**Writing Assignment #1**

**Thinking about descriptions:**

As you begin work on your written description assignment, I encourage you to read a variety of texts to explore how descriptive language can be used.  Note that different authors have different purposes, so think about your dual goals to communicate a clear mental image of your object and to engage your reader.  Here are some samples to compare:

[MoMA (4:19](http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/audios/373/6199))  (Kirchner, Street, Dresden, 1908)

[Smarthistory at the Khan Academy (9:55](https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/early-abstraction/expressionism1/v/ernst-ludwig-kirchner-street-dresden-1908)) (Kirchner, Street, Dresden, 1908)

Here are three examples of different lengths of descriptions:

**Description 1**

Van Gogh’s *Starry Night* (1889, Museum of Modern Art) presents a nighttime landscape beneath a heavily impastoed dark blue sky filled with swirling orbs of yellow and white. **(28 words)**

**Description 2**

*Starry Night* (1889, Museum of Modern Art)presents a nighttime landscape, dominated by a heavily impastoed dark blue sky, filled with swirling orbs of yellow and white, that consumes three-quarters of the canvas. A group of tall cypress trees pushes forward in the left foreground, separating the viewer from the central vista of a small town and rolling hills in the distance. In the center of the valley, a church steeple reaches toward the sky, a stable vertical that contrast the animated clouds that stretch across the horizontal composition. **(90 words)**

**Description 3**

In *Starry Night* (1889, Museum of Modern Art), a horizontal oil painting measuring 29 x 36 ¼”, Van Gogh used short choppy brushstrokes and rich vibrant colors to create this nighttime landscape that now serves as an icon of art history. His expressive treatment of the subject evokes broad emotions ranging from melancholy to joy to the sheer tactile pleasure of Van Gogh’s paint on canvas.

A heavily impastoed dark blue sky consumes the upper three-quarters of the composition. Here, the artist’s technique shines through to suggest a fast-paced, passionate approach to art that contributes to the painting’s expressive quality. Curving lines of bright white paint stretch across the lively sky, mixing with richly toned blues and electric yellows to form clouds that swirl around the stars and that twinkle throughout the sky.  In the upper right hand corner, a large crescent moon radiates pale yellow light to create a circular halo that dominates Van Gogh’s famous sky.

Beneath this celestial commotion, we see a quiet valley where a village sits clustered around the prominent profile of a steepled church. Presumably late at night, just a few lights are visible in these small buildings that appear nestled between hills that roll gently across the distant horizon and a group of tall trees in the left foreground nearest the viewer. Like the sky, Van Gogh’s brushwork animates the trees that seem to sway as they reach toward the stars and draw our eyes upward again toward the night-time sky.  **(248 words)**

**PART 2:  ASSIGNMENT DETAILS**

**Overview:**

For this “paper,” you should write **THREE** concise, compelling descriptions of your on-line museum study object from *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection>

Your final submission should also include a digital reproduction of the object from the museum’s website. **This assignment should be handed in to me in class. No on line submissions will be accepted.**

**Directions:**

In brief passages of approximately 30, 100, and 250 words, describe your artwork as fully and completely as possible.  Don’t analyze, don’t research. Think of these descriptions as textual substitutes for the artwork itself.

**Hints:**

* Focus only on what you see.  If you can’t see it, don’t say it!  You shouldn’t include any historical information except for the name/date/accession number of the artwork.  Identify the materials if you know them, but if you don’t, simply describe their effect.
* Choose your language carefully in order to keep the description as concise, specific, and vivid as possible. Avoid technical terms or vague language. Make every word count!
* Begin the longer descriptions with the single-sentence overview and add additional detail, including artist/title/accession as appropriate.
* Establish a clear logic and organizational framework for your long description. If you are discussing a narrative artwork, make sure you summarize both the plot and describe its visual elements.
* Check the longer description for repetition and clarity; read it ALOUD to yourself.  Be sure to proofread for errors.