***Questioning Strategies***

Exert from “Aesthetic Scanning”, Pat Villeneuve, 1992; Spencer Museum of Art

Recognizing that students and tour groups do not scan spontaneously, Hewett and Rush (1987) developed questioning strategies for aesthetic scanning. They identified five kinds of questions that range from simple to complex:

SAMPLE QUESTIONS (followed by the scanning property in parentheses)

**Leading –** *encourages agreement*

* There’s a lot of red in this painting, isn’t there? (sensory)
* Don’t you agree that all those dark colors convey a depressing mood? (expressive)

**Selective –** *offers a choice of answers*

* Is this a watercolor or an oil painting? (technical)
* Is the balance symmetrical or asymmetrical? (formal)

**Parallel –** *requests additional information*

* Other than blue, what colors do you see? (sensory)
* Frances said “somber”. What other words could describe the mood of this piece? (expressive)

**Constructive –** *asks for specific information in a short answer*

* What shapes do you see? (sensory)
* What material was this sculpture made from? (technical)

**Productive –** *requires general information in an “essay” answer*

* How did the artist achieve balance in this work? (formal)
* How did the artist generate this computer graphic? (technical)

USING QUESTIONING STRATEGIES

* Use different kinds of questions (leading, constructive, etc.) to keep the group interested and to encourage everyone to participate.
* Avoid asking constructive questions that require only a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. Instead of asking “Do you see any lines?” try “What kind of lines do you see?”
* If there is no response, change the kind of question to make it simpler or more sophisticated. For example, change “What colors do you see” (constructive) to “Boys and girls, the artist used a lot of yellow, didn’t she?” (leading) to make the question easier to answer. Or, substitute “Explain how the artist achieved the color gradations.” (productive) for “Do you think the artist did the shading with an air brush or palette knife?” (selective) to make the question more challenging.
* Ask one question at a time, and wait for an answer.
* Don’t panic – questions about art require a little time for thought.
* Multiple answers can be correct, if they are supported by evidence found in the work of art. For example, one student may describe the mood of a piece as chaotic, while another may see it as jubilant. Ask for justification.
* However, do not accept wrong answers—there is no green in a black and white photograph. Refer to the artwork for documentation: “Students, is there any green in this photo?”

IMPLEMENTING SCANNING IN THE CLASSROOM

Aesthetic scanning can be done in most classrooms, preschool through higher education. There are two basic approaches to implementing scanning:

1. Students can learn the scanning format and vocabulary and actively participate in scanning. This is most productive when done on a regular basis with ample time allowed for student discussion. This approach works well as part of a visual art or language arts program.
2. Teachers can direct scanning, with or without teaching the format and vocabulary. This can be loosely structured – “Let’s talk about lines and colors”—or carefully prepared with a few questions moving the students through the sensory, formal, and technical properties and on to a lengthier discussion of the more important expressive properties.

To take scanning further, ask students to compare and contrast two scanned artworks or to discuss similarities (based on sensory, formal, technical, or expressive properties) between two seemingly different works.