HOMESCHOOL TEEN ART WORKSHOP
LESSON OUTLINE: INTERPRETATION

WEBSITE DESCRIPTION:
Learn how to think like an artist while experimenting with different mediums through observation, dialogue, and practice in the Walters’ galleries and studios. During this monthly workshop, work with instructors during a single session to learn basic skills, or attend multiple sessions to develop expertise.

OBJECTIVES:
- Introduce students to National Geographic’s Educator + Explorer Exchange Program and Tsiory’s work through a video.
- Experiment with different techniques for interpreting art and natural objects in artwork.

MATERIALS:
- Clipboards with paper
- Charcoal pencils
- Colored pencils
- Drawing pencils
- Drawing paper
- Drawing boards
- Erasers
- Evaluation sheets for video
- Mixed media materials
- Sharpeners
- Sticky notes

VOCABULARY:
Observation: utilization of the senses to gain information about a subject matter
Inquiry: investigation
Interpretation: the meaning of something

1:30 PM-2:00 PM INTRODUCTION IN THE AUDITORIUM:
Discussion: Review the Explorer + Exchange Program with students. We are involved with a special partnership that I would like to include you all in. It is called the National Geographic Educator + Explorer Exchange Program. It partners educators with National Geographic emerging explores to embark on new education initiatives in the classroom. We are partnered with Paleontologist Dr. Harimalala Tsiory Andrianavalona in Madagascar. She uses observation and interpretation of the natural world to reconstruct environments of the past. Tsiory and I have discussed the possibility of photographing your work and putting it on a blog. That way she can comment directly on your work and you can access her feedback whenever you would like. What do you think about his idea? What challenges do you foresee that we haven’t thought of?

Activity: Dr. Andrianavalona is building the first science center in Madagascar and is working on adapting her explanation of scientific concepts for the general public. Dr. Andrianavalona would like you to rate your level of comprehension concerning the topics explained in the video. Watch videos on the auditorium screen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jA9QunxhOY
Evaluation

I don’t understand                                I fully understand

1          2          3          4          5

Describe what you didn’t understand?

What suggestions do you have for improving the explanation?

What thoughts do you have after watching the video? What questions do you have for Dr. Andrianavalona? Where do you see commonalities with the creative process in her explanation? How is observation important to her work? What is interpretation? How do you see interpretation being used in her work? Dr. Andrianavalona describes her work as similar to being a detective looking for evidence to answer questions. As a paleontologist she has big questions that she seeks answers to while using evidence from ancient animal artifacts. She looks at details and analyzes them to make conclusions. She looks at shape, surface, and texture, all of which are important data and evidence. Her interpretation is informed by her observation while comparing and contrasting the data. Last month we focused on observational drawing. Who can remind us what techniques we focused on? Blind contour drawing, chiaroscuro, stippling and mixed media.

Today we will focus on interpretation. What is interpretation? Why is it important for scientific discovery? In what ways is it important to the artistic process? We are going to practice several different methods of critique to determine the interpretation of objects in the galleries. How do you think the skills of observation we have discussed and practiced help when interpreting a work of art or scientific concept?

Brief review of observation as the foundation for interpretation/critique.

Examine a work of art independently and encourage students to use the following questions in their observation:

Descriptive questions (describe the work without using value words):

- What is the written description on the label or in the program about the work?
- What is the title and who is (are) the artist(s)?
- When and where was the work created?
- Describe the elements of the work (i.e., line movement, light, space).
- Describe the technical qualities of the work (i.e., tools, materials, medium).
- Describe the subject matter. Are there recognizable images?

Analytical questions (describe the organization and composition):

- How is the work constructed or planned (i.e., acts, movements, lines)?
- Identify some of the similarities throughout the work (i.e., repetition of lines or shapes).
- Identify some of the points of emphasis in the work (i.e., figures, movement).
- If the work has subjects or characters, what are the relationships between or among them?

Interpretive questions (describe how the work makes you think or feel):

- Describe the expressive qualities in the work. What expressive language would you use to describe the qualities (i.e., tragic, ugly, funny)?
- Does the work remind you of other things you have experienced (i.e., analogy or metaphor)?
- How does the work relate to other ideas or events in the world and/or in your other studies?
2:00 PM-2:20 PM INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP CRITIQUES IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST GALLERY:
Activity: Table Top Twitter—Find a painting or object in the gallery to reflect on, one person per object. At the top of your page, briefly describe your object. In 140 characters or less, leave a written response about what you see. What is your interpretation of this object? What is the meaning behind it?

When finished, place your clipboard and paper on the ground and rotate to another clipboard and object. Respond to something someone has written, or write your own interpretation of the object in 140 characters or less. Repeat 2 or 3 more times.

Discussion: At your last rotation, take time to look through all the comments on your paper and pick one or two to share with the group. Why did this interpretation stand out to you? Did reading everyone’s interpretation of an object help inform your interpretation? How so? Did you disagree and agree with different interpretations? Sometimes even an opinion that you disagree with can help you form your own opinion about something, disagreements can be just as important as agreements.

2:20 PM-2:45 PM GROUP CRITIQUE IN THE ITALIAN PAINTINGS GALLERIES:
Activity: Think-Pair-Share—Find a partner for this next activity. Together, locate a work of art that you would both like to have a discussion about. For the first five minutes, think to yourself while making your own observations independently. You can write them down or think to yourself. For the next five minutes, talk to your partner about your observations. What is the meaning behind your observations? Explain what evidence you saw that made you think that. For the sharing portion, each group will share their partner’s interpretation of the artwork.

2:45 PM-3:20 PM ART MAKING IN THE 4TH FLOOR GALLERIES:
Activity: Mixed Media Collage—Pick a landscape painting of your choice for this next activity. First reflect on the work of art by using the solo spot, and note card exercises.

Solo Spot: Activity inspired by Audubon’s Nature Educators Workshop
Pretend you are in this painting. Settle in to your spot. Take a deep breath, pushing away all cares and concerns, focusing on what is going on around you right now in the painting. How do things sound around you? Can you describe that smell? What’s that sparkling over there? Does your area feel rough, dry, moist, and smooth? Take a few moments to fill in the unfinished sentences below.

- I think the rocks feel:
- The smell of the air around me:
- This spot I’m sitting in:
- The farthest thing I can see is:
- I rubbed a leaf between my fingers and it smells:
- Behind me I hear:
- In front of me I see:

Note Card: Activity inspired by Audubon’s Nature Educators Workshop
Draw the sounds you might hear in your painting through creative mark making—wind in the trees, rushing water, birds, rain, thunderstorm...

Using the observations you just made, create a mixed media collage representing the sounds, textures, or objects in your painting. This collage can be representational, or abstract.
Discussion: After everyone has finished, gather their work into the center of the room. Give everyone a few sticky notes. Provide feedback on the work of several of your classmates by writing a response on your sticky note and attaching it to their work. What is your interpretation of their artwork? What is the artist emphasizing? What would it feel like to be in this landscape based on the information the artist gave you to interpret?

CONCLUSION:
What is challenging about interpretation? Did you enjoy group interpretation, or solo interpretation? What makes you say that? What is your process for interpreting artwork? Where do you start and where do you end? What commonalities do you think exist between interpretation in the scientific and creative processes? What makes you say that?

References: