Teaching Primary Art & Design: Discussing artworks

What do you see?

Do you like what you see and why?

Begin by showing a section of the artwork or the whole image; children should be encouraged to simply describe what they see and discuss what they like or dislike about it.

How do you think the artist made this work, what materials and techniques did they use?

Refer to previous art lessons that the children have had and other artworks the children have seen; encourage them to recognise effects, materials and techniques that they know of.

What country do you think this work was made in and how can you tell?

Children can refer to a world map to make connections. They might be able to identify and share what it is that reminds them of a particular place, and they should be encouraged to refer to prior learning in topic and/or geography work.

When do you think this work was made and how can you tell?

You could ask the children to guess at this before revealing facts about the date of the work. Children might be able to identify and describe styles/costumes/objects as being ‘old’ or ‘new’, and older children can use more specific vocabulary such as ‘ancient’ or ‘contemporary’.

How long do you think it took the artist to make this work?

Encourage the children to consider the skills and scale of the work and to reflect on how long it takes them to produce their artworks, the process they undertake and how they know when they have finished a piece of work.

Can you describe the colours/shapes/lines in this work?

Younger children can count and name the shapes and colours; older children can use more descriptive language and discuss why the artist might have used particular shapes/colours/lines to represent ideas/convey a mood.

Is anything moving in this work? How has the artist shown this?

Discuss the challenges of creating movement in a still image and bring the children’s attention to how the artist has used light/textureshape/line/colour to do this.
Teaching Primary Art & Design: Discussing artworks

Has the artist made anything look 3D, how have they done this?

Discuss the challenges of making a 2D work look 3D, bring the children’s attention to the ways that artists do this. Look at the particular techniques used in the work.

Is there a lot of light in this work, can you work out where the light is coming from?

Encourage the children to identify any light sources in the work and to notice shadows cast. They should also discuss why the artist might have selected to have light in particular areas of the work.

Can you describe the style of this work?

Encourage the children to make comparisons with other art they have seen and to discuss the similarities and differences. You could focus on subject/paint effects/colours/narrative.

How large or small do you think the work is?

Discuss this before revealing the facts about the scale of the work and use actual objects in the classroom to give a clearer idea of scale. Remind the children that the image they are seeing is not to scale but is a certain size because of the interactive whiteboard.

Can you see any people/animals/objects/places in this work?

Encourage the children to list these and discuss each one, focusing on how these elements relate to each other as well as what they tell us about the setting/narrative.

What message do you think the artist was trying to give us with this work?

Is there a story being told in this work? What is it?

Why do you think the artist made this work?

Ask the children to imagine they made the work and consider what they wanted the viewer to feel/think when viewing the work. They could also consider whether the artwork has any moral/religious/historical lessons to impart. Older children can discuss how the work came about, i.e. was it a commission for a particular place or a response by the artist to a specific theme?

Would you hang this work in your room? Why or why not?

Ask the children to consider how they would feel if this work was in their environment and viewed every day; this can open further discussions about the purpose of the work, where it was intended to be shown and why. Discuss why some artworks might be important to look and discuss even though we might not want to own them. You could also discuss art collectors and why some individuals collect/sell art.
Teaching Primary Art & Design: Discussing artworks

Does this work remind you of anything?

How does this work make you feel and why?

Allow the children to discuss freely and relate the artwork to anything that comes to mind, e.g. dreams, memories, people, music, places, shapes, dance moves.

If you had to create sounds or dance moves to go with the work, what would they be and why?

The children could actually make these sounds and moves and even work in groups to do so. This may be better suited to more abstract/expressionist works; for works with more of a narrative nature, children could act out scenes, including before and after the scene depicted.

Look at the artist's name – does it tell you anything about where he/she is from? Do you know anything about that part of the world?

Encourage the children to refer to a world map and to discuss the reasons they think the artist is from a particular place, e.g. an accent over an ‘e’ is a clue that the artist may be French.

Look at the date the work was made, can you think of any historical information about the world at that time?

Encourage children to think about events and people they have learnt about in topic/history work and relate this to the artwork.

Is there a title for the work? Does it give you any more information about the work?

If you were to give this work a title, what would it be and why?

You could ask the children to come up with a title before revealing the actual title. Discuss whether knowing the title helps you to understand the artwork more or gives you a different perspective.