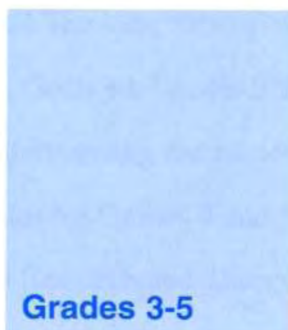
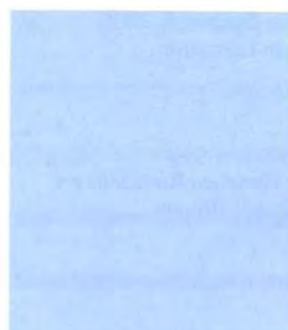
VTS BASIC MANUAL

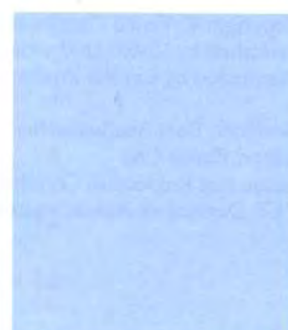
Learning to Think and
Communicate Through Art

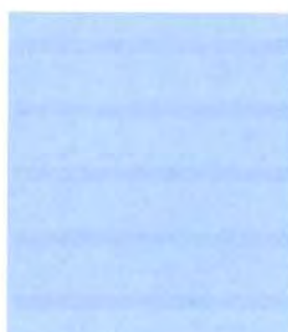
by Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine

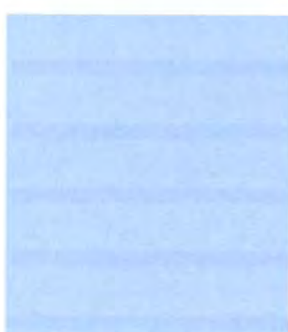


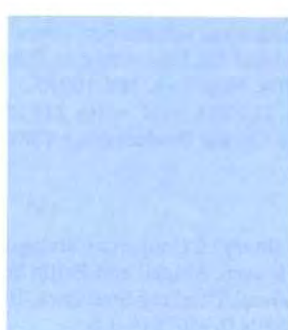
Grades 3-5











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Published by Visual Understanding in Education
Distributed by Crystal Productions

Designer, Beat Baudenbacher
Editor, Elaine Chu
Image and Production Coordinator, Gretchen Rothenberger
VUE Director of Administration, Gerard Holmes

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Housen, Abigail and Philip Yenawine
Visual Thinking Strategies, Basic Manual: Grades 3-5
ISBN 0-9667849-3-6

The Visual Thinking Strategies are dedicated to the teachers and museum educators who have committed themselves to expanding the role of art in schools and in the lives of young people.

The Visual Thinking Strategies were developed with the cooperation of people in many countries who provided thoughtful evaluations and many practical suggestions for improvements. Extensive research was carried out in Byron, MN under the supervision of Catherine Egenberger. The teachers of Urbana, IL, Boston, MA, Minneapolis, MN, and San Antonio, TX must be acknowledged, including Linda Duke, Peggy Burchenal, Judy Hornbacher, and Penelope Speier, who led them. In addition, the VTS coordinators and teachers in Russia, Estonia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Macedonia, and Ukraine made significant contributions.

Funding for various aspects of research, writing, design, and production has been provided by a number of generous sources, all of which we acknowledge with gratitude: Advanced Information Technology Group; The Beckman Institute Visualization Laboratory; Eastman Kodak; The Charles Englehard Foundation; National Center for Supercomputing Applications; Open Estonia Foundation; Open Society Fund-Lithuania; Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation-St. Petersburg; Open Society Institute-Macedonia; Open Society Institute-NY; the Red Farm Foundation; Renaissance Foundation (Ukraine); Revson Foundation; Soros Foundation-Kazakstan; and the Soros Foundation-Kyrgyzstan.

Visual Understanding in Education wishes to thank the museums, galleries and artists whose works are included in this curriculum.

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Welcome to the Visual Thinking Strategies

Making meaning out of the world around us is a basic human behavior, whether we are wondering about a rock, the rain, a smile, or a painting. Grappling with meaning in art is particularly rewarding: art's messages are often out of the ordinary, mysterious, and complex—challenging, but intriguing.

Most cultures through time have used art to teach essential beliefs and understandings. And today it is useful for teaching young people to think and communicate. When we talk about art, our eyes and minds work together to combine perceptions, feelings, logic, memory, reason, imagination, information, and common sense. We draw on our experience as well as our creativity. We find language to express ideas that matter.

The VTS uses this, teaching thinking through discussion of art. Students articulate ideas drawn from examining art, and respond to each other's comments. Everyone succeeds, growing both viewing and thinking skills.

There are many reasons for this. Most cognitive scientists believe that learning involves coming to understand observations of, and interactions with, our environment. Many argue that this process requires language; that ideas are formed through words. Verbalization is a key to learning.

Certainly language is a primary means of human communication. We search for language to express what we think, feel, and want others to know. We use verbal means to clarify our thoughts and emotions. When we talk with others, listening as well as speaking, we share knowledge and experience. Interacting stimulates further thought, and thus we expand ourselves with each other's help.

The VTS introduces a method of open-ended discussion which, if properly facilitated, is thorough and rigorous, feels pertinent and valuable to participants, and allows for much diverse opinion and debate. Art invites verbal response from virtually everyone and also stimulates and challenges in ways students enjoy.

The VTS is student-centered. As the teacher, you ask only a few open-ended questions that are formulated to elicit thoughtful responses to the art. You paraphrase all answers, assuring each student that you understand and accept the contribution, at the same time ensuring that the whole class hears the comment. You also acknowledge comments by pointing to whatever students mention, keeping their eyes focused on the image. You facilitate the interactive discussion by linking points of agreement and disagreement.

There are a total of ten lessons each year. Each of the nine classroom lessons is accompanied by three images to be examined and discussed in sessions lasting 40 to 50 minutes. The final lesson is a museum visit, optional in Grade 3.

It is easy to begin to teach the VTS, but mastery takes time. It is hard to hear and remember all that is said. Paraphrasing tests your language resourcefulness and flexibility. Linking thoughts requires that you understand and recall students' evolving debates. Letting students discover and grow while you simply facilitate, without interfering, is difficult. Assessing changes in what they grasp and retain, and how they express themselves, is also not easy.

It takes time and commitment to become a good VTS teacher, but the engagement and new competencies of your students richly reward the effort. Intelligent verbal expression and rich thinking are within the reach of most of us. The VTS is designed to nurture both.

Goals for Grades 3-5

For Students

- to develop flexible and rigorous thinking skills, including observing, brainstorming, reasoning with evidence, speculating, cultivating a point of view, reflecting, and revising
- to strengthen language and listening skills, including the willingness and ability to express oneself, respect for the views of others and ability to consider and debate possibilities
- to develop visual literacy skills and personal connections to art, advancing one's ability to find meaning in diverse, complex art
- to nurture problem-solving abilities, curiosity and openness about the unfamiliar
- to build self-respect, confidence and willingness to participate in group thinking and discussion processes
- to apply VTS-supported skills in many contexts, both in school and out
- to extend one's experience with computers

For Teachers

- to learn to facilitate open-ended discussions about sequenced works of art using developmentally-based questions and a supportive method of responding to student participation
- to improve one's facilitation skills with the help of peers
- to learn to assess verbal expression and thinking
- to expand experience and comfort with art
- to use peer discussion of the VTS as a means to reflect on teaching in general

Understanding the Basics

The Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) uses art to teach thinking, communication skills, and visual literacy to young people. Growth is stimulated by three things: looking at art of increasing complexity; responding to developmentally-based questions; and participating in group discussions that are carefully facilitated by teachers.

Thinking about art, or *aesthetic thought*, is rich and complex. Psychologist Abigail Housen has been studying aesthetic thought since the early 1970s and has found it to encompass the cognition that educators refer to as critical and creative thinking. Housen's studies over ten years of field research of the VTS have shown that it produces growth in aesthetic thinking, and that other cognitive operations also grow in a relatively short time — specifically, observing, speculating, and reasoning on the basis of evidence. These skills have been documented as transferring from art viewing to examining other phenomena, as well as to reading and writing.

During VTS lessons:

- all students must have ample opportunity to point out what they see in the art they examine and express their opinions about it;
- students must know that their thoughts are heard, understood, and valued;
- students must provide evidence to explain their interpretive comments; and
- students must see that each comment contributes to the group process of mining the art for multiple meanings.

Rigorous discussion of a wide range of art is the impetus for cognitive growth. The art has been chosen to allow students to draw upon, apply, and reflect on what they already know. As teacher, you are the facilitator of this process, never the source of information or opinion. You enable students to debate possibilities and let the visual thinking process itself strengthen their ability to examine, articulate, listen and reflect. Students' engagement in turn stimulates curiosity and a search for information.

At various points you are asked to apply the VTS method to other subjects you teach, reinforcing the transfer of skills likely to occur. Writing and reading exercises are introduced (optional in Grade 3, strongly advised in Grades 4 and 5) to further encourage this transfer and to give you concrete evidence of how students operate without group support. Where possible, students use computers for these activities.

Though your main goal might be meeting thinking and communication standards, the VTS also significantly increases art viewing skills, extending the art making skills that are the appropriate emphasis of art teachers in your school. You are helping these specialists with the task of developing visual literacy among students and meeting standards in art education.

As you know, everything you do as a teacher has a direct impact on students' behaviors. Using the VTS, you are given a structure for powerfully influencing them in useful, enriching ways. Take the time to read what follows, practice and reflect on the VTS process, and learn to make the most of it.

The curriculum works best if you follow certain basic, logical, tested rules, even if they seem a bit restrictive at first. In truth, these simple rules open a world of possibility:

- Ask the questions provided to initiate an active process of discovery and probing on the part of the students.

- Listen carefully to and acknowledge every answer by looking with the students at the image, pointing to those details mentioned, and paraphrasing what students say.
- Facilitate the discussion as it progresses, linking various converging and diverging opinions and helping students to synthesize a variety of viewpoints.
- Encourage further inquiry, keeping the process open-ended and asking students to stretch and search for information beyond what they know.

Asking Questions

The VTS is a discovery process. Discussions are initiated by questions, phrased to provoke many thoughtful responses to what is seen in the images. Responding leads to active and extended involvement. The questions ask students to focus, become reflective and to question—the basis for thinking critically. They acknowledge art's ambiguity and its multiple and shaded meanings. Answering the questions in this context is safe (no one is going to be wrong), engaging, and fun.

VTS questions are calculated to insure particular results. We ask you to use them as written, as you would follow a time-tested recipe.

