

The Guide for Museum Educators is written by Bonnie Pitman-Gelles, Associate Director for Program, Seattle Art Museum, to assist museum staff and teachers in coordinating museum experiences that support and enhance follow-up to programs in THE BIG A series.

### Program 1 "Telling a Story in Art"

Look for a work of art in your collection such as a statue or portrait commemorating a hero, an important person, or a civic or national event.

#### Describe

Have the students *describe* it, listing all the details in the object such as the number and types of people, what they are doing, how they are doing it, what colors and shapes are repeated.

#### Analyze

Have the students *analyze* the work. Help the students with some basic research on the person or historic event. Analyze how the artist uses lines, color, shape and texture to create a mood and to help us understand more about the person, people or event. Help the students see how the artist focuses our attention on the most important part of this work.

#### Interpret

Have the students *interpret* the work of art by acting out the life of the individual or the scene that is portrayed in the work based on previous research. Discuss why artists create works of art that tell stories of important events.

### Programs 2 and 3 "Getting Ideas" "Exploring Ideas"

Have the students collect ideas and log them into their Idea Books while visiting a museum, zoo, nature center, park or historic house. For example, locate a flower in a garden, then wander through the museum and record all the different ways flowers are represented. This might include flowers used in fabric patterns, as symbols in a religious painting, as decorations on furniture or buildings, or as part of a landscape.

#### Describe

Describe the many different ways that flowers have been used by artists. How are they similar and different?

#### Analyze

Analyze why flowers have been such a popular image in art.

#### Interpret

Have the students create a piece of furniture or fabric using their ideas and designs for flowers from their Idea Books.

### Program 4 "Tools and Materials"

Many artists in different periods of history and in different cultures use materials in both similar and different ways. During a visit to the museum, have the students make a list of all the different materials they can find in two galleries such as paint, marble, wood or glass.

#### Describe

List all the materials that can be found. Describe how wood is used and what qualities it has compared to glass or paint. Examine the differences between painted wood and real wood in a mask or frame.

#### Analyze

Select one material such as wood. Look for the many different ways it is used by artists and compare how each artist completes the work, such as a totem pole, an African mask, an American chair or a frame for a 19th century painting.

#### Interpret

Provide the students with materials to explore what happens when clay is used in place of steel or wood to create the same work of art. How does the material affect the final product?

### Program 5 "Teamwork"

When the students are visiting a museum or historic house, demonstrate the various ways people participate in the creative process. In each case, the activity should include three steps: *describe*, *analyze* and *interpret*.

Some examples are as follows:

#### Textiles

Making textiles involves many different people, with different participants in various cultures. Shearing of wool may be done by men; spinning and weaving is often done by women; dyeing and development of design may be by women or men; and fabrication of a costume or dress might be done by women. Show the students textiles in the museum's collection from different cultures. Discuss how the textiles were made, explaining the process and the roles of men and women in the production.

#### Festivals

Festivals and celebrations require successful team coordination. The museum's collections might include masks or costumes that show the impor-

tance of a group working together. For example, the musicians, singers, dancers and costumed dancers all participate in the celebration of the harvest.

#### Museums

Museums require a team of people working together; the registrars, curators, designers, educators and many others cooperate to preserve and display the collections. Give a behind-the-scenes tour and introduce the students to the many different professionals who work in the museum.

### Program 6 "Lines, Shapes, Colors and Textures"

Offer a tour of works of art or historical artifacts to demonstrate the expressive qualities of line, shapes, colors and textures that distinguish works of art. Artists use these visual elements to interpret their ideas and feelings about subjects and themes. For example, the tour might focus on these three levels:

#### Describe

Look at one painting and have the students list all the variations of lines, shapes, colors and textures in their Idea Books, or select a particular color and list all the different variations that can be found in one work of art or in a gallery.

#### Analyze

Analyze the special qualities of each element. For example, analyze how the artist shows movement with line (the movement of waves), with color (the passage of time in a day), with shape (the trees or people), or with textures (how the raffia, shells and bells move and sound when worn by a dancer).

#### Interpret

Have the students select works of art that focus on one or more of these elements (for example, a pop art or color-field painting). Have them draw the work in their Idea Books, using an entirely different approach to the color or line. They could use pale colors instead of primary ones, or no colors at all, or only small wavy lines instead of fierce, bold ones.

