

UNLOCKING THE JUNGLE

Name: _____

Henri Rousseau (1844–1910) was a French artist who never actually saw a real jungle! He used his imagination, visits to botanical gardens, and stories from soldiers to create lush, wild worlds. His style, called Naive Art, is famous for its bold colours, simple shapes, and "dream-like" feeling.



Rousseau, H. (1891). Tiger in a Tropical Storm (Surprised!) [Painting].
The National Gallery, London, United Kingdom.

Part One: The Challenge: Look at the painting for two full minutes. Can you find 20 specific details?

- 10 Natural Objects (Plants, animals, weather):

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

6. _____ 7. _____ 8. _____ 9. _____ 10. _____

- 10 Art Elements (Textures, specific colours, types of lines, gestures):

11. _____ 12. _____ 13. _____ 14. _____ 15. _____

16. _____ 17. _____ 18. _____ 19. _____ 20. _____

Teacher's Guide: Rousseau's "Tiger in a Tropical Storm (Surprised!)"

This guide is designed to help you lead a classroom through an imaginative exploration of "dream-like realism" and narrative observation using Henri Rousseau's 1891 Tiger in a Tropical Storm (Surprised!)

Suggested grades: 3 to 6.

Phase 1: Leading the Discussion

Instead of just looking for facts, encourage students to "enter" the jungle. Use these prompts

- Senses: If you were transported inside the frame, what would you smell (wet grass, ozone/electricity)? What would you hear (the crack of thunder, the rustle of leaves)? What would you feel on your skin (cold rain, humidity)?
- Secrets: What is something in this painting that you didn't notice at first? Look into the dark corners or between the leaves. What "hidden" details did Rousseau include?
- The "Before & After": What happened one minute before this scene? What will happen one second after?

Phase 2: Analyzing Art Elements

- Line (Rhythm): The diagonal lines of the rain and the waving grass create a sense of rhythm. It makes the viewer feel the wind.
- Colour (Contrast): The bright orange and black of the tiger create a focal point against the deep emerald and forest greens.
- Texture: Notice the "sharp" texture of the leaves compared to the "soft" texture of the tiger's fur. Layering and Depth (Overlapping): Rousseau creates a sense of a dense, impenetrable jungle by overlapping shapes. Notice how the grass overlaps the tiger, and the tiger overlaps the trees. This creates a "3D" effect without using traditional perspective.
- Pattern and Repetition: The leaves aren't just green shapes; they are repetitive patterns. Every leaf has a central vein and a specific edge. This repetition creates a visual "beat" that mimics the organized chaos of nature.
- Movement (Dynamic Diagonals): Most lines in the painting—the rain, the wind-blown grass, the tiger's leaning body—are diagonal. Diagonal lines always create more energy and "action" than horizontal or vertical ones.
- Value (Light & Dark): Point out the Chiaroscuro (light/dark contrast) in the sky. The dark, ominous clouds make the sudden, bright flashes of white "lightning" feel startling and dangerous.
- Scale and Proportion: The leaves near the front are enormous compared to the tiger. Rousseau plays with scale to make the plants feel "monstrous" and overwhelming, heightening the sense of being in a wild, untamed place.

Phase 3: Analyzing the Writing

After students finish their narrative, use these additional prompts to bridge the gap between observation and integration:

- **Word Choice & Impact:** Look at the 12 words you chose from your inventory. Which specific word do you think is the "strongest"? How does that one word help the reader "see" Rousseau's jungle in their head?
- **The "Invisible" Details:** Were there any details you noticed in your list of 20 that you didn't include in your story? Why did you leave them out? This helps students understand the concept of editorial choice.
- **Perspective Shift:** You wrote your story from a certain viewpoint. If you had focused on a different detail from your list—like the lightning instead of the tiger—how would the "energy" of your story have changed?
- **Connecting Elements:** How did seeing the diagonal lines of the rain influence the "verbs" you used? (e.g., Did they use words like slashing, leaning, pelting, or whipping?)
- **Texture to Text:** Rousseau uses very sharp, repetitive patterns for the leaves. Did your writing feel "sharp" and fast-paced, or "soft" and slow? How did the artist's texture affect your writing style?
- **The "Surprise" Factor:** The painting is titled *Surprised!*. Based on the details you listed, did your story treat the tiger as the one being surprised, or the one doing the surprising? What visual evidence led you to that conclusion?

Phase 4: Background Information

Henri Rousseau (1844–1910) was a self-taught French painter known for his lush, imaginative jungle scenes. Unlike most famous artists of his time, he never attended a formal art academy and held a day job as a toll collector, which earned him the nickname "Le Douanier" (the customs officer).

- **The Imaginary Traveller:** Despite his famous tropical paintings, Rousseau never left France. He created his "jungles" by visiting the botanical gardens in Paris, studying taxidermy animals, and listening to the stories of soldiers who had travelled overseas.
- **Naive Art Style:** His work is the definitive example of Naive Art. It is characterized by a "flat" perspective, bold colours, and a childlike simplicity that ignores traditional rules of anatomy and light.
- **From Mocked to Master:** For much of his life, critics laughed at his work, calling it awkward or "primitive." However, younger artists like Pablo Picasso recognized his genius, seeing him as a pioneer of modern art who captured the truth of dreams rather than just the facts of reality.



Rousseau, H. (1891). Tiger in a tropical storm (Surprised!) [Painting]. The National Gallery, London, United Kingdom.

Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiger_in_a_Tropical_Storm