



**Objective:** To teach the students how to follow a structured method of critiquing an artwork by analyzing the elements and principles of design, as well as how to form an opinion regarding the artwork's substance and meaning.

## A) Introduction:

Today we are going to discuss how to talk about art. During each of your Art Adventure lessons, there have been opportunities to discuss the works of art that were presented. Did you know that there is actually a way to discuss artwork that follows a structured criteria? This type of discussion of art is called a "critique." A critique can be a discussion that is verbal or written.

Do you remember from previous Art Adventure lessons any of the fundamental elements of art? [Line, Shape, Form, Space, Texture, Color, Value, and Pattern.] How about the principals of art? [Balance, Contrast, Emphasis, Movement, Harmony, Proportion, Unity, Depth, Variety, Rhythm, and Composition.] Critiquing a work of art involves thinking about the fundamental elements and principals of art. Lets review some terms related to critiquing art:

## B) Vocabulary:

- **Critique:** To express critical judgment, review or evaluate using a set of rules and principles.
- **Describe:** A To give an account of, or represent with spoken words.
- **Analyze:** To separate into parts or elements that can be critically examined.
- **Interpret:** To give the meaning of something.
- **Judgement:** A decision, opinion, evaluation or estimation.
- **Elements of Design:** Line, shape, form, space, texture, color, value and pattern
- **Principles of Design:** Balance, Contrast, Emphasis, Movement, Harmony, Proportions, Unity, Depth, Variety, Rhythm and Composition

## C) Critique:

There are four distinct steps to the process of critiquing a work of art. Those were presented in the vocabulary for this lesson. Let me display the words again so that we can refer back to them as we follow these steps and critique this piece of artwork together.

[Display vocabulary words Describe, Analyze, Interpret and Judgment and begin with first print, Vasily Kandinsky, Improvisation No. 30 (Cannons)]. Take a moment to look at this print and consider all of the things that you see. Think about the vocabulary that you use when it comes to creating or talking about art. Now let's see if we can describe this Kandinsky painting.

\*Note to Art Adventure Guide: based on allotted time, you may not be able to ask all questions in each critique step below; however, it is important to cover each step and a few questions pertaining to each. You may wish to gauge your time and decide which, if not all, can be answered.



**STEP ONE—DESCRIBE:** The students will describe the artwork in terms of its literal content. Basically, tell what you see (the visual facts), and tell what you know (facts regarding the artist or artwork and its history).

1. What is the name of the artist who created the artwork? **Vasily Kandinsky**
2. What kind of artwork is it (painting, photograph, sculpture, etc.) **Painting, Oil on canvas**
3. What is the name of the artwork? **Improvisation No. 30 (Cannons)**
4. When was it created? **1913**
5. Name some other major events in history that occurred during or around the same time this artwork was created: **World War I**
6. List the literal objects in the artwork (trees, people, mountains, rivers, etc.): **Cannon on wheels, leaning tower/buildings, crowd of people.**
7. What do you notice first when you look at the work? Why? **Answers may be different, some may say bright, vivid colors, others may see the cannon, buildings or crowd.**
8. What kinds of colors do you see and how would you describe them (cool or warm)? **Vivid cool and warm colors**
9. What shapes do you see? What kind of edges do the shapes have? **Geometric and organic shapes; hard edges**
10. What sort of textures do you see? How would you describe them? **Implied texture (surface doesn't look smooth)**
11. What time of day/night is it and how can you tell? **Difficult to tell**
12. What is the overall visual effect or mood of the artwork? **At first glance, cheerful due to bright colors**

**STEP TWO—ANALYZE:** In this step, the students should consider the most significant art principles that were used and will describe how the artist used them to organize the elements.

1. How has the artist used colors in the work? **Vivid colors**
2. What sort of effect do the colors have on the artwork? **Draw attention to piece**
3. How has the artist used shapes within the work of art? **To create cannons, angled buildings/ tower and crowd of people, as well as geometric shapes.**
4. How have lines been used in the work? **The repetitive line quality contributes to the rhythm's quickness.**
5. How has texture been used in the work? Has the artist used the illusion of texture or has the artist used actual texture? **Difficult to tell from poster print.**
6. How has the artist used light and value in the work? Does it create a sense of depth? **The variety of light and dark colors help create a contrast within the composition**
7. How has the artist combined the elements in this work to create a sense of rhythm or movement? **All of the elements work together to create a large sense of movement**
8. Do the elements in the artwork have a sense of harmony, or does one or more element stand out above the rest? **The continuous sense of movement creates an overall balance and the eye is equally drawn to all parts of the piece.**



**STEP THREE—INTERPRETATION:** Based on what they have learned so far, the students will try to explain what they think the artist was trying to convey in the artwork.

