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Visual Art Exhibition Tour Strategies For Teachers & Tour Guides

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Key Concept

How can an art works communicate ideas?

The art works are fragments of three personal *perspectives* within three very different approaches to art. Each body of work is a portrayal of the artist's external or internal perspectives, a personal response to surroundings and ideas that influence ways of thinking about and approaching the world.

What motivates personal expression?

Art exhibitions offer us the opportunity to look beyond how a work of art is made, and ask the question why it was created. What motivated the artist to create it?

VOCABULARY / GLOSSARY

- ♦ The vocabulary that you use will be tailored to the age group of the tour participants.
- ♦ Select the most important words from the list below.
- ♦ Introduce them to the group before the tour begins, especially with younger participants.
- ♦ Ask the students to research the meaning of these words.
- ♦ Ask tour participants to group words that have similar or related meanings.

Are there other words that should be added to the list?

Elements: any of the parts that make up a whole.

Content: the meaning or significance of a literary or artistic work.

Context: 1. the words that come before and after a particular word or phrase and help to fix its meaning.
2. The circumstances in which an event occurs.

Hue: 1. gradation of colour. 2. The attribute of colours that permits them to be classed as red, yellow, green, blue or an intermediate between any contiguous pair of these colours.

Colour: Pure colours are colours, which have "hue". They appear on the basic colour wheel. Neutral colours (black, white and grey) do not have hue.

Texture: is the surface appearance of something. In two-dimensional works, the illusion of texture can be created.

Shapes: can be positive or negative. For example, if a student draws a tree with leaves, two types of shapes are created. The leaves form positive shapes and the spaces between them form negative shapes.

Geometric & Organic Shapes: Organic shapes are free flowing, usually with soft edges and often exist in nature. Geometric shapes have hard edges and are often not found in nature, but seen in the human-made world.

Symmetrical & Asymmetrical Shapes: symmetrical shapes can be divided into two identical halves. Asymmetrical shapes cannot be divided in this way, such as, the human hand.

Line: there are many types of lines in art, such as: curving, thick, thin, sharp, hard-edged, soft-edged, straight & broken. A line can be created with various media.

Space: a boundless, three-dimensional extent in which objects and events occur and have relative position and direction.

Subject: something represented or indicated in a work of art.

Focus Attention:

Provide an opportunity for all members of the group to participate. Ask some questions which focus the group's attention and introduce some key concepts in the exhibition. Invite participants to consider their own experiences.

- ♦ How many of you have seen an art exhibition before?
- ♦ What did you see?
- ♦ What do you expect to see today?
- ♦ Why do artists make ART?
- ♦ What materials do they use?
- ♦ How do art works communicate ideas?

Introduce the Exhibition:

The viewing process often involves *dialogue* - either a silent one between the viewer and the work of art or a verbal one involving two or more viewers involved in a discussion about an artwork. You are a *catalyst*. Your task is to stimulate dialogue and initiate discussion. You will not tell the group about each work. You will supply some information at appropriate points. **Most of the time you will ask questions and listen to answers.**

Why has this exhibition come to your (our) community?

- ♦ The exhibition is being toured by **Manitoba Arts Network** to communities like yours throughout Manitoba.
- ♦ Before you talk about the images, encourage viewers to quietly walk through the exhibition and look at all the work take about 5 minutes to do this, and then meet to talk about what you saw.

A Questioning Strategy

The purpose of questioning is to set up conditions for learning. Questions can focus the group's attention on specific concepts or ideas. Following are a wide range of questions. They are presented to offer you options and stimulate your thoughts. A good questioning strategy starts with good knowledge of the exhibition being presented.

Characteristics of Good Questions

Questions should be *clear* in their meaning - they should be *easily understood*. They should be *simple*, not long and involved. Questions should be *specific* and to the point. They should be *definite* and *direct*. Questions should be *thought provoking* and *challenging*.

First Impressions:

- ♦ Gather the group together and ask guiding questions that will allow them to describe their first impressions of the exhibition. Begin by focussing on one artwork.

Ask:

What is the first word that comes into your mind when you look at this artwork?

- ♦ Record their answers on a large sheet of paper with a marker.
- ♦ Collect as many words as possible. Select one word from the list.

Ask:

What is it about this artwork that made you think of the word ?

- ♦ The viewer may describe what they *see* in the artwork. This will generally lead the viewer from an initial impression into a more analytical exploration of details.

Analysis: Gathering Evidence

- ♦ *Analysis* is a process of gathering evidence. This step acknowledges that the artist has *manipulated* the *materials (media)* and the *elements* in such a way as to elicit the viewer's first impression.

The group will *compare* and *contrast* visual elements, *analyze relationships* among visual elements and *gather evidence* that leads to meaning in the work.

- ♦ Begin by taking a visual inventory of the *formal elements*, such as, *line, colour, shape* and *texture* and describe how the artist has used these elements in the artwork. (Refer to Part I: Vocabulary/Glossary.)

Ask:

What has the artist done, specifically, to make you think of the word _____?

What other details do you see in this artwork?

What do you notice first and where does your eye travel from there?

What techniques and devices (medium) did the artist use?

What do you see up close, and what is noticeable far away?

What visual elements are repeated?

Compare this artwork with another work in the exhibition.

What is different and what is the same?

Artists are aware of our expectations and cultural conditioning. They can use them when planning the impact of their work. Sometimes they deliberately challenge our ways of thinking.

Find works that challenge what we believe or know.

What looks different than what we expect to see?

Interpretation: Discovering Meaning

At this stage, you will be asking questions that encourage the group to explain the meaning they

discover in the works. Comparing works often makes the interpretation process flow more easily.

Ask:

If this artwork was the cover of a CD, what kind of music would it be?

If this artwork was the cover of a book, what would the book be about?

Do the art works tell stories? Which ones? What stories?

What symbols does the artist use?

What was the artist's purpose in creating these works? (See background information of artists and exhibition)

What did the artist leave out of this work?

Do these artworks speak of the past, present or the future?

Remember that there is **NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWER** to any question!

Context:

Ask:

If you were able to give this artwork a title, what would the title be?

*What title do you think the artist chose for this artwork? (Look on the *title card* to see what title the artist chose for the artwork.)*

Now that you know what title the artist has given this artwork, does it bring new meaning to the work?

Synthesis: Bringing it all Together

• Now it is time to combine all of the information gathered during the stages of: ***First Impressions, Analysis, Interpretation*** and ***Context***, so the viewer may arrive at a ***personal evaluation*** of the artwork.

Ask:

What will you remember most about this artwork?