

### How can I use these *Discussion Topics* in my classroom?

The goal of the following materials is to assist educators in facilitating open-ended dialogues with students about works of art and in a larger sense, ultimately, the world around them. This guide can be adapted for use with grade levels, pre-K-12<sup>th</sup> grade. Please adjust vocabulary as needed.

### How will these *Discussion Topics* benefit my students?

Through inquiry based learning, students build skills across the curriculum, including those valuable to literacy such as the ability to:

- Think critically
- Use descriptive language
- Observe closely
- Form hypotheses <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Solomon R. Guggenheim, Teaching Literacy Through Art, Year One 2004-05 Study

Additionally, inquiry based learning can provide entry points into learning about a broad range of topics and can be adapted to any subject, including, culture specific information, artistic techniques, aesthetics and art-historical and historical concepts.

### Practical Guide to Using Inquiry

Select a few the images from the on-line image gallery. Choose one image and begin the discussion simply by asking the students to LOOK. Give them a few minutes to observe and reflect. Allow them time to absorb the image. Create a relaxed environment by mentioning that special knowledge is not needed to experience or understand the images you are presenting. Refrain from mentioning the title of the work or supplying the students with information until they have had a chance to consider the works for themselves. This method encourages the students to focus on what they can see rather than what they think they *should* see/perceive, to trust their senses and to form a relationship and understanding of the work as a basis for inquiry.

Encourage the students to comment on formal aspects such as shape, size, scale, color and texture and to use descriptive language. Once they have had time to discuss move to a discussion of concepts such as mood, presence. Draw students out by asking them to support and elaborate on their observations and comments.

By presenting context building information later in the discussion rather than at the start, you leave room for individual interpretations and discovery. Introduce information about media, techniques, artist's bio, history, as is relevant to support and enrich understanding. Strive to honor the independent communicative powers of works of art and the collective statements & questions an assembly of them can make to students primed to be receptive viewer/thinkers. By honing the visual analytical and critical thinking skills of your

students, you prepare them to become observant not only in exhibition settings but in their daily lives as well.

What are some ways that I can create an optimal environment for open-ended discussion?

Ask questions that have a broad range of possible answers. Avoid yes/no questions

Repeat comments and provide a bridge linking other's comments and differing ideas to spur debate and to encourage students to support their assertions.

Accept comments neutrally and without judgement. If a comment seems inappropriate or off-topic redirect focus to the image and ask the student to relate their comments to something evidenced in the artwork.

If you are asked a question you cannot answer, inform the student that you don't know. Discuss the best way to find the answer and agree to return to the question after you both have researched.

<sup>1</sup>Solomon R. Guggenheim, Teaching Literacy Through Art, Year One 2004-05 Study