

ART RESPONDING WORKSHOP

**PRACTICAL TASKS TO ENGAGE LEARNERS
IN DESCRIBING AND INTERPRETING ART**

OVERVIEW

- What is descriptive writing?
- What does a *description* about an artwork contain?
- Activity to get students to describe an artwork (Years 7-10)
- Activity to get students to compare and contrast an artwork
- Useful resources for students
- Questions for non-representational, representational and 3D artworks
- Designing a mini art responding task – **optional**
- Art responding assessment model (Year 7-10) - **optional**
- Look at a VCE Art Unit 1 practical unit (Personal & Formal Frameworks) – **optional**
- Q & A

EXTRACTING DESCRIPTIVE DETAIL

What is descriptive writing?

- Vividly portrays a person, place, scene or thing (the artwork) in such a way that the reader or listener can visualise the work and 'enter' it.

What are the characteristics of writing *descriptively* about art?

- Title, date and artist of work (if known)
- Technique, materials, processes
- Elaborate use of sensory language
- Rich, vivid and lively detail
- Figurative language such as simile, hyperbole, metaphor, symbolism and personification can be used
- Showing and telling through the use of active verbs
- Specific names, places, adjectives, locations, arrangement of subjects (composition)
- Present tense



Brett Whiteley, *Self-Portrait in the Studio*, 1976 (oil, collage, hair on canvas. 200.5 x 259cm)

- Provide a model example
- Get students to annotate

Description

This large oil painting by Whiteley depicts the artist working in his harbourside studio in Sydney. In the **foreground** of the work the artist is depicted sketching his own portrait in a sketchbook using a mirror. **To the left** there is a **cropped view** of a nude lying on a couch that has been painted using Whiteley's recognizable style. Placed around the room are objects from the Pacific and Asia that represent Whiteley's interest in exotic arts such as sculptures, patterned rugs, a Chinese ginger preserving jar on a coffee table and a Chinese cabinet with a Bonsai plant. The coffee table also has placed on it examples of Whiteley's tools such as brushes and a palette. There is a cane chair, also an Asian influence, with a sketchbook leaning against it. On the back wall of the studio are windows with views of Sydney harbour. However, they have been flattened to seem as though they are artworks hanging on the wall. There are also two Chinese scrolls that are inspiration for Whiteley's work. They match the ink drawings of nudes that have been drawn in a calligraphic style, and hang alongside them.

DESCRIBING ACTIVITY

How can you get your students to describe an artwork in rich detail?

Back to back activity:

1. Arrange students in pairs, sitting back-to-back.
2. Designate one person an image of an artwork (Student A). The other partner will have a paper and drawing tools (Student B). Student A **cannot** show Student B their image.
3. Student A will describe the artwork to Student B as **accurately** and **detailed** as possible with the aim for Student B to draw an accurate depiction of the work.
4. Reverse the process with a different image so both partners have the chance to draw and speak.
5. Compare drawings with original images and reflect on what accounted for a more 'accurate' representation.

Tips

- Pay attention to words that you use.
- Include details of the formal elements and principles of design (scale, colour, texture, pattern) and composition.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Activity objective: to support the development of visual literacy through comparing and contrasting artworks with a focus on content, structure and expressive qualities.

Task:

Choose two artworks about the same subject or theme. Based on what you see compare and contrast the two artworks considering:

- What is represented or presented in each artwork.
 - What are the most important art elements and design principles in the artworks?
 - What are the materials and processes used to make each artwork?
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- What sensory effects do the elements and principles create in each work?
 - What meanings and ideas do the above communicate?

Objective /
Descriptive

Subjective /
Interpretive

Compare and Contrast

Artist's Name: _____

Artist's Name: _____

Title of Work of Art: _____

Title of Work of Art: _____

Write only what you see
in this work of art

Write only what you see
in this work of art

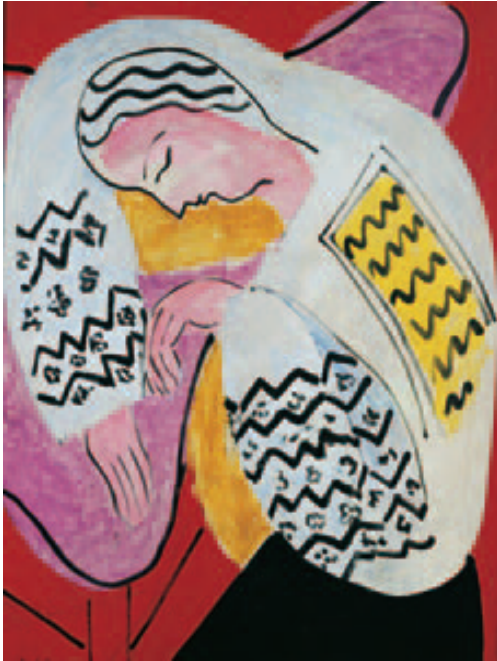
Write only what you see
in both works of art



Henri Matisse, The Dream, 1940. Oil on Canvas.



