

# A picture is worth a thousand words

[Art & Culture](#), [Painting](#)



The year is 1612. A girl has just been raped. She rushes home. She finds a dagger. The girl is overwhelmed by guilt. To protect her family honor she takes her own life. This story is depicted in a single painting by the famous artist Rembrandt. It depicts a girl with a knife plunged through her stomach. The blood ruining her white dress. Her family is running down the steps in the background, but they are too late. The girl is dead. Imagine discovering that your daughter has been raped and that she has taken her own life. The raw emotion would be crippling. Imagine that a painter could take the guilt, anger, sadness, frustration, and every thing you felt at that moment and put it on a canvas. That is what Rembrandt did. A picture is worth a thousand words. Last winter I visited the Rembrandt exhibit in Raleigh at the North Carolina Art Museum. It featured the largest collection of Rembrandt paintings ever presented in an American exhibition. One of the most famous paintings was “ The Suicide of Lucretia”. That is the painting I just described to you. That girl’s death led to a revolt that overthrew the monarchy and established the Republic of Rome. Rembrandt took great strides to express Lucretia’s mental feelings. It showed her family honor, virtue, and duty all through her eyes and facial expression. This painting not only expresses the emotion of the moment but also the story that this girl’s life, made on the world. This is why Rembrandt is considered one of the finest Dutch Realist artists. This historical painting is of enormous power and emotion. When I was younger, there was an art museum in Fayetteville. My younger brother enrolled at one of their summer art enrichment camps. One day, my mom and I were waiting to pick up my brother Alex. We decided to tour the museum briefly while we waited. As we walked through the small museum I

noticed a saying on one of the walls. It said, "A picture is worth a thousand words." I didn't really understand the cliché at the time so I did what all young kids do and I asked my mom. She explained to me that it was a cliché and what a cliché was. My mom taught me that this cliché meant that a picture could tell a story the same way that words do. She compared it to the cover page of a book. She said that the cover page gives insight (another word she had to explain) into what will happen in the story. In that way a picture told a story that was worth a thousand words. I left the museum that day with an appreciation for art, a greater vocabulary, new knowledge, and even more admiration for my mom. It is a timeless cliché. A picture is worth a thousand words. It is one of few clichés that still rings true. A picture can take in a scene, tell a story, or explain the true emotion behind an event. Famous artists through time have created paintings that were worth much more than just thousand words. Van Gogh and his "Starry Night". Monet with his "Impression Sunrise". Leonardo Davinci with his "Mona Lisa". The "Mona Lisa" was insured at \$100 million dollars. This was in 1962. If you account for inflation, then the painting today would be worth \$645 million. A Painting is worth a thousand words, but that price is enough to leave me speechless. I still believe that a picture is worth a thousand words; however to prove this cliché we have to evaluate the price of a thousand words. But are they a thousand random words? Words from the bible? From a famous speech? Martin Luther King Junior's "I Have a Dream" speech has a little over a thousand words. This speech was pivotal in the Civil Rights movement; but you can purchase it online for around \$8. If a thousand words is only worth \$8 then the Mona Lisa far exceeds the worth of a thousand

words. The same goes for Rembrandts piece. I believe that a picture is worth a thousand words and that the worth of the words is in the story they tell and what they mean in your heart. I believe that the cliché shows how works of art can be priceless. Whether the picture costs \$20 at your neighborhood art store or is insured for \$100 million, that picture can tell a story which is worth a thousand words. This cliché derives from an original Chinese proverb; however the proverb was translated incorrectly. Correctly translated, the Chinese proverb says that a pictures meaning can express ten thousand words. I believe that a picture is worth an infinite amount of words. A picture can express emotions better then any words. Fear is best expressed in the painting " The Scream". " The Scream" expresses fear better then the word fear does. It would take a thousand words to describe that single emotion, but one painting expressed fear easily. Rembrandts piece expresses many emotions. So it describes more and is worth more than just a thousand words. Paintings describe emotions and tell stories better then the most influential and experienced writers of our time. People say to not judge a book by its cover, but I think that its cover could tell the story better then the book. Some argue that a book is better then a movie, but it takes days to read a book and only hours to watch a movie. Movies still have words though. To understand the full capability of a picture to tell a story we can look at silent films. The three stooges tell a story for comedic purposes without the use of words. Pictures seem to tell the story more efficiently. I conclude that the cliché, a picture is worth a thousand words, is still true. I think it is more than true. It is accurate and insightful. Pictures can describe emotions, words, and tell stories. It takes authors chapters to set up

a setting when a painting's setting is all around it. It is incorporated into the piece. It is a part of the painting. Pictures are a form of expression that is briefer but deeper than any collection of words could ever be. A picture is worth a thousand words.