

National Gallery of Art
Teacher Institute 2014: Impressionism and Post-Impressionism
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Teaching Methodology: Visual Analysis Exercise

Activity: Students will work in groups to visually analyze and discuss an artwork using a worksheet as a guide. Each student will play a specific role and work in a team to complete the activity. Part one asks students to *describe* the artwork through close looking and part two utilizes guided questions to aid the group to *interpret* through discussion. Each group will wrap up with a brief presentation to their fellow classmates on what they learned about the artwork.

Timing: Assign roles: 3 minutes

Close looking and observations: 7 minutes

Discussion questions: 15 minutes (this is modified to 7 mins. for today's activity)

Group presentations: 5 minutes each (e.g., in a classroom of 25 students, 4 groups might take about 20 minutes total for presentations)

Total = approximately 35-40 minutes, depending on classroom size. More time can be allotted for additional discussion questions.

Learning Objectives:

- Create a foundation for visual analysis of artworks through close looking and verbal description
- Develop critical thinking, oral communication, presentation, and collaboration skills
- Foster a sense of ownership and confidence with visual analysis

Tips for working with younger students:

- Emphasize adjectives or short phrases as descriptors. For example, list 10 words you would use to describe this painting. Examples: colorful, bright, happy, circles, etc.
- Ask students to explain why they chose these descriptors. For example, “where do you see circles... why do you think the artist placed them there?” or “where in this painting do you see happiness?”
- Instead of a “presentation” at the end, students could each tell the class what they liked most about the artwork – using visual description and pointing out certain parts of the artwork

Additional resources:

- Renoir's *Dancer*: <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.1211.html>
 - Be sure to listen to the audio recording under “Related Content”
- Vuillard's *Portrait*: <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.46545.html>
 - For more on Vuillard see audio under “Related Content”:
http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/artist-info.1960.html?artobj_artistId=1960&pageNumber=1



Step One: Split into groups of 5-7. Each member should take a role: 1-2 note-takers, one timekeeper, one part-one discussion leader, one part-two discussion leader, and 1-2 presenters (3 minutes)

Step Two: Complete part one (7 minutes) and part two (7 minutes)

Step Three: Present your findings to the rest of the class (5 minutes for each group)

PART ONE: Examine the artwork very closely. Take turns making observations, but refrain from making any interpretations at this point. Describe *everything* you see.

Examples: “It’s colorful. Mostly greens, blues...” “Her leg here appears...” “The texture on her dress is...”
“Her facial expression is...” “I see...”

PART TWO: Some 19th-century critics used the following words/ideas to describe Renoir’s technique. Work as a group to find specific visual evidence that supports or refutes these descriptions:

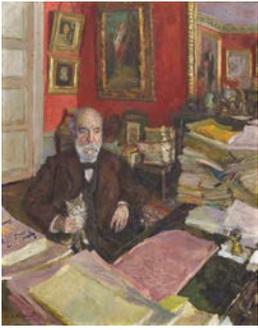
“Sketch-like... lacked quality of a finished painting.”

“Unrealistic space and shadow... No break between floor and wall.”

“Alive and luminous.”

PART THREE: Share what your group discussed and learned about the artwork with the rest of the class. This is an informal presentation but these questions may serve as a guide:

- a. What were the most important things the group learned about this artwork just by looking?
- b. How did the critics’ descriptions change or enhance what you discussed?



Step One: Split into groups of 5-7. Each member should take a role: 1-2 note-takers, one timekeeper, one part-one discussion leader, one part-two discussion leader, and 1-2 presenters (3 minutes)

Step Two: Complete part one (7 minutes) and part two (7 minutes)

Step Three: Present your findings to the rest of the class (5 minutes for each group)

PART ONE: Examine the artwork very closely. Take turns making observations, but refrain from making any interpretations at this point. Describe *everything* you see.

Examples: “It’s colorful. I see...” “I see many...” “The angle seems...” “His facial expression is...”

PART TWO: Based on what you see in this painting, what would you deduce about the figure’s profession, his interests, and his state of mind? Name at least five places in the painting to support your answers:

Hints: Discuss the stacks of books and papers, wall hangings, mirror reflection, facial expression, the cat

PART THREE: Share what your group discussed and learned about the artwork with the rest of the class. This is an informal presentation but these questions may serve as a guide:

- a. What were the most important things the group learned about this artwork and who the sitter might be just by looking?
- b. What do you think Vuillard is trying to express in this portrait?