

Museum Musings...

When visiting an art exhibit or museum

Would you like one easy lesson on becoming a magician, using words as your bag of tricks?

If so, **find a painting that emotionally involves** you; you may love the picture or somehow be disturbed by it.

Now wave your magic pen and, with vigorous strokes, transform the details of your visual experience into words.

Please make notes in your journal, on cards, on your message system...somewhere...as you look.

1. Let's start with **theme**. What is theme? It's the central idea in a work that says something about "life in general" "all humanity" or "the universal." Is there a dominating idea in the painting you've chosen? What is the artist conveying about civilization? Is the artist optimistic about the future of humanity? Does the artist see humanity as evil? Do you agree with the artist? Is this theme appropriate for our day and age?

2. Think about the **setting**. When and where is this painting taking place? What are the physical arrangements in this composition? Can you guess the occupations of the characters, if any? What is the time in which the action takes place? What is the general environment? Could it happen elsewhere—some other time? How important is the setting to the entire picture? Is the setting believable? Does the setting help to create a particular mood?

3. **Characters** need careful analysis. What are their physical descriptions? How important are they? What are they like emotionally? What are they like spiritually? Are they happy within themselves? Do they relate well with each other? Are they stereotypical? Do they seem "romantic"? Do they fit into particular groups? Is there a common problem they may face? Every successful characterization becomes an example of the universal. Can the characters in your painting represent something in relation to the world at large? Study your painting. Analyze the characters in every way possible.

4. **Conflict** may be viewed in many ways. A conflict is a struggle between two opposing forces. Are there two opposing forces in this painting? Are they significant or trivial? How would you resolve the conflict? Is the conflict between characters or ideas? Is the conflict man vs. man? man vs. himself? man vs. society? man vs. nature? Which side would you take?

5. Every picture has a **tone**. What is the artist's attitude toward the subject matter? Is this attitude or tone playful? serious? ironic? informal? intimate? Would the artist enjoy the company of the characters? Would the artist consider the characters trustworthy? friendly? If the painting has no characters, what seems to be the artist's attitude toward the environment, or message in the painting?

6. **Mood** expresses attitudes of the characters toward the theme or toward one another. What are the attitudes of the characters? Could they be friends? Are their attitudes predictable? What is your attitude toward the characters or message in the picture?

7. **Plot** is a series of episodes or actions. Could you make up a plot for this painting? What would be the next action? Would the characters in each action behave realistically? emotionally? Would it have a surprise ending?

8. A **title** is important. Give this painting your own title. What made you choose this title? How does it compare with the artist's title?

9. Think about **symbols**. A symbol is something that is itself, yet stands for, or suggests, something else. Is there an object that might stand for some larger idea? Is there a meaning on any other level than the literal?

10. **Point of view** is the way in which the painting is presented by the artist. Every time the point of view changes, the message changes. For example, assume you disagree with your parents about some issue and later repeat your side of the story to a friend. You are giving your point of view. If your parents were to respond with their story, this would represent their point of view. The point of view results from the artist's consciousness. If you were the artist, what would be your point of view? Describe the painting from a character's point of view. Do you agree with this change?

If all this has sounded somewhat familiar here's why:

The practical job of constructing a painting is similar to the practical job of constructing a short story or a novel. There is a combination of elements that produces the whole. Every element contributes to the "unity of effect."

Be an artist with words. Brush-stroke with syntax and diction instead of paint.

"It adds a precious seeing to the eye." (Shakespeare, Love's Labour Lost, IV,iii)

So now we will write (ca 1 page)...

Choose one:

(please provide a copy of the companion art for us to see)

1. Jump into the picture you have analyzed. Where would you put yourself and why?
2. You are a narrator. Narrate a short story (flash fiction/one page) about this picture.
3. This picture is Act II. Describe what happened in Acts I and/or III.
4. This picture is a dream you had last night. Analyze it.
5. Look at two pictures. Write a dialogue in which they talk to each other.
6. Remove something from the picture and reveal how this affects it.
7. Add something to the picture and reveal how this affects it.
8. Which feature in the painting is most emphasized? Write a simile focused on this feature.

(a simile, of course, is a similarity between two objects or ideas using like or as)

A Plea to Modern Art

I hear music in this painting
bright red with anger,
yellow with the morning sun.
You coil tightly on my brain,
invading my prism of reality.
Soaring free in space,
you tuck me in your dream.
My intellect prizes order,
but you with your sharp
geometry, open an abyss on
the edge of shock.
Should I plant a flower in the
right hand corner of my mind?
The drippings from your palette
burst my order from its crisp
white house.
I want a sermon and instead
you prick my skin.
You sweep me up before I
can erase your mystique.
You dart here and there
stemming from the dark of man
when I need, instead, radiance to
help me taste the salt of tears.
I'd rather sharpen precision
than peep through pinholes.
Leave your cloudy provinces.
Give me a breath or air.
Explain yourself.
I fear the unknown.



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