

## PLANNING AN ART INVESTIGATION

**I**N THE CLASSROOM an Art Investigation can last anywhere from 10 minutes to over a half hour, depending on students' interest in the work and the time available for the discussion. Preparation for the Art Investigation does take some time. At first, it might take an hour or two to prepare; with experience and an archive of images, however, investigations can be planned much more quickly, perhaps in 10 or 15 minutes.

The steps in planning an Art Investigation are laid out in this chapter. They include selecting a subject area or theme, which can be related to almost any area of the curriculum, and a line of inquiry to explore (Steps 1 and 2); choosing a relevant image to discuss and briefly researching the artwork (Steps 3 and 4); and drafting open-ended, engaging questions to ask students with information incorporated where it will further the students' ability to interpret the work (Steps 5–7). Art Investigations always include the following:

1. An observation prompt at the beginning of the engagement with the work of art
2. Open-ended questions that encourage analysis and synthesis of new ideas, prior knowledge, and/or information about the artwork
3. Information related to the work of art or the artist that helps students think more deeply about the theme and the artwork, followed by questions that build on this information

Throughout the conversations, students should also be encouraged to make personal connections with the artwork and should be offered opportunities to engage with the art using different modalities.

I have imagined a hypothetical middle-school teacher to model each stage of planning through the development of a sample Art Investigation. Throughout this chapter this voice can be found in this typeface, in the sections delineated by rules.

## STEP 1: CHOOSE A THEME

The first question you will grapple with in planning an Art Investigation is what kind of conversation you want to spark and whether, or how, to link this lesson with other areas of the curriculum. Will the Art Investigation help students better understand a culture or time period under consideration in a social studies unit? Will the Art Investigation be linked to an art lesson in composition? Is the class engaged in a study of how artists and poets use symbolism?

The Guggenheim encourages framing an Art Investigation around a single, targeted theme. One can revisit a work of art daily and see and think about new things; conversations about Marc Chagall's *Paris Through the Window* (Plate 2) in the Guggenheim Museum—with different groups, at different times—have explored the use of fantasy, the depiction of Paris, modernity, color, animals in art, the notion of a two-faced person and duality of personality, immigration, artistic composition, and more. However, during a 20-minute conversation with a classroom full of students, it is not possible to address all of these connections or themes in a meaningful way. It is best to choose a single theme or area of exploration related to a piece and allow time to explore it deeply.

Table 2.1 offers a chart of the artworks discussed by students in Chapter 1, and possible themes that might guide an Art Investigation.

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I WANT TO LINK my inquiry to junior high science because that is what I teach. I'd like to focus on human biology, which my eighth-grade students are learning about. I'm choosing this area both because I'm interested in art about the human body—and there's a lot of it!—and because it's something I want my students to think more deeply and personally about.

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## STEP 2: IDENTIFY A LINE OF INQUIRY OR TARGETED AREA OF STUDENT UNDERSTANDING

Once you choose a theme for the Art Investigation, it is useful to think broadly about what related questions you want students to explore. Art Investigations work best when they are open-ended explorations that access the imagination, and this happens where there is space for students to consider their own ideas and opinions in the context of the subject. This type of exploration opens the door for students to learn more about their lived experience and their ideas about the world through the lens of the artwork. Through a dialogue related

**Table 2.1.** Works of Art and Possible Art Investigation Themes

Artwork	Theme from Chapter 1	Other possible themes for this artwork
Edgar Degas, <i>Dancers in Green and Yellow</i>	How artists and writers try to influence the world	The theatrical experience; body language
Faith Ringgold, <i>Tar Beach</i>	Urban community	Family; storytelling
Vasily Kandinsky, <i>Composition 8</i>	Interpreting abstraction	Movement; shape

to a big, open line of inquiry, art can take on a central role in students' examination of what matters to them. In other words, you will be identifying what Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (1998) call the "enduring understandings" of the unit. What is it that you want students to better understand after they participate in the Art Investigation?

When the investigation is too specific or factual, the line of inquiry ceases to be open-ended. For example, "What are the systems of the human body?" is a very limited line of inquiry; there is a correct set of answers to this question, with no room for inventiveness or personal interpretation. This is not an area of understanding, but rather a list to be memorized.

