

One way to analyze a painting (adapted from an article by David DeNaples, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute)

Art Analysis

One way of analyzing anything is by separating the whole into parts in order to ultimately better understand the whole. When analyzing a work of art, in this case a painting, fundamental questions can be asked about those parts in order to gain an understanding of the piece. Some basic questions that can be applied to almost any work of art are:

1. What was my initial reaction to the piece?
2. Who is the artist?
3. What is the title?
4. When and where was the work made?
5. What purpose did it serve? You may or may not know this from the image. *But notice if it is a religious painting, a painting of someone famous, if a painting of landscape does it look like it was meant to elevate, honor, respect, the land. Does it make the land look scary or welcoming to humans? Does it show humans dominating the land or are they included as part of it?*

The list below constitutes some conceptual and formal elements that, taken together create the meaning of the painting. For your written analysis you will want to discuss these topics:

- *Subject* - What is the topic? What is happening in the painting? What does the theme suggest or remind the viewer of? Are there humans in the painting? Are they at ease, fearful, or dwarfed by nature? What is their relation to the horizon and the sky? Is the sky clouded, stormy? Clear, bright? Is that forest inviting and nurturing or dark and threatening? Are there artificial objects in the scene?
- *Style* - What is the style of painting and what does that style suggest about the artists point of view or place in time?
- *Color* - What mood do the colors evoke? What do certain colors traditionally represent? Are the colors imitative or expressive?
- *Line* - Are the lines definitive and hard or are they irregular and indistinct? Do the objects blend in with their background or do they stand out off the canvas? Can you even see lines or are they implied?
- *Light* - What is the effect of light in the painting? Does it illuminate a scene or character in the painting, or does it shadow? Does the light (dark) unite or divide the a painting?
- *Angle* - In what direction is the artist trying to direct your gaze by use of posture or light?
- *Matching* - What colors, poses, or objects appear to be aligned with one another on the page? Objects - are they harmonious with one another or at odds? Do the objects equally share the viewers attention?
- *Other Elements to consider* - include depth/space, medium, shape, size, and scale.

Your analysis should be in an in depth study. It does not need to include all answers to all questions but make sure you discuss each aspect included above. Write about 2 pages, no larger than 12 point type and 1.5 line spacing.

Also, write and edit your paper carefully. This is not a list of things to talk about in order but some suggestions about what to include. Depending on the painting, some things may be more important than others.