

Visual Literacy

'I know nothing about art,' is often heard and yet we all know something about it!

Here are some easy steps and some key words to help you explain what you see.

Select a painting then try the following.

1. EMOTION:

Take TIME to look around the painting. Use your senses.

What do you SEE? What do you HEAR? What do you FEEL?

(Key words: busy/calm, worried/happy)

2. MOOD:

What atmosphere has the artist tried to create? Do the colours and content set the

MOOD?

(Key words: happy/sad, noisy/silent, contrasts, light/dark, dim/bright)

3.FORm:

*** Shape: In orientation, is it portrait or landscape? Sometimes shape is symbolic e.g. an**

arc may symbolise part of a circle for God's eternal love

*** Size : Why might it be very large or small? These also convey meaning.**

- Location: Try to imagine it in situ. Large paintings often adorned large rooms or halls, sometimes above mantelpieces, so would have been viewed looking**

upwards. Smaller paintings needed close viewing and so may have been hung in a home. Is it located in a suitable position in the gallery?

- **Medium and technique:** What medium was used? Does this support what may be the meaning?

(Key words: close up/far away/eye level, oils/ water colour, brush, palette)

4.SUBJECT or CONTEXT:

What is the historical context to the work? The painting may show the political, social, religious or cultural aspects of the time. Who commissioned the painting? WHY?

- **Is it landscape/ cityscape/seascape, portrait, still life?**
- **Where or on whom does the light fall? Does the gallery's lighting enhance it?**
- **Title and artist: Do these help you to interpret the painting? Does the artist's style help?**

(Key words: oils/ aquatint, realism/abstract, brush, palette, figurative/non-figurative, symbolic, happy/sad, war, commentary, narrative)

5.MAIN ASPECT:

What is the main focus of the painting? Is it a colour, person, design or an item? Why is it so important? Do lines or a gaze draw your eye to it?

(Key words: centre, contrasts, lead to)

End product! You have interpreted a painting for yourself!

WELL DONE!!

Finally, ask yourself, 'What message does the artist want to convey?' Maybe you need to do a little extra background research on this one!