STEP INSIDE THE STATION

Name: _____

Rodriguez, D. (2023). Baker St [Painting]. UTA Artist Space.
Retrieved from: https://utaartistspace.com/devon-rodriguez-checklist/

Devon Rodriguez was born in the Bronx, NYC. He is a world-renowned artist famous for his hyper-realistic portraits of subway commuters. His work, like Baker St (2023), captures the quiet, "unseen" moments of everyday life. By focusing on the textures and emotions of strangers in transit, Rodriguez reminds us that every person we pass has a story as complex as our own.

Choose one person in the painting and "step inside" their world using the prompts below.

1. See: List two specific physical details about your character (clothing, posture, or items they are holding).

2. Think: What is occupying their mind in this exact moment? Are they reflecting on the past or planning for the future?

3. Feel: What is their current emotional state? Use visual evidence from the painting to support your answer.

4. Care: What is a core value or personal goal this person is holding onto? What matters most to them?

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After completing your "Step Inside" analysis, use these questions to discover how the artist used specific art elements to tell your character's story:

1. Lighting and Mood (Value) Look at the shadows on your character's face and clothing. Does the harsh overhead lighting make them look tired, mysterious, or deep in thought? How does the light help show their "Feel" or "Think" from the previous section?

2. Composition & Space (The "Crowded" Feeling) The artist "crops" the edges of the painting tightly, making the train car feel small and packed. Does this closeness make your character feel safe and cozy, or trapped and overwhelmed? How does the Space around them change their story?

Using the drawing by Rodriguez, draw the space where this person is sitting and consider what they think, feel, and care about?

Teacher's Guide: Devon Rodriguez's "Baker St"

This guide is designed to help you lead a classroom through a contemporary exploration of empathy and "urban solitude" using Devon Rodriguez's 2023 painting.
Suggested grades: 6 to 9.

Phase 1: Leading the Discussion

Use the See, Think, Care model to move students from observation to deep, empathetic characterization.

1. See: Ask, "What are the physical facts?" (A woman in a red coat, a man with a backpack, the reflection on the train walls, the specific 'Baker St' tiling).
2. Think: Ask, "What is the story of this commute?" (Is it 8:00 AM or 11:00 PM? Are they going to work or going home? How does the artist use light to show their thoughts?)
3. Care: Ask, "What motivates these people to keep moving?" (This shifts the focus from "what they are doing" to "who they are.")

Phase 2: Analyzing Art Elements

- The Focal Point (The Red Coat): Notice how the woman in the red coat stands out. In a world of grey and steel, her colour represents a "spark" of humanity. Ask: Why did the artist want our eyes to land on her first?
- Hyper-realism: Rodriguez paints with such detail that it looks like a photograph. This technique makes the viewer feel like a "voyeur" or an observer who is actually standing in the train car.
- The "Gaze": Notice that almost no one is making eye contact. This represents the "invisible walls" we build in crowded cities.
- Composition: The tight, crowded framing mimics the physical closeness—yet emotional distance—of city life.
- Lighting (Value): Observe the high-contrast lighting. The bright overhead "fluorescents" create deep values (shadows) under the eyes and chins, adding a sense of weight, fatigue, or drama to the faces.
- Space (Proximity): The artist uses a tight crop, placing the viewer directly inside the carriage. This creates a sense of "enforced intimacy," where we are physically close to people we don't actually know.

Phase 3: Historical & Social Context

1. The Tradition of "The Flâneur"

- Historically, artists like Edgar Degas or Honoré Daumier (and later, photographers like Henri Cartier-Bresson) acted as flâneurs—observers of modern life who wandered cities to capture "candid" moments. Rodriguez continues this tradition in the 21st century.

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- Social Context: In the 19th century, this meant sketching people in cafes; today, it means sketching people on the London Underground or the NYC Subway. It represents the transition of "public life" from town squares to transit systems.

2. Urban Solitude and the "Commuter Mask"
- The painting explores a social phenomenon called civil inattention. This is the unspoken rule in big cities where people acknowledge each other's presence but avoid eye contact to respect privacy in a crowded space.
- The "Phone as a Shield": Notice the passengers looking at phones or staring into space. Historically, commuters read newspapers; today, technology provides a digital "wall" that Rodriguez meticulously paints, highlighting our modern struggle to connect.

3. The "Post-Pandemic" Gaze
- Created in 2023, this work reflects a world that has recently returned to crowded public spaces. After years of social distancing, the physical closeness of the Baker St carriage feels different. There is a lingering sense of caution and a heightened awareness of "personal space" that Rodriguez captures in this painting.

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