

APPRECIATING, EVALUATING AND UNDERSTANDING ART

General Objective

The goal of this practical sheet is to demonstrate the problems that you may face when attempting to comprehend what art is and is not, as well as how you might assist your students in understanding and appreciating art.

In this fact sheet, you will:

- ✓ Learn more about what art is in general.
- ✓ How to define art and how art speaks/works.
- ✓ Acquire a better understanding of how to enjoy, comprehend and evaluate art.
- ✓ Learn more about different techniques and activities that can be put in place to make art more appreciated and comprehensible to your learners during an art workshop.

You will need:

- a computer with a good internet connection
- photos, paintings, and other works of art of different periods.

Challenges and settings

When comparing contemporary works of art to old ones, such as renaissance portraits, where beauty and symmetry emerge, we might easily become confused and associate art only with elegance, rejecting modern tendencies (see example Picture 1&2).

This is perfectly reasonable, because when we ask: "What exactly is the meaning of art?" We don't really have a definitive answer.

For decades, philosophers and art critics have been unable to reach an agreement. Because artistic interpretation is complex and subjective, and it is unlikely to provide a definitive answer.

A logical explanation for this is that people's times and societies change all the time, and their art reflects this. Artistic interpretation changes over time.

Everyone can appreciate art, and being subjective in nature, different art forms appeal to different people. It can be highly subjective, because it depends on individuals' personal tastes and preferences.



Picture 1

Girl with a Pearl Earring - Johannes Vermeer, Source: [Wikipedia](#)



Picture 2

Untitled- Keith Haring, Source: [Europeana](#)

Guidelines for Analysis of Art

Here are the levels which you can use to explain a work of art:

1. Description: simple description of the object without value judgments, analysis, or interpretation. It answers the question, "What do you see?".
2. Analysis: determining what the features suggest and deciding why the artist used such features to convey specific ideas. It answers the question: "How did the artist do it?".
3. Context: Historical, religious or environmental information that surrounds a particular work of art and which helps to understand the work's meaning.
4. Meaning: A statement of the work's content. A message or narrative expressed by the subject matter.

5. Judgment: A critical point of view about a work of art concerning its aesthetic or cultural value.

Adaptation

According to the theory of Intentional Fallacy by the literary critic W.K. Wimsatt and the philosopher Monroe Beardsley, we should not be concerned with the artistic intention when evaluating a piece of art. Because we don't always know what the artist was thinking. Also, if we possessed such knowledge, it would divert our attention away from the project's quality.

Literary theorists Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, on the other hand, are divided. Claiming that an intentional creator makes his work understandable.

There is, however, always a middle ground in all arguments. As the modern philosopher Noel Carroll contends, purpose is merely one piece in the center of a complex puzzle.

Thus, art evaluation and appreciation are not simply liking or disliking.

Before we go into detail about how to appreciate and understand art, we want to reiterate that art evaluation and appreciation is about explaining WHY we like or dislike something, not simply WHETHER we like or dislike it. For example, you may not like a painting because it is too dark, but you may still like the subject or appreciate the overall message of the painting. To put it simply, "I do not like this picture" is not enough. We need to know the reasons for your opinion and also whether you think the work has positive qualities.

How do you appreciate the beauty of a painting?

Aesthetics is a very personal subject. We all see things differently, including "art" and especially "beauty." Besides, painting is primarily a visual art - something we see rather than think about. So, when we are asked if we think a painting is beautiful, we are likely to give an immediate answer. However, if we are asked to evaluate the beauty (or lack thereof) of a painting, i.e., to explain and justify it, things are quite different. To help you analyse the

situation, here are some questions you can ask yourself about the painting. Most of them are about the harmony, regularity and balance that is visible.

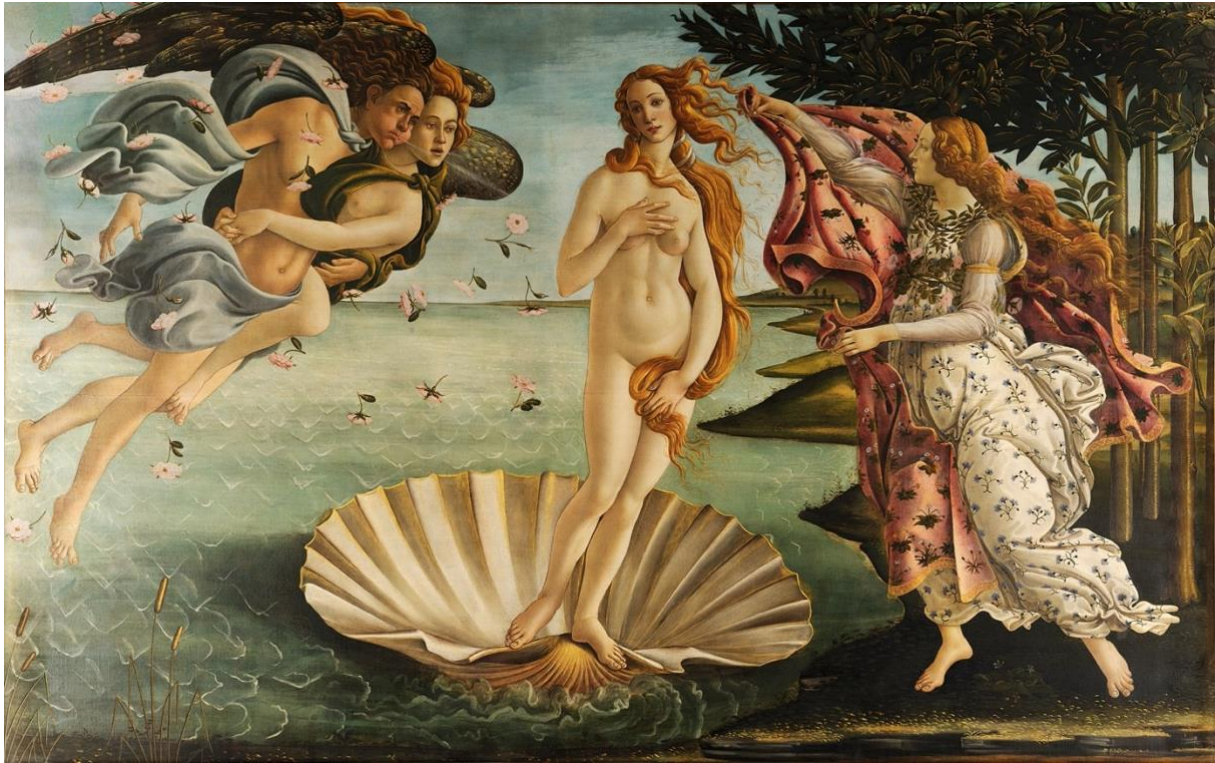
What proportions can be seen in the painting?

