

Art Analysis: Three Degrees of Separation

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The ideas below are based on some ideas shared with me by experienced art teacher Susan Maygar.

This is a new and interesting way to interact with artworks that are viewed in real life. It was developed following a meeting with Art teacher, Susan Maygar during a professional discussion about how Art can best be taught. Her idea that different qualities can be noticed and appreciated in artworks from different distances led to the development of a formal process that can be positively used with students.

To use it, you simply need to select an artwork and view it carefully from 3 different distances to observe differences in what you can actually notice and appreciate. The 3 different distances are referred to below as Three Degrees of Separation. This process could be undertaken in a gallery, school or even at home.

From different distances the qualities that can be observed and appreciated in an artwork change considerably. You see more things the closer you are and you see some things quite differently. Sometimes these responses are just refined or adjusted a little and sometimes they totally change. As the distance between the artwork and the viewer is diminished, new technical and artistic qualities and details appear and new interpretations of things already observed occur. Getting closer and seeing differently doesn't mean that what you see from a distance isn't important or invalid – just different. Besides, some artworks are best seen from greater distances.

This process of viewing an artwork from different distances is obviously intended to take you closer and closer to the artwork. It reveals more of what the artist did to the artwork and more that the artist achieved. In this way, the viewer is not just moving closer to the artwork but is actually moving closer to the artist. Once this analysis from different distances is completed additional investigation and research would allow you to get even closer to the artist than can be achieved by just viewing the artwork alone.

You could use this process alone or the teacher might break your class into groups to undertake one of the degrees of separation listed below. Responses could then be compared as a class or by forming new groups with including one student from each of the first 3 groups.

1st Degree of Separation

1. From about 20 paces observe what you can see or notice about the artwork.
2. Observe and record what you feel about the work in terms of whether you like it or not
3. Observe and record any other observations you can make from that distance
4. Enjoy your valid responses to the artwork from this distance

2nd Degree of Separation

5. Move towards the artwork about 7 paces and observe and record new things you can see or notice
6. Observe and record any changes to what you now feel
7. Enjoy your new but valid responses to the artwork from this distance

3rd Degree of Separation

8. Move again another 7 paces closer and observe and record what new things you can be see or notice
9. Observe and record any changes to what you now feel
10. Enjoy your new but valid responses to the artwork from this distance.

One last thing you could do is to investigate the artwork using research, reading or questioning to discover some factual information about the artist or artwork that

cannot be gained from just looking at it. In a way, this might be considered a 4th Degree of Separation – except that it would actually take you closer still to understanding the artwork.