Developing High School Students’ Ability to Write about their Art through the Use of
Art Criticism Practices in Sketchbooks: A Case Study

A thesis presented to

the faculty of

the College of Fine Arts of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Fine Arts

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June 2008
This thesis titled
Developing High School Students’ Ability to Write about their Art through the Use of
Art Criticism Practices in Sketchbooks: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

JONES, RITA A., M.F.A. June 2008, Art Education

Developing High School Students’ Ability to Write about their Art through the Use of Art Criticism Practices in Sketchbooks: A Case Study (202 pp.)

Director of Thesis: Connie L. Wolfe

This mixed methods inquiry took place in an advanced high school art class to determine if the application of art criticism practices in their sketchbooks would improve students writing and thinking about their art.

During the study, the targeted class was involved in a variety of classroom and sketchbook exercises designed to assess the impact that reflective journals have on the students’ thinking about art and develop their skills in the use of art criticism.

Data for the study was gathered using a variety of data collection methods as a form of triangulation. These methods included: Pre- and Post-study questionnaires, detailed observations, direct participation, informal interviews, reflective journal writings, and the student sketchbook journals.

Combining the use of art criticism as a part of students daily sketchbook procedures successfully engaged students in critical thinking about their art, and impacted their ability to articulate their ideas in a more meaningful way, improved their journaling performance and developed their ability to think and write critically about their art.
Because art teachers are continually describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating works of art during the process of instruction, implementation of the four actions of art criticism into my curriculum proved to be a natural step for not only my students, but for me as an art educator.

Art making alone provides students with an unmatched opportunity to digest the abundance of media and information they come in contact with throughout the day. By combining art making with the journaling process (even without art criticism), educators can cultivate yet another avenue through which they can strengthen their student’s educational experience.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Connie L. Wolfe

Visiting Assistant Professor of Art
This thesis is dedicated to my parents

Claude E. and Hilda C. Marshall

Mom, thanks for hanging in there with me.
Your determination, support, and encouragement have served as a buttress for me throughout this process.

Dad, although you are gone, I can still feel your love and strength.
Your faith in my abilities is with me every day of my life.

Thank you.

And to my husband

Roger N. Jones

When I need them most my words escape me.
Your love and friendship has made me whole, kept me afloat, and given my life purpose.

With all my love.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my thanks to my advisor, Connie Wolfe, for all her counsel and unfailing patience and to my thesis committee members, David Bower and Don Adleta for their support and encouragement. I would also like to thank Rosalie Romano and Anne Burkhart for their willingness to guide me through this process.

I want to convey a special word of thanks to my family who tirelessly listened to my ideas, calmed my nerves and extended encouragement when it was most needed. I offer a special thanks to my mother and granddaughter, who both set goals for me to strive for and attain.

I would like to convey a very special thanks to my husband, who supported me throughout the writing of this thesis – patiently assisting with words of assurance, proof reading, laundry, and housekeeping.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

Introduction

This mixed methods inquiry evolved as a direct result of a trend I observed in my advanced art classes. Students enrolled in the visual arts program had the artistic skills to produce the required work; however, they consistently lacked the ability to talk, think and write critically about their artwork.

Beginning in their junior year, I require all of my advanced students to keep a sketchbook. The purpose of this sketchbook is to provide students with a vehicle through which they can practice their art. The sketchbook is their personal portable studio. It provides them with a place where they can record teacher appointed assignments, as well as random sketches, doodles, ideas and thoughts. Written thoughts that the students record are generally more personal in nature but possess a genuine, candid quality.

In the advanced classes, we routinely conduct critiques of student work. The classroom critique is an organized setting in which students discuss their artwork. These oral assessments are rigid and even painful. High school students are hesitant to talk about art and uncomfortable with oral critiques for a number of reasons including: personal embarrassment, lack of knowledge about art and/or critique, fear of hurting someone else’s feelings or their inability to verbalize their feelings.
The students were conditioned in the general classroom to do what it takes to receive a passing grade. They performed as independent thinkers when it came to their artwork, but when asked to write or talk critically about their art or the art of others they were uncomfortable and at a loss. Students have not been conditioned, as a part of their general education, to do the kind of independent and personal thinking necessary to write critically about their work.