Ancient Greek art and Renaissance art were often based on certain rules of proportion that were consistent with classical views of optical harmony. So perhaps the beauty you see (or do not see) can be partly explained by the proportions (of objects and figures) in the work (see Picture 3 & 4).



Picture 3

Venus de Milo, Source: [Wikimedia](#)



Picture 4

The Birth of Venus- Sandro Botticelli, Source: [Wikimedia](#)

Do certain shapes or patterns repeat in the painting?

According to psychologists, the repetition of appealing shapes, especially in symmetrical patterns, can relax the eye and the brain so that we feel pleasure.

Do the colours used in the painting complement each other?

Colour schemes with complementary hues or tonal variations are known for their appealing effect on the senses.

Does the painting captivate you? Does it hold your attention?

The best paintings are the easiest to look at. They draw our attention, and then "signposts" guide our eye through the work.

How does the painting compare to others?

Everything is relative. So how does the painting in front of you compare to similar paintings by the same artist? If it is a mature work, you may find that it is better than earlier works and vice versa. If you cannot find other paintings by the same artist, look at similar works by other artists. Ideally, start with works painted in the same decade and then gradually move forward in time. You cannot look at too many paintings!

Practical examples and inspiration

As practical examples we suggest the following activities:

1. The gallery game
2. Different perspectives
3. Role game

Activity 1 - The gallery game

For the first activity, students are asked to imagine themselves in a gallery. You can print some paintings you like in large format and high resolution or project them with a projector.

Students are invited to look at the paintings in five stages.

1. description: ask them for a short description that includes objective criteria. For example: a woman sitting on a chair.

2. analysis: ask them for a more detailed description as well as a more subjective view, for example: a young/very young woman sitting on a chair, / resting, / bored.

3. setting: ask students about the time they think the painting is from, the actual socio-economic situation, and how they came to this conclusion.

4. comprehension: After hearing everyone's opinions, you can all come to a conclusion about what the painting represents.

5. review: Ask students what emotions the painting evokes and whether they like it aesthetically or think it has artistic value.

The process is pretty simple and the goal is to help students understand the subjectivity of art. It also encourages visual analysis and helps establish concentration.

Activity 2 - Different Perspectives

In this activity, the teacher will place an object of their choice in a visible place in the classroom, such as a water bottle or an umbrella.

They then ask students to recreate what they see on paper.

At the end, students exchange their papers with those of their classmates and discuss the similarities and differences in their images and the reasons that led them to create the object in this way.

Through this activity, students' imagination are stimulated and their creativity is encouraged.

Art is a visual learning experience that can help them improve their visual perception.

They can develop visual perception skills in this way, such as:

- Discernment - the ability to distinguish between similarities and differences.
- Memory - the ability to remember what is seen
- Sequential memory - remembering what has been seen in the correct order
- Comprehension - understanding what is seen



- Perception of shapes - distinguishing between patterns and shapes
- Depth perception - the ability to judge how far something has progressed

Activity 3 – Role gaming

You can ask students to choose their favorite historical period and imagine themselves living in that time during this activity. After everyone has chosen their role, you will show students illustrations, such as of animals, and ask them to comment on them using period information. This information may have already been discussed in class before the game begins. Thus, the students have to reproduce the feelings triggered by this work through the eyes of the role.

In this activity, students can learn to take the perspectives of others, because everyone will deal with this activity quite differently. At this point, let us emphasize the importance of the time period they choose, because it creates differences in the socio-political environment, class discrimination, etc.

Inspiration

ART APPRECIATION - UNDERSTANDING ART AND ARTISTS

<https://www.artyfactory.com/art-appreciation.html>

A Beginner's Guide to Appreciating Art

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkIRvqej1eE>



Art Appreciation (Elements and Principles of Art)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pTyJEwUtiE>

How to Look at an Artwork

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZoKEIBwKCs>

Additional resources

- Europeana, or the European Digital Library, is a pan-European digital library that provides access to two million books, maps, recordings, pictures, archive documents, tables, and videos from the European Union's 27 member countries.
 - <https://www.europeana.eu>
- Video with useful information about art.
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vV2cc_fGmA
- TEDEd lesson about artistic interpretation from Hayley Levitt
 - <https://ed.ted.com/lessons/who-decides-what-art-means-hayley-levitt#discuss>

