

These activities help you develop your ideas and claims for your visual analysis assignment. **Activity 1** guides you through the basics of visual analysis for your chosen artifact. **Activity 2** asks you to start brainstorming and drafting. **Activity 3** checks if you are thinking about the artifact within a larger context, which is a necessary skill for the next assignment.

# Activity 1 - Elements of Art

A visual analysis is much like that of a literary analysis, but for a different medium. Instead of considering plot, setting, or rhetoric, you have been asked to interpret a piece visually–the composition of an artwork. This activity asks you to think about how the materiality, composition, and iconography of your chosen artwork creates meaning. Ultimately, your paper should answer the question: What way of seeing the world does this artwork create?

The steps below identify common characteristics of artwork that you can analyze and provide guiding questions to consider. In the provided blank space, detail how you see these aspects in your chosen artifact. Descriptive text from this section has been modified and relies on The J. Paul Getty Museum’s resource, “Elements of Art” (<https://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building_lessons/formal_analysis.html#:~:text=Artists%20use%20color%20value%20to,light%20reflected%20within%20the%20composition>).

1. **Color** is often associated with mood–the feeling of the painting. Color has three main characteristics: **hue** (red, green, blue, etc.), **value** (a scale from dark to light), and **intensity** (a scale from dull to bright). Colors can be described as **warm** (red, yellow) or **cool** (blue, gray), depending on which end of the color spectrum they fall.
   1. What color is used the most in the piece? The least?
   2. What color(s) clash with the other colors?
   3. Where is the color vibrant and varied? Where is the color one-toned?
2. **Lines** often define the edges of a form. Lines can be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal, straight or curved, thick or thin. They **lead** your eye around the composition and can communicate information through their character and direction.
   1. Where are straight lines in this piece? Circles?
   2. Where do lines point in the artwork, if anywhere?
   3. What kinds of lines are used? How do they make you feel?
3. **Texture** gives a visual sense of how an object depicted would feel in real life if touched: hard, soft, rough, smooth, hairy, leathery, sharp, etc. In three-dimensional works, artists use actual texture to add a tactile quality to the work.
   1. How is this object meant to be interacted with?
   2. Where does your eye go first when looking at this artwork?
   3. What objects are depicted in the piece?

# Activity 2 - Art in Context

Remember to investigate your chosen artwork beyond observation. Utilize the library and online databases for more information. If the artwork is part of a series, in what way does it relate to the project of the larger whole? Does the artwork remake an earlier object or reimagine a preexisting genre? If so, how and why? This assignment also asks you to place your artifact in conversation with the political, racial landscape at the time of its creation. What have secondary sources said about this artwork? In what specific ways does the work of art engage with history and politics?

The sections below list relevant databases to search for your artwork and ask you to find resources on each website, with space to take notes. Remember to keep in mind any specific instructions from your discussion section instructor.

1. JSTOR: <https://www.jstor.org/>

Put the title of your artwork into the search bar and record the first 3 sources that come up. What are the 3 most important pieces of information from each source?

Source 1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Source 2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Source 3: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Project MUSE: <https://muse.jhu.edu/>

Put the title of your artwork into the search bar and record the first 3 sources that come up. What are the 3 most important pieces of information from each source?

Source 1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Source 2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Source 3: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Oxford Art Online: <https://www.oxfordartonline.com/>

Put the title of your artwork into the search bar and record the first 3 sources that come up. What are the 3 most important pieces of information from each source?

Source 1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Source 2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Source 3: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# Activity 3 - Argumentation

Now that you’ve analyzed and researched your artwork, the steps below guide you through putting your observations into the structure of an argument. This will be the basis for your thesis statement and topic sentences throughout your paper.

1. How do the elements within the artwork work together? How do they create opposing or similar meanings?
2. What do the elements of art suggest about your artwork’s intended meaning? By looking at the piece, what is a viewer meant to see? Feel? Question?
3. When the piece was made, what was the political context? What major conflicts were happening locally? Globally? Any notable historical events?
4. Who was the creator(s) of the artwork? Did they create an artist’s statement or participate in interviews about their work? What do critics say about the artwork?
5. What way of seeing the world does this artwork create, based on the elements in the piece and the context outside the piece? (This is a great start for a thesis statement!)