

Leading Critical & Creative Thinking: A Guide for Teachers and Chaperones

There are many kinds of museum experiences. Visiting a museum can be relaxing, analytical, awe-inspiring, and playful. A visit to a museum can also, sadly, be boring or superficial. This resource is designed to help you support your group of learners (and yourself!) to slow down, look and think with art, and get creative. Some activities have variations for younger students or for situations in which focusing is a challenge.

Ways to notice & think critically

Slowing down, looking closely, and reasoning with evidence help us to build a set of skills that help us think critically, and to consider points of view different from our snap judgments. This section of the guide is designed to help you guide the students through slow noticing and interpretation.

ODIP (Observe, Describe, Interpret, Point to evidence)

Allow students to explore a gallery. Select a work of art that students are drawn to – you will spend several minutes with it. Lead students through these steps:

- 1. Observe:** Have everyone look closely at the artwork, in silence, for one minute *without reading the label*.
- 2. Describe:** Have each student share one thing they notice, or a phrase to describe what they see. Explain that these should be things the student could point to, *not explanations of what they think is going on*. Hear from each student at least twice and continue until many observations have been shared.
- 3. Interpret:** Bring together the observations with questions. What do you think the story might be? If this artwork is the middle of the story, what might have happened before or will happen next? At this stage students may read the label and consider how clues like the title, year of creation, artist nationality, or other information shifts their thinking.
- 4. Point to Evidence:** Each time a student shares an interpretation about what might be going on, ask them to explain their reasoning by asking them, *“What makes you say that?”*

See, Think, Wonder

Ask students to pair up and look silently at a work of art for 30 seconds. Take turns finishing this phrase 5 times each: *I see....* Then, have students finish the sentences *I think...because...* and *I wonder...*

More ways to look closely

Find a partner. Have your partner close their eyes. Now describe a work of art using tons of detail and describing words. Describe as much as you can for a whole minute. Have your partner open their eyes and see how well you did. Can they find something you missed in your description?

Name 5 things you find in a work of art. Now have your partner find 5 different things. Can you find 5 more things? Who will run out of new things to find first?”

Try telling students to look “like a detective” or “like a scientist.” Try to find as many details as possible like they are clues to a story. Artworks hold mysteries, and we can develop theories through observing, interpreting, and drawing connections.

More ways to think critically

After you have taken time to slow down and look closely try these questions.

Ask yourself, “What question do I have about the story in this artwork? What do I wonder about the artist or the art object itself?”

What is one “big idea” that this artwork raises for you? Can you connect this to an issue in the world today? What is different about this big idea here and now, versus in the time, place, or people in this artwork? What is similar?

Consider the artist’s perspective. What do you think you can conclude about the artist’s point of view, and what makes you say so? How might it look different from another point of view? What is your, unique perspective on this?

Ways to imagine

Imagination and play are important elements of the creative process, for artists and for you. This section of the guide is designed to help you spark imagination and play. Select a game for you and the students to play individually, together, or in small groups. In addition to these, be on the lookout for interactive stations in many galleries. Grown-ups – you’re invited to play, too!

Take a trip





Find a work of art that shows a place (a landscape). Look at it for 30 seconds. What do you see? Now imagine stepping inside (but remember not to touch the art!). What do you imagine that you hear? Smell? Feel? Taste? What does the air feel like on your skin? What creatures might live there?

Playing pretend

Find a work of art with multiple animals or people. Partner up with someone you are visiting with. Take turns imitating the pose of one of these characters and have your partner guess who you are miming. Imagine you are the characters, what would you say to each other? What are you doing?

Choices

Enter a gallery and each of you select the following:

-  An artwork you love – what do you love about it?
-  An artwork you really dislike – what do you dislike about it?
-  An artwork you think took a lot of time to make – what makes you think so?
-  The artwork you would most want in your home – why choose this one, and where would you place it?

Headline News

Pretend this work is late breaking news, what would the Headline be? Share your headline with a partner and see if they can find the work you wrote it about.

Neighbors

Find two works of art that are next to each other. Now, imagine they are alive. What do you imagine their relationship would be like? Are they family, friends, or rivals? What do they talk about when no one's watching?

Ways to create

Artists have always found inspiration in works of art by others. These prompts can help you and your students make art no matter what you think your skills are.

Students will need paper and pencil. Feel free to use any available seating you find. Ask a Gallery Associate to direct you to folding stools or sit on the floor. Please do not use pens or markers; pencils may be available at the admissions desk. Some clipboards may also be available at the admissions desk; please **do not use the wall as a writing surface**.

Compose

Look at a work of art and freely write down what you see or any words or phrases that come to mind. Do not edit or censor, just write. When you feel like you are done (try for at least a whole minute), read through what you've written. Circle the words that strike you as powerful. Rearrange them into a poem. Don't concern yourself with rhyme or form, just create.

No-Look Contour Drawing

Pick a work you want to spend time with. **Without looking at your paper, looking only at the artwork**, use one continuous line to draw the outlines and the shapes you see in the artwork. Keep your pencil on the paper the whole time. No erasing, no peeking. If you get lost just start again without looking at the paper. There's no "wrong," and what you create should not look like a realistic copy, but a funky reinterpretation.

Dialogue

Find different ways for works of art to "talk" to each other. Imagine that one or more of the artworks is a scene in a play and write a scene of dialog between characters. Or, choose to write a letter or postcard from one work of art to another.

Ways to reflect & share

"We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience." --John Dewey

Before leaving CMA, encourage students to reflect on their visit. Here are some possible prompts to choose from:

- Fill in the blanks: "Before this visit, I used to think ____ Now I think ____"
- Fill in the blanks: "I think ____ I feel ____ I wonder ____"
- What's one thing you want to share with someone about your visit today? Whom do you want to share it with, and why?
- What's something you liked? What's something that challenged you? What's something that surprised you?

We love to know what's sticking with our visitors; share your takeaways with us on social media using #myCMA.