What's going on in this picture? opens up the discussion. The phrasing of this question suggests that the image is "about" something which can be figured out—that the things depicted add up to something discernible. It particularly encourages the finding of stories or activity, playing into the natural tendency of beginning viewers to be storytellers (see *VTS Research and Theory,* pp. 14-17). At the same time, the question's phrasing allows comments of any sort—addressing colors, feelings, information, highly personal associations, and so forth. Students are asked simply to think and speak for themselves.

Think about the wording of the question above. Compare it to "What do you see in this picture?" The latter often results in students making lists of what is depicted. The wording we recommend (and the several variations provided) urges them to probe for meaning. Making meaning is rewarding in a way that list-making is not. It engages students and nudges them toward deeper thinking.

What do you see that makes you say that? asks students to look more and gather evidence to support their opinions. They argue their points, not proving them so much as grounding their interpretations in concrete visual data. This requirement helps them to become fact-based and logical when they express or debate a position; it is useful in any critical inquiry, whether it be about art, history, science, or mathematics.

Again the phrasing is important. "Why do you say that?" might seem a reasonable alternative, and indeed at some point it becomes one. But at first, the much more concrete "What do you see that makes you say that?" keeps the discussion anchored in the image. It is also less daunting; asking "Why?" implies that the student should provide motives, not evidence, for an opinion.

What else can you find? has the effect of making the conversation more complete. Details that might be missed are found when students are urged to look for more. The habit of making

thorough examinations is thus encouraged, and it is partly the sense of being thorough that makes the VTS serious and rigorous.

This question must be asked frequently—not just when no hands are in the air—in order to make the point that there is usually more to be seen and talked about than students first think. This question may also be used when you think students have dwelt on a topic for long enough and you want them to return to searching.

2 Acknowledging Responses

VTS discussions are structured to insure that participants get immediate feedback. You acknowledge every student's contributions in ways that feel supportive and signal to the group the value of each person's thoughts. Nothing encourages participation more than being heard and respected. Individual growth results from participation.

Point, and be physically expressive.

As students speak, point to all that they mention in the picture. Gesture with precision so that all can see exactly what is being pointed out. This encourages students to keep looking actively—their eyes follow your finger around the image so that more is taken in. (Being thoroughly familiar with the images yourself helps.) Alternate looking between the students and the picture as you point. Nod and smile to underscore how you value them and their contributions.

If you cannot find what a student is seeing, ask her/him to come forward and point it out.

Paraphrase each person's response.

First, listen carefully, then consider new phrasing. Rephrase each comment, as if you were saying "What I hear you saying is..." This process accomplishes many things:

- You ensure that all in the group hear each comment.
- You underscore the fact that listening to and trying to understand others is important.
- You indicate that you have not just heard but also understand them, encouraging students to participate.
- Through this positive attention, you build all students' sense of being valued and capable.
- If you are careful and skillful, you can turn a student's halting answer into something crisper, clearer or more exact. This helps him/her expand vocabulary, improve grammar, and/or increase the accuracy of language without making him/her feel as if s/he has been corrected.
- You have a short but clear view of how a particular child sees and thinks. When you are listening intently enough to rephrase a child's comment, you are inside her/his mind and understanding the link between her/his thoughts and expression.

In rephrasing, make sure you change only the words and not the content of the student's thought. You can tell from his/her face if you have it right. Ask for clarification if you are not sure. The short, simple answers of very young children are often hard to paraphrase, and therefore repetition is acceptable. With long or meandering comments,

take care not to cut a child short; then summarize, but try to capture the entirety of a student's thoughts.

Paraphrasing takes practice. You must be good at it to maximize the benefits of the VTS. It is the tool you use most to assess a student's growth.

Remain open and accepting. As part of teaching critical thinking, you need to emphasize the importance of considering all possibilities. Remain open, therefore, as students offer their ideas. Acknowledge each comment as equal in value to all others. Experience tells us that staying neutral elicits the most fruitful conversations.

This might be challenging for you, however, as it runs counter to convention. There will be times when you think a comment is mistaken, but right and wrong are not issues at this point. Practicing thinking is what matters. Don't correct or add comments. Don't be overly enthusiastic about responses that confirm your own views. Let students carry out a full process of discovery. Most of their interpretations will coincide with what the artist intended when grounded by evidence from the picture. Over time, group interaction usually sorts out the "truth." In any case, the VTS process allows students to find the interpretations that mean the most to them, thus encouraging further learning.

When you hear answers you think are "wrong," try to figure out what's behind them. They may mean that students see things differently from you. There may be mis-steps in a process that still ends up in the right place. "Wrong" answers often inform you about how a student's mind works.

When a student says something intended as a challenge or to be silly, continue your neutral stance. It helps to defuse reactions. Moreover, having to answer "What do you see that makes you say that?" minimizes the student's pleasure in putting you on. If you think it necessary, be clear that you know you are being tested. But try to do so in a way that does not undermine delight in brainstorming. You might be surprised: outlandish comments often jump-start creative thinking.

Neutrality is even more essential when you hear a comment that is hurtful. Use your common sense about how to handle such situations. But consider this: such comments reflect things students have learned outside of school. Telling them they are wrong seldom achieves its goal. Paraphrasing allows you to take the sting out of a comment. For example, a student says, "She looks like she's on welfare." You want neither to condone nor vilify the remark because the child is simply reflecting what s/he has picked up elsewhere. You can say, "So you think she might need assistance to live." You thus demonstrate how carefully chosen language can change how something sounds. Since you do not want to extend what might be hurtful, avoid asking, "What do you see that makes you say that?" Immediately follow your paraphrase with, "What else can we find?" This encourages other opinions to be expressed. What ultimately convinces someone to drop a bias is to think that there are other more interesting ways to think.

Let them talk. The VTS gives students a chance to speak out in non-threatening circumstances. They are free to use their imaginations as well as their recollections, which can include books, films, and television programs. When new to this, students might speak for a long time about each picture, and their stories can be fanciful, even far-fetched. Just remember that as they start to wander, you can ask them to anchor their stories in the picture by using the very productive question, "What do you see that makes you say that?"

With very quiet students, use your judgment to decide when to call on them even if their hands are not in the air. You can encourage shy students by saying something like, "Who haven't we heard from today?" Or, "Is there someone who hasn't had a chance and might like to say something?"

In the opposite case—students who always have something to add—you might at some point insert a comment that acknowledges their enthusiasm, but opens the way for others: "I see that Brent has something more to say, but let's give someone else a chance to contribute." Or, "Shelley has given us many good ideas, so let's hear from someone else." If a student habitually takes the floor and seems reluctant to relinquish it, you may want to ask him/her to try to become more concise and give others more of a chance. This is best done after class; handle this with the kind of directness and delicacy you use to discuss any domineering behavior.

Don't worry about repetition. To the extent that students repeat, they need to, and they need acknowledgement for speaking out. For very young children, repetition is a natural way to learn. Their thoughts become real to them as they articulate them, not necessarily when someone else does. They may not hear their voice in someone else's words. Older students need time to adjust to the freedom of thought that is allowed in the VTS. They are accustomed to seeking the "right" answer and may believe your acceptance of a first response means that it is "correct." And they may not have registered what someone else said; listening, too, is a skill they must develop.

Give them time and encouragement to speak, assurance that you value what they say, and they will develop listening skills in good time. They will eventually learn that any comment can be added to, changed, or debated as new discoveries occur. Repetition decreases as habits of thinking and rethinking increase.

That being said, you may see a time when it is helpful to suggest that an idea has already been expressed. This is the time to say, "So you see that too. Can you find other things to point out? How about others—any different ideas?"

3 Linking Thoughts

Discussions about art are potentially rich, lively, and fruitful. Yet they must be facilitated to become a catalyst for learning. This is your job in VTS teaching.

The first and perhaps most critical aspect of facilitating a discussion is explained above: acknowledging every comment. This encourages participation, and participation insures engagement, and engagement results in a variety of observations and interpretations. This diversity of insights helps students grow beyond the tendency to see things from a single perspective and leads to habits of valuing different viewpoints and of speculative thinking.

Second, you must manage and nurture the group dynamics. Working together, students can solve many complex problems, deciphering the meanings in a work of art, for example. Student interactions lead them to more observation, more ideas, and usually more accuracy. Debating and building on the ideas of others, students stretch their reasoning skills, often deducing an artist's intentions, methods, and context. As individuals

take in the discoveries of others, they are stimulated to find more layers of possibility. Given new information, students often revise first opinions or change their minds. While all of this leads to thoughtful interpretation of art, it also provides practice at most aspects of critical and creative thinking.

In order to encourage this, you are asked to keep track of various strands of thoughts and to draw links among them. For example, you acknowledge agreements and disagreements: "It seems that several people see that," or, "We have a variety of opinions here." You also connect thoughts that build on others: "Rebecca said the woman had a sad expression, and Edward added that he thought it was because of her eyes." You note shifts: "Several of you thought she was sad, but now there are arguments suggesting she might just be thinking about something." Or, "I see you have changed your mind, or added another possibility."

When you link various ideas, creating a kind of outline of the discussion as it builds, students become aware of how thinking unfolds and meanings are discovered. They begin to see how observations stack up and lead to others, and how many interpretations can be achieved if you keep working at something.

Tracking discussions in this way is a difficult thing to do. You have to be attentive to everything that is said and at the same time pull back to think about how one part of the discussion connects to others. You will have time to develop and refine this skill, however, because it takes a while for the students' conversations to deepen and mature. As part of your training, you are asked to observe other teachers and to make videotapes of your own classes to help with this process. It will be difficult for you to nurture and assess students' growth if you are not able to understand their thinking well enough to link.

Answering Questions

Practice has proven that students have more to say than to ask about art in the VTS. If given permission to talk freely, and to give their own interpretations of the art they see, they tend to be satisfied with what they figure out on their own. Curiosity develops after a certain amount of experience, at a point when they become aware that what they know is not all there is to know.

When someone does ask a question, the first response should be, "Can we answer that by looking?" Or you open the question to the group: "What do you think the answer to that might be?" or, "Does anyone know the answer to that?" In these ways, most questions are answered to the satisfaction of students at this moment in their development.

If it is the kind of question that cannot be answered by examining the picture together—for example, "Who painted this?"—reply by asking, "Where can we look to find that out?" Help them find the answer themselves. If they need help with this, show them how you would seek information: "If that were my question, here is how I would look for the answer."

If you are in the museum and there is a label near the picture, you might refer to it, showing what information is usually available. Discuss what can be gleaned from it. See *Looking Ahead to Your Museum Visit,* pp. 19-23 for more information about labels.

Always deal with questions in a way that reveals how to acquire information. Students should learn

how to use appropriate resources, finding out what they want to know as a step toward independent learning.

The best way to prepare yourself for questions is to look carefully and think about each image—in the way you would prepare for a lesson involving reading. You do not need vast expertise. Just turn the question into a quest.

