



Topics for Inquiry about an Artwork



Subject Matter

Some artworks have subject matter and others do not. Subject matter refers to anything real or imaginary that is depicted (shown or represented) in an artwork.

People	Places	Things
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Elements of Design

Traditional elements in Western art include:

Two-Dimensional Elements	Three-Dimensional Elements	Four-Dimensional Element
line	form or mass	time
shape	space	
value (light and dark)	texture	
color		

Design Principles

Ways artists organize elements of design to create interesting and unified compositions.

Some Traditional Principles:

Balance	Variation	Focal point	Pattern
Harmony	Repetition	Movement	Transition
Emphasis	Rhythm	Direction	Proportion
Contrast			

Some Postmodern Principles: (Gude, 2004, pp. 6-14) O.

Appropriation	Juxtaposition	Hybridity	Gazing
Recontextualization	Layering	Representin'	Interaction of text & image

Technical Features

The technical features of an artwork are the results of how it was made physically.

Tools	Materials	Processes
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Function

Artists make artworks that serve a great many diverse traditional and new functions, such as:

Capturing the beauty of a place in nature	Memorializing an important event
Demonizing or glorifying a prominent person	Experimenting with visual possibilities
Challenging traditional perceptions	Promoting a belief
Celebrating the artist's heritage	Adding aesthetic interest to something ordinary
Many more	

Reproduction Vs Original

Some reproductions can look pretty different from the originals. Common differences between originals and reproductions are:

Size	Colors	Surface texture	Luminosity
Angle of view	Lighting	Other	

Care/Condition

The condition of artworks can deteriorate over time for many reasons, among them:

Perishable or fragile materials	Damage in storage	Accidents
Mounting, matting, or framing	Temperature and humidity	Vandalism
Display case or pedestal	Other	



Topics for Inquiry about an Artist's Background



Artist's Life

The personal lives of artists can affect their work, including such factors as:

Family Work Education (not art education) Travel
Personal life experiences Other

Physical Environment

The physical world, both natural and human made) can inspire their work:

Natural environment (plants, animals, climate, landforms, etc.)
Constructed environment (buildings, roads, bridges, vehicles, furniture, consumer goods, etc.)

Culture

Artists can draw ideas for their work from their cultures:

Values and beliefs Hobbies and entertainment Politics Economic
situation
Language Heritage and/or ethnicity Other



Topics for Inquiry about Shared Art Experience



Art Education and Career

Artists get ideas and support from other people involved in art, through:

Art education or apprenticeships
Positive judgment by specialists in the artist's art form (tattooing, quilting, fashion, architecture, ceramics, portraiture, product design, cartooning, etc.)
Representation by art galleries
Contact with art patrons and collectors
Acknowledgement through art awards, prizes, and other art honors
Adding their work to museum collections
Receiving grants and commissions from private and public art organizations

Style

Style is a set of distinctive qualities ("family resemblance") that are shared by more than one artwork.

Artists develop their own style and incorporate aspects of the styles of artists from their own or other times and cultures.

Artist's style
Style of art movement or period
Cultural style

Art Influence

Most artists are influenced by artists who worked before them, though some self-taught artists, called "outsider artists," work in isolation, largely unaware of the work of other artists. Influences can include:

Technical and aesthetic achievements by other artists
Other artists' ideas, innovations, commitments

Traditional or historical art ideas to follow, extend, or break away from



Topics for Inquiry about Meanings and Goals



Artist's Intention

Artists decide how they want their artworks to look. Their intentions may be:

Personal or private	Traditional	Revolutionary	Boundary breaking
Unconventional			
Evolving	Focused on collector, patron, funder, or other viewer		Other

Art Specialists' Understandings

The considered opinions of art specialists direct viewers' attention to aspects of artworks that they judge to be worthy of that attention. Art specialists include:

Artists	Art teachers	Museum curators	Art critics	Art historians	Others
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In some visual worlds, specialists sometimes include such experts as:

Ceremonial leaders	Master craftspeople	Tribal elders	Guild members	Others
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Cultural Understandings

A viewer's cultural understanding draws upon a set of ideas, beliefs, and standards shared broadly within a culture. These are learned, not by special effort and instruction, but simply through growing up as a member of a culture.

Your Own Viewpoint

Viewers' responses to artworks are affected by:

conscious thoughts (likes and dislikes)	unconscious reactions	personal preferences (likes and dislikes)
careful viewing and more	thoughtful reflection	relevant information



Topics for Inquiry about Shared Themes



Theme

Some broad, cross-cultural themes have been the focus of many artists throughout history and across the globe:

People and nature	Cultural pride	Conquest	Overcoming obstacles
Strength of family	Love	Fantasy	Social order
Harmony	Chaos	Revisiting history	Heroic adventure
Religious devotion	Many more		