

## Visual Inquiry: Conversation Starters

Visual inquiry is an open-ended conversation about a work of art, nature, or everyday object.

When looking together encourage children to describe what they see, create stories about it, compare and contrast, and to look carefully. Alternate conversations with opportunities to connect to prior knowledge, dramatize, count, sing, or make art!

*Remember: You do not have to be an expert about the art object or animal, you just need to have an interest in sharing it with others!*

### START WITH OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Using *exclusively* open-ended questions for the first few inquiries is the best way to teach children new ways of thinking: how to look at art and make meaning and connections. Research shows that using open-ended questions alone is the best way to develop language, observation, connection-making, and other skills. Don't be afraid of wait time; with repetition of the exercise, children will get the hang of it.



*“What’s going on here?”*

*“What do you see that makes you say that?”*

This is important to encourage learners to connect what they think to what they see-- finding evidence to support their opinions

*“What more can you find?”*

### USING GUIDED QUESTIONS

Sometimes, you want to focus children’s attention on one part of the picture in order to explore a certain theme or concept (e.g. Shapes, line, seasons, etc.). In those cases, guided questioning may be used to structure (but hopefully not limit!) children’s observation process. In some cases the answers don’t come from just looking at the picture, they will require children to use their memory, recall prior knowledge or experiences, observe, and use evidence to back up their answers. Try using guided questions after the children have gotten the hang of open-ended inquiry.

Example of guided questions:

- Describe the lines/texture/shapes:
  - Are the lines straight, bumpy, curvy, or wiggly?
  - Can you put your finger in the air and trace the lines you see? (Remember not to touch!)
  - What would it feel like if you could touch the \_\_\_\_?

- Would it feel soft, hard, squishy, smooth or bumpy? (Remember not to touch!)
- What shapes can you find?
- How many \_\_\_\_\_ can you count?
  
- About people or animals:
  - What are they doing? Let's act it out with our own bodies.
  - What do you think they just did? What happened first?
  - What do you think would happen next?
  
- About places:
  - What would it feel like to be in this place?
  - Have you ever been to a place like this? When?
  - Do you think this place is in New York City, or somewhere else?
  - Does this take place today, in the past, or in the future?
  
- About animals:
  - What animals do you see?
  - What are they doing?
  - Where do they live?
  - How would it feel if you could touch the animal?
  
- Same or Different:
  - How is this object/animal the same from other objects/animals?
  - How is it different?
  
- Spark a curiosity for learning:
  - What do you wonder?
  - What more do you want to know?
  - What do you want to see next?

