



Roz Chast, Cartoonist

Drawing From Life

Lesson Introduction

Interview Log: Interviewed on September 6, 2022 by Nancy Steiner

- Access *The Thread* episode of Roz Chast on our [YouTube channel](#) or at [LifeStories.org](#) and download the transcript [here](#)
- Access her long-form interview on [LifeStories.org](#) and download the transcript [here](#)

Learning Objectives

Social Studies Focus

- Explore the freedom of expression and of the press
- Discuss the role of art, and cartooning specifically, as social commentary

English Language Arts Focus

- Inspire students to tell their own stories through cartooning
- Examine perspective taking from the point of view of one artist
- Explore the idea of purposeful work and a meaningful life
- Use Roz Chast's episode as evidence to write a rhetorical argument, commentary, or synthesis essay

Episode Overview

Roz Chast reflects on growing up as an anxious child of immigrants with overprotective parents and weird sense of humor influenced by cartoonist Charles Addams. Chast discusses the challenges of aging, the importance of pursuing what you love, and examines how storytelling emerges as a way to make sense of life, connect with others, and express empathy.



Biography

Roz Chast is an American cartoonist and a staff cartoonist for *The New Yorker*. Since 1978, she has published more than 800 cartoons. Roz Chast's work has appeared in numerous magazines through the years, including *The Village Voice*, *National Lampoon*, *Scientific American*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Redbook*, *Mother Jones*, and *The New Yorker*. Chast attended the Rhode Island School of Design, where she studied painting. After graduating in 1977 she returned to New York City, where she quickly established her cartooning career. In addition to collections of her *New Yorker* cartoons, Chast has written and illustrated a range of books. Her latest, *Going Into Town: A Love Letter to New York* (2017), a personalized travel guide to New York City that began as a going-away present to her youngest child, who was moving from the family's home in Connecticut for school. Chast's first memoir, *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* (2014) won a National Book Critics Circle Award and was shortlisted for a National Book Award.



Teaching Tip: First Take

A **First Take** is a warm-up writing or conversation exercise created uniquely for **The Thread** that strengthens media literacy skills. Like an opening song in a musical, the first stanza of a poem, or even the first impression one person makes on another, the First Take asks students to reflect and share their initial thoughts and feelings about the episode's opening.

Suggested Steps

- Read the opening of Roz Chast's episode aloud to students:

"Storytelling connects things. It's kind of like, Well, I'm here. I don't really know why. I don't know how I got here. I don't know where I'm going from here, although I do know I'm going to take the 1 (train) down to 72nd Street after this. But in general, you know, it's a mystery."



- Ask and Discuss:** What do you learn about Roz Chast from these opening sentences? What insights can you infer?

- Next,** have students do a one-minute quick write reflecting on what she shared or have students get into pairs and share their thoughts and feelings about this opening.

- Last,** as a class discuss the reasons they think the filmmakers choose this opening for the episode?





Teaching Tip:

THE THREAD Up Close

After watching the interview, have students debrief her life story with these suggested questions:

- ▣ How do you interpret the title for Roz Chast’s episode, “Drawing From Life”?
- ▣ If Roz Chast were in the room, what question would you like to ask?
- ▣ In what ways did you connect with her story?

After discussing, have students return to **The Thread** episode and engage students in a close read and analysis of her interview using the video and transcript. Depending on the lesson, question, or theme you are aligning **The Thread** with, have students annotate the transcript, select passages that reflect the assignment, and explain their reasoning in class.

Here is an example of a THREAD connection: If you are exploring coming-of-age, highlight how Roz Chast shares a point of view about her childhood and her relationships with her parents that is often not discussed:

“I was anxious. I was a hypochondriac. I wasn’t sure about other children. I loved to draw. I had a weird sense of humor. I was very angry and depressed. And I was waiting to get out. I was waiting to grow up. I couldn’t wait. Couldn’t stand my parents. Terrible thing to say, but true. You know, my mother was super strict. Super strict, very rigid. And my father was a sweet man who just could not stand up to her. So, you know. I was just waiting to grow up and get out.”

Connections

- ▣ What are things that give you insight into yourself?
- ▣ How do you navigate life’s challenges?
- ▣ When you have conflict at home, how do you manage your emotions?
- ▣ What are ways you express your voice that help you through tough times?
- ▣ Where do you find inspiration? What makes you laugh?
- ▣ What are you passionate about?
- ▣ What new insights did you gain about (yourself, your community, your world) from her humor, her work, her creativity, and her life story?



Photos: Cartoon drawing of girl looking at book Diane Arbus at MOMA. left; Cartoonist Roz Chast, Jan 1, 1986. right



Activity: Drawing From Life

Start your conversation about Roz Chast by sharing this question and her response:

Interviewer: “When you look at your life, where do you feel you have learned the most?”

“I think it is really important to figure out what you love. To have something that deeply, deeply engages you. Hopefully it is something that can be there for your entire life. Knowing that it was important to not just do whatever, but to have a passion. My father, it was languages. My mother, it was music and teaching.”

She goes on to share that the celebrated cartoonist [Charles Addams](#) was an enormous inspiration and influence on her life as an artist.

“The other thing about Charles Addams that when I discovered him, I was about eight or nine, was that his cartoons had children in them. So, you know, Wednesday and Pugsley, they didn’t have names when they appeared in *The New Yorker*. They only got names for the TV show, but most *New Yorker* cartoons didn’t have children, and these were very unusual children.”

Create: Have students explore creative expression of voice and perspective by creating their own cartoon on a topic of their choice. Encourage students to explore the work of Chast’s favorite cartoonists, such as [Ed Koren](#) and [Helen Hokinson](#), [Charles Addams](#), [Gahan Wilson](#), [Mary Petty](#), [Victoria Roberts](#), [Emily Flake](#), [Ed Steed](#), and [Liana Finck](#).



Additional Resources

- Learn more about Roz Chast at [Rozchast.com](https://rozchast.com).

