

Guidelines for Describing an Artwork

When you describe an artwork, list only things that you can see. Report only facts. Don't worry about what the work mean, or whether you like it or not. The guidelines below can be used to describe works with or without recognizable shapes. You may not use all of the items listed in the guidelines for a particular work.

- 1) **Label information:** Artist, title, and date of work. Medium (what is it made of). Processes used to make it. Size of art work. Country where it was created.
- 2) **Subject Matter:**
 - a) Figures, animals, objects (trees, sun, clouds, grass, birds, machines, buildings, etc.). If there are no recognizable objects in the artwork, describe art elements: line, color, value, shape, texture, space, movement.
 - b) Describe what figures, animals and other things that move are doing. How many are there?
 - c) What is large/small, near/far, in front/behind?
- 3.) **Art Elements:**
 - a) **Lines.** Are they straight, curved, swirling, jagged, diagonal, vertical, horizontal, continuous, broken, heavy, thin, dark, light? Do they occur at edges where color, value or texture changes suddenly? Are there lines that direct your attention from one place to another?
 - b) **Colors.** Are they warm, cool, bright, dull, opaque, transparent? Are they like colors you see in the real world, or different from real world colors? Is there a dominant color? Are there related colors?
 - c) **Values.** Are the colors dark? Light? Both? Are there strong contrasts of dark/light? Are there soft contrasts of dark/Light?
 - d) **Shapes.** Are shapes realistic, unrealistic, or not representational? Do shapes appear flat or do they appear to have depth (roundness)? Are they geometric (squares, triangles, circles)? Are they organic (curved and irregular edges)?
 - e) **Textures.** Are they visible in the artwork? Where? Don't confuse texture with patterns like checkerboard, stripes, and polka dots.
 - f) **Space.** Does space appear deep? If so, is it due to: overlap; placement of small objects high in the picture and large ones low; making objects smaller as they get farther away; linear perspective (converging lines); colors that seem to advance and recede: Does space appear shallow? Why?
 - g) **Movement.** If movement is suggested in the work, is it due to: alternating shapes; figures and other life forms doing something; repetition of one thing after another; elements that progress from large to small, small to large, dark to light?