

Teaching with *Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher* by Mitsuno Ishii Reedy



This document is designed to help teachers present, discuss, and teach about Oklahoma history and art literacy through the use of this work of art. The information and exercises here will aid in understanding and learning from this artwork.

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First Analysis and Criticism

The steps below may be used for group discussion or individual written work.

Before beginning the steps, take two minutes to study the artwork. Look at all the details and subject matter. After studying the artwork in silence, follow these steps:

Describe:

Be specific and descriptive. List only the facts about the objects in the painting or sculpture.

- What things are in the artwork?
- What is happening?
- List what you see (people, animals, clothing, environment, objects, etc.).

Analyze:

- How are the elements of art – line, shape, form, texture, space, and value used?
- How are the principles of design – unity, pattern, rhythm, variety, balance, emphasis, and proportion used?

Interpretation:

Make initial, reasonable inferences.

- What do you think is happening in the artwork?
- Who is doing what?
- What do you think the artist is trying to say to the viewer?

Evaluate:

Express your opinion.

- What do you think about the artwork?
- Is it important?
- How does it help you understand the past?
- Do you like it? Why or why not?

Overview of the Artwork

Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher was born in Chickasha in 1924 where she attended the segregated school of her time, Lincoln School. She married Warren Fisher in 1944 and had two children, Bruce and Charlene. After graduating from the segregated Langston University with top honors in 1945, Fisher volunteered to be the successful test case for admission to the University of Oklahoma Law School represented by NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall and Oklahoma attorney Amos T. Hall.

When denied admission on the basis of race, Fisher filed a suit asserting that she must be admitted to the OU Law School since there was no comparable facility for African American students. Losing in state courts, Marshall argued the case before the Supreme Court which reversed the lower courts in 1948. The state quickly created a makeshift law school in the State Capitol with three part time instructors and one potential student. Fisher refused to attend. Further litigation was initiated to prove the two law schools were not equal.

In June of 1949, the University of Oklahoma Law School changed its admission policy and finally permitted Fisher to enroll. After graduating in 1951 and passing the State Bar the same year, she practiced law in Chickasha. In the 50s, she became a professor at Langston University where she taught for 32 years. She earned a master's degree in history at OU in 1968.

Following her retirement from Langston University, she worked as Corporate Counsel for Automation Research System Limited in Alexandria, Virginia, the second largest African American owned computer corporation in the country at that time.

In 1981, the Smithsonian Institution designated her as one of the 150 outstanding black women who have had the most impact on the course of American history. In 1991, OU honored her with an Honorary Doctorate, and in 1992, more than 45 years after she was denied admission to the law school, Governor David Walters appointed Fisher to the University of Oklahoma Board of Regents. She died in 1995.

About the Artist

A native of Osaka, Japan, Mitsuno Ishii Reedy began her career in mid-1970's painting portraits, still lifes, and landscapes for collectors throughout the United States. She has studied with notable pastel artists Albert Handell and Daniel Greene, and oil painters John Howard Sanden and David Leffel. She was elected a full member of Pastel Society of America in 1978, an associate member of the Pastel Society of Japan (Gendai Pastel Kyokai) in 2001, has been listed in *Who's Who in the South and Southwest* and *Who's Who in American Art*. She is represented by the Howell Gallery in Oklahoma City.

History Details



1. Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher was born in Chickasha 1924.
2. The school she attended, Lincoln School, in Chickasha was segregated. She also graduated with honors from Langston University in Langston, Oklahoma, which was also a segregated school.
3. Because of the segregation laws passed by Oklahoma's first legislature, school officials who admitted a black student to a "white" school would face a penalty of fine and/or imprisonment.
4. Fisher was denied admission to the University of Oklahoma (O.U.) School of Law in 1946 because of her race. With no other school like O.U. available to blacks, she took her case to the Supreme Court and was finally permitted to enroll in 1949 after O.U. changed their admission policy.
5. After Fisher was first denied admission, it was Roscoe Dunjee who went with her to the university president to argue that she should be admitted based on educational merit.
6. In her appeal for admission to O.U., Fisher was represented by NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshal and Oklahoma attorney Amos T. Hall.
7. She graduated from the O.U. Law School in 1951 and earned her master's degree in history at O.U. in 1968.
8. Fisher practiced law in Chickasha for several years and taught at Langston University for 32 years.