5 Timing

Fifteen to twenty minutes per picture is a good rule of thumb for discussions, although there is no prescribed length of time. When the process is new, discussions are likely to take a bit longer. To know when to stop, take your cue from the students. Don't be too hasty; students often find stories in an image after your interest has waned. Silence does not always mean they are finished; they may just be thinking.

If more students are restless, or if comments are repetitive or silly, it is time to move on. If, on the other hand, hands are still in the air when you think it time to move on, suggest to the students that there is always more to think about in art.

If time is limited or discussions take a long time, use only the first two images in a set, perhaps coming back to the third at a later date. You will gradually learn how to manage the flow of time in these classes as you have in other subjects.

6 Closure

The act of interpreting works of art seems to justify itself. Strenuous efforts to bring closure are not needed.

Moreover, letting students think they have "completed" a discussion of a work of art is misleading. One of the most wonderful aspects of art is the fact that it can be revisited many times productively. The most expert viewers never tire of looking at the same works, knowing that each encounter brings something new. Therefore, suggesting that the experience is complete and finished is counterproductive.

Summarizing or trying to render some kind of consensus is unwise, as it is hard to remember all that was said and is unnecessary if you have linked throughout the discussion. Summaries seldom do justice to the art or the discussion. Moreover, as you summarize, you take back the reins from students. It becomes about you and what you recall and choose to highlight.

The best way to end a class is to complement students on how well they worked, probing a particular image, for example, or listening respectfully. You can also ask students to reflect on what they did, what they enjoyed or what they might like to remember to tell others about the class. It is recommended that you preview the next set of slides and tell them when to expect another lesson.

7

Developing Connections to Other Classes

The observation, thinking, and communication skills that develop as result of the VTS classes will at some point be transferred by students to other subjects. You may soon see certain habits—like giving reasons to back up an opinion—carry over to other classes independent of any suggestion from you.

You should encourage this by applying the VTS questioning and response strategies to other situations where they appear helpful—when you have images in any other texts, for example, or when you are looking at objects in science classes. The VTS method applies easily to discussions of reading as well.

It also has an effect on writing. Since the research on the VTS began, teachers have commented on how, after experience with discussions, images stimulate both interest in and ability to write among most students. Some lesson plans, therefore, come with descriptive and expository writing activities. In addition, students might also write stories, poems, or scripts where images are either a starting point, or a mid-point, or the final scene of fictions that they create. They can draw stories as an alternative, perhaps combining them with text, again based on the contents of an image that interests a student.

The art teachers in your school should become familiar with the VTS as you learn to use it. They can be invited to attend your discussions to see the skills that students are developing. Together you might develop art activities and projects that build on classroom discussions.

8

Class Size

It is difficult to conduct effective discussions in classes of more than 28-30 pupils, however, they work well with 22-25. Perhaps a perfect size is 15-18—enough voices to make sure that there are many ideas, yet all have ample chance to speak. Some teachers create smaller groups by giving half a class an assignment that keeps them busy while conducting the discussions with the other half, then switching.

In the museum, it is better to keep the groups close to fifteen. This presupposes that some accommodation can be made to split larger classes into sub-groups. Museum staff might be enlisted to take half of large groups in the museum, and if they do so, they should be familiar enough with the VTS to use the method, as that is what the students will expect.

9

Have Fun!

Enjoy these lessons. Relax into the process of discovery—your students and your own. As you teach observation, critical and creative thinking, effective self-expression, listening, and group interaction skills, you can still have fun.

Notes for Grades 4 and 5

The VTS lessons are sequential, and each year builds on the years before. As students' experience with images and discussion expands, they need to be supported and challenged in appropriate ways. Your skills build as well, and you need time, practice and reflection to improve your facilitation skills to the point where you can insure that your students' learning sticks.

The lessons contained in this manual are provided to introduce both you and your students to the VTS. The three questions asked constitute a basic strategy useful for a lifetime of looking; they are the questions the most expert viewer asks when confronting something new. Still, they instigate deep and extended observations for beginners, and can sustain fruitful conversation among your students throughout the year.

In future years, however, while Grade 3 students continue using these lessons, new questions and images will be added for Grades 4 and 5. These build on the foundation constructed during the first year, keeping pace with students' cognitive growth. This year's lesson plans, while appropriate for older students' aesthetic stage as they initiate their art viewing process, does not reflect their overall developmental abilities in ways that later VTS curricula do.

It is possible, though not likely, that older students will become restless with the basic lessons by the end of this year. There are three things that minimize this. The first involves using the strategies in other circumstances so that students become aware that the method is generally effective in decoding unfamiliar material. When you encounter other images in texts, have short discussions about what is going on and ask students to consider how the images relate to the text they accompany. Apply the same strategies to reading to allow students to find and discuss meaning in a range of writing. As they see that the VTS applies to many situations, it is easier for them to become conscious of its usefulness and seriousness.

The second relates to your skills in facilitation: if you link comments skillfully, students will be clear that they are thinking productively together and that the outcome is worth the effort. They will remain focused.

The third is to ask students to write about images in addition to talking about them, allowing them to choose from among several images and to work independently from the group. Writing assignments follow Lessons 7 and 8 and are available to you on the website, http://www.vtskids.org, password "teacher". Ideally, students should be able to use computers so they can view the images, write their responses, and send them to you electronically. This way they are exercising several skills at once, and it provides a way for you to create a concrete record of their ideas and observations. You can then use these to monitor the changes in their skills as a result of the VTS.

If your students do not have access to computers, the VTS website provides instructions on how to handle the writing assignments in the classroom. If you are unable to get online, contact either the distributor, Crystal Productions (1-800-255-8629), or Visual Understanding in Education (212-253-9007).

Next year, the curriculum will contain additional challenges for Grade 4 and 5 students in a number of ways, emphasizing:

- finding meaning in increasingly complicated works of art;

- probing for deeper insights with the aid of additional questions;
- beginning to focus on the choices artists make to influence our thinking;
- becoming aware of how their discussions enhance and augment the viewing process;
- understanding more about how the VTS applies elsewhere, with emphasis on reading;
- using writing as another way of responding to works of art and of gaining independence from a group; and
- gaining further computer experience.

The skills that you as teacher will be given additional practice in are:

- developing your aesthetic thinking, ensuring you keep pace with your students;
- developing your paraphrasing to the point where you are able to assist students with language development and flexibility;
- developing your capacities to manage discussions so that you reflect to students how their thinking as individuals interacts with others, and how, as a group, they see and think about more than they could alone; and
- developing your capacity to assess student learning resulting from the VTS, observing students' verbal expression and their writing.

In the following year, Grade 5 students will receive yet another curriculum which will continue to emphasize group discussion for problem-solving, oral communication skills, writing skills and use of technology. More diverse and complex works of art will be included. Many of the images will be chosen to fit the specifics of new probing questions. A selection of self-portraits will be included.

Specific new skills will also be stressed:

- probing images for evidence of their historical period;
- thinking further about motivations of and choices made by artists;
- comparing images;
- raising questions to which students want answers; and
- seeking information to amplify what they know.

Teachers' development will focus on understanding and assessing changes in the thinking and verbal abilities of their students.

VTS Research and Theory

The VTS is named in honor of Rudolf Arnheim whose work in Gestalt psychology led him to write convincingly about the connection between visual perception and thought—"visual thinking" as he called it. In Arnheim's useful view, identifying what we see is an act of cognition. We think even as we sort out what we see. The VTS builds on this premise: using visual art to teach thinking.

In the interests of being student-centered, the VTS also takes into account the developmental stages first articulated by James Mark Baldwin and documented in detailed research by Jean Piaget. One key principle, acknowledged by others including Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, is that we accommodate only what is within our capacity to grasp. We can take in information and ideas that are beyond our natural range, but we cannot put them to use independently unless we are ready. Learning occurs, then, in increments that relate to the developing interests and capacities of the learner.

Furthermore, both Piaget and Vygotsky proved that learning occurs from interactions with the environment — also cited by John Dewey and Jerome Bruner. Vygotsky, especially, drew attention to how the social environment — interactions with people — produces growth. He specifically demonstrated how the help of more capable peers — those who operate within the same framework as the learner but with greater abilities in certain areas — enabled learning. He thus helped explain the powerful role of other children in teaching their siblings and classmates, and why sensitive teachers or parents take cues from the learner as they help the child grow. All of these developmental issues are key tenets of the VTS.

Vygotsky further influenced the VTS because of his insights into the relationship between language and thinking. His experiments made it clear that thinking requires language. He suggested that children must develop their speech in order to think and understand complex concepts. The VTS, therefore, encourages students to talk, using discussion as a key tool for learning to think.

To a greater extent than these other research-based theories, the VTS builds on the work of Abigail Housen, a cognitive psychologist whose focus is what she calls "aesthetic thought." Because her work is less well known that that of fellow scholars mentioned above, we describe it in some detail below.

In the mid-1970s Housen began studying what people think and say when looking at art. Noting differences between people without experience and those with a great deal, she set herself to the task of coming to understand the changes in thinking that occur given experience with art over time.

As she did this, Housen was able to document the array of thoughts that art provokes, discovering it to be a very rich fabric. Even beginners use a range of observations to draw conclusions that are full of associations, memories, facts and emotions. The complexity of the thinking elicited by art also intrigued Housen because of the concern in education for developing critical and creative thinking. She saw a deep correspondence between aesthetic thought and the skills that educators sought.

Housen began her research by observing the behaviors of museum visitors, and soon decided

she wanted to know what thoughts motivated the behaviors she witnessed. As her interest built, she realized that understanding the spectrum of viewing would involve studying people of diverse ages, backgrounds, education and economic levels, not just those who go to museums.

Over time, she developed her primary data collection tool: a non-directive interview. Participants are asked to simply talk about anything they see as they look at a work of art, saying whatever comes to mind. There are no directed questions or prompts to influence the viewer's process. Called the Aesthetic Development Interview (ADI), this tool provides Housen with a window into a person's thinking.

In order to analyze ADIs, Housen breaks them into thought units that are then examined. During her initial research, Housen had found 144 different kinds of thoughts expressed by the universe of people interviewed. She organized these thoughts into thirteen domains, each containing precisely-described subcategories. Each interview can therefore be coded, unit by unit, according to kinds of thoughts contained. Interviews are often examined by two independent coders to insure reliability and consistency, and the coding is then charted graphically by computer to enable a representation of all thoughts as well as the depiction of their overall pattern.

Housen also studies each interview as a totality to see how individual thoughts flow and fit together. Finally, she cross checks all of this with demographic, attitudinal and biographical information about each subject, as well as their responses to specific questions.

