FABLES ON FURNITURE

Grade Levels: 6–10
Estimated Time: 1.5–2.5 hours

Introduction:
Sideboards were introduced in the decades following the American Revolution (1775–1783) and provided a place for dishes on their way from the kitchen to the dining room table as well as space for the display and storage of flatware, glass, and ceramics. The Art Institute’s Sideboard (see page 41) made by Daniel Pabst, created around 1880, is connected to the Aesthetic movement, which stressed the principles of refined, handmade craftsmanship. It also stressed the educational role art could play in the home, with reliance on the belief that instructional decoration could promote morality and good conduct. The decoration of the Art Institute’s Sideboard teaches a lesson about the importance of true hospitality. The cabinet door panels recount Aesop’s Fable of the fox and stork. In this cautionary tale about false generosity, the fox invites the stork to dinner and offers it broth in a shallow dish from which the stork cannot drink because of its long beak. In return, the stork invites the fox to supper and serves the meal in a jar with a long neck, preventing the fox from reaching the food.

Lesson Objectives:
• Examine a piece of fine art furniture.
• Learn the meaning and purpose of fables.
• Compose a piece of creative writing.

Key Terms:
• fable
• sideboard
• Aesthetic movement
• moral

Instructional Materials:
• pen/pencil
• notebook paper
• drawing paper
• colored pencils
• book of Aesop’s Fables

Procedures:
Discussion:
• Using image 13 or the enclosed CD, have students look closely at the Sideboard. Define “sideboard” for the class and tell students that this piece of furniture was made for someone’s home in the late 19th century. Ask: What materials were used to make this sideboard? What are the parts of this sideboard? Does it look well made? Do you see any decoration? What kind of decoration? Point out the front panels and ask students to describe what they see.
LESSON PLANS

- Tell students that this sideboard was designed by those who believed that furniture could play an educational role in the home. Explain that this sideboard uses a story from Aesop’s Fables, ancient stories that are meant to teach a moral or value. Describe the story of the fox and the stork. Ask students how the decoration on the panels illustrates this story. Also ask them why the designers might put this decoration on a sideboard instead of a different piece of furniture.

Activity:
- In pairs or in groups, have students choose a fable. (Either have several copies of Aesop’s Fables in the classroom or ask students to go to the library.) Have students read the fable and discuss its moral intent.
- Tell students they will create a drawing that illustrates their chosen fable, and that they will choose a place in a home where this image would go.
- Have each group draw a scene from their fable. Each group will present their drawing to the class, explaining their choice of fable, its moral, and the scene they illustrated. Also have them explain where this drawing would be seen in a home and why.

Evaluation:
Base students’ evaluation on their participation in class discussion, their ability to work in groups, and their class presentation.

Follow-up:
Ask students to write and illustrate their own fable based on a moral or value, such as doing homework, respecting others, sharing, etc.

Illinois Learning Standards:
English Language Arts 3
Fine Arts: 25, 27

For more detailed information on the Illinois Learning Standards, see http://www.isbe.state.il.us/ls/.