## Program 7 “Putting It Together”

Have the students focus their attention on the ways artists use different combinations of balance, repetition/variety and focal point to express their ideas and feelings. If possible, select paintings in the museum's collections that represent a variety of ways artists use these elements in different periods of history, styles of art and parts of the world. It may surprise the students to compare portraits from the 15th to the 20th century to see the changes in how people have been posed, though in all cases the face of the sitter remains the focal point of the painting.

In a different project, the students could compare and contrast how artists use balance, repetition/variety and focal point in landscapes, narrative scenes and abstract paintings.

The following exercise can easily be adapted to many different types of art; it can be done individually or in a group.

### Describe

Describe the subject of the painting, and the way the artist has used color, line, shape and texture.

### Analyze

Analyze the way the artist has used color, line, shape and texture to create balance, repetition/variety and focal point. In a portrait, what has the artist done with the sitter's hands, direction of the body, and background? In an abstract painting, what colors, lines or shapes are directing our attention?

### Interpret

Interpret by discussing what would happen to the work of art if the elements which focus our attention were changed—the bright red was a soft grey, the sharp angular lines directing our attention were not there. Change the focus of the painting by imagining or acting-out different alternatives. Discuss the artist's process in arriving at a visual resolution.

## Program 8 “What Does It Mean?”

We are besieged by images in newspapers, on television, on billboards and in magazines. We mostly look at them for information. Our eyes and minds are conditioned to find what the message is without pausing to analyze how and why it has been stated. It takes time to look at a work of art. The museum is a special place in the community where this can occur. For example, the following activities could help students look for meaning:

Take the students on a tour of the collection. Using the three stages of responding to a work of art described in THE BIG A Teacher's Art Kit,

*describing, analyzing and interpreting*, to focus on how to look at works of art.

Compare and contrast what the students first see and record in their Idea Books with what they see after a discussion of the work of art with a museum “expert.” The curator or educator who interprets the work of art can provide a cultural or historical context for the piece and judge its artistic quality.

## Program 9 “I Like It Because . . .”

The viewer uses four separate kinds of mental activities when analyzing a work of art: *looking at it, reacting to it, learning about it in a variety of contexts and making judgements* about it.

### Describe

Use the four mental approaches together with the criteria described in THE BIG A Teacher's Art Kit (well-made, good design and unique) to describe works of art. Have the students select two works of art, one that meets the criteria successfully and one that is a poor example. Students can list reasons for each choice in their Idea Books.

### Analyze

Analyze the different objects selected and the values that have been placed on the work of art by the students. Were some works viewed as both successful and not successful? Discuss the different viewpoints and the different reasons.

### Interpret

Have the students record in their notebooks and discuss with you how the same works of art may have been interpreted at different periods of history or by the original makers. For example, impressionist paintings were considered “shocking” and “not well-painted” when viewed by the public in the late 1800's. Have the students report how they will approach a work of art on their own now. For example, what questions will they ask themselves?

## Program 10 “Different Ways of Seeing”

*Invention, experimentation and exploration* are important in the history of art. Artists and craftsmen continually adopt new materials, experiment with new ways to use them in a work of art and explore new ways to look at subjects (for example, steel and computers). Students can explore these themes in your museum in ways such as the following:

### Describe

Select a simple form, such as a circle, and have the children record what materials it is made of and its different purposes in a jade Pi, a Chinese symbol of eternal life, the hand of the Indian god Shiva, coins from ancient Greece and from today, a gold halo in a Renaissance painting, a painting from Jasper Johns' target series, or a porcelain plate from the 18th century. Add to this list a comparison of circles in everyday life such as donuts, telephone dials or sculpture.

Identify ten “innovative” uses of materials in the museum's collection (for example, the earliest oil painting, the earliest porcelain dish or the earliest use of plastic or steel). They could also list different ways to view a subject or element of art such as flowers by comparing how different artists have represented them.

### Analyze

Use the above activities to analyze what artists are doing today as compared to 100 years ago. Compare what once was perceived as an innovative approach to art to what is easily accepted by the students (for example, photography, pop art or impressionism).

### Interpret

Have the students sketch their ideas for new ways to use these materials or to present a new point of view for their subject in their Idea Books.

Discuss the materials artists are using today and the new possibilities they have. Then discuss why some artists continue to use “traditional materials” like paint and canvas, photography, metal and wood but are depicting new images and interpretations of our world.



THE BIG A is a production of KCTS/Seattle.