

Art Appreciation Activities

These activities, fun for all ages, will help you connect with artworks and practice useful visual skills in the process. You can use any artworks that you choose, and [here](#) are some ideas about where to find images in books or online.

The activities below are meant to be done at home or perhaps in a classroom. They are not intended for use in a museum, because they take too much time, require materials, or would be disruptive. However, I have some activities and challenges meant for use in museums [here](#). If you plan to use these activities with children, make sure to choose artworks that you consider age appropriate.

Storytime: Create a story to explain what's going on in an artwork. You can write a short scenario, imagine the artwork as comic strip and supply the text, or create pretend social media posts as though you're one of the characters in the scene. Don't feel limited to the official interpretation. The whole point is to let the artwork inspire your imagination. If you are feeling creative enough to write a story inspired by an artwork that doesn't have people in it, that would be especially cool.

Visual Association: Name all the things an artwork makes you think of and feel – words, emotions, memories, stories, other visuals, etc. Come up with as many associations as feels natural. If you have a partner to work with, compare your associations for the same artwork. Did you both experience it the same way?

Categorizing: How many different ways can you arrange a group of artworks into categories? Your categories could be based on anything – subject matter, color, shape, mood, etc. For example, you might have one category of artworks depicting flowers and another of black-and-white artworks. An ink drawing of a woman with a rose in her hair would be in both categories, but a colorful vase with a flower motif would only go into the first one. Start with about 12 artworks and put them into as many or few groupings as you want. If you have a partner to work with, see if they can identify the commonality within each category. This game is most fun with a group of really varied artworks so that it takes creativity to find similarities to group them by.

Description: Describe an artwork in words so that someone else could identify it. Pick a set of about five similar objects, then describe one to your partner, who must figure out which one you're referencing. For this game to be fun at all, you have to use artworks that are all fairly similar to each other so there's some level of challenge in describing their differences.

Spot the Difference: Pick two artworks that have something obvious in common, such as their subject matter, and then find all the ways those two works are different despite that similarity.

Sensory Challenge: Imagine that you've stepped inside the world of an artwork and name all the different things you can see, touch, hear, smell, and taste. Try to imagine each sensation in as much detail as you can. Within a landscape painting, for example, you might imagine the shimmering sight of the lake through the hazy atmosphere, rough feeling of the trees' bark, sweet

taste of the berries growing on a bush, cheerful sound of the birds chirping, and earthy smell of the grass. Some sensory categories will be more difficult than others; try to find at least one thing for each. This is easiest in representational artworks with lots of detail, especially landscape and still life paintings. But you could also be more imaginative and try it with abstract artworks or objects.

Statue Charades: Find some statues of human figures and mimic their poses. Get a feeling for how artists use gesture and body language in portraying human figures. Which ones are natural and comfortable? Which are artificial or even physically impossible? How do they make you feel? What looks nice on a statue isn't necessarily an enjoyable or even realistic posture in real life. Try statues from all different styles, places, and time periods, as they often use different types of poses.

Artist Pantomime: Pretend you're an interpretive dancer portraying an artist at work. Find an artwork where the artist's marks (pencil lines, brushstrokes, chisel marks, etc.) are easily visible. Look at them closely and think about what movements you would use to make them. Big movements or small ones? Dainty or vigorous? Controlled or sweeping? Try making those movements yourself and see what it feels like. Keep in mind the size of the artwork and what material it's made from. Painting a large picture would require different movements than a tiny one, and sculpting marble would be different than carving wood. See how believable you can make your impression as you put yourself in the artist's shoes. Artworks' size and medium aren't always clear from photographs, but that information is usually available in the caption.

Be the Subject: Step into the shoes of a figure depicted in an artwork. Imagine what they are seeing, thinking, and feeling. What is their life like? Notice if doing this helps you connect to these people and empathize with them. The obvious artworks to choose for this would be portraits, but I challenge you to find people in less prominent positions within the compositions.

Re-Create the Artwork: Take some photos re-creating your favorite artworks. You can use any means available to you – except for conventional art-making tools like paint or markers. You and your friends could restage the scene, but you could also re-create the composition using fruit, jellybeans, colored string, etc. The possibilities are endless. This game began in 2020 when museums challenged social media users to re-create artworks at home during the lockdown and post them with the tag #betweenartandquarantine.

Be the Docent: Pretend that you are an art museum docent (the people who give the tours) and come up with a short talk about a favorite work of art. What do you want people to know about this artwork? Real-life docents have to stick to the facts, but you can also include your opinion, interpretation, or anything else you think is relevant. You can also come up with a tour or talk based on an exhibition you've seen.

Scavenger Hunt: Pretend that you are making a scavenger hunt using artworks of your choice. Look closely to identify all the tiny little details that players will have to find in your hunt. See how challenging you can make it.

Be the Curator: Choose a few artworks to star in your own imaginary exhibition. Consider things like the exhibition's main theme and title, the ideas you want to convey, which artworks you would include, and how they would be arranged. Then, think about what you would tell potential viewers about each artwork and the overall show.

Scrapbook: Art has the great ability to help us feel better when we need it most. Look for artworks that help you in different situations and make a scrapbook (or collage, Pinterest board, digital photo gallery, etc.) with photos of them. For example, you might choose a selection of artworks that cheer you up when you're sad, calm you down when you're anxious, inspire you when you're frustrated, comfort you when you're afraid, and so on. Use it and add to it when you need to and see if you feel the benefits.

Want to learn more about art? Join a course at
ascholarlyskater.com/courses.