The Railway by Edouard Manet, 1873
Here are a few tips:

1. Before You Start
   - The activity encourages looking at, thinking about, and making meaning from art. It can be used flexibly and works well with individuals, small group, or whole-class work.
   - Here are a few tips to format students’ comments and ideas.
   - Encourage students to use descriptive language based on what they see in the work of art.
   - Provide information about the painting only after students have shared their careful observations, questions, and ideas.
   - Where possible, document the students’ impressions on a chart paper to make their thinking visible.
   - For Further Study
     - Averbeck, France Nagel and Eric Carle’s Art Tales: Little Cloud and Other Stories. Art Tales explores how artists depict the natural world and invites students to use their imaginations to make sense of stories in their own unique ways.
     - Averbeck, France Nagel and Eric Carle’s Exploring Modern Art: Picasso, Miro, Klee, and Kandinsky. The poster can be found online at images.nga.gov.

2. Observe and Describe
   - Take a quiet minute to look carefully at this work of art.
   - What do you see? Share words or phrase that describe any aspect of the work. Include as many details as you can. (Link to what you see with your eyes. Don’t rush to interpret.)
   - New look again.
   - Now what new things can you find?

3. Ask Questions, Seek Puzzles
   - With a partner, brainstorm a list of three to five questions about the work of art.
   - Use the following prompts to help you think of interesting questions:
     - What do you see?
     - What is happening?
     - What might . . . ?
     - What do you think . . . ?
     - What new ideas do you have about the work of art?
   - Now look again.
   - What new things can you find?
   - What do you see?
   - What is happening?
   - What might . . . ?
   - What do you think . . . ?
   - What new ideas do you have about the work of art?

4. Create a Poem
   - Building on your observations, questions, and ideas, write a poem using the format below:

   - One word title
   - One word nouns
   - Three descriptive words

   - What is happening?
   - What do you think . . . ?
   - What new ideas do you have about the work of art?

5. What new ideas do you have about the work of art that you didn’t have before?

6. Look for These Details
   - Despite the clouds of smoke and steam, we are able to identify the location of the painting:
     a. The window and two arched doors in the upper left corner depict the entrance to Manet’s studio at the time the painting was made.
     b. In the right are a stone pillar and black iron grillwork. These details have been identified as part of the Porte de l’Europe, a massive star-shaped bridge that was built to connect six tram routes over the Gare Saint-Lazare railway bed. With its unique view of the train tracks below, the bridge was a favorite place for Parisians to stroll and a popular subject with artists, like Manet, who were interested in capturing everyday life.
     c. A signature that, beneath the cloud of smoke, helps us identify the location as a railway.