One student in particular bordered on being nonverbal. That student would not talk with other students, and would ask me muffled questions with no eye contact only when it was absolutely necessary. To say this student was uncomfortable during an oral critique would be an understatement. While using this student as an example may be at the extreme end of the continuum, I have witnessed other less severe student discomforts during oral critiques.

This observation has led me to consider combining the use of art criticism practices within the context of their sketchbook and asking the research question: What impact do reflective journals have on student thinking about art?

**Purpose of the Study**

Through the use of art criticism as a part of their daily sketchbook procedures, I plan to show how writing about art will not only engage students in critical thinking about their art but also impact their ability to articulate those ideas in a more meaningful way,
improve their journaling performance and develop their ability to think critically about their art.

**Significance of the Study**

Making art gives students an inimitable opportunity to take the wealth of information that they encounter outside the art room and synthesize it to strengthen their educational experience (Stevenson, 2006). The axis of every creative process evolves around the critical assessment that promotes each student’s ability to be describe the work, analyze the process, interpret its meaning, and evaluate its success. By promoting environments that foster artistic risk taking, students can advance to higher cognitive levels.

The concept of teaching for higher order thinking entails assisting students with learning in an active, constructive manner that what they learn in one circumstance is transferable to a new situation (Kowalchuk, 1996; p.1). The art journal can serve as the unifying element for accumulating ideas for higher order thinking.

I will institute art criticism in conjunction with the concept of mentoring outlined by Barrett (2000) to resolve the adverse characteristics of critique. “Mentoring will not solve all troublesome aspects of critiques, but ideas about mentoring can provide instructors motivation to reflect on their critiques and change ineffective and counterproductive practices (p. 34).”
When students realize their instructor is working to mentor them in the process as opposed to criticizing them “students would likely respond more positively to and engage more readily in critical discussion of their work. They would be less likely to assume defensive postures when their work was being discussed, even when remarks were made to rectify perceived deficiencies in the work (Barrett, p. 35),” finding the words to talk comfortably about their art as well as issues that arise in art is essential.

Cotner (2001) reports, “In the classroom, verbal cues can help students explore and secure meanings in art. At the same time, these cues also can regulate what students look for and think about in their encounters with art (p. 15).”

Barrett (1989) also suggests the use of four basic questions: 1) What is here?, 2) What is it about?, 3) How good is it?, 4) Is it art?, which students can use “as a heuristic matrix with which they can read criticism so that they can discover how critics go about criticizing art (p. 32).”

Art criticism, as recommended in art education literature, is more successful than strategies traditionally used by studio art instructors. Barrett (1988) recommends, “Engaging students in descriptive analysis and interpretive argumentation” to arrive at “more carefully reasoned and more fully argued judgments.” This he contends will give both the teacher and students “more to consider and more to talk about (p. 27).”
Definition of Terms

Aesthetic Valuing

Being able to talk about works of art; learning the basic skills and knowledge essential to communicate in each art form is the center of arts instruction (Ragans 2000).

By learning the elements and principles of art, working with various media, and evaluating master artists’ works, students develop an awareness of and appreciation for the presence of art both within the classroom and in their everyday experiences (p. TM 4).

Analysis

Analysis is the second step in art critiquing process (Feldman 1973). At this point the critic expresses their thoughts about the message of the artwork. Analysis relies heavily on the critic’s knowledge of the Elements of Art and Principles of Design to articulate in knowledgeable style the information they see in a work of art. To describe how the work is organized as a complete composition the critic should ask the following questions:

How is the work constructed or planned (i.e., acts, movements, lines)? Identify some of the similarities throughout the work (i.e., repetition of lines, two songs in each act). Identify some of the points of emphasis in the work (i.e., specific scene, figure, movement). If the work has subjects or characters, what are the relationships between or among them?” (Payne 2008, p. 1)
Art Criticism

Barrett (1998) describes art criticism as searching for the meaning and value of art through talking and writing about it. Feldman (1973) defined art criticism in art education as informed talk about art. Talk that, Barrett (1988) relates as “informed and organized for the sharing of discoveries about art and the human condition. Informing and organizing talk about art teaches the value of looking longer, more carefully, and more intelligently at art. Goals of this activity are the ability to read the visual environment and the learning of skills needed to choose among competing values (p. 22).”

