

Artful Thinking: Color, Shape, Line, and Creative Comparisons

The **Artful Thinking** approach encourages active looking and learning through the practice of short, simple thinking routines. These routines help students to focus on specific aspects of an artwork and to organize their observations and ideas. The repetition of thinking routines across subjects and disciplines supports students in developing not only the skills for inquiry, but also the habits of an inquiring mind.

This lesson combines and scaffolds two thinking routines. The first focuses on observation and description, and the second on connection and comparison. It can be used in any context in which you want students to develop descriptive language and metaphorical thinking and to practice reasoning from evidence.

Grade Level

Adaptable for all grades

Common Core Academic State Standards

1. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1](#)
2. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5](#)
3. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.5](#)

National Visual Arts Standards

4. Responding: understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning
5. Connecting: relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context

Suggested Art Images

Click on the titles below to view high-resolution photographs on the Museum's website:

6. [And Then... You Just Smile](#), 2003, by Moe Brooker
7. [Male and Female](#), 1942–43, by Jackson Pollock
8. [Person in the Presence of Nature](#), 1935, by Joan Miró
9. [Red and Orange Streak](#), 1919, by Georgia O'Keeffe
10. [Sunflowers](#), 1888 or 1889, by Vincent van Gogh
11. [Winter Chaos, Blizzard](#), 1909–11, by Marsden Hartley



And Then... You Just Smile, 2003
Moe Brooker (American)
Color offset lithograph
Image and sheet: 21 9/16 x 21 1/2 inches (54.8 x 54.6 cm)
Gift of the Brandywine Workshop, Philadelphia, in
memory of Anne d'Harnoncourt, 2009
2009-61-11
© Moe Brooker

Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. Closely observe an artwork to describe the use of color, shape, and line.
2. Analyze an artwork to explain how specific colors, shapes, and types of lines contribute to its mood, story, or meaning.
3. Think metaphorically to make comparisons between an artwork and another category.

Materials Needed

4. Screen for projecting images
5. Color, Shape, Line Worksheet
6. Creative Comparisons Worksheet

Lesson Process

1. You may use any of the suggested artworks for this lesson. Once you choose an image, try to conceal the title until you reach the end of the exercise so as not to influence students' thinking.
2. Project your selected image for students to see. Explain that they are going to be looking closely at a painting and describing specific elements of it. They are going to think about how these elements contribute to the mood, or feeling, and meaning of the artwork.
3. Distribute Color, Shape, Line Worksheets, and read the directions for Part I together. Ask students for examples of each category, or provide some examples yourself. Then give students several minutes to look at the artwork and describe the colors, shapes, and lines they see.
4. Ask students to share their observations in each category. What did they notice first? Is there a color, shape, or type of line that stands out? What elements are repeated throughout the painting? Are there types of colors, shapes, or lines that the artist did not use?
5. When you have thoroughly described the artwork together, ask students what they think the mood of the painting is. What kind of feeling does the image give the viewer? Is there a particular color, shape, or type of line that contributes to that feeling? For example, squiggly lines might make a painting feel chaotic, energetic, or happy. Straight, horizontal lines might contribute a feeling of calm or peace.
6. After discussing one or two examples, read the directions for Part II of the Color, Shape, Line Worksheet with your students. Have them work in pairs to identify two formal elements of the artwork that they think contribute to the mood or meaning and to explain how.
7. Ask pairs to share their observations and their reasoning. Did students have similar responses to the artwork, or are there different feelings and interpretations? Why might different people have similar or different responses to the same artwork?
8. Now, ask students to begin thinking metaphorically. Review the meaning of "metaphor" and ask for, or provide, one or two examples. You might say that a person is a monster if the person behaves in an aggressive or uncivilized way. Or you might call a person sunshine if their mood is cheerful and bright. A metaphor is a way of comparing the qualities of one person or thing to something else.

9. In this case, students will compare the artwork they have analyzed to something in another category, like a season, a type of music, or an emotion. Read the directions on the Creative Comparisons Worksheet together. How can they use their thinking about the mood and meaning of the painting to develop and support a strong comparison?
10. Students may choose from the suggested categories, or they can think of their own. Have the class brainstorm a few more possible categories before beginning the activity. Ask for examples of why a painting might remind them of a character trait or a movie genre. What elements of a painting might make you think of a funny person, or a comedy movie? What elements might make you think of an adventurous person, or an action movie?
11. Provide time for students to work independently, and then invite them to share their creative comparisons.
12. Tell students what the title of your selected painting is. Ask them to reflect on how the title relates to what they see in the painting. Is the title literal or metaphorical? Does knowing the title change the way they see the painting?

Assessment

Show students one of the other suggested artworks. Have them complete a Creative Comparisons Worksheet independently to demonstrate their ability to develop a comparison from visual evidence.

Suggested Differentiation

You may scaffold this activity for younger students, who are more concrete thinkers, by encouraging them to compare the selected painting to something tangible and familiar, like an animal, a toy, or a musical instrument. Instead of writing out an explanation, they could draw pictures of their creative comparisons.

Suggested Extension Activity

Once students have developed their metaphors for a given artwork and explained their reasoning, have them create something to represent the comparison. This might be a movie poster or a drawing of a landscape. It might also be a soundtrack, a menu, or a poem. Guide students in brainstorming a list of possible creative extensions, but allow them to choose their projects independently.

Color, Shape, Line Worksheet

Take a few minutes to look closely at a work of art.

<p>PART I What colors do you see? Describe or draw them.</p>	<p>What kinds of shapes to you see? Describe or draw them.</p>	<p>What kinds of lines do you see? Describe or draw them.</p>
<p>PART II Choose a kind of color, shape, or line that you listed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does it contribute to making the artwork "work"? • How does it contribute to the mood or meaning of the artwork? • What new ideas do you have about the artwork? Do you see anything now that you didn't see before? 	<p>Color, shape, or line #1:</p>	
	<p>Color, shape, or line #2:</p>	

Creative Comparisons Worksheet

Take a few minutes to look closely at a work of art. What do you see in the artwork? What does it make you think of?

Compare Choose a category from the list below or identify your own category.	Imagine If this artwork were a kind of _____, what would it be?	Explain What are the similarities? Give three reasons for your comparison.
7. Animal 8. Character Trait 9. Emotion 10. Genre of movie 11. Genre of music 12. Food 13. Holiday 14. Place 15. Season 16. Sport 17. _____ 18. _____ 19. _____ 20. _____ 21. _____		