

Learning to Look

1. Active Looking
2. Choices
3. Context
4. Interpretation

Use this guided looking process to slow down and take time to make careful observations that ultimately lead to deeper interpretations. Be sure to give enough time for silent looking and thinking, and be careful about making assumptions. Support ideas with visual information and include contextual material carefully. This type of discovery works best in a collaborative conversation.



1. Active Looking

Take an inventory of what you see.

- Consider texture, surface, light/shadow, color, composition, narrative, subject, and other elements of art and principles of design.
- Talk about what you notice, and try to avoid jumping to conclusions and interpretations. This step is crucial to secure a solid foundation for rich conversation.

2. Choices

What could the artist have done differently?

- Consider scale, materials, colors, subject, orientation, composition, etc.
- How would these changes affect the way we experience this work of art?
- Given the choices the artist did make, think about what they may mean for the work.
- Remember that the quality of the conversation is what is important, not finding the artist's "answer."



3. Context

What connections or associations do you have with this work of art?

- Does anything about this work of art remind you of something?
- What if you were told the title of the work or the country in which it was made?
- Act as the gatekeeper of information. Pepper the conversation with context as the students explore the work of art more deeply.
- Do you have outside knowledge that could contribute to an interpretation? Perhaps about politics, history, art history, technique, etc.?

4. Interpretation

What might the artist be trying to communicate through this work of art?

- There is not just one grand, unifying meaning for a work of art.
- Use this observation process to collectively create an interpretation using the visual evidence, context information, and group discovery.

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