read three texts. Reread your favorite one. Then tell what you learned from that text about the different ways people tell stories through the arts.

TEXT: _____

In this text, people tell stories through art by: _____

Talk

As a small group, discuss the following questions.

What did you like about one of the ways to tell stories through art? Why?

What does this art form help people express?

I like the idea of sharing stories
through ____ because ____.

The art form ____ helps
people express ____.

Write

Which art would you use to tell a story? Why? Tell a story using that art form.