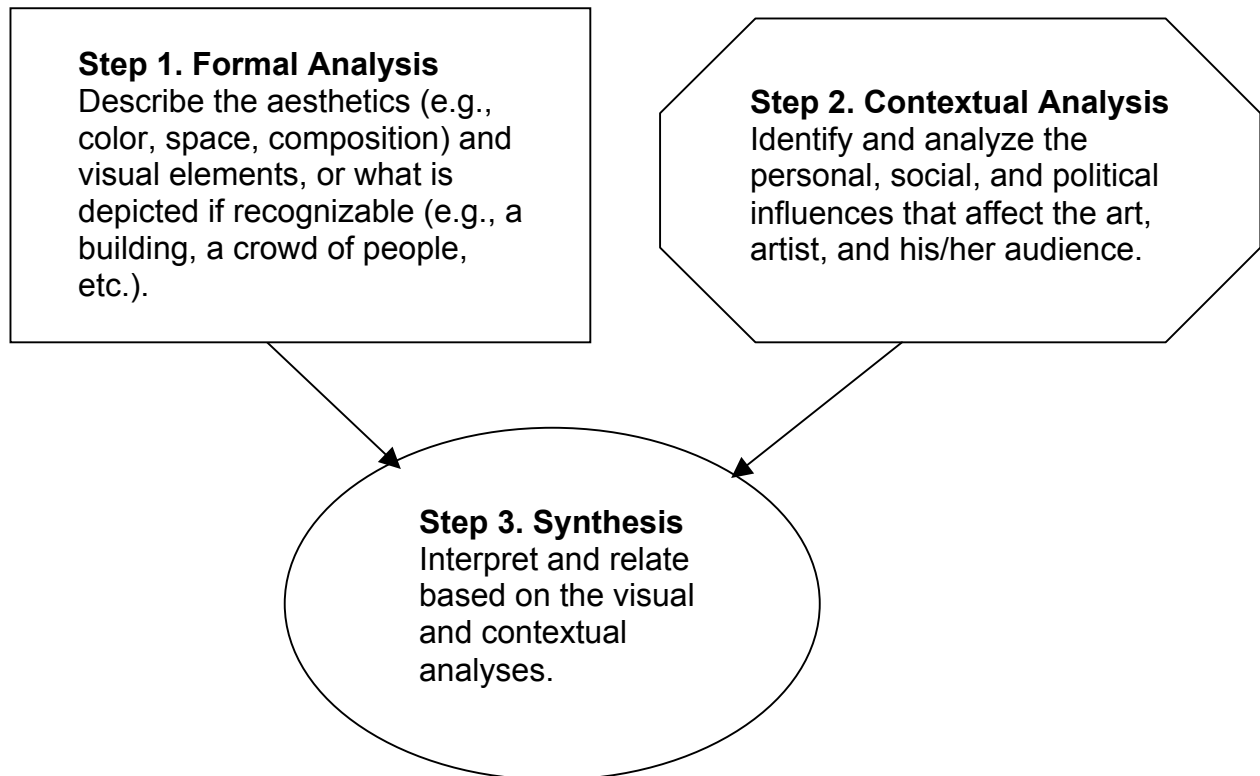


Teacher Lab

Look, Learn, Connect:

How to Interpret Art through the “Close Read”



Examples of Relevant Teaching/Learning Strategies:

- Engage and focus attention.
- Create a personal connection.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Clarify observations.
- Compare and contrast.
- Research
- Support ideas with examples and information.
- Justify inferences with examples and information.

CLOSE READ STEP 1: FORMAL ANALYSIS

Describe the aesthetics (e.g., color, space, composition) and visual elements, or what is depicted if recognizable (e.g., a building, a crowd of people, etc.).

Sample Questions:

Encourage students to spend time looking.

Look closely at this work of art for a few minutes and then we'll talk or write about what you see.

Invite students to share their observations.

So what did you see? What's going on in the image/work of art?

Help student direct their attention to things you want them to notice.

What is something you notice about ____? Describe the ____ in the image.

Help students analyze the artist's visual strategies.

What did you notice first and why?

How does the artist show us what's important?

How does your eye travel through the picture?

Notice the artist's use of line (or color, shapes, etc.). What adjectives describe the lines (colors, shapes, etc.)?

What's the overall mood of the painting? How do the lines (colors, shapes, etc.) help to create that mood?

Note: The facilitator might explain that visual elements and artistic techniques (visual strategies) are the result of the decisions the artist made about how to communicate an idea or ideas with us, his audience.

Invite students to interpret or speculate about the meaning of the artwork.

Guide students to support their responses with evidence.

What do you think the artist wanted to communicate? Why?

What's the main idea? What do you see that makes you say that?

What would be a good title for this work and why?

Encourage students to ask questions of their own.

What would you like to know about the artwork? What would you like to ask the artist?

CLOSE READ STEP 2: CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Identify and analyze the personal, social, and political influences that affect the art, artist, and his/her audience.

Note: This is an information gathering and processing step. The interpretation of the contextual information will come in Step 3.

About the TIME PERIOD

Relevant Kinds of Information:

- *At the time the artwork was made, what was happening in society, the economy, or politics that the artist was probably responding to?*
- *What do primary or secondary sources say about that time period that is relevant to understanding the artwork?*

About the ARTWORK

Relevant Kinds of Information:

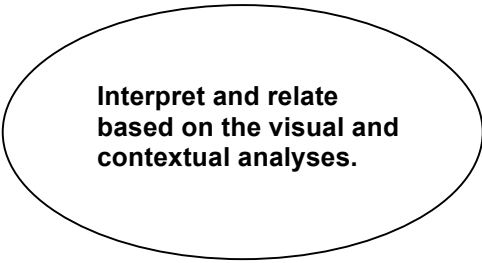
- *What is the subject? What does the artwork represent?*
- *What visual strategies did the artist use to get his/her ideas across?*
- *Did the artist write about the work? Is he/she quoted as saying anything about it?*
- *What did critics or art historians say about it?*
- *In what ways is the work a reflection of society or a product of its time?*
- *Why was the artwork made? Was it made for or commissioned by somebody?*
- *What expectations was the artist responding to?*

About the ARTIST

Relevant Kinds of Information:

- *When did the artist live?*
- *Where did he/she work most of the time?*
- *What about the artist's life experiences might have influenced or inspired him/her to make the work of art?*
- *What was happening in the artist's life when he/she made the work?*
- *What is the artist known for (what subjects or processes for example)?*
- *What was he/she most interested in exploring as an artist?*

CLOSE READ STEP 3: SYNTHESIS



From what was learned during steps 1 and 2 of the Close Read, what conclusions can you or your students draw or what connections can you make between the artwork and a larger classroom unit/lesson and/or personal experience?

Examples of synthesis questions:

Based on what you have learned, what do you think

- *the artist's message is?*
- *the artist shows about American ideas or ideals or values?*
- *about how the artwork relates to the time period?*
- *about how the artist communicates?*
- *about how this artwork relates to your experience?*
- *about how this artwork relates to stories, poems, and other artworks?*