

HOW TO STUDY A PAINTING

Artists paint to express their ideas and feelings that words sometimes cannot explain. Art is a language and we do not all have to speak the same words to enjoy and appreciate art objects.

We can look at each work of art by asking four main questions:

1. **WHAT DO YOU SEE?** (subject) Describe the subject matter of the work. Do you see people, flowers, animals, etc. Sometimes only shapes are recognizable such as circles, squares, or color like patches of yellow, splashes of green or lines that could be thick, thin, straight, diagonal, etc. Allow the students to express every FACT that they see!
2. **HOW IS THE WORK ORGANIZED?** (analysis) Form is the way the artist uses the elements of art and media to organize the subject. The students are still collecting facts, however your questions now center more around the elements of art, and the media used. For example, what color did you see first? Can you see any shapes in this work?
3. **WHAT IS HAPPENING?** And/or **WHAT IS THE ARTIST TRYING TO SAY?** (interpretation) Content is what the painting is really about. It is the message the artist is trying to communicate using the language of art. It could be an idea of theme such as family, or religion or an emotion like fear or love. Ask the students to use their imagination to answer the questions. As the students answer, you may interject and elaborate with actual information about the work of art.
4. **WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THIS WORK OF ART?** (judgment) Have the students give their opinions about whether they like or dislike the painting and why. Be open to their answers and encourage them to justify their ideas.

By using the four main questions with the students, they can in time learn to analyze their own works of art!