



Teaching with Art Resource Packet

This Teacher’s Packet focuses on resources for teaching with art in your classroom.

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Why use works of art in the classroom?

- Easily complement and extend the content of many subject areas
- Support different learning styles
- Promote visual literacy and critical thinking
- Inspire group activities and individual assignments

How do I talk about art with my students?

These **TEACHING STRATEGIES** can be done in your classroom with a projected work of art, as well as in the galleries with the original object. Use them as ways to start a discussion with your students. Enrich your teaching by adding your own expertise of the time period or concept your class is studying, and by taking some time to read about the work of art, its artist, and its history.

Choosing a Work of Art

In late summer 2011, you will be able to find large-scale images on the Milwaukee Art Museum Collection website at collection.mam.org. Project these in your classroom or print them out.

Here are some ideas for themes you might use for choosing a work of art that fits your lesson or strategy:

- Choose a work from the time period covered in your lesson
- Choose a work that uses elements/principles of art or techniques you are studying
- Choose a work made in a country your students are researching
- Choose a work whose conceptual ideas match those in your lesson. Some examples could be:
 - Chinese culture—funerary ceramics, such as the [Chinese barnyard](#)
 - Nature—a landscape painting, such as one by [Henry Vianden](#)
 - Emotions—abstract expressionism, such as [Vassily Kandinsky](#)
 - Geometry—minimalism, such as [Agnes Martin](#)
 - Narrative—many representational (realistic) paintings, such as [Mihály Munkácsy](#)
 - Power—portraits of leaders, such as [Eastman Johnson](#)
 - Myths—[Greek and Roman work](#), as well as 18th century Academic art, such as [William-Adolphe Bouguereau](#)
- Compare and contrast works by different artists, from different countries and time periods, or that use different elements/techniques.
- Revisit works of art after a lesson and have another discussion, encouraging students to connect what they have learned to the work.

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)

ALL SUBJECTS/GRADE LEVELS

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is an inquiry-based teaching strategy for all grade levels. You do not need any special art training to use this strategy. The goal of VTS is not to gain historical knowledge of the work of art; instead, it encourages students to observe independently and back up their comments with evidence.

EXAMPLES

See videos of VTS in action:

<http://www.vtshome.org/pages/a-vts-discussion>

How to do VTS

1. Project artwork. Choose a work that is not abstract.
2. Ask students to look closely and silently at it for a minute or two.
3. Three questions guide the discussion.
 - Open with: **“What’s going on here?”**
Summarize student responses using conditional language. (“Suzie thinks this could be...”) This keeps the conversation open to other interpretations by other students.
 - If appropriate: **“What do you see that makes you say that?”**
This encourages students to back up their statements with things they see in the work of art.
 - Ask the group: **“What more can we find?”**
This continues the conversation.

Tips for doing VTS

- During discussion, link responses together—compare and contrast what other students have said.
- Avoid inserting information. Let students look closely and reason out their responses, rather than learn facts. If a student comes to a factually incorrect conclusion, gently correct if absolutely necessary during your classroom lesson, *not* during the VTS conversation.
- Allow the conversation to go where it will, even if it gets off topic. Remember, the goal isn’t to share information, but to encourage critical thinking.
- At the end of the conversation, continue with your lesson, linking content with comments that students made.

Inquiry

ALL SUBJECTS/GRADE LEVELS

You may already use inquiry in your teaching to encourage your students to become self-directed learners. Works of art lend themselves well to inquiry.

Here are some good inquiry questions to use with any work of art. Begin with a minute or two of silent looking, then open up the discussion.

- What is the first thing you notice in this work of art and why?
- If you were standing inside this work, what would you hear and smell? What might you touch or taste?
- If we could hear one thought from someone or something in this work of art, what might they say?
- Why do you think the artist might have made this work of art?
- What do you see now that you did not see when we first started looking at this piece? What made you notice it now?

EXTENSION
Use these questions
as writing prompts.

How can I use works of art in my established curriculum?

Works of art are excellent supplements to already established lessons. The following **ACTIVITIES** can be used as bell ringers, exit slips, for brainstorming, as writing prompts, and more. Choose a work of art that relates to your curriculum and use it with one of the activities below. Let the discussion lead the way into the day's lesson, or allow your students to choose their own work of art from a set you choose.

These activities can be adapted for all grade levels and subject areas.

You can use the collection.mam.org website to project and print large images of works of art in your classroom.

