

Art Education Toolbox: Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)

NOTE: The following concept ideas were taken from www.vtshome.org

WHAT IS VTS?

Visual Thinking Strategies is a research-based teaching method that improves critical thinking and language skills through discussions of visual images. VTS encourages participation and self-confidence, especially among students who struggle. VTS is easy to learn and offers a proven strategy for educators meet current learning objectives.

HOW CAN A TEACHER IMPLEMENT VTS?

When viewing a piece of art, use the following three questions:

1. What's going on in this picture?
2. What do you see that makes you say that?
3. What more can we find?

Facilitate discussion among students by:

1. Paraphrasing their comments neutrally. Do not say “good,” “correct,” “wrong,” etc.
2. Point at the area of the image being discussed by students.
3. Link contrasting and complementary comments made by students.

HOW DOES VTS BENEFIT STUDENTS?

1. The process is learner-driven and places the power in students' control.
2. It is process-focused rather than product-focused— the students are not given a right answer; learning and discussion is the “answer.”
3. Fosters students critical thinking, both individually and in a group setting.

IN HISTORY THERE ARE OFTEN RIGHT AND WRONG ANSWERS—HOW CAN VTS BE MODIFIED FOR USE WITH HISTORICAL OBJECTS?

While a practitioner of pure VTS would not approve of any modification, the strategy can be applied to analysis of historical objects where there often is a “correct” answer. Teachers are still able to use the questioning and facilitation strategies to ensure students are engaged in critical thinking. Much as is practiced in brainstorming, incorrect answers should not be immediately pointed out, instead, have the student justify their answer, work through their logic, and make a suggestion as to other ideas or concepts they should consider.