

What Makes You Say That? | Queen Zenobia Addressing Her Soldiers by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo

Art: Subject/Composition

Social Studies: Gender and Leadership

Adapted from Julie Carmean, National Gallery of Art Teacher with the Washington International School, Washington, DC

Target Thinking Dispositions: Reasoning with Evidence

Thinking Routine: *What Makes You Say That?*

Work of Art: Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, *Queen Zenobia Addressing Her Soldiers*, 1725/1730

Disciplines: Art, History, Social Studies, English Language Arts

Curricular Topics: Subject/Composition, Gender, Leadership, Antiquity, War

Grade Level/Age: Grades 9-12 or Ages 14-18 (adaptable for older or younger students)

Total Time: 50 minutes (adaptable for shorter time frames or two sessions)

Learning Objectives: Students will observe a work of art, interpret what they see, and justify their interpretations using evidence-based reasoning.

Materials Needed:

- Art reproduction of *Queen Zenobia Addressing Her Soldiers* by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (poster, digital image, or individual prints)
- *What Makes You Say That?* templates
- Pencils and journals (1 per student)

What Makes You Say That?

1. Observing

~5 minutes

Introduce the work of art, the thinking goals, and connecting curricular topics. Explain to students that observation is the cornerstone of interpretation, and they will be interpreting the subject of the painting and thinking about its composition and the artist's choices. Ask students to look carefully at the painting and consider: "What's going on in this work of art?"

2. Interpreting and Justifying

~25 minutes

Invite them to provide their interpretations by asking:

- "What might be going on in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that? ...What else might be going on?"
- "What might be happening with the composition and artistic choices? What makes you say that?"
- "Regarding the subject matter, what might be going on? What makes you say that?"
- "What might be happening with the messages of this painting?"

Allow students time to respond by providing specific evidence from the artwork for their interpretation.

3. Curriculum Connection

~10 minutes

Ask the students the following questions:

- “Consider the idea of the female leader or heroine. What does this make you think about leadership? What makes you say that?”
- “What are you wondering about this work? How might it connect to our own time? To themes or current events in our own cultural context or to our own art?”

Have them Think-Pair-Share and discuss their ideas with the whole class.

Extending *What Makes You Say That?*

Provide Background on the Artist and Artwork:

~5 minutes

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo was born in Venice to a prosperous merchant family (1696-1770). Zenobia, the subject of this painting, was Queen of Palmyra, (aka “Warrior Queen”) and led her soldiers to challenge the Roman Empire in the 3rd century AD. She had fought alongside her husband Odaenathus against the Persians and together they captured Mesopotamia and much of the east. After his death, she continued as regent for her infant son. A shrewd diplomat and military strategist, she challenged the authority of the Roman Empire in the east. She led her troops—an unusual role for a woman in antiquity—to victories in Egypt and Asia Minor. Within five years of conquests, she became a threat to Roman power. Aurelian and his army attacked and defeated Zenobia. She was led in golden chains back to Rome and ended her days as an admired Roman matron.

Wrap-Up:

~5 minutes

Summarize the activity for students, highlighting links between the thinking routine (*What Makes You Say That?*), key dispositions (interpreting and reasoning), and any relevant curricular content.

Additional Suggested Works of Art:

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

- Robert Henri, *Indian Girl in White Blanket*, 1917
- Milton Rogovin, *Doris McKinney with Her Two Sons, Republic Steel (Working People Series)*, 1987
- Gilbert Stuart, *Catherine Brass Yates (Mrs Richard Yates)*, 1793/1794

For more works of art please refer to the Uncovering America resource on the National Gallery of Art website:

www.nga.gov/uncoveringamerica