To date, Housen and her associates have analyzed over 6,000 ADIs taken from individuals ranging from six-year-old children to eighty-something adults of both genders. These people run the spectrum in terms of art experience, race, ethnicity, education, and economic status; a wide variety of art has been used. The categories of thoughts Housen defined in her early research are found in interview after interview, including her studies of the visually-impaired, of urban and rural Americans in the United States, and of viewers in Russia, Lithuania, and Kazakstan. Her original coding manual holds up robustly.

During twenty years of data collection and analysis, Housen examined many other scholars' writings on aesthetics and perception and found that her insights resonated with the findings of others, although her data were more comprehensive. She concluded that a stage theory (which is often the result of research focused on human development) could be applied to aesthetic change. She identified five distinct patterns of thinking that occur in the trajectory of growth when looking at art, which she describes as aesthetic stages. Therefore, as a result of the coding of an ADI, each interview is assigned to one of the following patterns:

Stage I

Accountive viewers are storytellers. Using their senses, memories, and personal associations, they make concrete observations about a work of art that are woven into a narrative. Here, judgments are based on what is known and what is liked. Emotions color viewers' comments, as they seem to enter the work of art and become part of its unfolding narrative.

Stage II

Constructive viewers set about building a framework for looking at works of art, using the most logical and accessible tools: their own perceptions, their knowledge of the natural world, and the values of their social, moral and conventional world. If the work does not look the way it is "supposed to"—if craft, skill, technique, hard work, utility, and function are not evident, or if the subject seems inappropriate—then these viewers judge the work to be "weird", lacking, or of no value. Their sense of what is realistic is the standard often applied to determine value. As emotions begin to go underground, these viewers begin to distance themselves from the work of art.

Stage III

Classifying viewers adopt the analytical and critical stance of the art historian. They want to identify the work as to place, school, style, time and provenance. They decode the work using their library of facts and figures which they are ready and eager to expand. This viewer believes that properly categorized, the work of art's meaning and message can be explained and rationalized.

Stage IV

Interpretive viewers seek a personal encounter with a work of art. Exploring the work, letting its meaning slowly unfold, they appreciate subtleties of line and shape and color. Now critical skills are put in the service of feelings and intuitions as these viewers let underlying meanings of the work—what it symbolizes—emerge. Each new encounter with a work of art presents a chance for new comparisons, insights, and experiences. Knowing that the work of art's identity and value are subject to reinterpretation, these viewers see their own processes subject to chance and change.

Stage V

Re-creative viewers, having a long history of viewing and reflecting about works of art, now "willingly suspend disbelief." A familiar painting is like an old friend who is known intimately, yet full of surprise, deserving attention on a daily level but also existing on an elevated plane. As in all important friendships, time is a key ingredient, allowing Stage V viewers to know the ecology of a work—its time, its history, its questions, its travels, its intricacies. Drawing on their own history with one work in particular, and with viewing in general, these viewers combine personal contemplation with views that broadly encompass universal concerns. Here, memory infuses the landscape of the painting, intricately combining the personal and the universal.

Significant to understanding aesthetic development is that growth, while related to age, is not determined by it. In other words, a person of any age with no experience with art will necessarily be in Stage I. An adult will not be at a higher stage than a child simply by virtue of age or education. Exposure to art over time is the only way to develop. Without time and exposure, aesthetic development does not occur.

Over the course of her studies, Housen has found that most interviewees are beginner viewers, ranging from Stages I to II or II/III (which is a transition between two stages, II and III). Even among frequent museum goers, there are

relatively few people who have had sufficient interaction with art to have developed beyond the understandings of Stage II/III.

Over the course of Grades 3-5, the VTS is designed to address the interests and strengths of viewers who start in Stage I and work their way toward late Stage II. The VTS follows their developmental arc, supporting and challenging students appropriately. For example, the VTS emphasizes narrative art at the outset, to make the most of beginning viewers' storytelling capacity. The questions are designed to feel natural to the students at a given moment and also to provide a task that they are ready to learn.

In order to determine if the VTS accomplished growth in aesthetic thinking, ADIs of experimental and control students were collected over a five-year period in multiple sites in the US and abroad. The ADI findings were combined with data from other carefully-designed instruments to study transfer of VTS-learned strategies and skills to non-art viewing. In one instance, teachers learned to analyze student writing samples to assess skills observed in class discussions. The transfer study also relied on a second non-directive interview, focusing on an object such as a fossil. A method of analyzing these enabled Housen to document transfer, something rarely proven before this instance.

This field research tells us that growth in thinking first appears in the ADIs, in relation to works of art, and it transfers to non-art objects when students arrive in Stage II. The first operations that transfer are strategic: habits of observing more, in more detailed ways, and of backing up opinions with evidence. As a later outgrowth of the VTS process, Housen found significant increases in speculative thinking and the consideration of multiple possibilities.

Housen strongly feels that changes in thinking occur both because the VTS method works and because of the art itself: the fact that art juxtaposes meanings that are recognizable and clear with those that are ambiguous and layered. Similar growth, she feels, would not occur if another class of objects were substituted for the initial VTS exposure. Fossils or a pair of calipers ask to be identified specifically. Art, on the other hand, encourages musing and considering options. There is always more than one right answer.

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Assessing Growth

The VTS is designed to promote growth in thinking and communication skills, as well as aesthetic development. Standard measures of achievement have limited use in assessing this growth. Much of it will be known to you only as you hear and remember what students say, and to a lesser degree, study what they write. This kind of assessment may be new to you.

Paraphrasing is the main tool you have for keeping track of individuals in terms of oral language abilities, kinds of thoughts and concerns, and methods of processing information and ideas. Linking further helps you understand how thinking progresses during any given discussion, how individuals relate to the group, and how any given student changes over time. There are exercises built into the lesson plans to help you develop your capacity for paraphrasing and linking.

Regularly recording what you observe is an essential part of this process. Use the pages provided with each lesson to collect and write down your thoughts about your process, as well as that of individual students and the group. You will likely want to keep an additional journal to make detailed notations on individual students.

After each lesson, jot down observations about the art, the students, yourself, and/or the process. Here are some topics you might cover:

- Provide examples of students' comments, particularly ones you did not expect.
- Describe class interactions and student behaviors, and whether you have noticed them before or find them surprising. Make note of how the discussions develop.
- Compare behaviors shown during the VTS lessons to those in other classes.
- Make note of instances where both you and your students apply VTS strategies in other classes and subjects, particularly when students are not prompted to do so.
- Note questions you have about the VTS, about these materials, or about the images for later discussion with your colleagues.
- Write about your own experience teaching the VTS, and about comments shared by other teachers.

You will be asked to refer to your notes frequently. Such documentation will provide the data for assessment of the changes taking place; changes in yourself as well as individual students and your class as a whole. It will also be the basis for learning additional, more structured assessment that becomes useful later.

For further information about assessment, consult the VTS website: http://www.vtskids.org, password "teacher". Many additional insights, tools, and practice opportunities are provided there.

Looking Ahead to Your Museum Visit

The VTS is based on the premise that a personal connection to art is the essential first step in building a long-term relationship to it. VTS discussions are the means of developing a rapport with, interest in, and curiosity about art. They are structured to benefit the early stages of aesthetic development, laying a foundation for later growth.

It seems important to mention this as you plan your museum visit because museums often convey the attitude that having a large body of information is the only way of knowing about art. They sometimes make new or infrequent visitors feel as if their personal responses are unwelcome. It is even possible to feel that discussion is discouraged.

Please try not to let any unspoken assumption stop you from enjoying the discussions that you and your students know how to have. Lively exchange based on extended observation is a highly desirable behavior, even among experts. Though the VTS is designed for beginners, its key emphases—looking carefully and reflecting—are also the central behaviors of the most expert viewers. These viewers know that having information is just one form of knowing. What you are doing with your students engages them at their current stage of development, asking them to draw from their own experiences and knowledge, while teaching them skills they will continue to use as their expertise grows.

Preparations for the Teacher

This museum visit might be the first time that you have taught in a museum. As with any new situation, you may feel nervous. The best way to insure a positive experience for you and your students is to prepare yourself fully.

Here are some ground rules, some of which are further elaborated on in this chapter:

- Contact the museum education personnel to enlist their help.
- Visit the museum to see what is on display, and to select four to five works that you think will engage your students.
- Lay out a reasonable path from where you enter as a group to the art you want to see, and back again.
- Consult with the museum staff regarding any procedures required. Make sure you have an appointment; know where, when and how to arrive and depart; what size group is allowed; and what supervision is required.
- Make lunch arrangements if necessary. Locate coatrooms and bathrooms.
- Ask any questions that occur to you, no matter how simple they may seem.
- Make whatever arrangements are required on the part of your school: buses; permission slips; class coverage, etc.

Regarding the choices of art: Select pictures that are similar to ones that produced good discussions in your classroom. If there are works of art from your museum that you viewed as slides in class, include one of these. Students will enjoy rediscovering it, and they can learn the difference between viewing the slide and the original. Keep in mind that the images need to be physically accessible, allowing a group to assemble so that all students have a good view. Scale is an issue here. Pictures should be neither so big, nor so little, that they cannot be easily seen.

Remember to check for glare from lights or from glass that may cover the image; you may need to squat to check this, given the difference in your height and theirs.

Regarding the timing: We recommend that you stay in the galleries for no more than an hour, limiting yourself to four or five works to give you time to have discussions comparable to those in the classroom: 12-15 minutes apiece. This timeframe is recommended because the experience is intense and is best stopped before it becomes either overwhelming or tiring. (If you feel that the recommended time is too short given the rare and rich opportunity, extend the stay. It might be better, however, to brainstorm ways students can return, perhaps with their families.)

It is a good idea to plan for one or two more images than you expect to use in case a gallery is closed at the last minute, or a particular image you planned to use has been removed for some reason, or is in use by another group.

Plan enough time for the visit overall. If you need up to sixty minutes in the galleries, calculate additional time for bathroom visits and other logistics. Expect that you will need a total of two hours from beginning to end. Add more time to eat, if that is an option.

Regarding the museum staff: Ask the museum staff to help you map out a route that will not only get you where you want to go without wasting time, but also introduce the students to the museum in general.

If the class you are teaching is especially large or especially young, you may want to break the group into two. You might enlist the aid of museum staff to work with one half of the group while the other remains with you. Working with a smaller number of students in this new setting often helps both you and the students feel more secure about dealing with unexpected circumstances, which naturally arise. Make sure in this case that the museum staff person is thoroughly familiar with the VTS method.

See if there is any information about the museum and its programs that you can take back to class or give students to take home.

Regarding the school administration: Make sure that your school administrators understand the importance of the museum visit. Ask for their support, particularly in communications with parents and other teachers. This is especially important if special arrangements need to be made with other teachers to cover any of your normal responsibilities, or if you need help making travel arrangements.

If the museum charges an entry fee and students in your class are from families for whom this is a problem, you may need to seek the assistance of your school or museum administrator to make special arrangements to have this fee waived.

