

## An Art Studio Program Developed With An Art Questioning Strategy

by

Donna Maddox, Department of Art, Columbus College, Columbus, Georgia

A way to assist students in progressing to a mature, involved studio level, is to utilize a questioning strategy that requires observation, discussion, contemplation, planning and decision-making prior to production and reflection. During these activities teacher and students will look at a work of art, discuss questions, then plan and produce art.

An art questioning strategy requires active participation of students observing art, sharing knowledge and developing imagination. Questioning and responding strengthens students' involvement and encourages others in seeing. It promotes higher order thinking skills which can be transferred to a higher level of studio commitment. While looking at and talking about a work of art, students will discuss context, content, process, and purpose. This will develop perceptual intellect prior to independent studio planning and production. A student will then have a strong knowledge base which may be used in a creative manner. Objectives to consider accomplishing during the questioning strategy are: increasing thinking, analyzing and discussion skills; developing perceptual knowledge; emphasizing productive thinking skills; and discovering meaningful information to act as studio motivation.

In utilizing a questioning strategy prior to studio production, a teacher may consider proceeding as follows. First observe and discuss several works of art in media to be utilized. Select works which represent specific artistic problems. Select questions which are appropriate for a particular class. Concentrate on discussing facts and knowledge about art.

**Facts and Knowledge About Art.** Determine by **whom, when** and **where** the art work was created. Such knowledge may provide insight about the purpose and meaning of art. Comprehending and using art information increases the ability to determine why a work is created and to garner information for future production of art. For example: Select a work of art and gather information about it. Consider: Who made this? • When and where was this made? • What prompted the artist to make this? • How has art knowledge or experience contributed to this work? • Did the time and place shape this work? • What influences are shown? • Is there a connection to art made before or after this work?

**Compare works of similar theme and different styles or cultures.** What cultural artistic standards are illustrated? • How has society influenced this art work? • How this work would be different if done by another culture, in another style, in another time period? • By what stylistic standards does this work demand to be judged? • How does a culture determine which objects are art? • What role do traditions and history play in creation, interpretation and evaluation? • How does this work show economic, social, religious or ethical value? • What reasons did the artist/designer give for creating this? • How is the subject conveyed? Explain. • What more would you like to know about the artist/designer?

**Next explore art content.** Develop discussion utilizing selected questions: Investigate what the work of art is about, the idea or intended meaning being conveyed in the art work. If students are to communicate ideas through their work, they should be able to look at, respond to, and give meaning to art observed. Art content is *what* the work is about; functions, and techniques describe *how* the art content is conveyed. For example, look at a work and ask some of these questions: • What are the features one perceives? • **Explain how ideas or objects have been used:** What is the focus of attention? • What should be noticed? • How was this art work put together? • Decide if and how principles and elements are utilized? • Why do some images make you think? • Describe the symbols. • Explain the environment shown. • How do these images communicate or inspire? • How does this work express a feeling or thought? **Classify the beliefs illustrated:** How is this unique? • How are images and feelings related? • Analyze the art from different critical philosophies: as an imitationalist, a formalist, expressionist, a post modernist or a socialist: Marxist or feminist. Evaluate different conclusions from these points or view. Plan for, recognize and capitalize

on aesthetic questions as they arise during review: • Is this art? • Does this object have aesthetic value? Translate the subject matter into a statement. • What interests you most about this artwork? • Report on other artworks that resemble this. • Decide why this style was used. • Identify the center of interests and give reasons for your choice. • Assess the personal and social significance of this art.

**Third, evaluate processes, skills and techniques appropriate for the objectives being developed.** Describe *how* an artwork is made: the processes, techniques or steps used to create works of art. Also included are the selection of tools, materials, media, and how they are manipulated to communicate ideas and meaning. As students learn more complex ways and processes of working, choices are made for specific purposes of communication and ideas. For example: Look at works done in different media and processes. Consider: What are the differences in these works? • How is a painting, print, drawing, sculpture, vessel, photo, or design made? • Explain how tools are and are not used in a skillful manner. • Analyze if traditional rules of media or processes must be used or may be broken. • Discuss how the art work shows vast experience or a master of technique or skill. • Decide how a work would be different if done in another media. • Debate if the media selected is the best. • How is this technique emotional or intellectual? • How does the artist utilize creativity? • Explore or invent new technical methods. • Demonstrate various ways artists have used media. • What skills would you need to make this art object? • Describe the steps used to make this object.

**Next, select and analyze purposes and/or functions of art.** Give a reason *why* the art was made and tell *what* this work of art hopes to communicate. Art work may be intellectual or emotional; the theme may reveal a goal, intent or achievement of the artist. For example, an art work will primarily: • *Record*: document; give a historical reference • *Persuade*: teach; show social values, beliefs or issues; reinforce ideology • *Illustrate*: explain or narrate • *Beautify*: idealize; initiate; and represent • *Organize*: formal objective arrangement • *Redefine reality*: stretch the ability to see or feel anew • *Visualize the unknown*: imagine, express • *Design*: architecture, interior, fashion, industry, graphics or crafts. Choose several works of art which have distinctly different purposes or functions: • Determine the major purpose of each. Justify your opinion. • Observe works with more than one purpose. Analyze these by asking questions and evaluating artists' goals. • Debate other purposes for art. • Review art of various cultures and select works which illustrate distinct purposes. Consider these questions: Decide how this art object should be treated; now, in five years, in ten years. • What is your opinion of the object's social significance? • What characteristics make this art object valuable? • How does this object fit your ideas of beauty or good design? • How would you incorporate this artwork into your personal life?

At the conclusion of this visual investigation and after responding to selected questions about art, students should be well prepared to develop substantive art products. Students should be instructed to complete some of the following: *Plan*: In a sketchbook collect references, images and drawings. Research and plan the purpose, concepts, process and/or content of work to be completed. Keep written and visual notes regarding goals. Experiment with media and do preliminary studies to resolve technical pitfalls. Sketch many possible compositions. *Produce*: Proceed in an analytical, intuitive, intellectual, emotional, objective or subjective manner. And work, work, work at making art. Give the mind, eye and hands an opportunity to unite aspirations. *Reflect*: Review products in process as an objective viewer. Consider process and goals. *Evaluate*: Recognize plans which were achieved and accomplishments which were the benefit of intuitive creative processes. Make decisions regarding new production plans and goals and get to work again. *Produce* a series which shows clear direction and purpose. *Analyze* the completed series for aesthetic success. Note strengths and weaknesses and begin anew.

Using this indepth questioning strategy with studio production will promote a perceptual, intellectual foundation and assist in developing individual style with rich and varied personal artistic results. A teacher utilizing an artistic questioning strategy prior to studio production will find that student's thinking skills are of a higher order and these skills will transfer to a higher level art production.

### Resources

- Hamblen, K. (1984). Art criticism questioning strategy. *Studies in Art Education*, 26(1) 41-50. Reston, VA: National Art Education Association.
- Eaton, M. (1988). *Basic issues in Aesthetics*. Los Angeles, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Dake, D. (1995). Effective uses of art history. *NAEA Advisory*. Reston, VA: National Art Education Association.