

# VTS



## Introduction to Visual Thinking Strategies



NEW YORK  
State Museum

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is an inquiry-based teaching method used by museums and schools“... *to teach visual literacy, thinking, and communication skills...*” (Yenawine, P. (2013). *Visual Thinking Strategies: Using Art to Deepen Learning Across School Disciplines*. Boston: Harvard Education Press.) Visual Thinking Strategies build on observation, critical analysis, and a sharing of ideas to develop higher-level thinking skills hand-in-hand with a deep appreciation of art. In the VTS approach, the teacher is facilitator rather than lecturer, and the student is an active participant in the learning process.

VTS supports the Common Core Learning Standards. Using Visual Thinking Strategies, students “demonstrate

independence”, “build strong content knowledge”, “comprehend as well as critique”, “value evidence”, and “come to understand other perspectives and cultures” (Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects).

An excellent article extolling the merits of using VTS in achieving the goals of the Common Core Learning Standards can be found in *Art Education*, January 2014. (Franco, M. and Unrath, K. (January, 2014) *Carpe Diem: Seizing the Common Core with Visual Thinking Strategies in the Visual Arts Classroom*, pp 28-32. Retrieved from: <http://www.vtshome.org/pages/articles-other-readings>. ([click here](#))

*Web links are underlined*

## Using Visual Thinking Strategies with Students

The VTS technique empowers students to think critically about each piece and make decisions based on their observations about each work of art. Instructors refrain from prompting students with information about the subject of the piece, the artistic execution, or the artist’s intent. The instructor initiates and ensures that student conversation continues by asking three consistent, open-ended questions that readily invite student participation in the discussion of the viewed object:

*“What is going on in this picture/piece?”*

Encourages children to share their observations.

*“What do you see that makes you think that?”*

Stimulates analytic skills and self-awareness.

*“What more can we find?”*

Gives permission for students to probe more fully into the subject of the viewing.

The creation of links between the students’ answers creates a group consciousness and synergy which leads to a more in-depth exploration of the subject than can initially be done by one student alone. Students are asked to do the following throughout the process:

- *Look carefully at works of art* • *Talk about what they observe*
- *Back their ideas with evidence* • *Listen to and consider the views of others*
- *Discuss many possible interpretations*

With practice and maturity, students will be able to delve more deeply into multiple facets of art, including the artist’s intent and style. To find out more about the VTS system, go to <http://www.vtshome.org> ([click here](#)) for a full description of the technique, along with links to schools and museums in New York and across the country that use VTS in the educational setting.