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Enduring Idea:

- **Cross-disciplinary:** Observing, questioning, and interpreting details can help us understand complex information in any subject.
- **Art-specific:** Critically examining visual elements helps us understand the choices artists make and the meaning behind artworks.

Contemporary Artist Connection: Nick Cave, Faith Ringgold

Visual Art Content Areas: Art Criticism (Description, Analysis, Interpretation, Judgment)

3 Art Criticism Strategies:

1. Detective Note Sheets: Students write detailed observations and clues about artwork (Description & Analysis). Appears Day 1, during the gallery rotation.
2. Peer Discussion Circles: Students share interpretations and defend their ideas with classmates (Interpretation). Appears Day 1, after individual observation.
3. Mystery Artwork Creation & Critique: Students create a personal “mystery artwork” and peers apply the detective method to critique it (Judgment & Analysis). Appears Day 2, during creation and peer review.

Lesson Title: Art Detective Mystery: “Who Made This Art?”

Grade: 6th Grade

Time Allotment: 3 class periods, approximately 50 minutes long

Lesson Plan Overview

1. Lesson Summary: Students become art detectives as they examine a series of artworks, make observations, and form interpretations. They then create their own “mystery artworks” and have peers analyze them using art criticism strategies.
2. Rationale (The Why): Art criticism teaches students to observe closely, think critically, and articulate reasoning. By framing the lesson as a detective game, students engage naturally while practicing description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment, skills that are valuable across all subjects.
3. Artworks, Artists, and/or Artifacts:



David Salle, *Mingus in Mexico*, 1990



Minnie Evans, *Design Made at Airlie Gardens*, 1967



Hilma af Klint, *The Ten Largest*, No.3, 1907



Faith Ringgold, *Coming to Jones Road #4: Under a Blood Red Sky*, 2000



Nick Cave's *Hustle Coat* (2021)



Vincent van Gogh, *The ravine of the Peyroulets*, 1889

4. Key Concepts:

1. Careful observation of visual elements, such as color, line, shape, texture, and composition, is essential to interpreting the meaning of an artwork.
2. Artists make intentional choices to convey ideas, emotions, or stories, and these choices can provide clues about the artwork's message.
3. Art criticism involves a process of describing, analyzing, interpreting, and judging artworks, and that using evidence from the artwork strengthens their interpretations.

5. Essential Questions:

1. How do artists use visual elements to communicate ideas or feelings?
2. What clues can we find in an artwork to help us understand it?
3. How can we support our interpretations with evidence from the artwork?

6. Standards:

- VA:Cr1.2.7a - Develop criteria to guide making a work of art or design to meet an identified goal.
- VA:Cr3.1.7a - Reflect on and explain important information about personal artwork in an artist statement or another format.
- VA:Re9.1.3a - Evaluate an artwork based on given criteria.
- VA:Cr1.1.7a - Combine concepts collaboratively to generate innovative ideas for creating art.
- VA:Cr9.3.8a - Analyze and interpret works of art for meaning and artistic intent.
- VA:Cr9.1.8a - Create artwork based on personal ideas and respond to peer works with constructive critique.

7. Interdisciplinary Connections:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1 - Engage effectively in collaborative discussions.
- ELA:CC.1.4.7a - Interpret evidence and articulate reasoning through discussion and written responses, supporting interpretations with text-based or visual evidence.

Objectives

1. Students will identify visual elements and describe artworks accurately using art criticism vocabulary.
2. Students will apply detective observation strategies to analyze artworks and create a personal mystery artwork.
3. Students will demonstrate curiosity, open-mindedness, and respect during peer critique, supporting opinions with evidence.

Assessment

Pre-Assessment:

Students will fill out a worksheet about “What makes an artwork interesting or mysterious?” The class will then have a discussion where students share what makes an artwork interesting to them.

Formative Assessment:

The teacher will observe and review students’ completed Detective Note Sheets during gallery rotations and discussion circles. Participation in group discussions and the quality of observations and interpretations shared orally will be noted. Students will also complete a brief exit slip identifying one artwork they found most intriguing and explaining why, using evidence from their observations.

Summative Assessment:

Students will be evaluated based on completion and thoughtfulness of their mystery artwork, along with the Detective Note Sheets completed during peer critique. Participation in discussions and the reflective paragraph written at the end of Day 3, describing what they learned from analyzing others’ artworks, will also contribute to the summative evaluation.

Instructional Procedures

Day 1:

Motivation/Engagement (The Hook): To begin the lesson, students will be introduced to the idea of being an “art detective”. Students will receive an Art Criticism worksheet with prompts to fill out about what makes an artwork interesting or mysterious to them. After about 5 minutes given to fill out the worksheet, the teacher will give a presentation showing 6 diverse artworks of artists students have previously learned about without revealing the artists’ names. The teacher will explain, “These artworks are part of a secret museum, and your mission is to figure out the artist and story behind each piece.”

Development: After the hook, students will be split into groups and receive Detective Note Sheets and rotate through the artworks. At each station, students will record their observations, analyze how the elements of art are used, interpret possible meaning, and judge whether the

artwork should be displayed in the museum. This rotation will last about 25–30 minutes. Afterward, students will participate in discussion circles, sharing interpretations and evidence-based observations. The teacher will guide students to support their ideas respectfully, challenging assumptions and noticing details others may have missed.