Vocabulary

- **Alpha-List** Have students write each letter of the alphabet in list form on a piece of paper. Looking closely at the work of art, have them write a descriptive word that starts with each letter. Encourage students to use their most flourishing and precise vocabulary. If they get stuck, work in pairs, then groups to flesh out the list. This exercise can be used as a warm-up for writing a poem or short story using these words as inspiration.
- **Art Dictionary** Make a classroom dictionary! As you go through your lessons, have your class decide on vocabulary words that relate to the work of art as well as your curriculum. Compile these words in a book or on a bulletin board. At the end of the unit, your class will have ownership over their own dictionary—and will likely remember the definitions better for it.

Writing

- **What's in a Name?** Have students title the work of art themselves. Why did they make that choice?
- **Persuasion** Write a letter to your grandmother or older adult in your life and explain to them why they would love this painting. Now write one to a younger sibling or younger cousin. If you had to text your letter instead of write it, how would you shorten it to the most essential point?
- **Six Word Story** Can you write a story about this work of art in exactly six words? Students may want to write a paragraph first, choose their golden or favorite sentence, and then break it down into six words.
- **A Picture's Worth a Thousand Words** Use this saying as inspiration for a writing activity: Have students free-write for 1,000 words about this work. You may want to use an inquiry question (above) as prompts for this activity.
- **Art Rap** Forget poetry—have your students write a rap about a work of art. This is a great opportunity to discuss rhythm, rhymes, and editing.

- **Act it Out** Have students choose two characters (or even objects) in a work of art and give them a voice. They should decide on personalities and write a dialogue between the two. You could also do this in the Museum galleries with multiple works of art—what might they say to each other? This is a great opportunity to introduce or develop the concept of voice in language arts.

Movement

- **Strike a Pose** Have students choose a person or object in a work of art. On the count of three, students stand and strike that figure's pose. Was it hard or easy to make the motion? Does this pose tell us anything about how that figure is feeling or what they are thinking?
- **Let's Get Physical** Standing in a circle, have each student create a movement that is inspired by a work of art. Repeat the motion as a group after each student shares. At the end, you'll have a dance inspired by the piece of art to which each student has contributed.
- **Moving Image** Adapt the "Machine" activity you might already use in your classroom to a work of art. One student begins by making a repetitive motion that is inspired by the artwork, then another student "builds" on the movement with another repetitive motion. At the end, the whole class is a moving work of art themselves.

Arts/Sketching

- **Sketch It** Sketch the work of art quickly—no more than three minutes. What did you notice that you didn't see before?
- **Before & After** What might have happened before and after the moment shown in this artwork? Students can either write short stories addressing this question, or create a comic strip to illustrate their ideas.

Research

- **Research Ready** Use a work of art as inspiration for a research project. Have students divide a piece of paper into two columns, with the headers "What we can know by looking (and why)" and the other "Questions that require research." Have them fill out the chart, making sure they back up their observations with what is going on in the work of art.
- **Museum Labels** Talk with your students about labels in the museum and how they share important information about the work of art. Have your students create their own labels. Use this as a research project to create historically accurate labels for the piece, or let them use their imaginations to create a backstory for the work. Encourage them to look closely at the piece, just like the curators do, to explain the art.

Communication

- **Call Me** Pair students; one turns to the back of the classroom, the other faces a projection of the work of art. The second "calls" the first and describes the work of art in as much detail as possible. Reveal the work; have pairs discuss what they expected to see versus what's really there.

- **Living with Art** Give students a printout of a work of art to take home and “live with”—they should hang it up in a place they’ll see it every day. What did you fall in love with? What bothered you? What do you still wonder about?
- **Create Your Own Eye-Spy** Have students make their own eye-spy for a work of art to encourage close looking. Have them exchange their eye-spy with another student. You could also have your students share the eye-spy activities with other classrooms in your school.

How do I prepare my students for a visit to the Museum?

Here are some resources created for you to prepare your class for a visit to the Milwaukee Art Museum.

- Watch the **Museum Manners video** at mam.org/u/museum-manners
This video is a fun way to talk about do's and don'ts on a Museum visit.
- Prepare your chaperones by giving them the **Chaperone Guide**, a PDF download at mam.org/u/chaperone-guide
- Use the "Planning Your Visit" **checklist** in the [School & Teacher Programs Brochure](#) to prepare for your trip.

The Museum has also created tools to help you advocate for your class trip to the Museum.

- Download a **letter to principals** from Daniel T. Keegan, Director of the Milwaukee Art Museum. mam.org/u/principal-letter
- Present this **list of Wisconsin state standards** to your administration. mam.org/u/state-standards