



The Art of Observation: Sharpening Observation Skills

Key Takeaways and Ideas to Think About

Children were asked to describe to their teacher what they could see in the poster of the artwork. What is the benefit of directing children’s attention to the lines, shapes, and colors that they notice in the artwork?

As children notice the elements of line, shape, and color, they are beginning to gather information about the artwork. This is a strategy that encourages careful looking, which is an important skill. As children notice these elements, they begin to think and talk about the interaction of these elements with each other. When teachers ask more targeted, open-ended questions and encourage conversations, children’s observation skills are more broadly developed.

In the video, the teacher directed the children to attend to the top, middle and bottom of the painting as well as to look all the way to the right, go across the middle, and look all the way to the left. What purpose do you think the teacher had in mind when encouraging the children to look so thoroughly at the painting?

By directing the children to attend to all parts of the painting, the teacher was explicitly teaching them *how* to look. Teaching children how to look and giving them ample time to carefully observe can provide a springboard for discussion about what children observe. Children can use their curiosity and inquisitive nature to tell stories about the artwork. Artists often present stories in their artwork. As the children continue to look at and think about these elements, they begin to think about how the elements are connected and what the story could be that the artist is representing in the artwork.

What do you think is the benefit of encouraging children to connect what they see in a work of art to their own personal experiences? What advantage do you see in having children share stories about what they think the story is about in the artwork?

Prompting children to connect what they see to their own personal experiences gives them an opportunity to expand on concepts that they already know and helps children remember the experience. Artists are very careful about the colors that they use in their artwork because colors represent the feeling or mood that is part of the story. Children can tap into their emotions and convey their personal reactions to what they see, inspiring them to create narrative about the artwork. Telling stories engages children’s higher-order thinking skills and their imagination — encouraging active participation, creative thought, self-confidence and linguistic fluency.