History Details



9. In 1981, the Smithsonian Institution designated her as one of the 150 outstanding black women who have had the most impact on the course of American history.
10. In 1991, O.U. honored Fisher with an Honorary Doctorate, and in 1992, more than 45 years after she was denied admission to the law school, Governor David Walters appointed her to the University of Oklahoma Board of Regents.
11. In addition to all her accomplishments, Fisher was also a working mother with two children and a husband.

Painting Details



1. The image of Ms. Fisher was painted from an old black and white photograph taken of her as she heard the news of the Supreme Court's decision to permit her to enroll at O.U. School of Law.
2. The newspaper she is holding is from the day a story was published about her success.
3. The University of Oklahoma School of Law is pictured in the background.
4. The United States Supreme Court Building is shown representing where she won her case.
5. A Sipuel family portrait from 1943 is shown in the background: Travis B. and Martha Bell Sipuel are in the front row; Ada Lois, Lemuel, and Helen Marie Sipuel are in the back row.
6. The American flag is included in the painting because Fisher's stand against segregation laws impacted not only Oklahoma, but the entire nation.

Suggested Reading

Oklahoma Adventure, Centennial Edition 2006 by Oklahoma History Press
Chapter 21: 'Just a Little Police Action,' **pages 209-210**
Oklahoma Stories: More about the African-American Experience, **page 379**

Oklahoma: Land of Contrasts by Clairmont Press
Chapter 16: Wars and Baby Boomers, **page 420**

Online Resource

Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History & Culture, Oklahoma Historical Society
<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/F/FI009.html>

Final Analysis

After completing the readings and activities, go back and look at the artwork again. Now that the students are more familiar with the subject matter, ask them to write a few paragraphs about their interpretation of the artwork. In their own words, the writing should address the following:

- Description of the artwork and who/what is in it
- How the elements of art and principles of design are used within the artwork
- What feelings, emotions, or information the artwork depicts
- Their opinion of the artwork

Pass Objectives

Grade 4- Social Studies

Standard 5: The student will demonstrate an understanding of the unique features which contributed to the settlement of the state of Oklahoma.

5. Develop an understanding of and an appreciation for the cultural diversity of his or her community by examining the historical and contemporary racial, ethnic, and cultural groups of the area.

Grade 4- The Arts

Standard 2: Visual Art History and Culture - The student will recognize the development of visual art from an historical and cultural perspective.

1. Describe and place a variety of specific significant art objects by artist, style and historical and cultural context.
2. Identify themes and purposes of works of art and artifacts in history and culture.
3. Demonstrate a basic knowledge of several fields of art such as painting, sculpture, drawing, computer graphics, printmaking, architecture, and fiber arts.
4. Identify how visual art is used in today's world including the popular media of advertising, television, and film.

High School- Oklahoma History

Standard 1. The student will demonstrate process skills in social studies.

1. Identify, analyze, and interpret primary and secondary sources (e.g., artifacts, diaries, letters, art, music, literature, photographs, documents, newspapers, and contemporary media).

Standard 7. The student will examine major cultural and ethnic groups represented in Oklahoma.

1. Identify cultural and ethnic groups in Oklahoma (e.g., African-Americans, Eastern Europeans, Italians, Germans, and Vietnamese) and explore the causes and effects of their immigration and settlement patterns.
2. Trace the cultural, political, and economic contributions of these groups.

Standard 8. The student will examine factors that contributed to the political, economic, and social history of Oklahoma during the twentieth century.

1. Identify significant individuals and their contributions (e.g., Jerome Tiger, Frank Phillips, Kate Barnard, Angie Debo, Ada Lois Sipuel, Clara Luper, George Lynn Cross, Ralph Ellison, Robert S. Kerr, Henry Bellmon, and Reba McEntire).

High School- The Arts

Standard 1: Language of Visual Art - The student will identify visual art terms (e.g., content, engraving, foreshortening, mosaic, perspective)

3. Describe exhibitions of original works of art seen in the school or community.
4. Differentiate between art criticism and art reviews, recognizing that criticism is positive as well as negative in its evaluation of a work of art.

Standard 2: Visual Art History and Culture - The student will recognize the development of visual art from an historical and cultural perspective.

5. PROFICIENT: Identify major regional, national, and international collections of art.

Standard 4: Visual Art Appreciation - The student will appreciate visual art as a vehicle of human expression.

2. Demonstrate respect for their work and the work of others.