Be sure to follow all of your school's procedures for conducting a field trip.

Preparations for the Students

Introduce the museum in advance of the visit so that students have a sense of where they are going and what they will find there. Ask them for any recollections they have of past museum visits, and make sure they are clear about the kind of museum you are visiting. Students often confuse one museum with others. Share some of your experience from this museum and from others.

Since one important objective of this lesson is to insure that the students feel comfortable in the museum, explain the "museum rules" to them in advance:

- Not touching the art keeps it clean and safe for future visitors. There is invisible dirt and harmful oils on our fingers.

- Not running and not walking backwards in the museum decreases the likelihood of accidentally bumping into something. Being quiet in the galleries allows other visitors to look, think, and talk.

- There may be other rules pertaining to your museum. Guards will be on hand to help students remember them. If possible, ask the guard to introduce him- or herself to establish a rapport with students.

- Suggest that students dress so they can sit on the floor. It is strongly encouraged that you "sit them" so that they can all easily see the picture being discussed as well as hear one another. This also helps them stay focused—not such an easy thing to do in this new environment full of interesting distractions.

Preparations for the Chaperones

The museum visit offers your community an opportunity to broaden understanding of the goals of the VTS by inviting parents, grandparents, other teachers or school administrators who may be curious about the VTS lessons to chaperone. These chaperones should be prepared for their role.

The VTS teacher should meet with prospective chaperones or otherwise explain to them what the VTS is. They may have a different expectation of the museum visit. Describe the museum visit as an essential part of a process of learning about art and ask them to not only serve as monitors of student behavior, but also as active observers. While you do not want them to participate in the discussions, you can suggest that they listen closely to the questions asked and silently follow the looking/thinking process as students make discoveries. Ask them to think about the ways students are learning to cooperatively construct meaning from the art that they discuss. Tell them that you will ask for their comments at the end of the museum visit, and remember to do this. Include their comments in your journal.

Preparations for the Museum Staff

It is important for the museum staff to be aware of the VTS method because in some ways it differs from traditional museum teaching. One of the biggest differences is that the classroom teacher continues to teach in the museum. Another is that the VTS precludes the giving of information that has not been requested. If you are working in partnership with a museum, it is likely that these and other issues will already have been addressed. If not, please show them this manual as an initial step in arranging for a visit that allows you to continue working by the same method that the students have learned in class.

If museum personnel do understand the VTS, you can enlist their aid in planning your visit, helping you to select works of art to view, or to break your class into two groups for easier viewing.

You might also invite museum teachers to attend one of your in-class lessons, to introduce themselves to students. This way they can also see the students at work on their home turf, and they

can even be invited to teach one slide to further their acquaintance. It is useful for the students to think they have a friend at the museum.

Using Labels

Students may pick up on the presence of labels, a tool that is important in the long run to learn to use. However, once discovered, students may think they can use labels as a short cut to understanding the image. If they find a title or explanation which they think "explains" the picture, they treat the information as if it were just another opinion. Ask students to examine the picture in light of what they have read: *"What do you see that supports that comment?"*

Here is what the standard identification label contains:

Name of the artist

Birth and, if applicable, death dates

Nationality. Usually the country of the artist's birth. In the case of artists who were born in one place but lived most of their productive life in another, the "adoptive" country may be given.

Title of work. Titles are usually given by the artist. Sometimes they are merely descriptions of the work, for example, "Still Life;" sometimes they identify the subject: "Street, Dresden" or "Fish." At other times, titles are a key to what the artist might have wanted us to think or see: "One" or "The Persistence of Memory," although such titles can still be cryptic. When "Untitled" is used, it usually represents the artist's wish to provide no additional remarks.

Accession information. This data is provided by the museum to indicate the manner in which the work came into the collection. It is a way of acknowledging donors. There are sometimes name and number codes given to show how the object is recorded in museum records, and when it was acquired by the museum.

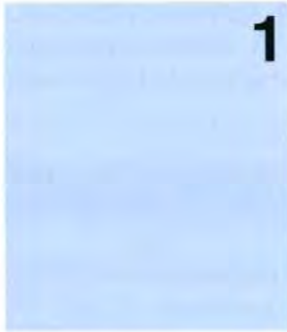
Medium. Usually this is a list of the materials and/or technique that the artist used in creating a work. "Oil on canvas", "watercolor on paper", "lithography", etc., are common examples of materials and techniques used in works of art. "Mixed media" indicates a number of different materials used to create a work of art.

Some works come with additional explanatory labels. The information and ideas they contain are what the museum staff wants people to know about the art. Some labels provide background not visible in the picture and use vocabulary that is often the specialized language of art history. If students want to debate the opinions given in the labels or look for evidence of what is said, let them. Just make sure these additional labels do not intimidate. They are there as thoughts, not truths.

Checklist for Museum Visit

- [ ] Name, address, phone of museum
- [ ] Contact person(s)
- [ ] Appointment and lunch confirmations
- [ ] School group entrance address
- [ ] Bus/travel arrangements
- [ ] School administrative permissions
- [ ] Parent permissions
- [ ] Chaperones
- [ ] Works of art to be discussed (including alternates)
- [ ] Follow up details
- [ ] Notes for future visits

VTS at a Glance



Starting the Lesson

Introduce the VTS: it allows students to examine art, to think, to contribute observations and ideas, to listen, and to build understandings together. Ask students to recall these aspects of the process often.

Project the first slide. Always give students a moment to look in silence before you invite them to speak.

Asking the Questions

After they have examined the slide, ask the question, **What's going on in this picture?** Once students have learned this question, use any of the variations introduced in the lesson plans.

Whenever students make a comment that involves an interpretation (a comment that goes beyond identification and literal description), respond first by paraphrasing, and then ask, **What do you see that makes you say that?** Once students understand the point of this question, begin to vary it, as suggested in the lesson plans.

In order to keep students searching for further observations, frequently ask them, **What else can you find?** Again, variations are useful once students are familiar with the point of the question.

Responding to Students' Comments

Listen carefully to students, making sure that you hear all of what they say and that you understand it accurately.

Point to what they mention in the slide. Be precise, even when it is a comment that has been repeated.

Use encouraging body language and facial expressions to nurture participation.

Paraphrase each comment. Change the wording, but not the meaning of what is said. In rephrasing, demonstrate the use of proper sentence construction and rich vocabulary to assist students with language.

Accept each comment neutrally. Remember that this process emphasizes a useful pattern of thinking, not right answers. Students are learning to make detailed observations, sorting out and applying what they know. Articulating their thoughts leads to growth even when they make mistakes.

Link answers that relate, even when there are disagreements. Show how the students' thinking evolves, how some observations and ideas stimulate others, how opinions change and build.

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Concluding the Classes

Thank students for their participation. Tell them what you particularly enjoyed. Encourage them to think of viewing art as an ongoing, open-ended process. Avoid summaries; linking throughout is enough to show how conversations build. Preview the slides to be discussed in the next lesson.

About the Art

The images selected for the VTS come from many world cultures and different eras. Though most are realistic and well crafted, they represent many mediums and styles. The diversity itself increases the flexibility of students' thinking as they realize they can find meaning in all sorts of visual languages.

The images, at the same time, are full of recognizable elements: children and other familiar people, places, things, activities, interactions, and situations. They tell stories—ones that the students have the capacity to decipher with considerable accuracy, although varied interpretations are valid. They are full of cues that trigger responses involving both memory and imagination. The values expressed are familiar.

Not all images are light and happy. Art deals with the full range of human existence, and any broad selection like this brings up difficult subjects and emotions. While students are likely to think that they are discussing the pictures, they are often talking about themselves and their relationships to each other, to their families and to society. We hope you find this a heartening possibility, opening a window to issues your students face in their daily lives.

Cultures other than our own are represented in some images, though we do not expect students to see the pictures as windows into another time or place. The capacity to see images as representing other people's ideas and ways will come over time, an along with it, the curiosity and interest in knowing more. For the present, it is enough for students to read the images from their own perspective.

Abstract images are not included, and there are a number of reasons. The most important is that artists of abstractions rarely intend viewers to find stories—which is the great strength of your students. Even when they enjoy looking at abstractions, their searches for meaning are not as fruitful as with images that are rooted in the physical world. Given the VTS experience, it is very likely that finding the kinds of meanings an abstract artist intends will soon become possible and enjoyable.

The images are carefully sequenced in the VTS to build experience in a manner that corresponds to your students' growth as viewers, as thinkers, and as peers interacting. The images increase in complexity, ambiguity, subtlety, use of symbols, and layers of meaning. Please keep the slides in the order presented.

Before each VTS lesson, be sure to examine the images, thinking about each one and trying to see with your students' eyes so you can anticipate their responses. It is important for discussion dynamics for you to be familiar with the images. Otherwise, it takes too long for you to find what they point out and to understand what they are talking about.

You also need to think about the images in ways that mirror the complexity of student thinking as it develops. If you do not understand what they are saying, you cannot paraphrase effectively nor link the thoughts in the discussion. You cannot easily develop your own aesthetic thinking alone. It is strongly suggested that you discuss these images — and ideally others, perhaps visiting museums and galleries — with your own peers. You do not need to develop a body of information about art, but you definitely need to have equivalent experience viewing, thinking about, and discussing images or you will fall behind your students. Hopefully this will be a pleasure for you.

Images for Lesson Plans 1 and 2

Lesson 1

Image 1.1 Carmen Lomas Garza. *Curandera (faith healer).* Oil on linen mounted on wood, 24 x 32 in. Collection of the Mexican Museum, San Francisco, CA. © 1989 Carmen Lomas Garza. Photo: Wolfgang Dietze.

Image 1.2 David Turnley. *Father and Daughter Playing Guitar.* 1986. Color photograph. © David Turnley/CORBIS.

Image 1.3 David Siqueiros. *Peasant Mother.* 1962. Museo Nacional de Arte Moderno, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, D.F., Mexico. Photo: Giraudon/Art Resource, NY. © Est. David Alfaro Siqueiros/VAGA, NY, NY.

Lesson 2

Image 2.1 Cadzi Cody. *Hide Painting depicting the Sun Dance.* c. 1880. Elk hide and pigments, 68 x 79 in. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis. Gift of Bruce B. Dayton.

Image 2.2 Assyria, unknown. *Figure of a Tribute Bearer.* 8th cent. B.C. Ivory, 5 5/16 x 2 13/16 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1960. (60.145.11) © 1987 The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Image 2.3 Limbourg Brothers. *November: Acorn Harvest. Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry.* 15th cent. Musée Condé, Chantilly, France. Photo: Giraudon/Art Resource, NY.