Art Critique

Art critiques, Barrett (1988), used by studio professors to generally achieve one primary goal, the improvement of the art making of their students. In art education literature, however, criticism is commonly considered to be more than a means; “it is considered a subject matter in itself and as subject matter, criticism is presented as a body of knowledge which has a logic, various recommended procedures, and a variety of goals.”

The studio critique, according to Barrett, is “inextricably linked to the evaluation of art made by student artists (p. 25).

Barrett (1989) states that critique employs “any one of the four procedures of description, interpretation, evaluation, and theory (p. 24).” He further explains that this four-step procedure provides “a very usable framework for teaching the reading of criticism and the doing of criticism (p. 32).’”
**Authentic Instruction**

Authentic instruction outlined by Newmann & Wehlage (1993) is a five component model of high-quality instruction that includes: higher-order thinking, depth of knowledge, connectedness to the world beyond the classroom, substantive conversation and social support for student achievement.

1) Higher-order thinking

Higher-order thinking (HOT) requires students to manipulate information and ideas in ways that transform their meaning and implications, such as when students combine facts and ideas in order to synthesize, generalize, explain, hypothesize, or arrive at some conclusion or interpretation. Manipulating information and ideas through these processes allows students to solve problems and discover new (for them) meanings and understandings. When students engage in HOT, an element of uncertainty is introduced, and instructional outcomes are not always predictable (p. 10).

2) Depth of knowledge

Depth of knowledge requires students to be able to deal with the central ideas and significant concepts of a discipline. The student uses their knowledge to problem-solve, understand arguments, and construct explanations.

Knowledge is deep or thick when it concerns the central ideas of a topic or discipline. For students, knowledge is deep when they make clear distinctions, develop arguments, solve problems, construct explanations, and otherwise work
with relatively complex understandings. Depth is produced, in part, by covering fewer topics in systematic and connected ways (p. 10).

3) Connectedness to the world beyond the classroom

This third scale of authentic instruction bridges the classroom to some personal experience or real world public problem students can relate to.

A lesson gains in authenticity the more there is a connection to the larger social context within which students live. Instruction can exhibit some degree of connectedness when (1) students address real-world public problems (for example, clarifying a contemporary issue by applying statistical analysis in a report to the city council on the homeless); or (2) students use personal experiences as a context for applying knowledge (such as using conflict resolution techniques in their own school) (p. 11).

4) Substantive conversation

From "no substantive conversation" to "high-level substantive conversation", the fourth scale assesses the extent of talking to learn and understand the substance of a subject. In classes with little or no substantive conversation, interaction typically consists of a lecture with recitation in which the teacher deviates very little from delivering a preplanned body of information and set of questions; students routinely give very short answers. Teachers' list of questions, facts, and concepts tend to make the discourse choppy, rather than coherent; there is often little or no follow-up of student responses. Such discourse is the oral equivalent of fill-in-the-
blank or short-answer study questions (p. 11).

5) Social support for student achievement

The final scale involves the development of “high expectations, respect, and inclusion of all students in the learning process.”

Social support is high in classes when the teacher conveys high expectations for all students, including that it is necessary to take risks and try hard to master challenging academic work, that all members of the class can learn important knowledge and skills, and that a climate of mutual respect among all members of the class contributes to achievement by all. "Mutual respect" means that students with less skill or proficiency in a subject are treated in ways that encourage their efforts and value their contributions (p. 12).

