

Welcome to the Stanley Museum of Art!

A contextual analysis can help us discover who made an artwork, how, why, and for whom. **It always begins with what we see/the object itself.**

Start by encouraging your students to examine what they see.

Next, ask questions to find out more. Use this list as a guide, but follow the interests of the students as much as possible.

1. What is the first thing you notice about the artwork? How does the artist make this stand out?
2. How does the artist represent it? Does it look like something you could encounter in the world (representational), or is it distorted (abstract)?
3. What are the main colors used? How are they organized? What seems intentional about the colors? Is anything bigger or smaller than expected? What is in light? Concealed in shadows? What questions do you have about what you see?
4. The choices artists make when constructing artworks can give us clues into why they made it, for whom, and for what occasion. Think about the observations you recorded above. What clues might the artist be giving you about this object?
5. What do you know about the subject represented? The time period? The geographical area? How might these issues be related to the object?
6. Why might have the artist have represented this subject matter at this time? Do you think there is a greater significance to the choice?
7. Why do you think the artist depicted the subject in this way? How does a representational or abstract style help the artist convey his or her meaning?
8. Does looking at the label give us any additional information? What is surprising, what did we already know? Does this change the way you see the work?
9. What questions do you have about the object, how it was made, why it was made, who made it, and for whom it was made?