

## Using “QUEST” (Questions for Understanding, Exploring, Seeing and Thinking)

Exploring art using the five entry points is outlined in Howard Gardner’s *The Unschooled Mind*. The QUESTs consist of open-ended questions that build on one another and scaffold understanding from the outside details to the core meaning of the work of art.

The five entry points are as follows:

**The Aesthetic Entry Point:** This is the entry point through which learners respond to formal and sensory qualities of a subject or work of art. For example; color, line, expression, and composition of a painting; the intricate patterns on the surface of a beehive, or the alliteration of a poem.

**The Narrative Entry Point:** This is the entry point, which learners respond to the narrational elements of a subject or a work of art. For example, the legend depicted in a painting, the sequence of events in a period of history, or the story behind the construction of a skyscraper.

**The Logical/Quantitative Entry Point:** This is the entry point through which learners respond to aspects of a subject that invite deductive reasoning or numerical consideration. For example, the question of what decisions led to the creation of an art object, the problem of calculating the overall dimensions of an automobile, or the determination of which character in a mystery is the real villain.

**The Foundational Entry Point:** This is the entry point through which learners respond to the broader concepts or philosophical issues raised by a subject or work of art. For example, whether and why calculus is thought to be important to society, whether metaphors depict or defy reality, or why a modern painting of a soup can is considered art.

**The Experiential Entry Point:** This is the entry point through which learners respond to a subject or work of art by actually doing something with their hands or bodies. For example, manipulating the same materials used in a work of art, producing a play about the history of a neighborhood, or setting a poem to music.

# QUEST: Questions for Understanding, Exploring, Seeing and Thinking

## Background

These questions were developed by Project MUSE as part of Harvard's Project Zero. Ideally, students discuss the set of questions in booklet form with one question per page, so as to focus on one question in depth and detail. When using the questions, it's helpful to model expectations for students, including taking turns asking, and respectfully encouraging all group members to participate. It's also important that students take a minute to look at the artwork silently before beginning their discussion.

## Aesthetic Questions—*Formal and sensory qualities of a subject or work of art.*

1. Look at the colors in this work of art. What one did you see first? Was color the first thing that you noticed? What else caught your eye?
2. Take turns describing the lines and shapes that you see in this work of art. (For example: "I see a thin curving line". "I see a heavy square").
3. Do you see movement in this work of art or does it seem still? Do the colors, lines, and shapes make it seem that way? How?
4. Describe the space that you see created by this work of art. Does it remind you of a place in your own life?
5. What makes this work of art look real to you? What makes it look unreal?
6. Does this work of art express an idea or an emotion? Do you the colors, lines, shapes, and movement help make that happen? How?
7. In making this work of art, what materials and/or tools do you think the artist used? What problems might the artist have faced along the way?
8. Take a look at other works of art displayed around this one. Do they seem to be made with similar materials and/or tools? What is different about them?
9. Think of a title for this work of art that is based on what you have noticed so far (colors, lines, shapes, textures, materials, or tools). Then take a look at the actual title of this work. On what do you think that title was based?
10. Think back on all your responses. What have you discovered about making and looking at art? Have you learned anything about yourself or others?

### Narrative Questions—*Narrational elements of a subject or a work of art.*

1. What is the story that you see in this work of art? How do the colors help to tell this story?
2. In the story that you see, who or what do you think is the most important figure, shape, or object? What makes you think so?
3. What do you think will happen next in this work of art?
4. Does anything you see happening in this work of art remind you of your own life story or of another story you know?
5. Is the story that you see in this work of art a true story? Where do you think the story comes from?
6. What emotions seem to be expressed in this story? What makes you think so?
7. What can you tell from this work of art about the story of the person who made it, or the time or place in which he or she lived?
8. Looking at the works of art around this one, what more can you discover about the stories of history or of art?
9. If you were telling the story of this work of art, what would you call it?
10. Thinking back on the stories you have discovered, what have you learned from looking at this work of art? Have you learned anything about your own life? Have you learned anything about the story or the stories of others?

### Logical/Quantitative Questions—*Deductive reasoning or numerical consideration.*

1. What color do you see the most of in this work of art? What color do you see the least of in this work of art?
2. What object or shape did you see first in this work of art? Why do you think this is the first thing that you noticed?
3. Look at what is happening in this work of art. Are things moving quickly or slowly? How can you tell?
4. Is this work of art older or younger than you? How can you tell?
5. Make an argument for why this work of art is true to life. Make an argument for why it is not.
6. Find a hidden idea or emotion in this work of art. What is it and what clues helped you to find it?
7. If you wanted to know how the artist made this work of art, what questions would you ask?
8. Do you think this art object is as valuable as the other works of art around it? What makes it seem more or less valuable?
9. Take a look at the title of this work of art. Does knowing the title change your understanding or appreciation of this work of art? How?
10. Imagine that a group of educators did not want students to see this work of art. These educators said that there was nothing to learn from looking at it. Make an argument for what there is to learn from looking at this work of art.

**Foundational Questions**—*Broader concepts or philosophical issues raised by a subject/work of art.*

1. Take a look at the colors in this work of art. Why do you think these colors were used? Do colors have meaning?
2. What do you see in the work of art in front of you? Do you think everyone sees what you see?
3. Is what you see in this work of art beautiful? Is it still art if it is not beautiful or it causes you to feel uneasy?
4. Does this work of art speak to you? Is art a language? What is said through art that cannot be said in words?
5. Do you think this work of art is real?
6. Does this work of art express emotion? Do you think that art needs to express emotion? Whose emotion does art express?
7. Why do you think the artist made this work of art? Why do artists make art?
8. Take a look at the works of art surrounding this one. Why do you think these objects are considered art?
9. Look at the title of this work of art. Why do you think it has this title? Should works of art have titles?
10. Think back on your previous observations. Is what you discovered important? How might this work of art change the lives of people who look at it?

**Experiential Questions**—*Learners respond to a subject or work of art by actually doing something with their hands or bodies.*

1. If you were a color in this work of art, what color would you be? Why?
2. Turn your back to this work of art. Try to draw the objects or shapes that you remember most clearly. Why do you think you remembered what you did?
3. Take a look at what is happening in this work of art. Act out what you think might happen next.
4. Is there something in your own life that this work of art makes you think of? Draw a picture of that experience.
5. Take a look at this work of art from a number of different places around the room (close up, far away, etc.) Does looking at it from one place make it seem more or less real than from another?
6. Sing a song that expresses the emotions you see in this work of art. You can sing a song that you know or make one up.
7. If this work of art is the artist's half of a conversation with you, what do you say back to the artist?
8. If you could rearrange the works of art in this room, where would you place them? Draw a diagram of your arrangement.
9. Take a look at the title of this work of art. Write a poem or dance a dance that would have the same title.
10. Think back on your previous activities. Which one was your favorite? Why? What does that tell you about yourself? What else have you learned from these activities?