

Learning to Look

How can we learn to see more when we look at art? This lesson leads students to become better observers of both art and the world around them through looking, describing, imagining, and responding. Drawing and writing activities are adapted for students' grade level.

Grade Level

Grades 4–12

Common Core Academic State Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1](#)

National Visual Arts Standards

- Responding: understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning

Suggested Learning Goals

Students will be better able to:

- Make observations and descriptions about a variety of artwork using all five senses
- Respond to artwork thoughtfully through discussion, drawing, and writing

Essential Questions

- How can we learn to see more when we look at art?
- How can close looking, describing, and imagining help us to experience artwork in a more meaningful way?

Suggested Vocabulary

Compare	Describe	Observe	Relate	Wonder
Contrast	Imagine	Reflect	Respond	

Lesson-Specific Activity

This activity is designed to prepare students for thinking and talking about artworks they may see during a "Learning to Look" lesson.

- Ask students to select a familiar, every-day object to observe and describe in detail. Challenge them to describe the object as if it is a strange thing they are seeing for the first time. They must not name the object in their description.



Memorandum Case with a Portrait of a Woman's Left Eye, c. 1800

Artist/maker unknown (English)

Watercolor on ivory

Miniature: 1 5/16 x 9/16 inches (3.3 x 1.4 cm)

Case: 3 7/8 x 3 3/16 inches (9.9 x 8.1 cm)

Gift of Joseph Carson, Hope Carson Randolph, John B. Carson, and Anna Hampton Carson in memory of their mother, Mrs. Hampton L. Carson, 1935

1935-17-1

- As a model for this exercise, read aloud the short passage from Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* in which the Lilliputians find Gulliver's hat (Part I, Chapter 3). Ask students if they can guess what the strange object is before it is revealed. What techniques did Swift use to make this familiar object seem strange? Which descriptive details help the reader identify it?
- Give students some time to look closely at the objects they selected. Encourage them to record as many descriptive details as they can. What does the object feel like? Does it have a scent, or make a sound? What does it remind them of?
- When students have completed their short descriptions, ask them to turn their writing in to you. They will bring their objects up to the front of the room to display.
- Hand descriptions back to students at random. Give them some time to read and to look at the selection of objects. When students are ready, they can place the description they received next to the object they think it describes.
- Discuss the process with students. Were their guesses correct? What details in the writing helped them to identify the object? What was difficult about the exercise?

Differentiation

- This activity can easily be modified for students of variable writing ability. Have students work in pairs, matching a stronger writer with someone who is less confident. Both students should contribute to the description.

Supplementary Materials

- *Gulliver's Travels*, by Jonathan Swift