

Art Experience Wheel

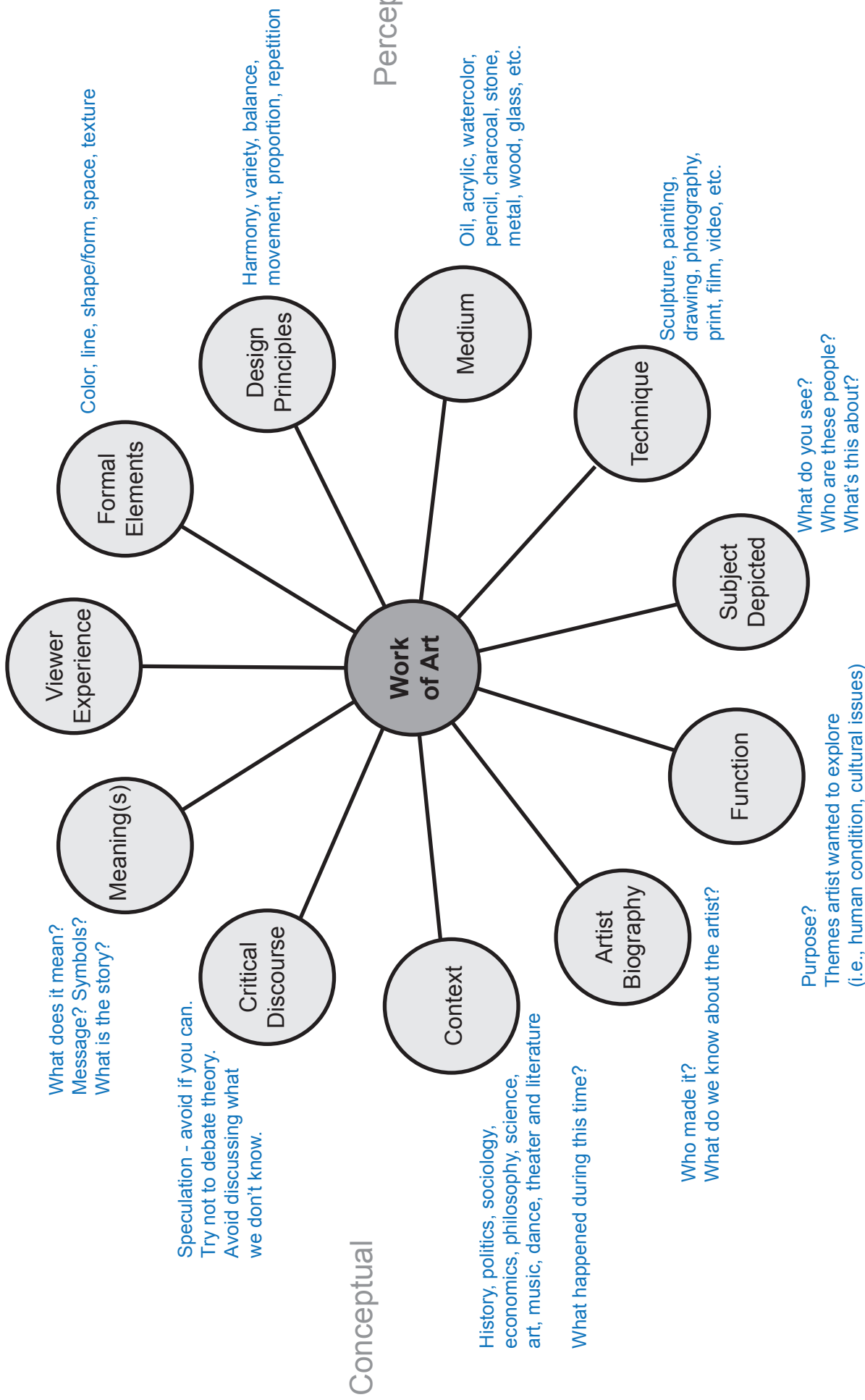
2022 National Docent Symposium
 Beyond Art History -
 Adult Questioning Strategies

Craig Anderson
 Karen Skillett

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art
 September 18, 2022

Emotional, intellectual, kinesthetic response

How were you meant to experience it?
 How do you experience it now?
 What can alter/affect/change that experience?