Big, open-ended lines of inquiry allow students to make personal meaning out of a work of art and generate a discussion that pushes student thinking to new places. An example of this type of inquiry or area of understanding as it relates to human biology might be: "What is the relationship between the 'true self' and the body?"—a question answered differently by different cultures and different eras.

Open-ended inquiries access and mirror the work that artists genuinely do: Artists respond to questions or themes that are of importance to them; they try to better understand or make sense of the world; and they use their imaginations to convey people, places, objects, ideas, or abstractions. For example, Edgar Degas painted dancers, and Pablo Picasso painted a woman ironing, in part in order to look at the otherwise invisible working-class world. Vasily Kandinsky painted abstractions to explore how art could help us free ourselves from the material world. These works are not exercises in composition, or replicas of people, places, or scenes; they are the result of people exploring big ideas and making sense of the world through visual expression.

Because at this point you have not yet chosen a work of art to look at with students, it is useful to think broadly about your unit and the various understandings that you want students to explore during an Art Investigation. Once you have chosen a work of art you can better match a line of inquiry to that work, and hone your ideas about what students should explore in this Art Investigation.

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I REALLY WANT students to understand the interrelationship between their bodies and their minds and between their bodies and the world. For example, I want them to think about how good nutrition and sleep strengthen the body, and how the body needs oxygen and breathes out carbon dioxide for the trees—that we are small systems that are part of a larger system. I want them to question the things scientists and doctors know and think they know. For example, what is Ritalin? Why does it calm students down? What is it really doing, and why do so many students take it, and should they? In my science unit, some of the big questions are:

- How do the parts of the body relate to the whole?
  - What does it mean to be healthy? How do we achieve this?
  - What do we know about the human body, and what cultural or personal beliefs do we have that are unrelated to science? (For example, is the heart really the site of love, do we really only use a small portion of our brain, and will cold air really make you sick?) How do we distinguish fact from fiction?
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### STEP 3: SELECT AN ARTWORK

Once you have identified a theme and a possible line or lines of inquiry, the challenge is to find an artwork that will engage students in a consideration of that subject. This is not a linear process; it is a dialogue between the works that interest you and the questions and understandings essential to the subject area at hand.

As you begin to consider artworks to look at in your classroom, there are a few criteria to keep in mind. Clearly, the works of art selected—like texts chosen for read-aloud or independent reading—must be appropriate for your students. Aside from the work that would obviously not be permitted in schools due to nudity or violence, there are politically driven pieces that require an understanding of gender or race that a third-grade student will not have acquired, but a seventh-grade student may have or may be ready to begin considering. For example, Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Still* series (see Figure 2.1 for one

of these photos) shows the artist in poses and settings that resemble film stills featuring different stereotypes of women. Middle school students can have a rich conversation about the mass media and stereotyping; second or third graders are probably not ready for this conversation. On the other hand, abstract or conceptual pieces that generally perplex adults who are novice art viewers often intrigue children, who have no difficulty accepting these works as art.

Just as important, the artwork needs to spark your interest. Enthusiasm is contagious, and will set the stage for a productive and interesting discussion. It is the rare occasion when a great conversation emerges in front of an artwork that does not engage the educator leading the discussion. Note that “engagement” or “interest” are not the same as “like”—an artwork that interests you might be one you have questions about, or are puzzled by, and want to spend time trying to better understand.

To find images, you might flip through art books or museum Web sites, conduct a Google image search, or visit a museum. Look for images that relate to your theme and line of inquiry. Find a few images to try working with, and start with the one that is the best match or the most appealing to you personally.



**Figure 2.1. Cindy Sherman.**  
*Untitled Film Still #15, 1978*  
 Black-and-white photograph  
 sheet: 10 x 8 inches (25.4 x 20.3 cm);  
 image: 9 7/16 x 7 7/16, edition 2/10  
 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York  
 Purchased with funds contributed by the  
 International Director's Council and Execu-  
 tive Committee Members Eli Broad, Elaine  
 Terner Cooper, Ronnie Heyman, J. Tomilson  
 Hill, Dakis Joannou, Barbara Lane, Robert  
 Mnuchin, Peter Norton, Thomas Walther, and  
 Ginny Williams 97.4573



Figure 2.2. Rineke Dijkstra.  
*Coney Island, N.Y., USA, July 9, 1993*  
(from the *Beaches* series), 1993  
Chromogenic print  
46 3/8 x 36 7/8 inches (117.8 x 93.7 cm),  
edition 1/6  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York  
Purchased with funds contributed by the  
Harriett Ames Charitable Trust 2000.110

While looking for images, begin to create a file (electronic and/or paper) of images that interest you or that relate to other areas you teach. This file will make it much easier to prepare for future Art Investigations. It also challenges you to begin an ongoing relationship with art: Notice artworks at museums, in magazines, and on the Internet. What appeals to you? Print or photocopy it, or buy a postcard. Begin thinking about what art you like and why.