Images for Lesson Plans 3 and 4

Lesson 3

Image 3.1 Gabriel Metsu. *The Sick Child.* c. 1660. Oil on canvas, 13 1/16 x 10 11/16 in. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Image 3.2 Jacques Emile Blanche. *The Painter Thaulow and his children*, also know as *"The Thaulow Family"*. 1885. Oil on canvas, 70 9/10 x 78 4/5 in. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. Photo: Giraudon/Art Resource, NY.

Image 3.3 Marisol. *The Family.* 1962. Painted wood and other materials, overall 6 ft. 10 5/8 x 65 1/2 x 15 1/2 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Advisory Committee Fund. Photograph © 2000 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. ©Marisol/VAGA, NY, NY.

Lesson 4

Image 4.1 Walter Rosenblum. *Family, Waiting Room, South Bronx.* 1980. Black and white photograph. Photograph by Walter Rosenblum.

Image 4.2 Togyokuko. *Man in a black robe, lady with child in her lap, before a standing screen.* 5 1/4 x 13 3/4 in. Collection of The Newark Museum, George T. Rockwell Collection. Inv.:9.1456. The Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey. Photo: The Newark Museum/Art Resource, NY.

Image 4.3 Egypt, unknown. *The Royal Family (Akhenaten).* From Tell el-Amarna. c. 1345 B.C. Limestone, 12 3/4 x 15 1/4 x 1 9/16 in. Aegyptisches Museum, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany. Photo: Vanni/Art Resource, NY.

Images for Lesson Plans 5 and 6

Lesson 5

Image 5.1 Paul Gauguin. *Breton Girls Dancing, Pont-Aven.* 1888. Oil on canvas, 28 3/4 x 36 1/2 in. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon. © 2000 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

Image 5.2 Lewis Watts. *Martin Luther King Way, West Oakland.* 1993. Photograph. © Lewis Watts. Reproduction of this image in any form is prohibited without permission of the photographer.

Image 5.3 Ben Shahn. *Liberation.* 1945. Tempera on cardboard mounted on composition board, 29 3/4 x 40 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. James Thrall Soby Bequest. Photograph © 2000 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. © Est. Ben Shahn/VAGA, NY, NY.

Lesson 6

Image 6.1 Doris Ulmann. *Cheevers Meadows and His Daughters.* c. 1933. Photograph. Doris Ulmann Collection, Division of Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon Library System.

Image 6.2 Maria Bashkirtseff. *A Meeting.* 1884. Oil on canvas, 74 15/16 x 68 15/16 in. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. Photo: Giraudon/Art Resource, NY.

Image 6.3 Flip Schulke. *Martin Luther King Jr. Eating with his Family.* Black and white photograph. © Flip Schulke/CORBIS.

Images for Lesson Plans 7 and 8

Lesson 7

Image 7.1 Greece, unknown. *Two Boxers.* Fresco from Thera (Santorini). Minoan, 13th cent. B.C. National Archaeological Museum, Athens, Greece. Photo: Nimatallah/Art Resource, NY.

Image 7.2 Gordon Parks. *Children on Harlem Street.* 1943. Photograph. © Corbis.

Image 7.3 Unidentified. *The Stephens Children.* Oil on canvas, 63 1/4 x 51 1/8 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Amelia R. Lowther.

Lesson 8

Image 8.1 Allan Rohan Crite. *School's Out.* Oil on canvas, 30 3/16 x 36 3/16 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Transfer from The Museum of Modern Art.

Image 8.2 Caspar Netscher. *A Lady Teaching a Child to read, and a Child playing with a Dog ('La Maîtresse d'école').* probably 1670s. Oil on wood, 17 3/4 x 14 9/16 in. © National Gallery, London.

Image 8.3 Jacob Lawrence. *The Libraries are Appreciated.* 1943. Gouache and watercolor on paper, 14 1/4 x 21 1/4 in. Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louis E. Stern Collection. Courtesy of the Jacob Lawrence estate.

Images for Lesson Plan 9

Lesson 9

Image 9.1 Paul Mathey. *Woman and Child in a Room.* 1890s. Oil on canvas, 19 1/10 x 15 in. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

Image 9.2 Graciela Iturbide. *7674, Chalmita, State of Mexico.* 1984. Photograph. © Graciela Iturbide.

Image 9.3 Hughie Lee-Smith. *Boy with Tire.* 1952. Oil on prestwood panel, 23 3/4 x 32 1/2 in. The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit. Gift of Dr. S.B. Milton, Dr. James A. Owen, Dr. B.F. Seabrooks and Dr. A.E. Thomas, Jr. Photograph © 1988 The Detroit Institute of Arts. © Est. Hughie Lee-Smith/VAGA, NY, NY.

Getting Ready

Before you begin the first lesson, read through *Understanding the Basics,* pp 4-11, along with the entire set of lesson plans to get a sense of how the VTS unfolds. The chapter, *VTS Theory and Research,* pp 14-17, helps you understand the rationale and logic of the VTS.

Before the first class, memorize the questions. Become familiar and comfortable with them.

Ask yourself the questions as you study the accompanying pictures so that you examine them with the thoughtfulness and thoroughness you expect of your students. We recommend that you view and discuss the images with fellow teachers as a way to practice your technique and develop your own aesthetic thinking. Repeat this process when preparing for upcoming lessons.

Continue to think about the various response mechanisms that are recommended: pointing with precision; using encouraging body language, facial expressions, and eye contact; paraphrasing; and linking students' comments.

Follow the instructions in order to experience the maximum advantages of the VTS.

Teach each lesson in sequence and maintain the order of the images.

To Prepare Your Classroom

Equipment: If you are unfamiliar with how to use projection equipment, practice before class. Learn how to advance and review slides, and how to adjust the focus. Find out what to do if a slide gets stuck or the bulb burns out. Make sure an extra bulb is nearby.

Slides: Make sure you project the slides correctly. They should appear on the screen as they do on pp. 27-31.

Darkened room: The room should be dark enough so that students can see each image clearly. This may require covering the windows with brown paper or even sheets, and/or scheduling your sessions during a time of day when the sun does not shine into your classroom. If there are other teachers teaching the VTS in your school, consider setting up one room in which to show the slides, and rotating the students into that room for these lessons.

Seating: It is extremely important for each child to be able to see the images. Many teachers rearrange seats to bring the students closer to the screen and to create an informal setting for these classes. You might have them sit on the floor or try a semicircle of chairs in front of their desks.

Lesson Plan 1

Student Objectives

- to begin a process of looking at and responding to art objects
- to comment on what they see in the pictures presented
- to hear the ideas of others
- to hear your acknowledgment and support of their responses

Checklist

- [ ] Don't even think about starting until you have digested *Understanding the Basics*, p. 4 and *VTS at a Glance*, p. 24.
- [ ] Have you studied this lesson plan? The accompanying images, p. 27?
- [ ] Have you memorized the questions?
- [ ] Is your equipment ready, classroom dark, and seating arranged?
- [ ] Have you thought about how you want to introduce the VTS?

Lesson Plan

Beginning

Tell students the name of the curriculum. Ask them what they think it means. Mention that the last class involves an art museum visit.

Project the first slide. Ask students to examine it silently.

Questioning

Begin with: **What's going on in this picture?**

Whenever an interpretation is given, ask: **What do you see that makes you say that?**

Throughout the discussion, ask: **What else can you find?**

Responding

Point precisely to what students mention.

Be warm and supportive as you listen.

Paraphrase each comment.

Use "What do you see that makes you say that?" whenever it is needed.

Concluding the class

Compliment the students on their discussion.

Preview the slides for the next lesson.

Teacher Objectives

- to become familiar with discussing images
- to learn the basics of the strategy: ask questions and acknowledge each student's response

Remember

Encourage all students to speak. Much of the learning at this stage comes through the process of verbal expression. Speaking enables growth; the silent viewer may not grow commensurate with others.

What to do when...

...some students talk too little and others too much. Find ways to bring out those who are quiet, even if it requires talking to them one on one. "Who haven't we heard from?" sometimes helps. Or saying to a child who is silent, "We've not heard your voice today. What would you like to add?" Never push, but continuously encourage. Similarly, use your skills as a teacher to show children who dominate that they must give others a chance to speak. Tell them, perhaps, you appreciate their enthusiasm but cannot let them do all the work.

Something to think about

Consider when it is appropriate to use the question, "What do you see that makes you say that?" Some descriptions ("I think that thing is a headdress.") and all interpretations ("I think the girl is sick.") are opinions that should be backed up with evidence. Use the question even when you agree with the opinion.

Don't be surprised if...

...a few students cannot explain their answers. They may never have been asked to think this way and it may take time. If words do not come in a moment or two, give them verbal credit for thinking: "I see that you are thinking, and that is fine." Or, "I'm sure you have reasons. They will come to you in a while." Make certain that the child who cannot accomplish this task easily feels as capable as the one who can.

Reflecting

After each lesson, make a habit of writing notes below or in a journal regarding your observations of the students during the lesson. Think concretely: did students say something you did not expect? Did they respond to something in particular in the images? Were there surprising interactions? Consider both what you saw happening and the significance of the behavior. What does willingness to speak up, for example, suggest related to other lessons?

Reviewing your notes periodically helps you to think about the progress of your students' learning and of your teaching. Use them to help you consider how you want to sharpen or refine your ability to facilitate.

Lesson Plan 2

Student Objective

- to practice the process started in Lesson 1

Checklist

- ☐ Review the images for Lesson 2, p. 27.
- ☐ Could students see the screen easily? Were the images projected clearly? Make any necessary adjustments before Lesson 2.
- ☐ Reflect on what happened in Lesson 1. What behaviors did you notice; what comments did you hear? Consider what prompted these behaviors/responses.
- ☐ Re-read any of the introductory materials that might be helpful given the experience of Lesson 1.

Lesson Plan

Project the first slide. Ask students to examine it silently.

Questioning, as in Lesson 1

Begin with: **What's going on in this picture?**

Whenever an interpretation is given, ask: **What do you see that makes you say that?**

Throughout the discussion, ask: **What else can you find?**

Responding, as in Lesson 1

Point precisely to what students mention.

Be warm and supportive as you listen.

Paraphrase each comment.

Use "What do you see that makes you say that?" whenever it is needed.

Concluding the class

Compliment the students on their discussion.

Preview the slides for the next lesson.

Teacher Objectives

- to practice the method started in Lesson 1
- to reflect on the questions used in the VTS

Something to think about

Learning to think requires active use of the student's mind. Questions are a good way to initiate such activity, but the type of question dictates the outcome. The VTS questions come from an understanding of what beginning viewers do. The first gives students the direction to apply anything they know to the problem presented: an unfamiliar work of art.

The second question asks students to give evidence to back up any interpretations and deductions. "What do you see that makes you say that?" keeps the discussion focused on the image and asks students to reason with evidence. Consider carefully when it is needed: whenever an interpretive comment is made, even when the evidence is obvious to you. It is not necessary when students simply give a straightforward description.

