Basic VTS at a Glance

by Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine

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.

Call students’ attention to the first image. Always give students a moment to look in silence before you invite them to speak.

Asking the Questions

After they have examined the image, ask the question, What’s going on in this picture? Once students have learned this question, use variations.

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.

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.

Concluding the Lesson

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.
Contemporary Art Start (CAS) is a yearlong arts integration program for 3rd-12th grade classrooms across Los Angeles County. CAS is a multi-pronged program designed to create deep and sustainable impact through high quality professional development, multiple facilitated museum visits for students, inquiry-based classroom curriculum, and dynamic family engagement programs.

**Track 1:** 3rd-12th grade generalist classroom, academic, and studio art teachers

**Track 2:** Middle & High School Arts Integration

**Cost:** $110 per teacher

**INFO:** 213/621.01.706
jhoel@moca.org
Go to moca.org/teachers for registration form (available 4/1/13), benefits, requirements, and professional development workshop dates

Application deadline: June 14
Wording matters!
Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)
The three big questions:

What's going on in this picture?
(or object, space, etc.)

What do you see that makes you say that?

What more can we find?

Remember to:

- Point
- Paraphrase
- Gather multiple answers

For more information on VTS, visit vtshome.org

For more information about VTS training in Los Angeles, visit moca.org/teachers or contact Jeanne Hoel, Assoc. Dir. of Education T: 213/62101.706 or jhoel@moca.org