

# Introduction and Rationale

## What Is *Investigating Contemporary Art*?

*Investigating Contemporary Art* is designed to help middle school students and their teachers explore contemporary artworks and investigate their meanings. Intended for use with *Experience Art*, it will help you and your students respond to contemporary artworks in the program.

Seeking and finding meaning through encounters with art is an ability students can develop and carry with them into adulthood. We want them to have, first, the inclination to view and respond to art and design, and second, the skills necessary to reap the most reward from their experiences. Students can be hesitant to engage in group discussions. This card set is designed so students don't always have to come up with their own ways to describe art; they just decide if a word given to them might somehow "fit" the work in question. By engaging in open-ended discussions about artworks, young people can develop new understandings and important insights about the world, each other, and our relationships.

## Why Investigate Art?

All artworks are loaded with meaning. Through investigation—careful looking and analyzing, and making connections with experiences and ideas—viewers of art, design, and visual culture construct interpretations and deepen their understanding of artworks. Artists present us with ways of thinking about what they see, what they do, how they feel, and ideas they have about the world and what it means to be human. Responders interpret and "try on" the views presented. The process allows us to see the world from another's perspective, ultimately affording the opportunity to develop empathy.

## Why Contemporary Art?

When students explore contemporary art—art from the last twenty years or so—they engage with ideas, identities, values, and perspectives of their own time. *Investigating Contemporary Art* focuses on contemporary art so that students become familiar with artists, artworks, and artmaking possibilities of their own time, but more importantly, so that students have access to perspectives on the world that they inhabit and seek to understand.

## Art Criticism and Art Education

The field of art education has a long history of promoting the inclusion of critical response to art. Art criticism is an integral part of Responding—one of the four National Visual Arts Standards, along with Creating, Presenting, and Connecting. The Responding standards are grounded in our human tendency to pay attention to and "read" what we see as we seek to make sense of our visual world. These standards recognize the inclination to seek, find, and construct meaning.

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In the National Visual Arts Standards, an Enduring Understanding states: “Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed through engagement in art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, the natural world, and constructed environments.” Empathy can result from serious and purposeful response to works of art, design, and visual culture.

The new standards describe desired behaviors or performances as students move through the grades learning how to engage in art criticism. Students demonstrate increasing proficiency in describing, analyzing, interpreting, and judging significance of visual art, design, and visual culture. *Experience Art* provides students with many opportunities to seek meaning in art throughout the program. In addition to the Art Criticism features in each unit, questions about meaning and suggestions for interpreting artworks can be found in artwork captions, in the student text, throughout the Teacher Edition, and in various sections of the Teacher Resource Package. *Investigating Contemporary Art* gives students another opportunity to engage in critical response—with a special emphasis on contemporary art.

## The Investigative Process

*Investigating Contemporary Art* engages students in art criticism through three investigative activities—Finding Clues, Making Connections, and Judging Significance.

**Finding Clues:** Students identify details in the image: subject matter, materials and techniques, and how the artwork is presented. Students also will find clues in the provided information about the artist and other contextual information.

**Making Connections:** Students construct interpretations, addressing the questions “What is the artwork about?” and “What is the artwork for?” They make connections between what they know about the artwork and what they believe it might mean or what messages it may send. As they make these connections, they consider the extent to which the artist employed contemporary artmaking strategies—sometimes referred to as postmodern principles and, in this program, as Evolving Ideas—that contribute to the meaning of the artwork.

**Judging Significance:** Students make decisions about appropriate criteria and apply those criteria to evaluate the artwork. They make judgments about the artwork’s merit, significance, and value.

# Components

*Investigating Contemporary Art* prompts discussion about eight unique contemporary artworks. The set includes six copies of each Art Image so they can be used by multiple groups simultaneously. The reverse side of each Art Image lists discussion prompts. To encourage engagement and facilitate student responses, color-coded word and statement cards are included that align with the discussion prompts.

Teachers and students can use these components in a variety of ways—in large or small groups or for individual student response. The goal is to provide students with opportunities to develop and refine their skills in critical response to art.

The components of *Investigating Contemporary Art* are:

- Art Images with discussion prompts on the back side
- Word and Statement cards
  - **Descriptive Words** (purple cards)
  - **Expressive Words** (blue cards)
  - **Themes and Ideas** (green cards)
  - **Evolving Ideas** (pink cards)
  - **Artist Information** on pages 13–20 of this guide (to be photocopied and cut into cards)

## Art Images

The Art Images are the same artworks, except for one, that open each of the eight units in *Experience Art*. As the featured opening artwork, each image was selected to represent the theme of the unit. Background information about the artist is provided in the Teacher Edition of *Experience Art*, along with suggestions for talking about the image with students. The featured artists are further discussed, and additional artworks are shown, in each unit's Evolving Ideas feature.