Culmination/Close : To end the class, students will briefly share one observation or interpretation they found interesting and record it on their Art Criticism worksheet before handing that into the teacher. This wrap-up should take about 5 minutes and reinforce the skills of description, analysis, and interpretation.

Day 2:

Motivation/Engagement (The Hook): To begin the lesson, the teacher will reveal the artists of the artworks from Day 1, highlighting surprising observations and interpretations. Students will discuss how their detective notes compared to the actual artists' intentions. This should take about 5–10 minutes.

Development: Next, the teacher will introduce the concept of "mystery artwork," explaining that students will create their own pieces with symbols, colors, and imagery that reveal clues about themselves without giving everything away. Students will spend about 30–35 minutes creating their mixed-media mystery artworks using materials such as markers, colored pencils, collage paper, or other media of their choice. Subject matter will be up to the students. The teacher will circulate, guiding students to think critically about their choices and encouraging thoughtful symbolism and hidden details.

Culmination/Close: To close the class, students will record in their sketchbooks a sentence about what they hope viewers might notice or interpret from their artwork. This reflection should take 5 minutes.

Day 3:

Motivation/Engagement (The Hook): To begin the final day, the teacher will review the Detective Note Sheet process and remind students of the four steps of art criticism: Description, Analysis, Interpretation, and Judgment. Students will have about 15 minutes to finish up their artwork from Day 2 and review their notes from Day 1 and 2, preparing for peer critique.

Development: Students will participate in a peer critique rotation, examining classmates' mystery artworks and completing Detective Note Sheets for each one. They will make careful observations, interpret meaning based on the clues, and provide constructive judgment. The teacher will circulate, prompting students to support their interpretations with evidence from the artwork and to ask clarifying questions. This peer critique rotation should last approximately 25 minutes.

Culmination/Close: To end the lesson, the class will gather for a reflective discussion. Students will share insights gained from analyzing peer artwork, discuss how observing others' creative choices influenced their own understanding, and self-analyze their mystery artwork. Students will then write a brief reflection on an exit ticket describing what they learned about themselves

as artists, what worked well in their artwork, and what they might do differently next time. This wrap-up should take about 5–10 minutes.

Preparation:

1. Teacher Research and Preparation:

- Research artists and choose 6 unique artworks, 1 from each artist
- Prepare Detective Note Sheets and What makes an artwork interesting or mysterious? worksheet

2. Supplementary Materials:

- Art Criticism Worksheet

WHAT MAKES ART INTERESTING TO YOU?

Name: _____

1. What makes YOU want to look at an artwork?
(Think: bright colors, cool details, weird stuff, characters, mood...)

2. What makes an artwork mysterious?
(Think: things that are hidden, confusing, surprising, or unexplained.)

3. What kinds of art do you like the most?

- Realistic pictures
- Abstract / colorful designs
- Fantasy or dreamlike scenes
- Artwork with people
- Artwork with animals
- Artwork with nature
- Funny or weird artwork
- Other: _____

4. When you look at art, what questions pop into your head?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____

5. What makes you want to look closer?
(Think: strange objects, tiny details, hidden clues, emotions.)

What is one observation or interpretation you found interesting from today's activity?

- Detective Note Sheets



ART DETECTIVE NOTE SHEET

Name: _____ Artwork Number: _____

1. OBSERVATION

Colors I notice: _____

Shapes/Forms I notice: _____

Textures/Patterns I see: _____

First thing that grabs my attention: _____

Overall mood/feeling of the artwork: _____

2. INFERENCES & INTERPRETATIONS

I think this artwork might be about: _____

The artist might be trying to say: _____

Emotions communicated: _____

A possible story in the art: _____

3. EVIDENCE

I think this because... _____

4. WHO WE THINK MADE THIS

Our guess for the artist: _____

We think this because... _____

5. STYLE & TECHNIQUE NOTES (Circle what applies)

Lines: thin / thick / curved / sharp / sketchy / bold

Color Scheme: warm / cool / neutral / bright / muted

Style: realistic / abstract / expressive / surreal / narrative

Other Notes: _____

6. MY PERSONAL REACTION

Do I like this artwork? Why or Why not?

7. QUESTIONS FOR THE ARTIST

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____



- Exit Ticket

Name: _____

1. What did I learn about myself as an artist today?

(Think: how you work, what you enjoy, what surprised you, what you're good at.)

2. What worked well in my artwork today?

(Think: choices you made, techniques you used, parts you're proud of.)

3. What would I do differently next time?

(Think: improvements, changes, new ideas to try, things you want to practice.)

- Presentation of artworks (Day 1)



<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/11CvWq5Qsn2xh2J4K0L31vq0QwMy4gRs-luJmqBupl3Y/edit?usp=sharing>

- Presentation of mystery artwork examples (Day 2)



<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/15ZQZDP1i4tLvmr0BQvnsCqwf0pu5XHVhwpdhwCNhWKM/edit?usp=sharing>

3. Student Supplies:

- 9"x11" Mixed media paper
- Markers
- Colored pencils
- Oil Pastels
- Construction Paper
- Glue
- Scissors
- Pencils
- Erasers

4. Considerations for modifications/adaptations:

- Choice of media allows multiple intelligences to be addressed (visual, kinesthetic, linguistic).

- Peer discussions scaffolded for students who need sentence starters.
- Visual examples support English Language Learners.