

LOOK, THINK, READ, and TALK: A Guide for Parents

Lion and Tiger Hunting: Things to talk about with children

This is a very big picture, with a lot of action going on in it. Some of the things the artist has included might be alarming for younger children. Talking over some of these issues may help.

What's happening?

The picture shows men on horseback with various weapons in a big brawl with wild cats. On the left, two partially dressed men are wrestling with a lion; one of them is trying to pull the lion's jaws open. In the center of the picture, a tiger is fighting back, biting the shoulder of the man on the rearing horse.

The artist, Peter Paul Rubens, probably never saw anything like the scene in his painting—in fact, the event probably never happened at all. This kind of work is called a *fantasy painting*, because it depicts a fictional, rather than historical episode. Aspects of the picture are, however, very realistic, and may have been based on the artist's observations and experiences.

Who would have wanted a picture like this?

Rubens was one of the most famous artists in the world and his paintings were prized possessions—status symbols for the people who owned them. Maximilian, Duke of Bavaria commissioned this painting and other hunting scenes from the artist. Owning paintings like these would have shown that Maximilian was a wealthy, well-educated person with good taste.

Maybe your family has objects or pictures at home that reflect your interests, or are souvenirs of places you've visited—precious or special things that you like to display or show to your friends.

Who are the people represented in the picture?

There appear to be people from at least three different backgrounds or cultures in the painting, but they all seem to be working together, with the same purpose in mind. Looking at their costumes and actions could provide an opportunity to talk with children about people from different places and different cultures who have different traditions, but who share some of the same interests or values.

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Is there a place where lions and tigers and leopards might have lived together in 1616?

In the 1600s, lions, tigers, and leopards ranged from eastern Turkey to western Iran, though each of these species lives in different regions now. Large cats were more abundant in those days, before people started using firearms to hunt them. Even though scientists have helped us study and understand the behavior of different animals, predators can still be frightening to the human beings who live close to them. Despite efforts to protect them in the wild, the poaching of big cats continues today. Discussing these issues with children could foster conversations about how people and animals might live together comfortably (or not), and how some species have been hunted to extinction.

Is the picture scary? What can we learn from looking at it?

The theme of the *Kidspace* exhibitions this year is *curiosity*. This picture demonstrates curiosity in a number of different ways: the artist's curiosity about how to paint a subject he probably never saw, the patron's curiosity about an exotic and dramatic scene, and the general curiosity about the ways human beings and animals move and interact.

Works of art, like movies, TV shows, and even fairy tales, can sometimes represent or describe dangerous activities or situations. We might enjoy seeing frightening scenes or reading thrilling stories because they provide us with the opportunity to explore different experiences and feelings—without being in any danger ourselves. This picture is rich in sensory details, and one can imagine how being in this scene might feel, sound, or even smell in real life.

A painting like this can offer an opportunity to talk about issues like hunting, fear, and how to cope with scary feelings. It might be interesting to talk about the relationship between curiosity and fear, and the desire to explore things we don't know, even if those things might be a little unsettling. There are even times when we might enjoy being frightened of the things we are curious about, especially if we know that we are really quite safe.

Looking at and thinking about art with your children provides an opportunity to talk about serious topics—conflict between humans and beasts, power and powerlessness, even life and death—without necessarily having to experience these issues first hand.

Think again about the title of the picture: *Lion and Tiger Hunting . . .*

“Who is doing the hunting—the people, or the animals?” and/or “Who’s going to win?” could be interesting questions to discuss with children. There are no right or wrong answers, but encourage your child/ren to support their opinion with visual evidence from the picture.