**Critical Thinking**

Critical thinking has been defined in a variety of ways over the years, According to Lewis & Smith (1993), “Critical thinking has been assigned at least three distinct meanings: (a) critical thinking as problem solving, (b) critical thinking as evaluation or judgment, and (c) critical thinking as a combination of evaluation and problem solving (p. 134).” However Facione (2007) offers an expert consensus outlining “critical thinking to a purposeful, self-regulatory judgment, which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriiological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based (p. 21).”
**Description**

Description is the first step in the process of critiquing art (Feldman 1973). It is during the description process that the critic makes observations about what they see. These observations must be objective with no inferences or expressions of personal opinion, listing only what is seen “without using value words such as ‘beautiful’ or ‘ugly’” (Payne 2008, p. 1).

What is the written description on the label or in the program about the work? What is the title and who is (are) the artist(s)? When and where was the work created? Describe the elements of the work (i.e., line movement, light, space). Describe the technical qualities of the work (i.e., tools, materials, instruments). Describe the subject matter. What is it all about? Are there recognizable images (p.1)?

**Higher Order Thinking**

Lewis & Smith (1993) propose the term higher order thinking to encompass problem solving, critical thinking, creative thinking and decision-making.

A clear and comprehensive definition of higher order thinking has the potential to help educators transcend the split between the sciences' "problem solving" and the humanities' "critical thinking." To this end, the following definition is offered: *Higher order thinking occurs when a person takes new information and information stored in memory and interrelates and/or rearranges and extends this information to achieve a purpose or find possible answers in perplexing
A variety of purposes can be achieved through higher order thinking as defined above. These would include: deciding what to believe; deciding what to do; creating a new idea, a new object, or an artistic expression; making a prediction; and solving a non-routine problem (p. 136).

**Interpretation**

Interpretation is the third step of the critiquing process (Feldman 1987). During this part of the critique the critic expresses their opinion about what they think the artist is trying to say by describing what it means to them, how it makes them feel or what expressive qualities the piece has. The critic should ask the following questions:

What expressive language would you use to describe the qualities (i.e., tragic, ugly, funny)? Does the work remind you of other things you have experienced (i.e., analogy or metaphor)? How does the work relate to other ideas or events in the world and/or in your other studies? (Payne 2008, p1)

**Judgment or Theory**

Judgment or theory is the final step in the art critique process (Feldman 1973). During the judgment the critics state their own opinion about the work of art. They access whether the piece is a success or failure by asking the following questions:

What qualities of the work make you feel it is a success or failure? What criteria can you list to help others judge this work? How original is the work? Why do you feel this work is original or not original? (Payne 2008, p.1)
Limitations of the Study

One of the primary limitations of this study was time. The project was conducted during a relatively short time span, about twelve weeks including time missed due to inclement weather, I believe a project of this type would have far greater implications if it was applied for a full school year. More time was needed for the development, application and practice of the concepts that were taught.

Another limitation to this study is generalizability. My research findings were gathered as a part of an investigative qualitative inquiry that limits their generalizability. Conclusions drawn are dependent on the mix of students, size of class, and student knowledge about art, therefore the findings may not be applicable to all art classes. While I collected sufficient data to support my hypothesis, a premise regarding the behavior of that data could be formulated to make it generalizable to similar circumstances. However, the techniques I used to guide my students through the exploration of art criticism and writing about art may not be applicable for less advanced classes.

By conducting my study with more advanced art students I may have created yet another limitation since the advanced nature of the class implies that they are more dedicated to art than the general art classes.
A final limitation was class size. The class I studied consisted of only five students. Because the class was small the techniques I employed may not be applicable or practical for larger classes.

Summary

In summary, this is a mixed methods inquiry study conducted in an advanced art class located in a southeast Ohio public high school to determine if the application of art criticism practices in their sketchbook will improve students writing and thinking about their art.

This study is a direct result of a trend I have observed in students enrolled in my advanced art classes over the years. Students demonstrated the artistic skills necessary to produce the required art, however, they lack the ability to think and write critically about their work.

This observation and the fact that students are hesitant to talk about art and uncomfortable with oral critiques led me to consider combining the use of art criticism practices within the context of their sketchbook.

