Four Step Evaluation of a Work of Art Handout

Student Handout Guiding Questions

Evaluating a work of art isn't as difficult as it may seem. There are four basic steps: describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating. Use these handy guiding questions and you'll be a pro!

Student's Name: _______________________________

Date: _________________________________________

Name of the Artwork Evaluated: _____________________________________________

Step 1: Describe

Describe what you see in the artwork:

Objects:
What sort of artwork do you think this is?
Portrait  Figure  Landscape

Seascape  Cityscape  Poster

Abstract  Nature  Still life

What kind of objects do you see in the artwork? (you may choose more than one)

People  Buildings  Boats

Landscape  Seascape  Animals

Plants  Water  Food

None  Other: (describe:________________________)

What style do you think the artist primarily used?

Realistic  Abstract  Non-objective
**Media:** What media or medium did the artist use? (What material is the work made from?)

**Two-Dimensional:**
- Crayon
- Pencil
- Fabric
- Yarn
- Paint (oil, acrylic, tempera, watercolor)
- Ink
- Pastels
- Photograph

**Three-Dimensional:**
- Clay
- Stone
- Found objects
- Wood
- Glass
- Metal
- Papier-mache

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**Step 2: Analysis**

**The Elements of Art**

**Lines**
What kinds of lines do you see?
- Sharp
- Thick
- Heavy
- Jagged
- Choppy
- Vertical
- Diagonal
- Fuzzy
- Thin
- Curved
- Graceful
- Smooth
- Horizontal
- Straight
- Broken
- Zigzag
- Dotted
- Wavy

Other: _______________________________________

**Shapes and Forms**
What shapes do you see?
- Circles
- Squares
- Triangles
- Rectangles
- Diamonds
- Other: _______________________

What forms do you see?
- Cones
- Spheres
- Cylinders
- Cubes
How would you describe the shapes and/or forms?
Curved    angular    hard-edged
Soft-edged    organic    free-form
Other:___________________________________

Colors
What kinds of colors do you see in the artwork?
Bright    darks/lights (values)    soft
Strong    warm colors    cool colors
Neutral colors (browns, greys, earth tones)
Complementary colors (colors opposite of each other on the color wheel)
Monochromatic colors (a single color containing light and dark values of that color.)
Triadic colors (three colors that are equidistant from each other on the color wheel; i.e., red, yellow, & blue; green, orange, & violet)

Texture
What kinds of textures do you see?
Rough    smooth    soft
Hard    dull    bumpy
Other:___________________________________

Space
Illusion of space: How is space used in the artwork? (circle one)
Deep Space (looks like you can see for miles, a very wide range of light and dark values)
Shallow Space (shapes are flattened with limited use of light and dark values)
Flat Space (shapes appear one value/color, objects appear not three-dimensional at all.)

If the work is a landscape what do you see in each division of space?
  • Foreground (objects nearest the viewer)
  • Mid-ground (space between the foreground and the background)
  • Background (objects that appear the most distant from the viewer)
The Principles of Design

*How are the elements of art in the work arranged?*

**Emphasis/Focal Point**
What is the first thing you see when you look at this art work?

How do you think the artist created the focal point?

**Contrast**
Are there noticeable differences between light and dark areas?
Yes    No

If there are noticeable differences, identify where the lightest and darkest areas appear to be in the work. Squint your eyes and look at the artwork. Circle where you see most of the light areas.

Top    bottom    middle    right    left

Circle where the darkest areas are located:

Top    bottom    middle    right    left

**Harmony/Unity**
Circle which elements of art have been used to create a sense of unity or hold the work together in a pleasing way.

line    color    value    texture    shape    space

**Balance**
What kind of visual balance is used in the artwork?

- Asymmetrical balance (each side of the artwork is different)
- Symmetrical balance (the halves of the artwork mirror each other)
- Radial balance (emphasis is in the center, viewer’s eyes are directed like the spokes of a wheel, flower, or target moving toward the middle)
Repetition & Pattern
What do you see repeated in the artwork?
Lines  shapes  colors  light/dark values  textures

Pattern or repetition that is used to lead the eye on a path through a work of art is called movement. Do you see movement in the artwork? If so, where?

Another planned use of pattern is rhythm, which can lead the viewer’s eye through an artwork while also giving the work of art a pulsating or even unbalanced quality. Do you see rhythm in the artwork? If so, where?

Variety
Variety refers to the differences of the use of the elements of art in the work. Variety can be achieved by using different shapes, textures, colors and values in the work. Circle the elements of art that have been used in a variety of ways to create visual interest.

Lines  shapes  colors  light/dark values  textures

Step 3: Interpretation
What is the purpose or meaning of the artwork?
You uncovered clues about the meaning of this artwork in the first two steps of this exercise. Sometimes even the name of an artwork can tell you something about its meaning or purpose.
Explain what the name of this artwork tells you about the meaning or purpose of this work.

There are many purposes of art. Circle which of these purposes you think the artist was primarily concerned with in this artwork.

- Expressive art (expressing emotions, feelings, and/or ideas)
- Narrative art (describing and illustrating experiences, telling a story)
- Functional art (art the serves a practical or useful purpose)
- Ceremonial or ritual art (work that celebrates or commemorates)
- Decorative art (created for the purpose of decorating or beautifying)
- Persuasive art (advertising, marketing, or propaganda art)
• Formalist art (works that deal solely with the arrangement of elements of art/principles of design as subject matter – found most often abstract or non-objective art)

• Reflecting the world – (art that imitates nature)

Circle the words that best describe what you think is the meaning of this artwork. (use as many words as needed – even supplying some new ones if necessary.)

Strength  fear  loneliness  fun
Mystery  anger  hate  love
Beauty  courage  peace  war
Sadness  happiness  madness  hope
Adventure  excitement

Interest in color  complexity of design  interest in shapes
Simple design

Step 4: Evaluation

What do you think about the artwork?
What is the value that you find in the artwork? For example, is it a beautiful work of art? Thought-provoking? Does it have an important social message? Does it give us window for understanding the past?

Does the work communicate an idea, feeling, or principle that would have benefit for others? Explain.

Rather than seeing the work as being very effective or totally without value, does the work fall somewhere in between? Do you think that the work is just ok? On what do you base this opinion on? (Possibilities might be the use of the elements of art, or the principles of design; lack of personal expression; lack of major theme or focus.)
Write a brief narrative expressing your opinion of the artwork. Include both your positive perceptions and your criticism of the work and explain your answers.