

Art Postcard Games

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The following games involve students in “structured play” using small art reproductions to explore art concepts. These games require carefully selecting examples and groups of art works beforehand so as to focus students’ attention on certain similarities and differences in works of art.

Interpreting Art Works

[This game requires selecting prints with narrative content] Have pairs of students select 3 or 4 postcards without knowing the purpose of the selection. Teach or review the parts of a story such as “the setting” which is the scene for some action, “the plot” which is the unfolding of the action, and “the climax” of the action. Ask the students to arrange their cards in a sequence to illustrate an imaginary story. Have them present their story to others in oral or written form.



Place a group of cards on a table which are active (abstract or non-objective) or which show narrative action by realistic figures. Have pairs of students select one card without knowing the purpose of the game. Discuss dramatization possibilities together. Determine “rules” of the game (e.g., words or no words, props or no props, etc.) Provide students with time to figure out the action appropriate to their selected card. Place all cards in a location so everyone can see them. Each group in turn presents their dramatization. The audience then makes informed guesses on which work is undergoing dramatization. Discuss the reasons for choices of action made by the students. Variation: Have students (in groups of 4 to 5) make the “sounds” their selected work would make. The audience then guesses which card was selected.



Classifying and Categorizing Art Works

One of the more interesting games to play with art postcards involves asking students to sort a group of art prints into self-determined categories. Have each group spread the cards out in front of them and then say, “Place these prints into groups that you think go together.” Afterwards, have each group explain how they grouped their prints. Identify works which were difficult to classify. Are their similarities in the ways groups completed the task?

Sort a group of art prints into theme categories such as landscapes, still lifes, portraits and ideas. Possible subcategories might include real and imaginary events. Share and reflect on the results. Discuss characteristics of prints found difficult to classify.



Define the terms “realistic,” “abstract” and “nonobjective.” Show an example of each. Have students sort a group of art prints according to these categories. Subdivide categories if possible. Identify works that were difficult to classify. Share and reflect on the results.

Classify a group of art prints according to time periods. For example, works completed in the 14th century, 15th century and so on. Select the category containing the largest number of prints and make inferences regarding what the works suggest about the art (and culture) of the time period. Determine ways to verify conclusions drawn. Share results.



Classify art prints according to emotions or moods expressed in the works. Students may invent their own categories or they may be given descriptive words such as “exciting,” “playful,” “calm,” “sad,” “indifferent,” and “mad” and asked to sort their prints accordingly. Select a work from each category and determine what the artist has done to convey the emotion. Share results. Identify works which were difficult to classify. Discuss the personal and universal quality of emotions.

Sort art prints according to the nationality of the artist. (See back of print.) Compare works within each category and identify similarities. Contrast works among categories and identify differences. Identify interrelationships across groups.

Ordering & Ranking Art Works

Before doing the following activities, the teacher should explain how a continuum consists of two extremes with the middle portion displaying characteristics common to both ends.

Have students rank a group of art prints in order from 1 (least liked) to 10 (best liked) among the group. Share rankings and criteria used to make decisions. Determine why a certain print was ranked fifth and the next one sixth. Decide if the group ranking reflects “popular” values among the public. Conduct a survey to verify conclusions drawn.

Place art prints on a continuum from oldest to most recent. Ask students to draw conclusions regarding the history of art as reflected in their time continuum. Discuss conclusions and indicate the basis for decisions made.

Sequence a group of 10 art prints from the most to least beautiful. Share the criteria used to justify the order. Discuss the personal and universal quality of “beauty.”

Place art prints on a continuum according to the depth shown (i.e., infinite/deep space to decorative/flat space). Identify and discuss ways artists show depth in a work (e.g., size, color, overlapping, perspective and so on).

Rank a group of art prints in order from 1 (most likely to be popular) to 10 (least likely to be popular) with the general public. Share rankings and criteria used to make decisions. Discuss issues related to “art in public places.” Predict how the ranking might change according to the audience (e.g., big city vs. small town, parents vs. children and so on).

Rank a group of art prints in order from 1 (most significant) to 10 (least significant). Share the criteria used to justify the order. Find examples of “great art” and determine what makes them significant.

Place art prints on a continuum from “active-noisy” to “quiet-still.” Select a print and ask “What has the artist done to make this a painting?” Try other polar pairs such as warm/cool, lonely/crowded or sharp/soft.

Have students invent their own art postcard games to play.