They performed as independent thinkers when it came to their artwork, but when asked to write or talk critically about their art or the art of others they were uncomfortable and at a
loss. Students have not been conditioned in the general classroom to do the kind of independent and personal thinking necessary to write critically about their work.

Through the use of art criticism as a part of their daily sketchbook procedures I plan to show how writing about art will not only engage students in critical thinking about their art but also impact their ability to articulate those ideas in a more meaningful way, improve their journaling performance and develop their ability to think critically about their art.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In order to support my research question of the impact that reflective journals have on student thinking about art, I examined the writings of art educators who have shown interest in aspects related to the subject and weighed the information I found in light of my own concerns and situation. Going through this process certain issues emerged in my mind that would be necessary to address.

The first issue was the term art criticism. Examining available research and thought about my experiences in studio art critiques, it came to attention that my goals for teaching art criticism up to the beginning of my study had been heavily influenced by the studio critiques this researcher had participated in while in college. Simply defining art criticism would not be enough it would be necessary to thoroughly explore the differences between the studio art critique, teaching art criticism and professional art criticism. Through both my readings and personal experience it was discovered that they are different yet in some ways similar; and, because of this ambiguity, each question would need to be addressed individually.

The next issues that emerged were to question why we do art criticism in the first place and subsequently why art educators should teach art criticism? Then, in order to establish a connection between art criticism and the sketchbook or visual journal, it
would be necessary to research issues on writing about art, as well as the history of the sketchbook itself and the role of the sketchbook journal within the classroom.

**Defining Art Criticism**

*Studio Art Critique verses Teaching Art Criticism*

Barrett (1988) pointed out there are several differences between the goals identified by professors of studio art for conducting critiques and those commonly outlined in art education literature for teaching art criticism. The main difference between the goals of studio professors and those of the selected art education literature is one of scope.

The studio professors generally used the critique to achieve a specific goal, namely the improvement of the art making of their students. In art education literature, however, criticism is commonly considered to be more than a means: it is considered a subject matter in itself and as subject matter, criticism is presented as a body of knowledge which has a logic, various recommended procedures, and a variety of goals (p. 25).

To make his point Barrett studied 19 studio art professors and reviewed the writings of three noted art educators, E.B. Feldman, L.C. Chapman and R.A. Smith.

“Feldman (1973) defines art criticism broadly as talk about art, talk which is informed and organized for the sharing of discoveries about art and the human condition (p. 22).” This informed and organized talk about art teaches students the value of not only looking
longer at art, but also more carefully, and more intelligently.

The goals of these activities are to gain both “the ability to read the visual environment and the learning of skills needed to choose among competing values,” as well as its “character-building through learning how to take chances in offering interpretations and judgments about art (p. 22).” He went on to observe Feldman’s outline of a compatible set of goals in which the four steps for art criticism: description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment, were identified.

Barrett pointed out the study and practice of art criticism by children is also advocated by Chapman (1978), who believes “that children gain the ability to respond to works of art and the environment, become acquainted with subtle forms of feeling and more challenging images than they are likely to examine by themselves, and learn how experts examine works of art (p. 23).” Chapman, he explained “offers several approaches to criticism including those she refers to as deductive, inductive, and empathic. She details each one of these approaches and stresses the critical procedure of interpretation more than the procedure of evaluation, excluding evaluation totally from the empathic approach (p. 23).”

“In his approach to criticism Smith (1973) distinguishes between two basic sets of activities he calls exploratory aesthetic criticism and argumentative aesthetic criticism (p. 23).” Smith outlines sub-activities that include: description, analysis, characterization,
and interpretation, but advocates that “the ultimate aim of art criticism is the furtherance of humane values (p. 23).”

Barrett contends that while the three authors he studied had differing descriptions of art criticism they were harmonious in their agreement about the broader goals of teaching art criticism.

