

Understanding Artists' Messages

Overview: Using a “placemat activity,” grade 2 students analyze art as a system. Students move to several stations that each have a piece of art placed in the center of the four Compass areas, then make connections as a group.

Grade: 2

Estimated duration: 80 minutes

Unit: How We Express Ourselves

Central Idea: Visual arts are a medium through which thoughts and feelings can be expressed and evoked.

Lines of Inquiry:
Different forms of visual arts
How visual art can evoke thoughts and feelings
How visual arts can reflect societies' values

The essential understandings students will develop...

- Artists convey thoughts, feelings, opinions and messages through their art
- Art has a function

The essential understandings students will gain...

- Artists use art to communicate
- Art can be interpreted
- Art can be used to make a statement

Resources/ Materials/Setting required: Works of art (covers of New Yorker Magazine)
Large paper (butcher paper)
4 colors of markers at each station

Outline:

1. Set up several stations in the classroom, each with a piece of artwork in the center of a piece of large butcher paper that has an “X” drawn from the four corners of the page and the four Compass areas labeled (Nature in green, Economy in blue, Society in orange, Wellbeing in red) and the four corresponding colors of markers at each station.
2. Students do a musical/silent brainstorm about “what is happening?” They move freely among the stations and write their thoughts/comments/questions in the appropriate part of the page depending on what they are noticing about the message in terms of Nature, Economy, Society, and Well-being.
3. Students are grouped and assigned to a specific table. As a small group they review everything written on that page and draw connections between the four Compass points (physically drawing lines between items they feel are related somehow).
4. One piece of art is chosen to discuss together as a whole class. The work done on that page is reviewed and the large group has a chance to add additional connections. Then they are asked to draw conclusions about the artist's message.
5. Students are asked, “If we were to change one part of the illustration, how would it change the message?” Various scenarios are explored.

Musical brainstorming technique:

When the music is playing, students go around to different stations to write their thoughts. They also have time to read what others have written silently. When the music stops, they have to stop and write down their thoughts/comments.

Assessment tips:

- Save the large butcher paper as a record of students' work.
- Require that each student make a certain number of written contributions.



What the compass does:

- Frames thinking (helps think from different perspectives)
- Helps make connections between different aspects of life much more easily (compared to blank paper)
- Encourages deeper thinking
- Promotes self-confidence to explain their thoughts
- Allows for different groupings – whole class, small group