



Observe, Question and Write

GRADE: 6 and up TIME: one session

Developed by **Linda Pfisterer**
Adapted from a workshop by Terry Barrett, Ohio State Univ.



KIT INCLUDES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lesson plan • 3 overhead transparencies and boards (<i>The Money Changer, A Meeting, and Radioactive Cats</i>): • <u>Scholastic Magazine</u> about Sandy Skoglund • vocabulary board 	MATERIALS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overhead projector • student response sheets • pencils
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LESSON DESCRIPTION:
Students examine a piece of art by asking who, what, when, where, and why questions. After reporting information through questions, they write a short story or paragraph.

VOCABULARY: visual culture installation art Questioning words: who, what, when, where and why	ART ELEMENTS: X – Could refer to all ___ Line ___ Shape/Form ___ Color ___ Value ___ Texture ___ Space/Perspective	ART PRINCIPLES: ___ Pattern ___ Rhythm/movement ___ Proportion/Scale ___ Balance ___ Unity ___ Emphasis	CONTENT CONNECTIONS: Social studies Language arts THEMES: Social statements Art as communication
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OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT CRITERIA:

1. Students will look closely at a piece of art through the use of questioning exercises.
2. Students will share information by collectively asking questions.
3. Students will use the ideas and information collected to write a paragraph or short story.
4. Students will have the option to read their stories aloud to share their ideas with other students.

PREPARE:

This exercise can be used with any piece of art that is a bit complex, ambiguous and has action. It is a great way to practice talking about art and will help people be open to such discussions in the future. Have a colored overhead made from the art that you choose to use for this exercise. Do not tell students anything about the art until after the exercise. Make copies of student response sheet, one for each student.

ENGAGE AND EXPLORE:

Visual culture is everything you see around you. Artists capture the visual culture of their times in the art they make. We use the information in the art/paintings to understand the culture in which the artist lived. Today we will look at two pieces of art made in different centuries and observe the differences in the visual culture they depict. Questions will be our method of observation. After the questions we will write a story to describe a moment in time. (If you choose to substitute or add other art visuals, make sure they will create questions in the minds of the viewers.)

This exercise is generic but the notes below are based on a particular piece. This is easily adapted to any piece of art that has recognizable action, has people, and is ambiguous.

CREATE:

1. Put the transparency of *The Money Changer and His Wife* on the overhead projector. Practice the questioning procedure by letting the students ask questions beginning with who, what, when, where and why. Begin with “who” and stay with it until about ten good questions have been asked by the students. Move on to what, then when and so on. Encourage them to be specific and give detail within the question, i.e. “Who is the person in the velvety red dress wearing the hat with white flaps?” In this type of questioning, more information is gathered.
2. When students are done using the “five w” questions to gather information and have heard lots of ideas, have them improvise a progressive story about the painting. The teacher will begin by starting the story with two or three sentences. Tell the students they can take over the story at any time by raising their hands. For instance:
“Isabella was reading her prayer book while waiting for a customer to come into the store. She liked to make good use of her time because she had a lot to do that day. Peter was sitting beside her weighing and counting the money from the last customer. It was a bit chilly in the room that day, but.....”
3. When the story seems to be done, give the students information about the painting, *The Money Changer and His Wife*. The art information is attached to the lesson plan. Share it with the students and discuss how we may see things differently because of the times in which we live.
4. Put a different piece of art on the overhead. Choose from “*The Meeting*” or “*Radioactive Cats*.” Instead of asking questions, hand out the attached paper.
5. Assign each student only one of the “w” question starters. Divide questions equally (similar to numbering off), only say who, what, where, when and why. Ask students to work individually; encourage them to write at least 5 thoughtful questions. Give an example of how to include detail in a question, e.g. “What is the bald man thinking as he watches the green cats jump up on the table?” (A question with detail might not be repeated by another student.)
6. When students are done writing, have those that wrote only “who” questions stand in the front of the room and read one question at a time until all students have taken a turn. Then go back to the beginning and let them all read one more, repeating this step until they are all done. (Those who have no more questions that haven’t been asked should just say “pass.”) After the “who” questions, have the “what” questions group stand in front of the room to read their questions...and so on.
7. Now have students individually write a story, creatively capturing the moment in time from the art.
8. After about 20 minutes of writing, let those students who wish to read their stories aloud do so. The teacher should ‘help’ students notice how many story variations can come from the same piece of art.
9. After reading the stories, share information about the artist and art with students (See attached page.)

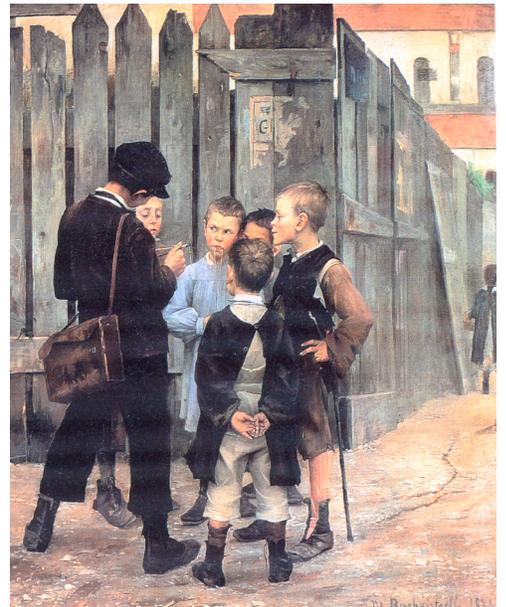
This is a good opportunity to teach students how to project their voices. (Remind them that the reason for speaking is to be heard.)

THROUGHOUT THIS LESSON ALL STUDENTS MUST LISTEN CAREFULLY BECAUSE SHARING IDEAS WILL HELP THEM GATHER INFORMATION FOR THE NEXT WRITING ACTIVITY.

The Money Changer and His Wife, Quentin Massys, 1514
He was a Flemish artist who lived in Antwerp, Belgium most of his life. The painting is about money changers who became indispensable in the trading centers during that time. The coins used for buying goods were different depending on where they came from and what materials they were made from. Only the money changer could determine the value of a coin by looking at it through a magnifying glass and by placing it on the scales to find out its exact gold or silver content. Money changers enjoyed a high status, but were often suspected of being stingy. In this painting, the wife of the money changer is holding a prayer book, and possibly hoping her husband will not be led into temptation by the lure of riches.



A Meeting, Marie Bashkirtseff, 1884 *A Meeting* is a portrait of Paris slum children. It is not clear what the taller boy is holding, but the body language and facial expressions of the boys helps the viewer speculate about what is happening at that moment. Marie Bashkirtseff, the artist, was born in the Ukraine to a wealthy family, but traveled across Europe most of her young years. She studied art in France at a time when it was very difficult to be a woman artist. She produced a large number of paintings before she died of tuberculosis at the age of 23. Unfortunately, a large number of her art works were destroyed by the Nazis during World War II. She was a painter, a sculptor and a writer. Her diary entitled *I Am the Most Interesting Book of All*, is still in print today. She wrote about the struggles of women artists, revealing how the bourgeoisie lived during those times.



Radioactive Cats, Sandy Skoglund, 1980 This is a contemporary work of art using multi-media to create a room filled with real life objects. The art is installed in a gallery for people to look at and later it is removed, only to be remembered through photographs. Sandy Skoglund has been a Professor of Art since 1973 and currently teaches at Rutgers University, New Jersey. She uses social themes in her connections between fantasy and the real world. *Radioactive Cats* could have two themes, one of social indifference to the aging, and the other about nuclear war and its aftermath.