Each values criticism as a means to understand and appreciate art; each recommends methods and procedural directives or general principles for engaging in criticism; each recommends some familiarity with the enterprise of professional art criticism; each takes the objects of criticism to be more than specific artworks and includes the visual environment; and each fosters the development of a critical social consciousness through art criticism (p. 23).

Summarizing the study he conducted of the 19 studio art professors, Barrett found that the studio classroom critique is inescapably connected to the student artwork. A number of the professors clearly associate the critique with judgment and a majority felt that criticism is defined as judgment. The art educators, on the other hand, provided clear definitions of criticism, which he described as “considerably more inclusive (p. 25).”

Barrett (1989) simplifies the inclusiveness of art criticism by outlining the criticism process made up of four steps: description, interpretation, evaluation and theory. These basic procedures can be reduced to an equal number of simple questions that can be used
with students as a matrix to help them see how professional critics go about criticizing art. Those questions are simply: “1) What is here? 2) What is it about? 3) How good is it? 4) Is it art (p. 32)?”

Barrett (1997) urged art educators to move their student critiques away from the traditional studio form and closer to the art criticism practiced by professional critics. Criticism, he explains, “is informed discourse about art.” Its purpose is to “increase understanding and appreciation of art (p. 5).” He contends that studio art critiques are different from professional criticism because they are an amalgamation of criticism that is generally conducted for the artist whose work is being judged.

**Professional Art Criticism**

“Professional critics write about art, and they write for their audience… They write to inform their readers about artists, exhibitions, and artworks (Barrett 1997, p. 5).” While artists may read what they have written, “the critics do not write for the artist (p. 5).”

Professional art critics approach art as the conveyor of not only personal expression but cultural attitudes. According to Anderson and Milbrandt (2005) the art critic looks at works of art in context to see what they tell us about the human condition examining aesthetic, formal qualities and symbolic, meaningful qualities in order to “approach art as both personal expression and cultural artifacts (p. 100).”
This form of art criticism is arrived at within a cultural context and is based on evidence gathering. Through this process, the critic offers an informed opinion determined by what they are looking for and by their own beliefs, values, and point of view. Professional criticism is generally driven by aesthetics. For the most part the critic consciously subscribes to one or more of the aesthetic theories (contextualism or formalism, for example), which will determine what they are seeking, how they look at a work, what they discover, and the value they give to the piece. The theory they subscribe to will therefore result in different findings (p. 100).

However, similar to art educators, critics on all levels (professional or not) will ultimately boil their examination of a work of art down to asking the same four basic questions: “What is this? What is it for? What does it mean? What is it worth (p. 100)?”

To stress the importance of mimicking the professional critic’s model for art criticism, Barrett (1997) observed:

If students are to learn about art in all its multicultural variations-learning through art history, aesthetics, and criticism-good educational sense says that critiques need to be more like the criticism that students will read the rest of their lives. If they are to become citizens who enjoy looking at, reading, and talking about art, they cannot experience criticism as negatively judgmental or prescriptive. If so, they might finish school believing that art is primarily about technique and skill rather than meaning, and they might forever wrongly believe
that art criticism is making fun of artists (p. 5).

**Why Do We Do Art Criticism?**

Like Barrett (1997), Anderson and Milbrandt (2005) contend that we do art criticism “because we want to know the meaning and significance of artworks. Because art reflects human values and understanding at a deeper level we engage in criticism to understand our own existence (p. 99).”

Ragans (2000) points out that through art criticism we learn to use the language of visual arts. This knowledge she explains “is a key to understanding, appreciating and creating works of art (p. 2).” Art criticism helps us hone our perceptual skills while we learn about artists and the definitions of art.

History tells us that the form and content of art and other expressive visual artifacts have been, since the beginning of man, our primary means of sending “messages to ourselves about who we are, what we believe and what we feel (Anderson and Milbrandt 2005, p. 99).” Art criticism is the means through which we can learn to interpret and understand these messages.