I'M JUST GOING to look at the Guggenheim Museum's Web site for art for now, since I don't have much time, and I could easily spend hours searching the Internet for an image. I'm familiar with a few of the artists, but will also just experiment by clicking on the names of different artists.

After spending a while searching (time flew!), I found a few images that are very clearly related to biology:

- Kiki Smith, *Ribs* (Plate 5)—this seems to be an artist's interpretation of a body part (ribs).
- Rineke Dijkstra, *Coney Island* series (see Figure 2.2)—these are images of children, who are about the same age as my students.

- Ann Hamilton's *Untitled* series—these are videos of body parts (mouth, ear, and so on) in odd situations: a mouth full of rocks (see Figure 2.3), a neck with water pouring down it.
- I think I'll start by trying to work with Kiki Smith's *Ribs*, because I think my students will be intrigued by it, and because it's my favorite of these three options. This piece might work with my question, "What do we know about the human body, and what cultural or personal beliefs do we have that are unrelated to science? How do we distinguish fact from fiction?"

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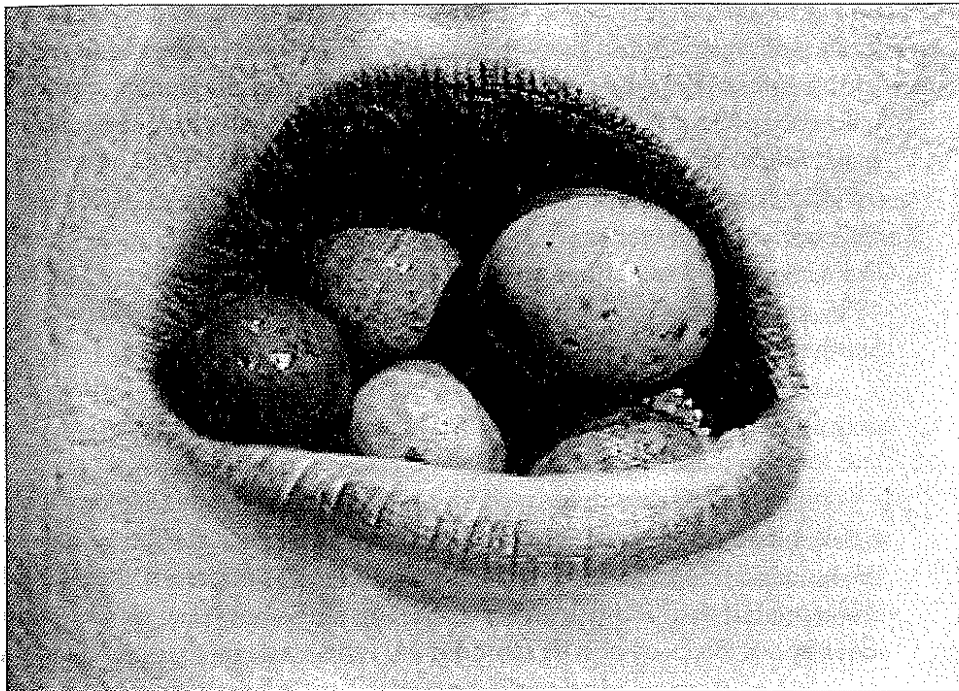
#### STEP 4: RESEARCH THE ARTWORK AND CONFIRM THE LINE OF INQUIRY

It is difficult, if not impossible, to teach something without having learned about it yourself. To lead an Art Investigation, you do not need to have a degree in art history, or read art books in your free time, or have conducted general research into art. You do need to know a little bit about the image you show to students and about the artist who created it.

The best way to get to know a work of art is to spend time looking at it. What do you notice? What do you like about the artwork? What interests you? What questions do you have? How might it relate to your theme or possible lines of inquiry? Become familiar with the artwork; think of this as a conversation such as you might have with a guest speaker before bringing him or her into the classroom. Looking at a work of art with a friend or colleague and having an informal conversation about the work is also a great way to get to know the piece. If you do this before you read about it, you will find that often much of what is written about a work of art are descriptions of details that you can notice on your own.