**4.2 EVOLVING IDEAS**

### Hybridity

**What is Hybridity?**  
Have you heard of a labradoodle or a golden-doodle? These two popular dog breeds are made by crossing a poodle with, in the first case, a Labrador retriever, and in the second, a golden retriever. They are hybrid dog breeds. In the world of gardening, a hybrid plant is made by pollinating the flowers from one variety of plant with pollen from another variety to create a new kind of plant. The mixing is called hybridity.

**Hybridity in art is similar to hybridity in dogs and plants. An artist might combine two or more materials that are not usually found together to create an artwork that is unique. Artists may also bring together different methods of artmaking**

that are not usually combined. The result is a unique work of art, often presenting its audience with an experience unlike any they have had. Hybridity is a strategy in which artists may mix materials, methods, ideas, or subject matter to create hybrid works of art.

**Vaughn Bell and Hybridity**  
Vaughn Bell wants to give her audience a close-up way to experience nature. She cares deeply about the environment and wants to use her artmaking practice to make more people aware of threats to our natural world. More importantly, though, she wants people to care about and care for nature. (Fig. 4-29)



**172 Unit 4: Nature**

**4 Nature**

*How do art and design reveal our connections with nature?*



**154 Unit 4: Nature**

Discussion prompts on the back side of the Art Image cards guide critical discussions of the featured artworks. Organized to assist in Finding Clues and Making Connections, the prompts direct students to describe what they see, share what they know, and construct interpretations. The emphasis is on describing the artworks and interpreting meaning. Prompts to help students in Judging Significance can be found on page 7 of this guide.

**Investigating Contemporary Art** Unit 4: Nature



**Unit 4: Experience Art** © 2022 Dove Publications, Inc.

**Investigating Contemporary Art**

Works of art and design have meaning. They send messages, raise questions, suggest moods, prompt action, and show beauty, for example. To discover what an artwork is about, spend time looking carefully and thinking critically. Work with others for multiple perspectives.

**FINDING CLUES**

The more information you gather about the artwork, the more evidence you have for making connections and creating interpretations.

**What do you see?**

- What is the art form? What materials and techniques did the artist use?
- What do you recognize in the artwork, if anything?
- What are the parts of this artwork and how did the artist organize them?
- What words can you use to describe this artwork? How do those words “fit” or describe the artwork?
- How is the artwork presented for viewers to experience it?

**What do you know about the artist?**

- How does the artist work?
- What has the artist said about art or ideas?

**MAKING CONNECTIONS**

What is this artwork mostly about? Interpret the meaning of an artwork by connecting what you see, know, and remember with the what the artwork suggests.

**What expressive words are suggested?**

- What expressive words “fit” or connect with the artwork?
- What expressive words do not “fit” or connect with the artwork?
- What evidence can you give?

**What themes or ideas are suggested? What, if any, purpose might the artwork have?**

- What evidence can you provide to support your interpretation?

**EVOLVING IDEAS**

Which, if any, contemporary strategies (Evolving Ideas) did the artist use?

- How does the use of contemporary strategies help convey the artwork’s meaning?
- What evidence can you provide to support your idea?

**Unit 4: Experience Art** © 2022 Dove Publications, Inc.

## Descriptive Words



The 32 unique, purple Descriptive Word cards feature terms that students can use to answer the question “What do you see?” in Finding Clues.

## Expressive Words



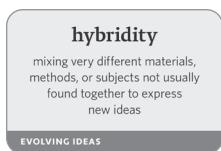
The 32 unique, blue Expressive Word cards assist students in answering the question “What moods or feelings are suggested?” in Making Connections.

## Themes and Ideas



The 32 unique, green Themes and Ideas cards provide possible answers to the question “What is the artwork about?” or “What is the artwork for?” and are used in the process of Making Connections.

## Evolving Ideas



Eight Evolving Ideas are presented in six identical sets of pink cards so multiple groups can use them simultaneously. Each Evolving Idea card includes a term describing a contemporary artmaking approach along with its definition. Students can consider which contemporary strategies the artist might have used in making the artwork during both Finding Clues and Making Connections.

## Artist Information

Artist Information cards, on pages 13-20 in this guide, are designed for you to photocopy as a sheet and cut into cards. These cards provide contextual information about each artist that may prove useful as students expand their understanding and interpretation of the artworks. Each group should receive a full set of eight cards corresponding to the artist who created the Art Image they are examining. There are questions in Finding Clues to prompt students to contribute relevant information using these cards.