

# Art as Text

An activity where students 'read' artwork.

---

## What is Art as Text?

In the arts – art works are considered our text. In this activity we support students to look at a piece of 'art' and 'read' it for information. We begin with observable, factual information, and then move on to information that students might inference based on their observations. Students dig deeper – pulling emotions, associations and stories from the artwork. Referring back to what students see, to the supporting evidence in the work, keeps the discussion grounded in the work of art.

---

## Why use Art as Text?

- Swaps the expertise from the teacher telling students what to observe in the artwork to the expertise coming from the students.
- Supports close observation, language development and vocabulary, working as a group, and learning from your peers.
- It lowers the affective filter as it is a low stakes entry point with no right or wrong for students into the artwork and next activities.

---

## How can I use Art as Text?

- Use it to introduce a piece of art to students
- Use it to introduce a concept, book, or area of focus
  - **Subject areas could include:** Theater, Dance making, Visual Art, Music, Science, Social Studies, and Literacy

---

## Activity Steps

- Make small groups of no more than 5 students
- Give each group an image – this could be an art work, a still from a dance or theater piece, or a photograph. Allow the students to have a physical copy of the image that they can look closely at and examine details.
- Students pass the image around the circle each student pointing out one thing they see or notice. No repeats!
- **Round one:** Factual, Objective and/or Observable Information – What can you see? "I see..." (you can repeat this round as many times as needed depending on how

complicated the image is). Sometimes it's nice to have the whole group respond with "Yes and..." as the image is passed to the next person.

- **Optional Round Two:** State possible problems you observe - "I notice... which makes me think...."
  - **Optional Round Three:** Subjective, Connections, Inferences, and/or Emotions - How are people feeling? What do you think about what's happening? "I think..."
- 

## Supports for Diverse Learners

- Provide multilingual learners (MLs) the questions in advance
  - Allow for extra wait time – wait 8-10 seconds for a response before moving the conversation along
  - Allow for non-verbal response – pointing, gesturing, selecting from images, etc.
  - Students at entering levels of proficiency can point to something in the image of interest and teacher can scaffold the English word or they can speak about that particular object in the first language and have another student translate.
- 

## Activity Extensions

- This can be expanded in a whole group discussion by using a chart to record what students, See, Think and Wonder about the image. This chart is the basis for building the necessary vocabulary to discuss the new idea and concepts in the lesson.
- This activity can be followed by students creating a tableau or still pose with their bodies of the art work being studied.
- Students might use a word bank created from their objective and subjective observations and responses to the art work to write an original poem.