That said, it is a good idea to read a few paragraphs about the artist and the work of art as background. This will provide you with some basic information about the piece, as well as making more evident what areas remain unknown or unclear to you (which it is always OK to admit to students). Content knowledge builds quickly: After spending a year bringing art into the classroom, you will find you have a surprisingly good knowledge base about art on which to build.

After researching your artwork, take a few minutes to confirm your line of inquiry. In doing this, you are also confirming your goals regarding the understandings students will gain from engaging in this Art Investigation. It is important to clarify this for yourself before writing specific questions you



**Figure 2.3.** Ann Hamilton. *untitled (the capacity of absorption)*, 1988/93  
 Color-toned video on LCD screen, silent, 30 min.  
 3 1/2 x 4 1/2 inches (8.9 x 11.4 cm), edition 3/9  
 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York  
 Gift, The Peter Norton Family Foundation 94.4260

will ask; with Art Investigations, as with all teaching, goals for student learning drive the lesson.

LOOKING AT Kiki Smith's *Ribs*, I am noting the fragility, and the way in which this piece is both similar to and different from real ribs. It's very fragmented. And why is it pink? I think of bones as off-white, but the vaguely pink color is somehow very biological—it rings true. It's also somewhat feminine—maybe because of both the color and the fragility I assume that these are female ribs. Some pieces are completely detached, and I wonder how they store the work and reinstall it each time—does it always look the same? And are you supposed to be able to see the strings?

Now that I have looked at the piece for a while, I read the short essays on the artwork and on the artist that I printed from the Guggenheim Museum's *Collection Online*, written by Jennifer Blessing (2009). The piece is from 1987; during the 1980s a number of artists were interested in the human body. Kiki Smith often focuses on the body: "fragmented and whole, depicted relatively realistically yet



always suggestively altered." She is interested in body and identity, and body and emotion, not direct representation. In 1979 Smith looked at Gray's *Anatomy of the Human Body* as a source for drawings about the human body. Then she made sculptures of the human circulatory system, nervous system, skin, and organs. *Ribs* is terra-cotta; the parts of the rib cage are strung together and held up like a marionette suspended from the wall. Pink rib bones, disconnected from the sternum, show repaired breaks—evidence of trauma? Fragile. The display is like a specimen at a natural history museum. Also of interest (from Smith's bio): in 1985, propelled by an interest in obtaining practical knowledge about the body, Smith studied to become an emergency medical technician.

I spent a few minutes looking online for Smith's other related work, but was only able to find images of one. When I have more time I'd like to go to the library and look up these other pieces.

When I look back at the possibilities of inquiry that I listed earlier, I see that this artwork lends itself to talking about what we know versus what we believe about the human body: fact versus fiction, biology versus symbolism. I want students to understand that artists research the biology of the body, but also have their own ideas about the body and its symbolism. I want students to understand that each of us has both knowledge of the body itself and also ideas about fragility, love, self, endurance, and so on that are cultural and personal beliefs related to the body. I want students to understand that these beliefs are valid and important, but that that they are not the same as an understanding of human biology.

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### STEP 5: WRITE AN OBSERVATION QUESTION

The educator and philosopher Maxine Greene (2001) writes about how the richness and depth of our interpretations of a work of art "may well be a function of the intensity of our attending" (p. 11). This "attending," or careful observation, is critical to understanding a work of art. Students should be encouraged to spend time looking at an image and articulating what they see before they begin to contemplate what they think it means. It can be argued that even the most basic observations are a form of interpretation; by choosing what to focus on, or giving words to what is happening in a scene, or describing a shape by noting what it reminds you of, you are engaging in the work of interpretation. That said, when students (or any viewers of art) jump to larger interpretive ideas—why Kiki Smith might have created a sculpture of ribs or why the cat in *Paris Through the Window* has a human face—without first fully attending to what they see, they often make assumptions based on misunderstandings or misperceptions.

