

Look Closely: Interpretation & Visual Art

TEP Exhibition: *All State High School Show*

Intentions

- Students will learn techniques for close looking and interpretation that can be applied to works of art.
- Students will explore multiple facets of a work of art such as the subject, object, and contextual approaches.
- Students will gain creative thinking skills to help interpret idea and concepts about the world explored through the work of various artists.
- Students will gain problem-solving skills through peer discussion, comparing and contrasting ideas from a variety of artworks.

Materials

- Scratch paper or clip boards for notes (optional)
- Access to (ideally 3) artworks that can be examined simultaneously with a group of students

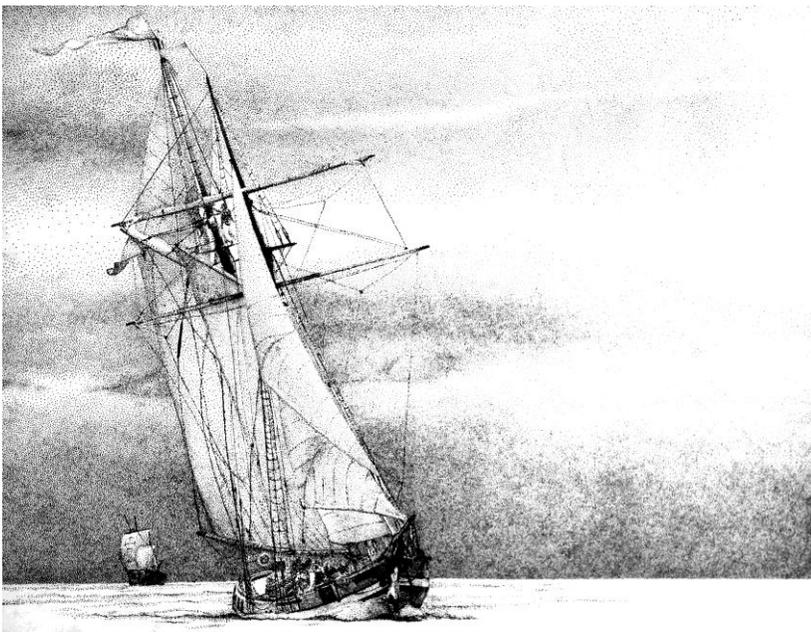
Backdrop

Artists often offer a proposition or idea about the world that is presented through an art work. By examining the formal elements of art, as well as including an exploration of ideas and concepts, students can have more meaningful encounters with artworks as they relate to a broader realm of knowledge in the world.

Current art theory tells us that artworks can have multiple meanings created by the viewer, rather than one set meaning created by the artists. This approach opens up the possibility for constructing meaning from wide variety of perspectives. Group conversation further helps to foster an extra layer of understanding.

The Traveling Exhibition *All State High School Show* provides a perfect forum to extend student confidence in viewing and interpreting artworks.

**the following approaches work best with artwork created after the 1900's. Historical artwork prior to this time often is embedded within certain conventions with more fixed meanings.*



Samuel Paul Furner, *Ocean Voyage*, Ink

Helpful Hints

All State High School Show: The work of these students provides a great format to discover what strategies the artists used to convey an image or meaning. Take the opportunity to propose alternative solutions and choices that could have been made and discuss their effects in order to explore what happened in the work and why.

Activity

Think of an artwork as having different parts to explore. Use each area as a conversation and try developing additional questions that students can explore.

- **First Impressions:** Start by describing what you see.
 - How do I feel about the work at a first glance?
 - How does my background or situation effect how I view the work?
 - What factors are contributing to how I view it? A memory; religion; experiences & background; interests; race; place I live; etc?
 - Does the work remind you of anything?
 - How do my perceptions compare and contrast to others in the group. How and why?
- **Object:** Describe the formal elements and materials.
 - What are the materials?
 - What was the process that it took to make the work?
 - Describe elements such as line, shape, space, color, texture, scale, etc. Why has the artist chosen to use these elements?
 - Ask yourself what message the work might convey if any of these elements were different. What associations or connotations do the media convey? Try replacing one element with another. For example, what if the artist used the color red instead? What does it covey about why the artist didn't make that choice?
**if you are unfamiliar with the formal elements of art visit this link for help. [Getty-Formal Elements](#)*
- **Subject:** Think of the artwork as a text or story. What is the artwork telling us?
 - What is the subject matter? What does it suggest about the work?
 - What is happening?
 - Does the artwork seem to stand for anything? Are there any symbols or objects that you recognize?
 - Is the artwork telling a story? Giving a command or a challenge?
 - How would you describe the overall feeling of the work?
- **Surroundings:** This is the context of the work. An exploration around historical contexts, current events, the public realm, and various disciplines such as culture, politics, science etc. Often, social and cultural topics are something you can detect and draw out of the work based on a visual examination of it. Our personal experiences of contextual meanings will be stronger after examining the work. Themes, references, and meanings are internalized into the viewing process, but are stronger when we discover them for ourselves.
 - When was the work created?
 - Where was the work created?
 - Who made the artwork and do we know anything about them?
 - Does the work seem to speak to any part of history?
 - Does the work seem to relate to any other subjects such as science, math, social studies etc.
 - How is the artwork displayed? Does it seem to have any significance?

Remember, our perceptions may reaffirm or contradict what we see. That's okay. Our interpretation may be varied and contradictory, but the important part is that you have arrived at them through a structured way of looking. The goal here is to have a meaningful encounter with a work of art. You may decide you like or don't like a work of art, but the important part is that you arrived at that decision and interpretation after closely looking.

Visual Arts:

- Use a visual arts form as a help in expressing an idea in a non-art subject. Students demonstrate how history, culture, and the visual arts can influence each other in making and studying works of art.

Language Arts:

-Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.*
-Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.*

Social Studies:

-Identify and consider the diverse viewpoints of the people who comprise a community.

Links to
the Core

**indicates link to
Common Core*