

## THE FOUR-STEP APPROACH TO DISCUSSING ART

One purpose of our Art Appreciation program is to show the children how they might look at art. We also hope to provide a vocabulary for talking about what they see in a work of art. With your help, they can move beyond “I like it” or “I don’t like it”, to a more informed response.

Before presenting your artist in class, prepare a set of question that you will ask the children. This will help you and the children to focus. Don’t come into the classroom with a set of facts that you are determined to convey. The object is to lead a discussion and elicit students’ reactions.

Looking at a work of art can be broken down into four levels. They are SENSORY, FORMAL, TECHNICAL AND EXPRESSIVE. Try using this approach as you plan your discussion. You can begin with #4 (What is the mood of this painting?) and then help the students explore how the artist created this effect. Did he use a lot of dark colors? How does he use light in his work? Where is the light source in the painting? All of these questions and more help the students to understand how the artist achieves his goal. You could begin with #1 and ask the children to describe what they see.

1. SENSORY ELEMENTS: What do we perceive by means of our senses of sight and touch?

Lines – are they straight or curved?

Shapes – are they regular or irregular?

Colors – are they bright or dull warm or cool?

Volume – is the work flat or does it look three-dimensional?

Texture – is it smooth or rough?

2. FORMAL PROPERTIES: How has the artist arranged the parts to form a whole?

Repetition – shapes and colors?

Balance – is it symmetrical or asymmetrical?

Focus – what is the center of interest and why?

Space – are things near you or far away from the viewer? Are they cluttered or uncluttered?

Direction – is the work arranged on the horizontal or vertical, the diagonal or spiral?

3. TECHNICAL PROPERTIES: What techniques has the artist used?

Medium – oil paint, watercolor, ink, pencil, collage, other?

Brushstrokes – are they delicate or broad, thick or thin?

Tools – did the artist use his hands, brushes, sponges, utensils?

How long did it take the artist to create his work?

4. EXPRESSIVE PROPERTIES: What kind of feelings or mood does the artwork express to the viewer? How do the sensory, formal, and technical properties convey this meaning? For example: Horizontal lines create a peaceful mood. Jagged lines might express anger. Cool blues and purples convey sadness. Exaggerated proportions or unusual colors create a dream-like quality.