

SELF-REFLECTION, CRITIQUES, ARTIST STATEMENTS, AND CURATORIAL RATIONALES



Self-Reflection

LOWER ELEMENTARY GRADES AND STRUGGLING WRITERS

Use questioning strategies and allow students to verbalize answers:

- *What is your work about?*
- *What is the most important thing people should notice?*
- *What did you learn today?*

As students move from kindergarten to first and second grade, increase the complexity of the questions:

- *Why did you choose those colors?*
- *Is there anything you need to learn how to do to complete this work?*
- *How did you use (whatever skill you taught, such as layering colors with crayons or color pencils)?*

UPPER ELEMENTARY GRADES AND STRONG WRITERS

Try these as sketchbook prompts or exit tickets as often as possible:

- Use sentence starters to guide students' thinking and writing.
- As students get older, increase the complexity of the questions and the expectations for the depth of their answers.
- Model the process with your own artwork by thinking out loud and showing them how artists use self-reflection.
- Try [artistic habits](#) as springboards for self-reflection.

MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL

Set expectations on day one for self-reflective thinking:

- Use daily exit tickets using focused, self-reflective questions.
 - *What did you focus on today?*
 - *What is the most important thing you accomplished today?*
 - *How are you using (contrast) in your work?*
 - *How did you decide to _____?*
 - *How do you feel about what you did today?*
- Use weekly reflections to focus on what they have accomplished and learned and plan out their next steps.
 - *What new skills/techniques did you develop this week?*
 - *What did you accomplish this week, and what will you do next week?*
 - *What might you need to improve/refine before continuing your work?*
- Teach them how to identify what they need to learn to improve the quality of their work.
- Model the process with your own artwork by thinking out loud and showing them how artists use self-reflection.
- Use questions to guide them while they work on a piece. [This webpage](#) has questions organized by various stages of creation.



Critiques

Set the stage for constructive critiques with these two tips:

1. Conduct historical and contemporary art critiques, but **save the Judgment component** for another time. This will allow students to focus on the process rather than on judging the product.
2. **Focus on a particular aspect** of the art and/or a concept you are teaching.
 - *What elements and principles did the artist use to create emphasis?*
 - *How did the artist use contrast?*
 - *How does the color contribute to creating a mood?*
 - *What is the theme/idea of the work?*
 - *How do you know this?*

LOWER ELEMENTARY

Focus on celebrating their ideas and work, as well as getting used to sharing in front of the class with these questions and prompts:

In [*Engaging Learners Through Artmaking*](#), Katherine Douglas and Diane Jaquith suggest using these prompts:

- *Tell me about your work.*
- *Where did you get this idea?*
- *I like the way you* (colored in the sky all the way down to the ground).
- *I wish* (the dragon was larger since it's the most important part).
- [Here are some fun, creative ways](#) to conduct critiques to develop a positive mindset around the refinement and revision of student artwork.

UPPER ELEMENTARY

As students advance through the grades, have them do peer-to-peer, small group, and whole-class critiques during the creation process as well as when students finish a piece

Ask [these three questions](#) of viewers and then ask the artist if there was something they missed or misunderstood:

1. *What do you see?*
2. *What do you think/feel?*
3. *What in the artwork makes you think/feel that?*

MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL

First and foremost, create a positive, nurturing mindset for critiques. Set strict ground rules similar to these:

- Emphasize that it's about the work, not the person, and the student artist must disassociate from their work during a critique.
- Focus on the goal of a critique, which is to analyze.
- Conduct formal, scheduled critiques as well as impromptu, informal ones when you see a student "hitting a wall" or needing some constructive feedback.
- Differentiate between the roles of an Artist, Viewer, and Moderator. Read the [Beginner's Guide to Constructive Critiques](#) for helpful information.
- Check out these [15 Questions to Inspire Quality Art Critiques](#). For a quicker, more informal critique, try the three questions method mentioned above for Upper Elementary.

ALL GRADES

Try Pair-Share or Gallery Walks with these questions for both work-in-progress pieces and finished works:

- *Which artwork shows the best use of contrast?*
- *What title would you suggest for this piece?*
- *What is a question you have about the work?*
- *What do you see?*
- *What do you think the work is communicating?*
- *How is this different from the artist's intent?*



Artist Statements

For non-writers, try these two ideas for artist statements:

- **Audio or video record their responses** and create a QR code to display with their work that will take the viewer to the recording.
- **Transcribe their responses** with the help of parent volunteers, older students, and/or teacher assistants.

ELEMENTARY

Create a template for students in Grades 2–5 to write their artist statements. Scaffold the forms for various writing levels by using sentence stems for beginning writers. For older students, provide questions with set expectations, such as complete sentences and two sentences or more per answer. As a baseline, some teachers require one sentence per grade level.

In [*Engaging Learners Through Artmaking*](#), Katherine Douglas and Diane Jaquith suggest using these prompts:

1. *Tell me about your artwork.*
2. *What do you want people to notice?*
3. *Where did you find this idea?*
4. *How did you make this?*

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Continue to provide a variety of options for students who may still struggle with written expression:

- Allow video or audio recordings.
- Provide sentence stems and questions.
- Provide peer assistance where appropriate.

HIGH SCHOOL

Provide differentiation as needed and appropriate, but also demand more depth and critical thinking about their work.

Focus on these three tips:

- Give clear directions and criteria.
- Emphasize the purpose for completing them.
- Display a typed version with their work.

MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL

Check out [this guide](#) to writing well-written artist statements appropriate for all secondary students.



Curatorial Rationales

The curatorial rationale is generally broken down into three parts:

1. Overview, Concepts, and Ideas

- *What is your work about?*
- *What are the underlying themes or threads?*
- *How did your theme come about?*
- *What are the concepts, issues, or ideas you have explored here?*
- *How are they linked in your work?*
- *What experiences have contributed to the making of this work?*

2. Selection of Works

- *What materials and techniques have you used?*
- *Why did you choose these?*
- *Do the materials have an impact on the meaning of the work?*
- *How do you justify your selection of works?*

3. Relationship With the Viewer

- *How does the way the work is presented contribute to how it communicates with the viewer?*
- *How did you consider the arrangement of the works within the available space?*
- *Do you have an overall vision for presenting this body of work?*

Here are [some journal reflections](#) to help students brainstorm and process before writing:

- *What media do you work with?*
- *What interests you about this type of work?*
- *What themes, concerns, and ideas have you explored in this work?*
- *Is there a relationship between the media you used and the ideas you worked with?*
- *What outside interests, artists, encounters, or experiences have influenced your work?*
- *What ties your individual pieces of work together into a cohesive body of work?*
- *Is there an "intention" behind the work?*
- *What do you want the work to achieve?*
- *How do you want your audience to experience it?*
- *How have your methods of display (how the work is arranged and presented) contributed to the viewer's experience?*
- *Imagine you could have any possible space or display method. What is your vision for presenting this body of work?*