

SUGGESTIONS FOR DEVELOPING STUDENT VIEWING SKILLS

The open-ended questions below can be used with any audience to look at nearly any work of art. The questions are intended for use in a structured discussion, as it has been found that analytic viewing skills develop best through verbalization in cooperative group settings. The educator serves as a facilitator, focusing the discussion, recapping student observations, modeling vocabulary, and generating additional thoughts. Based on a teaching paradigm pioneered by educator Philip Yenawine and cognitive psychologist Abigail Hausen and used in schools and museums worldwide, the method is a simple but effective way to show students how to look at art using what they see and already know. The emphasis on asking questions for knowledge acquisition can be applied across the curriculum. For more on Yenawine and Hausen's work and inquiry-based looking, see www.vue.org.

Objectives

- Expand student viewing and analytical skills.
- Build student confidence in interpreting meaning from something that may be unfamiliar.
- Provide an easy-to-implement evaluation tool for use at any curriculum stage.
- Familiarize students with photographs in *Taken with Time: A Camera Obscura Project*.

Curriculum Standards

- Critical Response – 9.3 A
(Pennsylvania Dept. of Education's *Academic Standards for the Arts & Humanities*)
 1. Start by asking students to look quietly for a moment at the work of art.
 2. Begin the discussion with questions that allow students to make multiple observations and interpretations. *What do you see in this picture? What do you think might be going on?*
 3. Ask students to support their interpretations by citing evidence in the picture. *What do you see that makes you say that?*
 4. Depending upon the discussion, more leading questions can be asked.
 - *What else do you see? What else is happening?*
 - *Can you add to that? How can you tell? Describe that to me.*
 - *What do you mean by that? Can you say more about that?*
 - *Does everyone agree? What do other people think?*
 5. If introducing outside information, ask students whether the new information affects their interpretations. *Does this information change how you see this picture? Why or why not?* In the case of photographs in *Taken with Time*, some of the first information to provide is an explanation (and ideally a demonstration) of the camera obscura in order to help students understand how the images were made and how this affects an artist's choices.
 6. Students can help summarize the discussion. *How have your ideas changed since we first started talking about this picture?*
 7. If desired, have students complete a written assignment defending an interpretation that emerges during the discussion, being sure to cite evidence from the artwork.