Pablo Picasso, Woman with Yellow Hair, Oil on Canvas, 1931



Henri Matisse was the leader of the movement called Fauvism, which deals with the use of intense colour placed in bold and random ways.

The Dream, 1940, uses **characteristics common in many of Matisse's paintings:** a female model depicted with sensual line qualities and rich color. In this painting, a sleeping figure rests her head on her right arm, her body gracefully dividing the picture plane into areas of floating color and overlapping shapes. A rich Venetian red defines the border of the painting, contrasting with the white of the sleeper's blouse and the ink black of her skirt. The line and color of the painting add to its decorative effect. *The Dream compares to Picasso's Woman with Yellow Hair, 1931, a cubist version of a similar subject*



Picasso was part of the movement called Cubism that shows multiple views of the same object all at once on the two-dimensional picture plane. It was a bold, new language. Picasso made viewers question the idea of traditional genres.

Picasso met Marie-Thérèse Walter, the subject of this portrait, in 1927 when she was 17 years old. They began an intense love affair, but concealed it from the public for many years as she was a teenager and the artist was married.

GREAT RESOURCES

Teaching students to critique

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/how-to/tipsheets/student-critique.aspx>

Interactive visual elements and principles toolkit for students to use (ICT)

<http://www.artsconnected.org/toolkit/explore.cfm>

‘Explore an artwork’ worksheets

<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/learn/schools-resources/art-start/explore-art>

Lesson plan ideas

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/lessons.aspx>

Art 21: Video, films, artists

<http://www.pbs.org/art21/learning-with-art21/on-contemporary-art>

LOOKING AT REPRESENTATIONAL ART

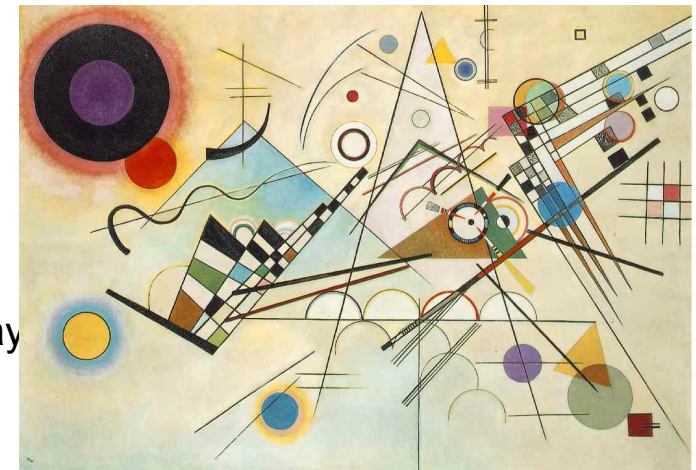
Some questions to help children look attentively at artworks and to make a personal response to them (some can be applied to non-representational art).

- What is happening in the picture?
- What do you see? What else do you see?
- What kind of place is it?
- What kind of light is there? How do you know? Where is it coming from?
- What time/day/year is it? Why do you think so?
- What part did you notice first and why?
- What colours stand out most and why? What colours are used more than once?
- Is the paint thick, thin, rough, smooth, - what is the texture?
- Can you see the brushstrokes the artist has made? What feeling does this give?
- Are the edges of things fuzzy, clear, sharp?
- What is the atmosphere of the picture? How is it created?

LOOKING AT NON-REPRESENTATIONAL ART

Some questions to help children look attentively at artworks and to make a personal response to them (some can be applied to representational art).

- What part of the work captures your attention most?
- What part is brightest, darkest, busiest, quietist?
- Do some parts seem closer and others further away?
- What colours seem closer to you and which seem to move away?
- Do some shapes overlap?
- How does the artist suggest movement?
- Can you think of words to describe the edges of things?
- Does the whole work look flat or does the artist suggest space?
- Is a mood created? What mood? How is it created?
- What elements and principles does the artist use to create a composition?



Wassily Kandinsky, "Composition VIII" 1923, Oil on canvas

LOOKING AT SCULPTURE / 3D OBJECTS

Some questions to help children look attentively at artworks and to make a personal response to them.

- Is the work a compact object or are there many components to it?
- Do some parts stick out a lot or is it a contained work?
- What is it made out of? What materials are used?
- Are there sharp jagged angles or smooth curves?
- Does it make you want to see what it is like on the other side? Can you imagine what it would be like on the other side?
- What would it feel like if you ran your hands around it?
- Can you *walk into* the space of the artwork? (E.g. public art, installation art, street art). If so, where would you see this artwork in our everyday environment?
- Is there a sense of touch, smell, sound and movement associated with the work? What are they and what effect do they create?

DESIGNING A MINI ART RESPONDING TASK

1. Select an artwork.
2. Devise a mini 'strategy' or activity to get your students to respond to the work.
3. Your questions should **engage students** into the work, elicit **descriptions, analyses, interpretations and judgments**.
4. You can use any models and techniques we have discussed and your own intuition!