1. What was the artist's statement in this work? What was he/she trying to say? **Upcoming war creates sense of uneasiness; artist expressing his feelings.**
2. Why do you think the artist created this work? **Subject matter deals with artists feelings with an upcoming war. Cannons, buildings and people leaning on an angle lend to sense of uneasiness.**
3. What feelings do you have when looking at this artwork?
4. Do you think there are things in the artwork that represent other things? Are there elements of the painting that are symbolic? **Cannon lends to the symbolism of war.**
5. How does this artwork relate to you? What does it mean to you?

**STEP FOUR—JUDGEMENT:** After completing steps 1, 2 and 3, the students are ready to make their own judgment of the artwork. This is a personal evaluation based on the students' understanding and perception of the work combined with their own opinion—there are no right or wrong answers.

1. Do you like this artwork? Why or why not?
2. What value do you find in this artwork? (For example, it is a beautiful work of art, conveys an important message, communicates an idea or feeling, and/or makes an insightful connection.)
3. Do you think this artwork belongs in a home? A museum? Why or why not?

This artist, Vasily Kandinsky, was one of the early abstract artists to replace representation of the natural world with the study of color and form. Kandinsky believed that color, like sound, evoked emotions and that together, with other fundamental elements of art (line, shape, form), color, like music, is a language that communicates to all. Improvisation No. 30 (Cannons) appears at first glance to be a random collection of vivid colors, shapes and lines. But in critiquing this visual chaos, we saw a crowd of people, a leaning tower/buildings, and a wheeled, blasting cannon and discussed the underlying symbolism and meaning.



## Reinforcement Activity

Individual Student Critique on The Old Guitarist, Pablo Picasso, 1903-04, oil on canvas, made in Barcelona, Spain during Picasso's "Blue Period." Place the print in front of the class and pass out the handout. Give students 10 minutes to complete. Tell the students they may not have time to answer every question; suggest they answer a couple questions from each category. Select a few students to share some of their answers from each category. Possible answers are provided here for your instructional purposes to add to the students' critique, but for most questions, there is no 'right answer' and students will come up with varying answers.

### **DESCRIBE:**

1. What kind of artwork? **Painting, Oil on canvas**
2. Name of artwork and artist? **The Old Guitarist by Pablo Picasso**
3. When was artwork created? **This piece was created in 1903 in Barcelona, Spain, and probably completed in Paris, France in 1904.**
4. What period or style does the artwork belong to? **Picasso's Blue Period; Transition from classical/symbolist art to cubist and abstract art.**
5. List the objects in artwork: **Man, Guitar, Clothes**
6. What do you notice first? **One will see an old man sitting crossed-legged on the floor playing a guitar with tattered clothes and his head bent to the side.**
7. What colors do you see? **Picasso used monochromatic colors in shades of blues and grays. He added shades of browns in the guitar and floor.**
8. Are the colors "warm" or "cool"? **Mostly cool (blues and grays), some warm (browns)**
9. What shapes do you see? What edges do the shapes have? **A lighter value of gray is used in a straight lined shape to create a rectangle at the top left, or foreground, of the piece. Shapes have hard edges.**
10. Are there lines in the work? **If so, what kind? The lines of the man are straight and angular, while the guitar is more curved and rounded.**

### **ANALYZE:**

1. What effect does the color have on the artwork? **The emphasis is on how one's eyes are drawn to the old man's hanging head with the white hair and deep receding eyes.**
2. How have lines been used in the work? **There is a combination of linear and curvilinear lines within the artwork. Straight, horizontal and vertical lines can be seen in background wall. Straight angled lines define the neck of the guitar. These contrast the curvilinear lines which define the mans head, shoulders, knees and guitar. The lines have created predominantly organic shapes.**
3. How has the artist used shapes in the work? **The shape of the old man's body, especially the curves in his shoulders and knees, mimic the curves and organic shape of the guitar. These shapes help to give the piece a smooth, continuous (rather than choppy) sense of movement.**
4. How has texture been used in the work? **The application of the paint itself appears smooth, however there is an implied texture in the background wall, folds of clothes and the muscles in the man's neck.**



