



Learning Activity: Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) Basket 1 Exploring with Video

Instructor Overview

Philip Yenawine and Abigail Housen developed this strategy to help adults talk about art in a way that is simple and meaningful. It also helps uncover multiple meanings and perspectives (see resources and in-depth discussions at the [VTS: Visual Thinking Strategies website](#)). It is a “student-centered facilitation method to create inclusive discussions.”

We offer this exercise as a starting point for honing our professional vision, developing shared interpretations, and focusing on teaching practice videos. We also offer it as an activity you can do periodically with your learners to explore new models and ideas, and to foster belonging.

Because it invites multiple perspectives and feelings about images and VTS is not an explicitly anti-bias and anti-racist strategy, we must carefully consider how we are using it to not confirm white supremacy and implicit biases. “When we are unconscious of our own biases and internalized racism, ageism, xenophobia, misogyny, etc., we are unconscious to how our facilitation choices may uphold and perpetuate oppressive structures of power.”(Monet, 2019) [Read more here](#) on how staff at VTS and others are working to “to unlearn oppression so that we can oppose violence and not perpetuate harm.”

If you want to share this strategy with your learners to use with the children in their care, you can use this [handout](#) we developed for the Cultivate Learning *Trauma Informed Care Modules*.

First, we suggest you watch the video [Trauma Informed Care Visual Thinking Strategies](#) (17 min, 14 s.) that demonstrates how you might use this strategy and why. We provide time stamps so you can watch the parts you want to focus on.

Learning Activity

Purpose: To elicit and uncover from your learners multiple perspectives and understandings about a shared image. To model restating what you have heard being said and connect what we see to how we understand.

Materials:

- Still photo of teachers or children. We have provided a collection of still photos available in the Learning Management System (LMS) Media Library. You may also choose to use another visual, such as artwork (3D and/or 2D), pictures in books, children’s art, academic model, etc. Or you can also choose an image from [VTS Image of the Week](#).
- A series of questions:
 - What’s going on here?
 - What do you see that tells you that?
 - What more can you find?

Time: The size of your learning group and the visual’s detail will determine the full amount of time you spend on this activity. For a group of 10 with a simple image, we recommend you allow 20-30 minutes.



Delivery: Online or in-person, and synchronous. Part of the power of this activity is to restate and confirm what each participant offers before moving on and being able to highlight differences in perspective in real time.

Procedure:

- Post the visual in a way that all participants can see it.
- Encourage everyone to look closely.
- Ask this series of questions:
 1. What’s going on here?
 2. What do you see that tells you that?
 3. What more can you find? What else do you notice?
- Pause after you ask the first question to give learners time to think. When a learner responds, follow up with the second question.
- Once the learner shows by pointing or tells you what they see that tells them that, your response is to simply restate and paraphrase what you heard and understood. For example: “You think he is sad and happy because he has tears on his face and is smiling.”
- Then open again to the group with the “third set of questions,” “What more can you find? What else do you notice?”
- Continue until the group seems to lose interest or no one offers more perspectives. If there are differing perspectives about what they see going on, you can point it out: *“Safirah thinks ____ is going on and ____ tells her that. Harvey thinks ____ is going on and ____ tells him that. We often have different perspectives. What else do we see?”*

References

Monet, K. (2019, July 3). What more can we do? [[blog post](#)]. Virtual Thinking Strategies.

Yenawine, P. (2014) Visual Thinking Strategies [[online course](#)]. LinkedIn Learning

- [VTS theory](#) (1:49)
- [VTS method](#) (2:06)
- [VTS results](#) (2:37)
- [VTS Film](#) (10:34)

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