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Visual Thinking Strategies

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is an elementary school curriculum developed by Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine that uses a learner-centered method to examine and find meaning in visual art. Field tested and refined for over ten years, this work was strongly influenced by that of psychologists and educational theorists Rudolf Arnheim, Jerome Bruner, and Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky's research concerning the relationship of language to thought, and his findings about growth that occurs from interaction with others were particularly influential in the development of Visual Thinking Strategies.

Initially designed to study the aesthetic thinking patterns of viewers and how they changed given time and exposure to art, VTS uses a sequence of carefully selected fine art images to engage students in facilitated discussions through the use of open-ended questions beginning with: What's going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find? In their role as facilitators, teachers paraphrase student responses, actively listening, validating individual views, demonstrating language use, and reinforcing a range of ideas.

Students are asked to look carefully, develop opinions, express themselves, consider multiple viewpoints, speculate together, argue, debate and/or build on each other's ideas, and possibly revise their conclusions. They are also asked to support their opinions with evidence as they endeavor to decode complex and diverse material and construct meaning together. This approach not only uses art to teach thinking, communication skills, and visual literacy, but also helps students practice respectful, democratic, collaborative problem solving.

The organization, Visual Understanding in Education, (VUE) has conducted many studies and continues ongoing research to explore how the practice of VTS art discussions affects the development of critical thinking strategies that can be applied in different contexts and content areas. These studies have shown that VTS measurably increases observation skills, evidential reasoning, speculative abilities, and the ability to find multiple solutions to complex problems across the curriculum. It has also been shown to nurture verbal language and writing skills.

To find out more about how The Carle uses VTS please contact Rosemary Agoglia, Curator of Education at rosemarya@carlemuseum.org or (413) 658-1114.

[Further Reading on Visual Thinking Strategies and access to their research:](#)

www.vtshome.org

www.artfulcitizenship.org/main_content.html

www.gardnermuseum.org/education/gardner.html#