Adult Tour Introduction

Welcome:

- Introduce yourself and the museum
- Learn who visitors are, where they are from; allows you to connect with them and may give information you can use to connect with discussions about the art
 - What motivated you to visit today?
- Have they visited the museum before?
 - When was the last time you visited us?
 - If not here, when was the last time you visited another museum?
 - What do you remember?
- Any types of art they love or maybe don't love?
- Be enthusiastic, warm and friendly; use humor and emphasize having fun
- Set the tone for the time together

What:

- Topic of the tour
- Length of tour
- Walking through the tour; mention availability of elevators if anyone wishes to use them

Where:

- How many galleries/spaces to be visited
- If topical tour, which galleries/spaces

How:

- Interactive, conversational and participatory
- Interested in visitors' ideas and perceptions; often hear something new
- Their tour not yours; going to experience the art together
- No right or wrong answers when it comes to what we think or see in an artwork

Guidelines/etiquette:

- No food, drink, gum
- Backpacks worn on the front
- Photos are allowed (exceptions will be noted for you)
- Please don't touch the art (unless docent shows where it's permitted)

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Open-ended Questions

These are questions that can generate multiple responses. They can lead to or open the discussion into other avenues that interest visitors. One visitor's idea or observation might expand what other visitors are thinking. A visitor can draw attention to a detail that hasn't been noticed before or introduce a theme or interpretation that hasn't been considered before – even facilitators hear and learn new things about a piece of art they've used many times before.

Characteristics of good open-ended questions:

- Allow for many responses
- Requires no prior knowledge about art or the art work being considered
- Encourages closer looking at the art to form an answer
- Allow visitors to draw on their own experience, ideas and perceptions of the art

Characteristics of poor questions:

- Calls for 'yes' or 'no' as an answer
- Asks for the right answer
- Tests knowledge of the art work
- Asks a 'leading' question (i.e., the question contains the answer)

Types of open-ended questions:

- Description/Observation (*How would you describe the clothing in this art work?*)
- Impressions or Moods (*How does this art work make you feel?*)
- Imagination (*If the people here were speaking, what might they say to each other?*)
- Clarification/Explanation (*Tell me more about that.*)
- Personal Experience (*If you've worn a mask before, what was it like? How do you think it would feel to wear this mask?*)
- Analyze the art; develop Information (*The artist traveled extensively across the American West. What can we find in this art work that might show that influence?*)
- Interpret (The title of this painting is Lynch Family. How does that information change or affect your view of this piece?)

Compare and Contrast Questions are very useful:

- Engage visitors without being threatening
- Provides relief from concentrating on just one piece; helps if conversation is 'stuck'
- Visitor doesn't need prior art knowledge
- Offers an opportunity for discovery and surprise
- Helps encourage those in the group to talk to each other

Some good Compare and Contrast questions:

- How are the figures in this painting similar to and different from each other?
- These two pieces were made about the same time. How are they similar to and different from each other?
- Let's focus on the facial features of the two figures you see here. What do you imagine each could be thinking?
- We just looked at an Egyptian sarcophagus. How is this Roman sarcophagus similar to and different from the one created in ancient Egypt?

What are some good open-ended questions (with some follow-ups)?

- What's going on in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find? (VTS)
- What's the first thing you noticed about this work of art? Why did you look there?
- What surprises you or intrigues you about this work of art?
- If you could ask the artist one thing about this piece, what would it be?
- How would you describe this work of art to someone who isn't here today?
- If you could touch the [object] in this painting, how would it feel?
- If you were standing in this piece of art, perhaps off to the side, what would you smell (or hear)?
- What if I told you the title of this piece is [name]? How does that change your view?
- All of the pieces here were found in a tomb. Knowing that, what can we discover about how the objects might have been used by those who placed them there?
- If this scene were a movie or a television show, what would happen next?
- Thinking of all the pieces we've talked about today on our tour, which one would you want to take home and why?

What are some questions that aren't open-ended, that can halt the conversation?

- Where did Monet paint this picture of his Water Lilies? (calls for art knowledge)
- What medium did the artist use to create this? (calls for art knowledge)
- Was this Native Americans jar functional? (calls for art knowledge)
- What stone is that on the necklace we're looking at? (calls for art knowledge)
- How were Napoleon's royal court and household organized? (calls for historical knowledge and is just too hard!)
- Why do you think the artist put symbols of rain on this jar made by the Pueblo tribes? (leading question)
- Would you say the woman in this painting looks sad? (leading question)

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