

Easy Approaches to Object-Based Learning

The following **2 strategies for engaging students with works of art** can be adapted to fit a wide array of student learners and instructional goals. These strategies help students build visual literacy and comprehension skills when applied repeatedly.

1. Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)

This approach uses art to teach thinking, communication skills, and visual literacy. Growth is stimulated by three things: looking at art of increasing complexity, responding to developmentally-based questions, and participating in group discussions that are carefully facilitated by teachers. Students are first asked to look at an image without talking. Then the teacher/facilitator asks 3 non-directive questions. These questions encourage students to examine what they see. Later more specific, probing and directed questions can be added. From the beginning, students are also asked to back up interpretations with visual evidence; whenever they state an opinion, teachers should ask them, "What do you see that makes you say that?"

The teacher ensures that every response is heard and acknowledged, by pointing to what is mentioned as students talk, and then paraphrasing what is said. As the discussion evolves, teachers link various related answers, helping to make students aware of their converging and diverging views, and of their developing skills at constructing shared, yet varied meanings. Discussions of any given image generally last roughly twenty minutes—long enough for students to look carefully, develop opinions, express them, consider multiple viewpoints, speculate together, argue, debate and/or build on each other's ideas, and possibly revise their conclusions. All along teachers are facilitators of the students' process, never the expert.

VTS Questions

- 1. *What is going on in this picture?***
- 2. *What do you see that makes you say that?***
- 3. *What more can we find?***

2. Wonder Questions

This strategy provides an opportunity for inquiry and the planned opportunity for research.

- Students respond to a work of art and inquire about it.
- Teachers create a list of their questions.
- Students research and construct information to share with class.
- Student questions can be used by the teacher as the basis for lesson plans.

Begin the session by asking students to look quietly at a work of art. Then, ask them to respond to the following questions:

- 1. *What do you see?***
- 2. *What does this work of art make you wonder?***
- 3. Pose follow up questions that help students think more deeply about their wonder statements. For example, *Why does that particular question intrigue you? or What information can you find in the work of art to help you answer that question? Where else could we find answers to that question?***