The first question when looking at a work of art should focus the students on careful observation. An appropriate question might be “What do you see?” or “What do you notice?” Other observation strategies and prompts include the following:

- Ask students to spend some time looking at the artwork before any discussion of it. Don’t allow any students to raise their hands or speak during this period.
- Have students share what they notice with a partner (often called “turn and talk” or “pair share”). In this way, everyone gets a chance to talk. Once students have a few minutes to share in pairs, some or all of these pairs might share something interesting they observed with the larger group.
- Challenge students to make a list, either alone or in pairs, of at least 10–15 things they notice in the painting. Make sure their lists are long, because the first five or so will be the obvious ones; after they have listed these they will begin noticing more interesting details.
- Ask students to sketch the artwork. Be sure to remind them to look as carefully as possible, and tell them that this exercise is about careful looking, not making something beautiful. You can let them know that sketching is a tool artists use to observe the world, as well as works of art, more carefully.

It is critical to root interpretations in observation, and an initial observation question helps students do this. Additionally, beginning an Art Investigation with a general observation question allows students to notice and consider what about the artwork interests them. For example, if looking at Kiki Smith’s *Ribs*, students might be interested in the strings that seem to both hold the work up and dangle from individual ribs, or in the insectlike shape of the piece. Letting them explore their observations in an open way allows the piece to become interesting and meaningful to them in ways that cannot possibly be predicted, and helps them interpret the work later in the process.

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I WANT STUDENTS to look for a while before they begin talking; otherwise I’ll hear from the same 3 or 4 kids who always talk. I’m hopeful that in this way new voices will emerge. My observation prompt will be: “Take a look at the artwork represented here. (Allow for at least one full minute of silent looking.) What do you notice?”

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### STEP 6: BRAINSTORM, SELECT, AND SEQUENCE INTERPRETIVE QUESTIONS

In the Art Investigation about Edgar Degas's *Dancers in Green and Yellow* that was introduced in Chapter 1, after asking an observation question, the teacher asks the following two questions:

- “What do you think is interesting to Degas about these dancers backstage?”
- “What are some ideas you have for how Degas might have wanted to change how people thought?”

These questions ask students to infer the artist's intent and interest. The latter question challenges students to synthesize their understanding of the artwork with prior knowledge, in this case their previous explorations of how artists challenge people to think in new ways. This question also brings students around to an explicit investigation of the intended line of inquiry: how artists try to influence people's ideas about the world.

Both questions are open ended. An open-ended question is one that has many, many correct answers. It must be broad enough for students to access and share their own opinions, and open enough to allow for multiple, conflicting correct answers. Open-ended interpretive questions tend to access the “how,” “why,” or “what if,” rather than the “what” of a painting.

Considering artist's intent is a question that art critics and art historians regularly engage in. It is open-ended in that an artist's true intent can never be completely confirmed, often not even by artists themselves. In order to allow for the fact that all statements about artist's intent are hypotheses, art historians use the conditional. In the essay about Marc Chagall's *Paris Through the Window* on the Guggenheim's Web site, curator Jennifer Blessing (2009) writes: “[The Eiffel Tower] served as a metaphor for Paris and perhaps modernity itself. Chagall's parachutist might also refer to contemporary experience, since the first successful jump occurred in 1912. Other motifs suggest the artist's native Vitebesk [a town in Russia].” Note the words *perhaps*, *might*, and *suggest*. The author does not know for certain what Marc Chagall was thinking when he painted this, but her job as an art historian and curator is to try to make sense of the artist's choices. Likewise, given time to look and think, students can make excellent guesses about what an artist might have intended. It is important, however, to pose questions in the conditional tense—for example, “How do you think Degas *might* have wanted to change how people

**Table 2.2. Sample of Lines of Inquiry in Three Art Investigations**

Artwork	Theme	Closed-ended line of inquiry	Open-ended line of inquiry
Edgar Degas, <i>Dancers in Green and Yellow</i>	Gesture	What are these dancers doing? How do these poses show us what they are doing?	Take the pose of one of the dancers. What might she be thinking? How can pose or gesture convey something about character?
Faith Ringgold <i>Tar Beach</i>	Detail in writing	What part of the story does this artwork show us? What details are in the artwork that are not in the text?	Pick a detail that is of interest to you. What does this detail tell us about the place and people? If you were going to make changes to this artwork, how else might you share this information?
Vassily Kandinsky, <i>Composition 8</i>	Geometry/ Shape	What shapes are in this painting?	Create a composition using at least three different types of triangles. Then compare your composition to Kandinsky's <i>Composition 8</i> . How are they similar or different? What are some things you notice about his use of triangles?

thought?"—rather than the unconditional—"How *did* Degas want to change how people thought?" Careful use of language can ensure that you are asking students for their ideas about what an artist could have been thinking, rather than uncovering the unarguable "truth."

