



FIVE TIPS FOR TALKING ABOUT ART

There are no wrong answers!

Be open-minded. Everyone will have their own idea about what an artwork might mean. We all experience art differently, come to different conclusions about what things may mean, and have different reactions to it. Be encouraging and try to avoid ideas about right vs. wrong interpretations.

Ask Open-Ended Questions

Ask questions that require critical thinking and analysis rather than a simple Yes/No answer. These types of questions can relate to what we see in the image, explore the artist's intention, or the possible meanings of symbols in the artwork. Some examples of open-ended questions are:

- What symbols clues do you see in this artwork?
- What do you see that makes you think that?
- Why do you think the artist made this?
- Why do you think they chose this color?
- Do you have any ideas about how the artist made this?
- If you could add something to this artwork, what would you add?
- If this artwork could sing a song, what would it sound like?
- What title would you give this artwork?

Don't Lead or Give Answers

Allow everyone the chance to develop their own opinions or thoughts and figure out their own answer. If someone is struggling with an answer, rephrase the question or move on. Not every question on this list applies to every artwork, so try to select the questions that feel most relevant. Stuck on how to express your answer? Take a moment and try writing it down, or just listing a few adjectives or verbs that describe your reaction.

Slow Down! Look Carefully and Take Your Time

While it is tempting to hurry through looking at an artwork, slow down and take your time. Try looking at the artwork for 5 to 10 seconds. Then close your eyes or look at something else for a few seconds to give them a break. Then take a longer, 20 to 30 second look. Try looking at it from different angles: standing, sitting, or from the side. Think about how seeing the artwork in a different way changes your experience, reactions, or ideas about the artwork.

Keep the Conversation (and Inspiration) Going

Looking at art is a great way to inspire curiosity and creativity. Continue engaging with art in other ways to build your understanding of techniques, art history, and art related vocabulary. Visit a museum or art gallery. Borrow a book or movie about an artist, art history, or an art movement from the HCLS collection. Try your hand at an artmaking activity or attend one of HCLS' art classes. Visit hclibrary.org for more resources and a schedule of classes.