

# The Art of Reading

Jennifer Klein and Elizabeth Stuart

**W**hat does it mean to comprehend? How can art be used to teach comprehension strategies? Teaching comprehension strategies through art allows children to use multiple modalities to learn, and, most importantly, apply the strategies in a text-free environment before applying them to text.

As educators, we know children learn best when they can touch, talk, and move. For many children, art grabs their interest, is motivating, and is safe. Most children have something to say about a piece of art. Once the strategies of making connections, questioning, visualizing, determining importance, inferring, and synthesizing are developed through discussing art, children are better equipped to transfer the strategies to text.

## Being Metacognitive

We can best support learners by teaching them to be metacognitive; to think about their own thinking. This means showing them how to activate their own thinking when analyzing art, and later, pieces of text. The visual arts can be a good avenue for teaching children comprehension strategies because once they understand that comprehension is making meaning out of what they see or experience, they can apply these strategies to reading in order to create meaning from what they have read.

## Making Connections

Good readers are constantly making connections between their own background knowledge and the texts they read; connections between texts; and connections between ideas presented in a text and the world. It is through these connections that students gain a deeper understanding of the text, of authors, and of community/world issues.

Here are a few ways to integrate these connections into an art lesson:

**Art to Art:** Students make comparisons between two works of art.

**Art to Self:** Students compare a work of art to their own lives.

**Art to World:** Students connect a work of art to the world around them.

## Questioning

Asking questions before, during, and after reading is an important strategy that engages children in reading and deepens comprehension. Ways to question in the artroom include:

- making predictions about what is underneath a covered piece of art.
- creating deeper-level questions about a work of art.

## Visualizing

Good readers use sensory impressions to gather information from the text

that relates to their own background in order to understand what they read. To help students use sensory

information, it is important to teach them to develop pictures in their mind. This could include:

- creating pictures from descriptions of artwork.
- creating pictures after reading or listening to text.
- illustrating visualizations while listening to descriptions.

## Inferring

Many readers are good at comprehending text at the literal level, but need support to learn how to infer. Children learn to use information from the text, combine it with their own

knowledge, and create meaning from the text. Activities that help students learn to infer include:

- using a work of art to “infer” what message the artist is trying to convey.
- using students’ own background knowledge to interpret the work of art.

## Determining Importance

What is the essential information children need to remember after reading or looking at a work of art? What are the “codes” writers and artists use? Strategies that help students determine what is important include:

- helping students use the elements of art and principles of design to “read” a work of art.
- using the principle of emphasis (focal point) to determine the important parts in a work of art.

## Synthesizing

Synthesizing information helps readers understand the big idea of the piece. As the reader gains new information from the story, a change may



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as Holmes spent years cultivating his talents and turning them into habits, so too must the reader.

An entertaining and highly engaging read, this book is great for any Sherlock Holmes fan, anyone wanting to develop their "brain attic," and especially artists, for whom the skill of observation is quintessential.

*Reviewed by Shantelle Kotowich, art education major at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff.*

## Websites



**Monuments Men Lesson Plans**  
monumentsmen.com/lesson-plans

George Clooney's film, *The Monuments Men*, which is based on the

book by Robert M. Edsel, tells the story of more than 300 men and women from thirteen nations who risked their lives to preserve and protect cultural treasures during World War II. After the war, they tracked and returned the more than five million works of art stolen by the Nazis.

Accompanying the fascinating story of these unlikely heroes (mostly middle-aged museum and art professionals) is an educational program entitled, "The Greatest Theft in History." Classroom materials introduce art, artists, art styles, and great museums of Europe, as well as discussion topics of protection, restoration, and rightful ownership. Besides visual art and art history, the materials relate to social studies, science, and language arts, and are linked to the National Standards.

Two lesson plans are available on the website: "Hitler, Art, Race, and Society" and "Degenerate Art," along with a glossary of terms. A \$10 subscription fee allows password access to the following lesson plans and updates: "More Than an Object,

More Than a Place," "Heroes and Villains of the Greatest Theft in History," "Conservation and Restoration," "Who Owns Art?," "Is Art Worth a Life?," "Going Once, Going Twice . . . and Perhaps Gone Forever," "What Is the Value of Art?," "Reparations as Resolution," "What Is Provenance?," and "Casualties of War." Video clips accompany each lesson, along with primary source materials, discussion strategies, ideas for classroom application and individual research, and links to related websites. A three-DVD set including the documentary film, *The Rape of Europa* is available for \$35, which also includes access to the lesson plans.

Educators are reminded to be sensitive to the content of the educational material, and for that reason these lessons are geared to upper grades and college use. ☹

*Reviewed by Rebecca Arkenberg, a museum consultant from Stratford, Connecticut.*

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occur in their thought processes as they merge new information with their own knowledge to create a new, greater understanding of the piece. Activities that help students synthesize include:

- comparing the commonalities

between two artworks by the same artist.

- providing students with biographical information about an artist and asking them to use visual clues from the artwork to make inferences or predictions to synthesize its meaning.
- having students synthesize information from a story and displaying their ideas in a quilt square. ☹

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## WEB LINK

[www.usingarttoteachreading.com](http://www.usingarttoteachreading.com)