

Art Analysis Assignment: *Between Shades of Gray* and Munch

“I thought of Munch as I sketched, his theory that pain, love, and despair were links in an endless chain.” - Lina

Ruta Sepetys’ conscious choice to make Lina an artist and the inclusion of Edvard Munch and his work in *Between Shades of Gray* each have a profound impact on the novel. Why did Ruta Sepetys choose Edvard Munch’s artwork as Lina’s inspiration?

In a well thought out, multi-paragraph response, explore why Ruta Sepetys chose to make Lina an artist and Edvard Munch as her inspiration.

Proposed Structure:

- I. Introduction and Thesis
- II. How has Lena’s own art influenced her experiences since her family was taken prisoner? Use a specific example from *Between Shades of Gray*. How is art inspirational in this story?
- III. Choose a painting from Munch that is appropriate to *Between Shades of Gray* and copy into your Google Doc. Then, describe the painting’s parts and what you think it means. Knowing some of Munch’s background and influences might help you interpret his paintings. Reference the Munch PowerPoint if needed. Don’t just copy what others say about the painting.
- IV. Using a direct quote from *Between Shades of Gray* that involves Munch and/or Munch’s painting, explain how Lina’s experience is connected to Munch’s artwork.
- V. Conclusion

By End of Today, Begin Parts I and II

Revisit in one week and add Parts III, IV and V. Revise!

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I. The famous author John Updike once said, “Art is like baby shoes. When you coat them with gold, they can no longer be worn.” For many, art is beautiful, gilded, and pleasing to the eye. John Updike, though, reminds us that art need not be beautiful and golden to be useful and serve its purpose. Just as baby shoes are no longer wearable with a coating of gold, the most accessible and authentic art is real and true to itself. The story of Lina Vilkas in the novel *Between Shades of Gray* emphasizes this same idea: That art should and does capture one individual’s reality and does not always look shiny, golden, and bright. In this story, the author Ruta Sepytys created Lina as a young girl who loves and cherishes art. Lina adores Edvard Munch, an famous 19th century painter, but also has begun to value and nurture her own identity as an artist. **In *Between Shades of Gray*, Ruta Sepytys uses art and Edvard Munch as Lina’s muse in order to _____.**

II. Art functions as a source of relief for Lina. Early in the story, Lina..... For example, Lina remembers art at key moments in the text: “QUOTATION [from flashback]” (55). In this flashback, Lina recalls.... Later in the story, Lina speaks of the importance of art once again. She mentions that “QUOTATION HERE” (70). Lina’s reliance on art becomes more significant as the story continues. In addition, the artist Edvard Munch appears early in the text and continues to emerge and reemerge in the story. Lina explains that Munch is her favorite artist and that he helps her to see the world in a way that makes sense. She explains that Munch’s art speaks to her: “QUOTATION” (75). Munch has clearly influenced Lina and her memory of his art helps her see clearly when the meaning of life becomes difficult. Ruta Sepytys clearly selected Munch to emphasize the ways that art can help people think, reflect, and escape difficult moments.

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“The Dead Mother” 1899-1900

III. Munch’s art has a strong influence on Lina in the story; she seeks refuge and knowledge as she recalls his paintings. Munch’s painting entitled “The Dead Mother” is an especially poignant work. While this work does not appear in the story, it captures precisely the reality that Lina seeks to feel, understand, and acknowledge. This work of art depicts a young girl standing next to a woman in a bed. The title answers questions that viewers of this work may ask: Who is the woman? Is she alive? What emotions is this little girl feeling? The simple, two-word title “The Dead Mother” answers each of these questions, leaving only the details and artistry of the painting open to interpretation. Munch captures the girl’s sense of shock with his signature stance; the girl holds her hands on her face in distress just as his painting “The Scream” shows a figure with hands in a similar location. Lina’s character certainly envisions herself alongside a ill or dead family member in the story, and Munch’s painting honestly reveals this reality. The use of orange on the girl’s face and below her feet highlights her small figure; she stands in shock, but at the same time, she stands very alive while her mother, in neutral and light colors, is lifeless behind her. Edvard Munch’s own life was intimately shaped by death and tragedy; he survived childhood as both his mother and sister died of tuberculosis. This painting certainly captures both his own personal grief, shock, and survival. Just as Lina must survive in difficult conditions, Edvard Munch lived his own life surrounded by difficult moments to endure. Munch’s painting clearly captures the way that life sometimes leaves us alive and alone, facing the reality of life while people important to us have passed on.

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IV. In *Between Shades of Gray*, Edvard Munch's work influences and provides Lina with a reason to survive. His art, in all of its darkness and suffering, helps Lina to understand the world around her. As an artist, her own work shapes her experience and helps her to express herself when there is little else to think about and believe in.

V. Art plays a prominent role in *Between Shades of Gray*.