

# VTS: *Visual Thinking Strategies*

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## Basic VTS at a Glance

by Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine

### Starting the Lesson

Introduce the VTS: it allows students to examine art, to think, to contribute observations and ideas, to listen, and to build understandings together. Ask students to recall these aspects of the process often.

Call students' attention to the first image. Always give students a moment to look in silence before you invite them to speak.

### Asking the Questions

After they have examined the image, ask the question, **What's going on in this picture?** Once students have learned this question, use variations.

Whenever students make a comment that involves an interpretation (a comment that goes beyond identification and literal description), respond first by paraphrasing, and then ask, **What do you see that makes you say that?** Once students understand the point of this question, begin to vary it.

In order to keep students searching for further observations, frequently ask them, **What else can you find?** Again, variations are useful once students are familiar with the point of the question.

### Responding to Students' Comments

**Listen** carefully to students, making sure that you hear all of what they say and that you understand it accurately.

**Point** to what they mention in the slide. Be precise, even when it is a comment that has been repeated.

Use encouraging body language and facial expressions to nurture participation.

**Paraphrase** each comment. Change the wording, but not the meaning of what is said. In rephrasing, demonstrate the use of proper sentence construction and rich vocabulary to assist students with language.

**Accept each comment neutrally.** Remember that this process emphasizes a useful pattern of thinking, not right answers. Students are learning to make detailed observations, sorting out and applying what they know. Articulating their thoughts leads to growth even when they make mistakes.

**Link** answers that relate, even when there are disagreements. Show how the students' thinking evolves, how some observations and ideas stimulate others, how opinions change and build.

### **Concluding the Lesson**

Thank students for their participation. Tell them what you particularly enjoyed. Encourage them to think of viewing art as an ongoing, open-ended process. Avoid summaries; linking throughout is enough to show how conversations build.

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Wording matters!  
Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)  
The three big questions:

**What's going on  
in this picture?**  
(or object, space, etc.)

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

**What more can  
we find?**

Remember to:

- *Point*
- *Paraphrase*
- *Gather multiple answers*

For more information on VTS, visit  
**[vtshome.org](http://vtshome.org)**

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