The third question, "What else can you find?" elicits a variety of observations and ideas, and helps avoid getting stuck on one viewpoint. Use this question as well as carefully chosen paraphrases to defuse any remarks that might be offensive. Sometimes students say things that hurt others, and you can mitigate this by the way you choose the words of your response, as well as by using the third question to shift the focus.

Remember

Listen to your students carefully.

Respond by paraphrasing what they say, trying to capture their ideas, not simply rephrasing their words.

Point accurately to the details mentioned. Ask students to do so if you cannot find what they see. Let them get up from their seats to do this.

Reflecting

Use this page to help you think about the behaviors encouraged by the VTS questions. Review the purpose of each in *Understanding the Basics*, pp. 4-11 if necessary.

Has anything pleasantly surprised you so far? Challenged you? Disappointed you? Compare your experience with that of fellow VTS teachers. Discuss any questions or problems you encounter. Write down your thoughts based on your conversations.

Lesson Plan 3

Student Objective

- to practice responding to images, listening to others, and unfolding a discussion

Checklist

- [ ] Review the images for Lesson 3, p. 28, preferably with other teachers, discussing each one.
- [ ] Memorize the variations of the questions introduced in this lesson.
- [ ] Are you writing down your observations after each class? What are you learning about your students?
- [ ] Do students seem comfortable and focused?
- [ ] Do you need to improve the classroom setup?

Lesson Plan

Project each slide, and always ask for silent viewing before beginning the discussion.

Question variations

Repeat verbatim the original questions for the first slide. Then begin to vary them.

What's going on in this picture? or
  What is happening here?
  What about this picture?

What do you see that makes you say that? or
  Where do you see that?
  How do you know that from the picture?

What else can you find? or
  What more do you see?
  Who sees something else?
  Does anyone see something different?

Responding

Continue to respond as in Lesson 1.

Concluding the class

Ask the students what they want to remember from their discussion or what they might like to tell their families and friends.

Preview the slides from the next lesson.

Teacher Objectives

- to continue practicing and thinking about the VTS method
- to learn variations of the questions used in Lessons 1 and 2

Something to think about

Reflect on what happened during the first lessons. Think about the kinds of comments your students have made. At first, we expect much listing of simple and concrete descriptions ("I see a girl." "There are some horses."). By now, you might notice a shift begin to occur as students become more descriptive: "The girl is lying in bed with the covers up." Or to offer more interpretations of what they see: "I think the girl is sick." "One horse is blue and another is black." They may have begun creating whole stories, "I think that woman is trying to help the sick girl, and that her brother is watching." Continue to record the behaviors you see on the note pages.

Consider the various purposes served by pointing to what students mention as they give their responses.

Don't be surprised if...

...there are answers that do not seem logical to you. Beginning viewers tend to see things from their own, often idiosyncratic viewpoint, and it is the nature of art to allow such interpretations. Students enjoy the fact that different opinions are possible. Class discussions will usually develop a consensus about the meaning of a picture that is in keeping with the artist's intentions. Silly responses are usually discarded, in part because students are asked to ground their answers and in part because of your neutrality. If you accept all answers equitably, students come to understand that your interest is in their thinking, not in a specific interpretation, or in "right" vs. "wrong" answers. Sometimes, by the way, it is the "off-the-wall" comment that turns out to provoke the most interesting, deepest thinking.

Reflecting

Do you notice any effect of pointing to what students mention?

Does speaking out in VTS classes seem to have any spill over into other lessons?

What is the benefit of encouraging students to defend their interpretations, even if what they are saying seems far-fetched?

Make lists of the kinds of comments you hear: simple identifications, more descriptive comments, interpretations, stories. Compare you lists with other teachers, and make notes on your impressions.

Lesson Plan 4

Student Objective

- to continue discussing images, working cooperatively to mine them for the diverse stories they contain

Checklist

- Review the images for Lesson 4, p. 28.
- Begin preparing for Lesson 5 by making sure you have a good tape recorder and cassette; you will be asked to record that lesson.
- Reflect on students' language abilities. Do you see any shifts in vocabulary or ability to express ideas?
- Continue to talk with other teachers about what is going on in VTS classes. Observe each other teach, if possible.

Lesson Plan

Continue to teach as in the earlier lessons, always beginning with silent viewing.

Question variations (same as Lesson 3)

What's going on in this picture? or
What is happening here?
What about this picture?

What do you see that makes you say that? or
Where do you see that?
How do you know that from the picture?

What else can you find? or
What more do you see?
Who sees something else?
Does anyone see something different?

Responding

Pay special attention to your paraphrasing as you facilitate: are you including entire thoughts, leaving no idea out? Are you finding new words to accurately capture the meaning of what was said? Are you remaining neutral? Visit the VTS website at www.vtskids.org, password "teacher" for paraphrasing help.

Concluding the class

Thank students for their participation. Tell them what you particularly enjoyed.

Preview the slides to be discussed in the next lesson.

Teacher Objective

- to focus on developing your skill at paraphrasing

Working on paraphrasing

Are you comfortable with your ability to paraphrase? Think about what is easy and what is not. Use the note page to record your thoughts about this. Practice using active response strategies in other circumstances, even at home. Use the phrase, "What I hear you saying is..." and then find your own words to communicate what you think you have heard. Ask students if they think you understand what they say, and what they think about hearing you paraphrase them.

Re-read *Understanding the Basics,* pp. 4-11. Think about what you are learning by paraphrasing each comment: in what ways does this process provide a window into each student's mind? How is this useful if you are to guide her/him toward more complex thinking? What does paraphrasing tell you about verbal skills? How can hearing you speak help students with their language skills?

Don't be surprised if...

...there continue to be some answers with which you disagree. As students talk about what they see, they are certain to make some comments they might later wish to revise. This happens to experts too. The point is that students are engaged and thinking, confident enough to speak up, and learning to use reasoning to bolster opinions—even if the opinions are off base. They are becoming problem solvers together, relying on their inner resources and also coming to terms with the importance of changes of mind and revision. Art is useful for this because there are many solutions to the "problem" posed. Give students the room to make errors, test possibilities, and to be wrong—as well as right.

Reflecting

What kinds of issues come up as students view the different images? How are you handling difficult comments or ideas?

Are all students participating? If not, is there anything you can do to bring reluctant ones into the discussions?

Are interpretations becoming more complex? Are there more differences of opinion? How do students react to this? Do they refer to each other's ideas?

Lesson Plan 5

Student Objective

- to begin to think about what they learn from the VTS

Checklist

- ▭ Study the images for Lesson 5, p. 29. Are you regularly viewing and discussing images with your fellow teachers? Remember, this practice helps you keep pace with your students and aids your paraphrasing.
- ▭ Are you prepared to tape record this lesson?
- ▭ Think about the VTS questions: why are no more introduced at this stage? Why not include directed questions?
- ▭ Rethink the purposes of paraphrasing. What are the benefits you've found?

Lesson Plan

Before showing the first slide, ask students what they think they gain from discussing pictures.

Questioning

Same as previous lessons.

Responding

Continue to be aware of your paraphrasing, practicing and thinking critically about it during the lesson. Also try to link responses that relate.

Take an audio tape recorder and cassette tape to class. Record the discussion during any one of the three images. Make sure you can hear both the students and yourself on the tape. Save the tape for later use.

Concluding the class

At the end of class, encourage students to think of viewing art as an ongoing search for meaning, and as open-ended. If you feel that some closure is necessary, continue to ask the students what they want to remember and to share with others. Also preview the slides for the next lesson.

Teacher Objectives

- to assess your progress in paraphrasing
- to think about how the nature of questions affects student behavior

More work on paraphrasing

At some quiet point in your week, play back the tape you made during class. Stop the tape after you listen to yourself paraphrase a comment and consider whether or not you understood and rephrased the whole idea. Did you reword or just repeat? Are you remaining neutral? Make note of comments which were paraphrased well. Write down several alternatives for those that could use improvement. Try this exercise with other teachers.

Remember

When your class hears you paraphrase each comment, it helps the entire group appreciate the importance of listening and of paying attention to everyone's ideas. In addition, it can help language development, including the building of vocabulary and the clarifying of ideas.

If for any reason you are unsure of the meaning of a student's response, or whether or not you heard the answer correctly, ask the student to repeat him- or herself. Then rephrase the idea. Continue to underscore the importance of understanding one another.

Something to think about

The VTS introduces very few questions this first year, and all are open-ended. Continue using them, despite the impulse to insert a directed question to push students toward or away from some point. Directed questions ask students to do what you want instead of thinking for themselves. They might arrive at an accurate conclusion more quickly, but this is a short-term advantage at the expense of learning independent thinking. Open-ended questions encourage a range of answers—a hallmark of creative thinking. They are not intimidating. They help students sort out and use what they already know. They also urge students to look longer than they might. The pairing of the two questions, "What's going on..." and "What do you see that makes...," encourages reasoning, as details are cited to back up opinions. Together they build self-confident problem solving.

Reflecting

With paraphrasing as your indicator, are you hearing any changes in language or expression since the early lessons? Is there any growth in the complexity of observations? Are more differing opinions being expressed?

Do students with challenges and disabilities behave differently from others?

Lesson Plan 6

Student Objectives

- to discuss images that address difficult social issues
- to consciously use the VTS method in other classes

Checklist

- Study the images for Lesson 6, p. 29, preferably with other VTS teachers.
- Apply VTS strategies to other visual materials in students' readings and textbooks. Use the method when discussing reading assignments: "What's going on in this passage/story?"; "What did you read that makes you say that?"; "What more can you find?"
- In your own words, explain the different objectives served by open-ended vs. directed questions.
- Recall what you learned about paraphrasing from the exercise in the last lesson. Implement any changes you think will improve your facilitation. Begin a similar process with linking.
- Re-read the section on linking thoughts in *Understanding the Basics*, pp. 4-11.

Lesson Plan

Questioning and Responding

Repeat the pattern of earlier lessons. Concentrate on linking related thoughts during the discussion.

Concluding the class

To bring this class to an end, point out something positive you noticed about the day's conversation: "You were particularly thoughtful about such and such an image today." Or, "You made me see things I had never seen." Or, "I was impressed by how much you seemed to be listening to each other during the discussion of such and such." Or, "I am glad so many of you contributed to the discussion today." Stress the thoughtfulness of their process and of their group interaction, not the contributions of any individuals, or particular content of the responses.

Preview the upcoming slides as usual.

Teacher Objective

- to concentrate on linking students' answers that relate to, extend, or dispute one another

Something to think about

The discussions you are having with your students are facilitated, not simply allowed to happen. The structure is provided by the questions and by each way you respond to comments. Through facilitating, you insure that conversation is thorough and rigorous, and also respectful of all students.

