

## The Art of Teaching Languages



Students in Intermediate Spanish I, taught by Sybil Alexandrov, Senior Lector of Spanish, in the Cornelia Cogswell Rossi Foundation Gallery

The Art of Teaching Languages is a program developed by the Education Department at the Yale University Art Gallery that encourages Yale foreign-language instructors to use the museum as an alternative learning environment for their students. With its vast collection of art objects from around the world, the Gallery can provide an immersive cultural experience for students akin to conversing in Italian at the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence or in French at the Musée du Louvre in Paris. Speaking eloquently about art in a public context boosts students' confidence in their language ability and prepares them for travel adventures abroad. Furthermore, students benefit from learning about the artistic achievements of the culture they are studying.

This fall, the program kicks off its second year with a session in the Gallery devoted to model teaching, given by staff in the Education Department. All foreign-language instructors are invited to attend the event, during which the Education staff introduces the method of teaching from original works of art. The faculty receives a handout of recommended activities that invite students to actively participate rather than passively listen to a tour of relevant works. Students can create annotated drawings, write letters to pen pals, or craft their own interpretive labels—all in the language that they are studying. Grammatical concepts such as verb tenses can easily be integrated into the visit as students describe the moments

before, during, and after the scene depicted in the artwork. Discussing the variety of objects and images in a work of art expands the students' vocabulary, and the entire experience is often transformed into a writing assignment.

As a follow-up to the in-gallery session, the instructors provide feedback to Gallery staff about their experiences teaching in the museum. They share their perspectives about what was a success and where different challenges arose. These peer-to-peer conversations provide a platform for further brainstorming and point the way to future collaborations, and the interaction between the language instructors and Education staff also helps build relationships and fosters open communication, both of which are essential when jointly

crafting a lesson plan that leverages the strengths of the collection with the goals of the curriculum.

The capstone of the Art of Teaching Languages program is the integration of the themes from Yale's advanced Spanish-language course into the fall installation of the Jane and Richard Levin Study Gallery. Rosamaría León, Senior Lecturer of Intermediate

Spanish II, with the help of Ian Althouse, P.H.D. candidate, selected fifteen objects from Spanish-speaking countries to go on view. The more than 100 students enrolled in the course will spend three to four course sessions in the Levin Study Gallery, engrossed in lively discussions before works by Enrique Chagoya, Francisco Goya, and Pablo Picasso. On your next visit to the

Gallery, perhaps the sonorous melody of Spanish emanating from the fourth-floor mezzanine will transport you to the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid or the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City.



Students discuss the drawing of a painted mural from Bonampak, Chiapas, Mexico (A.D. 790–92)