Art Appreciation Activity – Questioning in Learning and Teaching

The following questions may help you appreciate and interpret works of art. They can be employed in classroom at appreciation activity, or students’ own exploration and response to individual artwork. In writing your response, you can first answer the questions, and followed by short essays. No title is needed. You may try to express your feelings and opinions based on your understanding of the relevant artists and their works.

First, the students may provide data relating to the work:

- Title of the work and name of the artist
- When and where the work was created
- The media used
- Mode of presentation – How to classify the works (Impressionism? Abstract?)

Then, the students may participate in several art appreciation activities, including literal description, comprehensive feeling, formal analysis, interpretation of meanings and value judgment. In each appreciation activity, the teacher may ask through provoking questions to stimulate the students thought and promote interactive learning.

i. Literal description

Description is the collection of data from the visual appearance of an artwork. Students should be encouraged to carefully observe and describe the features of artworks. The description process may strengthen the students’ concentration and ability to make focus observation.
For example:

- Describe the image / object / people / event that you see.
- What is the artwork about? What is your assumption of the artist’s intention?
- Is the artwork 2-dimensional or 3-dimensional?
- Is the subject imagined / observed or recollected?
- Is the subject spontaneous presentation of the artist’s / patron’s social, religious, moral or political views?

ii. Comprehensive feeling

Owing to the variation of personal experiences and knowledge, the students may directly develop their respective comprehensive feeling of the artwork through association and imagination. The students should be encouraged to express their own feelings and views while appreciating the artwork, thereby promoting mutual exchanges.

For example:

- Has the artwork any influence on you? Does it arouse any mood / feeling you have experienced? Does it express feelings about life or nature? Can you imagine artist’s feeling at the time of creation?
- Is the work noisy, quiet, comfortable, upsetting, pleasant, sad, relaxing or shocking? How does the work move you?
- Does the work move you? Does it have any aesthetic power to arouse any keen feeling for something or make you think of anything new or take any action?

iii. Formal analysis

Formal analysis is based on literal description and comprehensive feeling of the artwork, and the students
• review how the artwork use principles of organisation to organise the visual elements;
• review how the composition achieves a certain effect;
• analyse the source of images and the strategies of image development employed in the work;
• identify the materials, techniques and processes used for creating the work;
• explore any signs and symbols used; and
• identify the culture or style presented by the artwork.

For example:

• How is the artwork arranged?
• Which are the main visual elements (lines, tones, colours, etc.)? How are they composed?
• What colour scheme (harmony, contrast, etc.) is used?
• Is one colour used as the main tone of the work? Do two or more colours have the same meaning?
• Is there any main shape? Or is the work made up of different shapes?
• Does any repeated shape / line, rhythm or form decide the overall design of the work?
• Does the scale of the work affect its appearance? And how? (record the size of the work if possible)
• Does the work relate with your work?
• Is the subject treated with realistic strategy or exaggeration / distorted / simplification? If so, why?
• How is the work produced? What materials are used?
• What stages has the work undergone from start to end?
• Has the artist used research, sketch, photograph, collage, steel plated stencil, and
practice model in his / her creation?

- Was the work created quickly or over a long time?
- What skills does the artist need to create the work?

iv. Interpretation of meaning

The students reflect, discuss and interpret the meanings and underlying message of the artwork in the specific context with reference to their personal experiences, information obtained through literal description and formal analysis, and contextual knowledge about appreciation and creation of artwork / artistic phenomenon.

- Can you explore what happened in the country at the time the artwork was created?
- How does the work reflect the relevant place and time / period / era?
- Does (did) the work serve any functional or religious purpose?
- Does the work have any implication / underlying message? What is it if any? (Is any simile or metaphor used?)
- Is the artwork spontaneous expression of the artist? What is the view of the artist or patron on social, religious, moral or political issue?
- What influence does the work have on the art in later times?
- What influence did the work have on the society at the time?
- Is the work representational / expressive / presentational? Does it have any implication? How do you know?

v. Value judgment

After literal description, comprehensive feeling, formal analysis and interpretation of meaning, the students may make rational, emotional and general judgment about the underlying message and value of the artwork.
For example:

- What traits of the work move you most? (content, technique in using media, elements used or personality of the work?)
- Do you think it a good work? Why yes? / Why no?
- Try to provide your true personal comment of the work, but it must be related the information of the work.
- Do you think the work inspires you?

After participating in the above appreciation activities, the students will have understood the basic principles of appreciation activities and may further compare and contrast other artwork, and explore the influence of the works of art on their own creation.

**Compare and contrast**

Try to consider the similarities and differences between the works of art (by the same or different artists) while comparing and contrasting two or more pieces of artwork from art appreciation (e.g. themes, styles, meanings, media and appearances).

**Influence on students’ creation of works**

- Consider the influence of the work on your works.
- Why do you decide to examine the work at this time of your artistic development? What relevancies do you think are there?
- Have you tried to produce in your work some effects similar to those produced by the artist?
- Does the work of the artist help you solve any existing problem or draw any conclusion?
• Does the study on the work help you make any improvement? (from the positive perspective)

Please use appropriate art terminology in your writing of art appreciation and criticism.

With reference to the teaching materials provided by Mr. John Doherty, Art Department, Shatin College.