One aspect of facilitation that gains importance over time is linking, because it articulates how thinking evolves and how some observations and opinions stimulate others: some expanding on earlier interpretations; some taking off in new directions; some involving changes of mind, and so on. Linking answers helps to shape the discussion and gives it momentum. It makes it clear to the class that thoughts don't exist in a vacuum, but build on, incorporate, or react to others. It enhances group process by making interactions obvious.

Linking exercise

Use the tape you made in Lesson 5 to listen for links between comments. Listen also for missed opportunities. Practice linking, first, by identifying the kind of idea you hear: "You are adding something new." Or, "You are building on an earlier idea." Take a segment of the discussion and make a list of ideas that seem to relate to one another and practice articulating how they connect.

Don't be surprised if...

...your role as facilitator is changing. Your students have begun to learn the rules of the VTS method. Observe how much of the strategy they seem to have incorporated, and how much you still need to prompt them, using the questions. Your focus might begin to shift from asking the questions to managing the thinking process by way of linking.

Reflecting

Are students beginning to back up opinions with evidence without your prompting? Have you noticed students applying the VTS to any other lessons? What happens in other classes when you introduce the method?

Does the VTS trigger any general thoughts for you about teaching and learning?

Lesson Plan 7

Student Objective

- to apply skills in observing, interpreting, and explaining within a group to individual writing assignments, utilizing the internet **(recommended for Grades 4 and 5, optional for Grade 3)**

Checklist

- ☐ Have you studied the images for Lesson 7, p. 30?
- ☐ For Grade 4 and 5 teachers, visit the website, www.vtskids.org, password "teacher", and read over the instructions for the writing assignment.
- ☐ If possible, arrange for students to use computers to perform the writing assignment.
- ☐ In your own words, what is the purpose of linking—of pointing out interrelated thoughts?
- ☐ Think about the skills taught through discussion that are hard to teach any other way.

Lesson Plan

Questioning and Responding

Continue to focus on your technique, working on paraphrasing and linking. By this time, it is important for the students' development that they understand the benefits of discussion. Help them see that ideas relate to and build on each other, and that discussions are constructive and expansive.

Concluding the class

Think about what kind of concluding comments have elicited the best response from the students, and repeat it.

Writing Assignment (recommended for Grades 4 and 5, optional for Grade 3)

Please refer to the VTS website for instructions. Log on to www.vtskids.org and enter the password "teacher". If it is impossible for your students to use computers to complete their assignment, download instructions for how to handle this in class without computers. Students using computers will also log onto the Internet for their assignments: www.vtskids.org, but will enter the password "student".

Teacher Objectives

- to continue to focus on your ability to facilitate discussions, as students increasingly build on comments of their classmates
- to introduce the computer as a tool for independent work **(recommended for Grades 4 and 5, optional for Grade 3)**

Writing and the VTS

While the VTS makes good use of group interaction, you eventually want students to operate with similar thoughtfulness and flexibility on their own. As a way of weaning students from reliance on the eyes and minds of others — as well as helping them learn to write in general — the lessons include individual writing assignments. The concreteness and interpretive nature of well selected art stimulate this writing. Given their discussions of the images, words and ideas are available to students, making the task relatively easy. Students are empowered by being able to choose the images about which they write. Enabling students to feel successful and engaged in this context can benefit their writing in non-VTS circumstances.

Something to think about

As a teaching tool, facilitated discussion is under-utilized. To some degree, open-ended discussions, in particular, run counter to what one traditionally considers good teaching. The teacher's role as information provider and supplier of correct answers is eliminated in favor of giving students the chance to utilize what they know. However, speaking and listening skills are extremely hard to develop without discussion. Collaboration is impossible without discussion, and brainstorming is difficult. Many of the skills necessary for successful relationships can only come by way of discussion. Can you think of other advantages?

Reflecting

Do students seem to listen to each other more than in the first lessons? Do they seem interested in each others' comments? Do they respond to each other in any direct way, agreeing or disagreeing? Do they build on each others' comments, as in, "I agree with Yoon, but want to add something"?

Lesson Plan 8

Student Objectives

- to be comfortable in a process of examining and talking about art
- to extend the application of viewing skills to individual writing assignments, utilizing the Internet **(recommended for Grades 4 and 5, optional for Grade 3)**

Checklist

- [ ] Study the images for Lesson 8, viewing and discussing them with other teachers. Write about at least one of the images.
- [ ] For Grade 4 and 5 teachers, visit www.vtskids.org, password "teacher" and read over the instructions for the second writing assignment.
- [ ] Have you made plans for your museum visit? Make sure that your school's art specialist knows about the upcoming trip, and if possible, accompanies you. If trained in the VTS method, s/he might take half of your students in order to allow for smaller groups in the museum.
- [ ] Discuss with other teachers what they see happening with their students as a result of these open-ended discussions. What have they seen in terms of skills transfer?
- [ ] Are you continuing to make notes after each class?

Lesson Plan

Questioning and Responding

Keep working on improvements in your technique.

Concluding the class

Ask students to reflect on what they do during VTS classes.

Ask what they enjoy and what they think they learn.

Writing Assignment (Grades 4 and 5, optional for Grade 3)

Please refer to the VTS website for the second writing assignment. Log on to www.vtskids.org and enter the password "teacher". Again, you will find instructions there for what to do if your students do not have access to computers. Students will also log onto www.vtskids.org, but use the password "student" for their assignments.

Teacher Objective

- to think about the implications of the VTS regarding state and district learning standards

Practicing and Reflecting

The VTS encourages a number of behaviors and attitudes, ranging from self-confidence and willingness to participate, to evidential reasoning and speculative thinking. Which of these are required for school success in general? In what ways do the skills encouraged by the VTS assist students with work they must do, meet standards, or pass standardized tests? How does the VTS assist students who struggle with language? Other sorts of challenges? How does experience with the VTS affect the way you think about students' capabilities? The way they think about themselves? About each other? What dynamics of VTS classes are useful in other lessons?

Planning the Museum Visit

The last lesson of the VTS is held in the art museum, although schools may be unable to make such a trip for all grades. If that is so, saving the trip for Grade 5 students is advised. If a trip can be arranged for your class, study *Lesson Plan 10*, pp. 60-61 and *Looking Forward to Your Museum Visit*, p. 19-23 to help you determine how to handle it.

Work with museum personnel to plan the logistics of the visit, including selecting images for the lesson and getting to and around the museum. If possible, find a museum staff person familiar with using the VTS to take half of your class (while you teach the other half) to allow for smaller groups.

Make sure you also handle any logistics required by the school well in advance of the proposed visit. Invite a few family members along to help you as chaperones; inform them about what you have been doing in class.

Reflecting

How are students handling the writing assignments? Is the writing different from what you expect of any of the students? What do the writing assignments tell you about what the students have internalized from the VTS?

Lesson Plan 9

Student Objective

- to focus on applying VTS skills to increasingly complex images

Checklist

- [ ] Have you studied the images for Lesson 9, p. 31? Do you feel that your own skills as a viewer are progressing?

- [ ] Are your plans in order for your museum visit? Have you confirmed the museum appointment, made bus and travel plans, filled out school forms, obtained parental permissions, made lunch plans, paid fees, arranged classroom coverage, and invited and briefed chaperones?

Lesson Plan

Questioning and Responding

Continue to focus on your facilitation skills.

Concluding the class

When you finish the last image, ask students to recall and reflect on the questions used in this year's VTS:

What are the questions we have been using to help us examine pictures?

Why do you think we use these questions?

After this discussion, let your students know that they are visiting the museum soon. Ask them to recall any museums they have visited. Explain the rules and procedures involved in the visit. These are contained in the chapter, *Looking Ahead to Your Museum Visit*, pp. 19-23.

Teacher Objective

- to review the VTS questions to see if students are aware of the strategy they have been using to construct meaning from pictures

Thinking about The VTS

- What changes do you notice between the first class and now?
- Are most students able to give evidence to back up their answers? With or without prompting?
- Do most students contribute to the discussion? Does anyone dominate? Is anyone left out?
- How do students interact with each other during the discussions? Do they build on each other's ideas and actively respond to each other's comments?
- Do you link both points of agreement (convergence) and disagreement (divergence)?
- How do the students handle disagreements? How do you handle any problems that arise during the discussions?

Writing Assessment Exercise

At some quiet point, review your students' writing samples from both assignments. Which learning behaviors from the VTS appear in these samples? How do the student's two writing assignments compare to each other? To other work you assign them? Be sure to write down all of your thoughts.

Reflecting

Note answers here to the questions on the preceding page.

Think about your role: how much of what you observe in class is due to how you are teaching?

Also, reflect on the relationship between the class discussions and students' writing: how do they support one another?

Lesson Plan 10 - The Museum Visit

Student Objectives

- to apply skills learned in class to viewing art in the museum
- to feel pleasure at being in the museum

Checklist

- ☐ Have you consulted *Looking Ahead to Your Museum Visit*, pp. 19-23?
- ☐ Have you selected works of art to discuss with your students?
- ☐ Do you know the route you will follow once in the museum?
- ☐ Have you asked parents to join you as additional chaperones? Have you explained the VTS to them?

Lesson Plan

Questioning and Responding

If you start with a picture students have talked about in class (which is not always possible) begin your questioning by asking:

Are you surprised by how this looks?

As you proceed, use the same questions and response strategies as in the classroom.

If questions arise, ask:

How can we find the answer to that question?

Concluding the class

Ask students how it feels to be in the museum.

Teacher Objectives

- to plan ahead so that you feel as comfortable in the museum as in your classroom
- to use your skills to facilitate discussions about works of art in this new context

Something to think about

All museums share a mission to present works of art for people to enjoy. The VTS addresses this mission, intending to help beginning viewers become self-directed museum goers. We therefore want the students to feel as if their museum visits are tailored to them. Try to ensure that the visits are relaxed and that they have some elements of spontaneity, such as stopping to discuss a work that catches their interest. Perhaps let students explore on their own for a few moments before starting each image discussion.

A museum label will often talk about things outside the picture itself, such as facts concerning the artist's life. If students read the labels, direct them back to the artwork to find evidence to support the label's claims. Keep their viewing active, even as they feed information into the mix of ideas.

Remember

In assembling students before a picture, consider the scale of the work of art: if it is very large, they should be far enough away so that their vision takes in the whole image. Stand to the side of the picture as you do in the classroom, and point to the parts of the picture that students note. Do not touch the work or its frame. Demonstrate the same cautious behaviors that are required of your students.

Getting around the museum takes time which, of course, is not wasted. Although the experience may be unstructured, students are noticing many things as they walk along passageways and galleries. The objects they pass will make an impression on them, and perhaps entice them to return.

Reflecting

How does discussing art support learning? What plans do you need to make to incorporate VTS teaching and learning in your plans for next year?