

See/Think/Wonder | *Improvisation 31 (Sea Battle)* by Wassily Kandinsky

Art: Elements of Art, Abstract Art

Literacy: Speaking and Listening

Adapted from Jenelle Diljohn, Seaton Elementary School, Washington, DC

Target Thinking Dispositions: Observing and Describing, Reasoning, Questioning and Investigating

Thinking Routine: See/Think/Wonder

Work of Art: Wassily Kandinsky, *Improvisation 31 (Sea Battle)*, 1913

Disciplines: Art, Literacy, English Language Arts

Curricular Topics: Elements of Art, Abstract Art, Speaking and Listening

Grade Level/Age: Grade 1 or Ages 6-7 (adaptable for older or younger students)

Total Time: 30 minutes (adaptable for shorter time frames or two sessions)

Learning Objectives: Students will interpret a work of art by articulating what they see, think, and wonder about it, and making connections.

Materials Needed:

- Art reproduction of *Improvisation 31 (Sea Battle)* by Wassily Kandinsky (poster or digital image)
- An individual print of the art piece on a clipboard for each student (optional)
- Photo of Wassily Kandinsky (optional)
- Three signs with “I see...”, “I think...” “I wonder...” (optional)
- Literature Connection: Read *The Noisy Paintbox*, by Barb Rosenstock, either before or after doing the See/Think/Wonder routine with Kandinsky’s painting, to help students make connections to the work of art.

See/Think/Wonder

1. Seeing

~10 minutes

Introduce the work of art and explain to students they will be using their observations and their imaginations to think about abstract art. Ask students to look at *all* parts of the art reproduction on their clipboards. They can use both their eyes to look and their fingers to outline the edges of the image to help with closer observation. Hold up the “I see...” sign and invite them to write down what they first notice (for example: a color, a line, a shape...). Then have them turn to a partner to share their answers. Have each student repeat back what they heard their partner say to practice their listening skills. Lastly, invite students to come to the front of the class to point out what they saw on the enlarged art reproduction.

2. Thinking

~5 minutes

Hold up the sign that says “I think...” and ask students to share with the whole class what the painting makes them think, or what they think might be happening in the work of art. Encourage students to make *connections* to things they have seen or done before.

3. Wondering

~5 minutes

Now ask students what they wonder about the painting, while holding up the “I wonder...” sign. After hearing several “wonders,” ask students to come up with one question they would ask the artist, if they could. Have students share their questions with the whole group.

Optional: Ask students what they would name or title the painting and take several responses. Then reveal the actual title: “Sea Battle.” Allow them to share anything new they might see, think, or wonder about the painting, now that they know its title.

Extending See/Think/Wonder

Provide Background on the Artist and Artwork:

~5 minutes

Kandinsky was born in Moscow, Russia in 1866. As a child, he loved music and learned to play the piano and cello. In the early 20th century, Kandinsky helped invent a new way of painting called Abstraction. Before Kandinsky's time, artists mostly painted in a realistic manner, meaning viewers could recognize people, places, and objects and see them in art as they would appear in the real world. What you see in “Sea Battle,” according to Kandinsky, is the essence of human emotion and ideas such as conflict or chaos expressed through the colors, shapes, lines, and forms. It is possible Kandinsky experienced each color as a specific sound and emotion. Through his choice and placement of specific shapes, lines, and colors, Kandinsky wanted the viewer to experience a series of emotions, just as you would when listening to music.

Wrap-Up:

~5 minutes

Summarize the activity for students, highlighting links between the thinking routine (See/Think/Wonder), key dispositions (Observing and Describing, Reasoning, Questioning and Investigating), and any relevant curricular content.

Additional Suggested Works of Art:

This lesson can be applied to other works of art, such as:

- William H Johnson, *Blind Singer*, c. 1940
- Mark Rothko, *The Party*, 1938
- Arshile Gorky, *Organization*, 1933-1936

For more works of abstract art please refer to the National Gallery of Art's collection website:

www.nga.gov/collection