Table 2.2 shows a few examples of closed-ended and open-ended questions for works we have already looked at.

In writing interpretive questions, it is helpful to follow a three-step procedure:

1. List as many questions as possible that are open-ended and might support exploration of this line of inquiry.
2. Select the two to four questions that best guide students from open-ended observation through analysis related to this line of inquiry.
3. Sequence these questions.

My LINE OF inquiry that relates to this Art Investigation is: "What do we know about the human body, and what cultural or personal beliefs do we have that are unrelated to science? How do we distinguish fact from fiction?"

I want students to understand that artists research the biology of the body, but also have their own ideas about symbolism; that each of us has both knowledge of the body itself and also ideas about fragility, love, self, endurance, and so on that are cultural and personal beliefs related to the body; that these beliefs are valid and important, but that they are not the same as an understanding of human biology.

Questions that might help students analyze the artwork in light of this line of inquiry and these goals . . . hmmm . . .

A few initial ideas:

- What does this artwork make you think about?
- What about ribs might have interested the artist?
- How is this sculpture similar to or different from real human ribs?
- What choices did the artist make about how to depict ribs?
- What might the artist think about the human body that is derived from cultural beliefs rather than biological information?
- How might this artwork be different if it were displayed in a different way?
- What do you think/know about or associate with ribs/bones?
- How are the artist's ideas different from yours?

Looking over my ideas, some questions are better for this particular Art Investigation than others:

- "What does this artwork make you think about?" I wonder if this question is too broad for my students.
- "What about ribs might have interested the artist?" I like this question; very in line with my theme.
- "How is this sculpture similar to or different from real human ribs?" If I ask this question, it would be early on in the Art Investigation. It's not so open, but perhaps could be a nice way to move from observation into interpretation.
- "What choices did the artist make about how to depict ribs?" Very similar to the question above. I wonder if my students would find this question hard to answer.

- "What might the artist think about the human body that is derived from cultural beliefs rather than biological information?" Definitely too complicated a question.
- "How might this artwork be different if it were displayed in a different way?" I like this question, but not really on track for my theme.
- "What do you think/know about or associate with ribs / bones?" I think I have to ask this at some point. Maybe before they talk about what the artist might think, they could share what they think.
- "How are the artist's ideas different from yours?" This is the clear comparison if I ask about their ideas about ribs/bones and then about the artist's. I wonder if there is a way to get them to articulate—or even sketch—symbolic or fictional ideas about the ribs or the body that they have?

OK, so maybe my best questions are these:

- "How is this sculpture similar to or different from human ribs? What are some of the choices the artist is making?"
  - "Why might the artist have made some of these choices?"
  - "What do you know—associate with—value—about bones or ribs?"
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## **STEP 7: IDENTIFY INFORMATION THAT WILL FURTHER THE CONVERSATION**

Information is one of the tools that can help push students' thinking further when used well (but prevent individual thought when misused). When information relevant to the general focus of the investigation is offered in small amounts and at appropriate times, it offers students new opportunities to make connections and reconsider ideas.

There is some difference of opinion in the museum education world about how much information to provide about a work of art. Adults crave information, yet without the opportunity to actively think about this information they may forget much of what they hear (Willingham, 2003). Students are also likely to forget information when they are not challenged to think about it, or when they are not given the opportunity to form associations between new and prior knowledge.

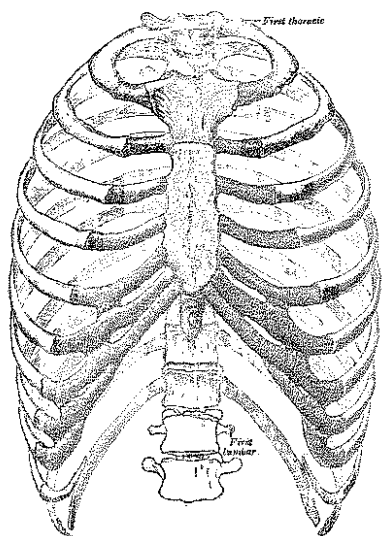
Given the right conditions—time, attention, personal interest—one can

certainly look at an artwork, make some sense of it, and react to it, without any outside information. If the goal is to make a personal connection to a work of art, information may not be necessary; in fact, it might inhibit a genuine response. The goal of Art Investigations, however, is to help students understand or make meaning from a work of art, and to teach them how to learn from and about a work of art they might encounter on their own. Often Art Investigations have the added goal of helping students develop an understanding of specific people, times, places, or ideas. In an Art Investigation, information helps the learner make new connections and inspires new ideas and understandings about a work of art.

