

Examples of ways to engage students with open-ended questions about what they are viewing:

Describe it.

What kinds of things do you see in this painting? What else do you see?

What words would you use to describe this painting? What other words might we use?

How would you describe the lines in this picture? The shapes? The colors? What does this painting show?

Look at this painting for a moment. What observations can you make about it?

How would you describe this painting to a person who could not see it?

How would you describe the people in this picture? Are they like you or different?

How would you describe (the place depicted in) this painting?

Relate it.

What does this painting remind you of?

What things do you recognize in this painting? What things seem new to you?

How is this painting like the one we just saw? What are some important differences?

What do these two paintings have in common?

How is this picture different from real life?

What interests you most about this work of art?

Analyze it.

Which objects seems closer to you? Further away?

What can you tell me about the colors in this painting?

What color is used the most in this painting?

What makes this painting look crowded?

What can you tell me about the person in this painting?

What can you tell me about how this person lived? How did you arrive at that idea?

What do you think is the most important part of this picture?

How do you think the artist made this work?

What questions would you ask the artist about this work, if s/he were here?

Interpret it.

What title would you give to this painting? What made you decide on that title?

What other titles could we give it?

What do you think is happening in this painting? What else could be happening?

What sounds would this painting make (if it could)?

What do you think is going on in this picture? How did you arrive at that idea?

What do you think this painting is about? How did you come up that idea?

Pretend you are inside this painting. What does it feel like?

What do you think this (object) was used for? How did you arrive at that idea?

Why do you suppose the artist made this painting? What makes you think that?
What do you think it would be like to live in this painting? What makes you think that?

Evaluate it.

What do you think is good about this painting? What is not so good?

Do you think the person who painted this did a good or bad job? What makes you think so?

Why do you think other people should see this work of art?

What do you think other people would say about this work? Why do you think that?

What grade would you give the artist for this work? How did you arrive at that grade?

What would you do with this work if you owned it?

What do you think is worth remembering about this painting?

Other – if you were on a deserted island for a year, which art piece would you want with you? Why?

If we want to understand a work of art, we should look at the time in which it was created, the circumstances that determined its style and art expression as well as the individual forces that led the artist to his form of expression.

“What’s going on in this picture?” can often lead to a lively classroom discussion. In order to keep the dialogue focused on the work itself, follow-up question like “What do you see that makes you say that?” or “What makes you think that?” are helpful and allow the children to support or revise their answers based on their observations of the work.

**It is also important to consider that helping children to understand and to appreciate the art of others is not a matter of simply spewing forth facts and information about the work being shown. Rather, the goal of introducing children to the world of art is to help them to become perceptive and sensitive viewers of the works of art they will encounter in their lives.

Subject Matter—the people, trees, buildings, or objects and the way in which they are represented.

Sensory Qualities—the lines, colors, shapes, values, or textures in the work and how they are organized through harmony, variety, balance, emphasis, and unity.

Emotional Aspects—the emotional quality, meaning, mood, or symbolism in the work and how it is achieved.

Technical Aspects—the medium, materials, processes, techniques, and style employed by the artist to create the work.

Context—the time period and culture in which the work was produced and the ways in which these aspects influenced the subject matter and techniques of communication that the artist used to create the work

Some essential questions worth exploring in art

- Where do artists get their ideas? What can we make art about?
- What can we make art out of?
- What is art? What isn't art? What is art for?
- What makes some works of art better than others? How can you tell good art from bad art? What criteria should we use?
- What work of art do I hate/love the most and why?
- Why do people make art?
- How does an artist know when a work or art is finished?
- Can anyone make art? Can animals make art?
- Should art be pleasing to the eye? Can art be ugly? Why would an artist make an ugly work of art?
- Should art make people happy? Should art tell a story? What should art do?
- Should artists imitate what they see? In what ways does art represent the world?
- Does something have to be original to be art? Can a forgery or copy be art? When is it okay to copy in art?
- What is an artist? Are artists the same in every culture?
- What are some different ways to approach art? What can we learn from studying a work of art?
- What makes an artwork good? Are standards for determining good artwork the same in all cultures?
- Does art mean the same in every culture? In every group?

Art teaches thinking skills

Looking at and talking about art encourages these thinking skills: observing, recalling, analyzing, comparing, questioning, and making choices. Learning about art helps young people form and verbalize ideas, thus fostering creative and critical thinking as well as language skills.

When writing or telling about what we see and what we experience in the presence of an artwork, we build meaning - *meaning?*

To interpret is to make meaningful connections between what we see and experience in a work of art to what else we have seen and experienced.

To look at a work of art and not interpret it is not to see it at all

Art as an event or an experience

Encourage students to consider how contemporary artists get ideas, and where their inspiration comes from. Ask them to consider the concept—the ideas, choices or decisions the artist made to create the work (such as the selection of materials, installation decisions, color or image choices). Why do they think the artist made those choices? What visual, literary and/or historical references do they see in the work? How does this work of art tell us something about the world we live in?

Emphasize process over product.

Rather than designing a curriculum with a final product or project in mind, consider different ways you can model how to develop and realize an idea. Plan backwards, to address larger learning goals that nurture critical-thinking and research skills, so that students can make meaningful works informed by well-researched and developed ideas.

Integrating contemporary art and themes into teaching requires a shift from predominantly technique-driven instruction to idea-driven instruction