5. How has the artist used light and value in the work? **The brightness of the uncovered arm moves the observer toward the hand that is hanging limp over the darkened hole of the guitar.**
6. Does the light/value create a sense of depth? **Depth is shown by the lightened shades of Brown in the guitar. This helps to create the illusion of overlapping in the piece. The lightened or highlighted left hand of the player draws the eye up the arm of the guitar to where one sees the angled and bony fingers in playing position on where strings should be viewed. The light gray and white window behind the man portrays depth.**
7. Is there a sense of rhythm or movement in the artwork? **Movement is shown as one travels from the hanging head down the darkened sleeve of the right arm. There is not great change in the contrast of the piece, however, the shift in color from blues of the man, walls, and window to the browns of the guitar help to give a sense of rhythm.**
8. Does one element stand out more than another in the artwork?

### Interpretation:

1. What do you think the artist was trying to state or convey in this work? Why do you think the artist created this piece?
2. What feeling do you have when you look at this work?
3. Do you see any symbols or symbolic meaning in this work?
4. How does this artwork relate to you?

**One interpretation is that of an extremely saddened, blind man who does not appear to have anything to live for except his music. The symbolism of Picasso's choice of monochromatic colors gives it a feeling of hopelessness. His use of a warmer color in the browns of the guitar show the symbolism that the music is the only thing he finds worthwhile, if anything at all.**

### Judgment:

1. Do you like this artwork? Why or why not?
2. Where do you think this artwork belongs?
3. What value do you find in this artwork?
4. Does it convey beauty, a message, idea, or feeling?
5. Does it make an insightful connection?

This is on an individual basis and is based on one's own perception of the piece of art. There is no right or wrong answer.



## Additional Background Material:

*This material is provided to give you, the discussion leader, additional information about the artists and paintings that may help you answer questions or generate additional discussion with the children if time permits. You are not expected or required to cover this information in the classroom.*

### **Improvisation No. 30 (Cannons), Vasily Kandinsky, 1913**

Vasily Kandinsky was born in Moscow in 1866. He lived in Germany for many years, then moved to France where he became a French citizen several years before his death in 1944. He painted this piece while living in Germany. Although abstract, many of his paintings contain recognizable elements like the crowd of people, leaning buildings and cannon in this piece. In a letter to Chicago collector Arthur Jerome Eddy, the artist explained such representational forms: "The presence of the cannons . . . could probably be explained by the constant war talk going on throughout the year. But I did not intend to give a representation of war; to do so would have required different pictorial means. . . . These contents are indeed what the spectator lives, or feels while under the effect of the form and color combinations of the picture." The influence of music had a big effect on the birth of abstract art and on Kandinsky. "Improvisation" is itself a musical term. Kandinsky also was known for his writing on spirituality in art and as an art theorist.

### **The Old Guitarist, Pablo Picasso, 1903-1904**

Even at an early age, Picasso demonstrated signs of great artistic ability. At the age of 20, following the suicide of his close friend and roommate, Picasso began what is referred to as his "Blue Period," which reflected his immense sadness and melancholy. Paintings like *The Old Guitarist*, which were created during his Blue Period, were characterized by their blue palette, somber subject matter and destitute subjects. This was followed by his "Rose Period." Picasso continually looked for new ways to express himself, never staying with one style or idea for long. Later, in collaboration with George Braque, Picasso experimented with translating what he saw into geometric shapes thus launching "Cubism." Such nontraditional compositions were met first with criticism then admiration from the established art world. From Cubism, Picasso began to integrate objects into his flat pieces, creating the first modern "collages." It is believed that because Picasso was so poor, he painted over and over again on his canvases, covering up prior paintings. As a result of recent advances in technology, x-rays and other methods revealed that two earlier compositions lie underneath the image of *The Old Guitarist*. If you look closely at the print, you can see a woman's face above the man's neck, and her legs on the bottom near the middle. For more information, and to see images of the earlier compositions, see <http://www.artic.edu/aic/conservation/revealingpicasso/index.html>.