Information helps people make sense of the world. It is important, however, to be very selective about the information you offer during an Art Investigation. What students will take away from an Art Investigation are the ideas that result from the interactions of new ideas and the action of thought. Therefore, the information offered during an inquiry-based discussion should be carefully chosen, related to well-crafted follow-up questions, and shared with students at the most relevant point in the conversation, never before students have had a chance to observe the artwork in depth.

The information to be shared might be as basic as the name of a painting, or the time and place in which it was painted. A child looking at *Paris Through the Window* may not recognize Paris or the Eiffel Tower, and—in the context of a lesson on landmarks—sharing with students that this is Paris, and that the tall structure is the Eiffel Tower, might spark new thoughts on the importance of landmarks both abroad and at home. In different discussions about the same painting, it might become important to share that Chagall was Russian and was living in Paris at the time he painted this, or that this work was painted in 1913 and that the Eiffel Tower and parachutist may be symbols of modernity. The information presented will depend on the theme of the Art Investigation and what information will help students delve deeper into the relationship of the artwork to that theme. It is unlikely that more than one of these chunks of information would be relevant to a 20-minute Art Investigation.

What information you feel best moves the conversation forward should be followed by a question that allows the students to synthesize this information with their own ideas, as well as with what they see in the work of art. The goal of information is not to end the conversation with an answer, but to spark new ideas and associations. In the case of *Paris Through the Window*, after telling students that this is Paris and that the tall structure is the Eiffel Tower, a teacher might say, “Let’s think of as many reasons as we can why the artist might have included this landmark in his painting.”



**Figure 2.4.** The thorax from in front.  
From Henry Gray, *Anatomy of the Human Body*  
(Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1918). Available at  
<http://www.bartleby.com/107/>

Alternately, the information about symbols of modernity might be followed by the question, “How do these symbols of modernity fit in with the rest of the painting?”

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SINCE MUCH OF the conversation will focus on Kiki Smith’s and the students’ interpretations of ribs, I’d like to share that she was looking at a picture of ribs from a biology book as inspiration for this piece, that it is rooted in actual biological information. I could even show them a picture of ribs from Gray’s *Anatomy of the Human Body* (Figure 2.4), so we could compare them—that would provide a very memorable look at an important part of the skeletal structure.

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The steps in planning an Art Investigation discussed in this chapter have been modeled through the development of an Art Investigation plan focusing on Kiki Smith’s *Ribs*, exploring how artists interpret the human body. In order to plan this Art Investigation, our hypothetical teacher has done the following work:

- Identified the subject area and line of inquiry that the Art Investigation will target
- Identified and researched an artwork, and then confirmed the line of inquiry along with goals for student understanding
- Written and sequenced observation and interpretation questions
- Inserted a little relevant information



This work has resulted in a plan ready to be taken into the classroom. The final Art Investigation plan, edited by mulling over it a few times, is as follows:

- Take a look at the artwork represented here. (Allow for at least one full minute of silent looking.) What do you notice?
- This picture is from Henry Gray's *Anatomy of the Human Body*, an anatomy book that the artist, Kiki Smith, looked at as a model for *Ribs*. In what ways is her sculpture similar to or different from this sketch of human ribs?
- The artist who created the illustration of the ribs in *Gray's Anatomy* was trying to create the clearest, most accurate image as a resource for doctors. Kiki Smith had a different goal and made different choices. Why might Kiki Smith have chosen to depict ribs, and why might she have made the choices she did?
- Take a minute and sketch an idea for your own artwork that uses some part of the human body to convey a message or idea about human existence.
- Compare your ideas to Kiki Smith's. Do you have any new thoughts on *Ribs*?

Once an Art Investigation plan is written, it is helpful to take the time to try it out on a friend or colleague. These discussions often lead to small changes that make for a more successful lesson in the classroom. After that is done, the plan is ready to present in the classroom. The next chapter contains advice on how to work with this plan to lead a lively and open, rather than scripted, conversation.