Art is usually not discursive. It does not explain its feelings like written or spoken communication, “rather, it is presentational: it presents us with a feeling, a visual world view, suggesting or implying what is or what may be but not giving an explanation (p.
99).” This is because the connotation of a work of art is transmitted by components that change and form its literal makeup. Because of this the meaning of art is often ambiguous and difficult to understand.

If we reduce art to an abstract formula it can be described as ‘content carried by aesthetic form that together make up the expressive presentational meaning and quality of the work (p.99).” To clarify this formula Anderson and Milbrandt create a visual image by comparing content to the figure of a horse; aesthetic form to the horse being depicted expressionistically through the use of overstated form and random colors; that when combined create the meaning and quality of the piece: its elegance, power or speed (p.99).

Thus, the only way for us to understand any work of art is through what Barrett (1989) calls the repeated practice of art criticism.

**Why Should Art Educators Teach Art Criticism?**

Many art teachers regard critique as essential to their teaching because it aids students in the understanding and evaluation of not only visual works of art, but visual culture and their personal responses to them (Barrett 1997).

In addition, regardless of the expertise of the students, critique can be a valuable tool because students can not only learn but also apply the vocabulary of art (House 2005).
Feldman (1968) noted that everything an art teacher does, art appreciation, studio instruction, etc., is essentially art criticism. “That is, art teachers describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate works of art during the process of instruction (p. 24).”

Eisner (1972) also values art criticism as an important part of art instruction. He contends that a statement made by a student about visual art is one major way to gain information about their critical abilities (p. 222).

Anderson and Milbrandt add:

Artistic expression and the style that transmits it, is communication, intentional or unintentional, from the artist to other people about some aspect of his or her being, seeing, and valuing. Art critics see art as personal and cultural artifacts that shed light on the human condition. As we attempt to understand ourselves, and others through art, we need to consider context-the conditions in which a work or artifact is made, used and valued (p. 99).

Artworks also reflect a collective soul, sensibility, and culture, because an artist is part of his or her place and time. When viewed together, the works of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, have many differences, but “despite those differences also share many qualities; in fact they are very similar to each other in the larger scheme of world art (p. 100).”
In spite of their individuality Mexican artists, like Rivera and Kahlo, cannot help being Mexican and Japanese artists cannot help being Japanese. “Artist’s culture, place, and time are a huge factor in their work. Through their work artists speak about their culture (p. 100).” …and culture in turn speaks through the artist.

“Artwork is never only its surface qualities; its qualities and its style always refer intellectually and emotionally to something beyond themselves. Artists always tell us something about what they think and how they feel, and their thoughts and feelings arise in part from their particular place and time (p.100).”

My students will frequently state: “This painting doesn’t represent anything, I just did it,” What they don’t realize is because they are who they are -American teen-agers living in Appalachia Ohio in the year 2008 - their work, no matter how they try to deny it, reflects their thoughts, place and time. The incorporation of art criticism within their art curriculum will help them not only realize that but will aid in raising their social consciousness.

According to Anderson and Milbrandt (2005) the primary goal of educational art criticism is to guide students in their understanding and evaluation of both individual works of art and visual culture, as well as to help them in forming their own responses to them. “Beyond that, the goal is for students to engage in art criticism in order to find meaning for their own lives and to understand the authentic meaning of others (p. 101).”
Their artworks and other expressive visual works not only become “cultural statements expressing shared assumptions, premises, forms, and ways of doing things,” but also work to “illuminate the artist’s individual values and sensibilities and so are also personal artifacts (p. 100).”

Since art ultimately sheds light on our human condition “the purpose of art criticism is to understand and appreciate art as visual culture in order to understand and appreciate people-ourselves and others (p. 100).”

**Writing about Art**

Why, with a vocabulary of visual imagery at their fingertips, would art educators feel the need to teach their students to write?

Artists and art students write about art in order to clarify experiences and to account for responses to things that excite or frustrate them. The written response, as does the visual response, demands that we more carefully examine what is before us or within so that we may translate it to word, image or symbol. It is that second or third look that moves to a deeper response. The outcome or product provides a forum for us to share that response with an audience (Haust 1998. p. 29)

In addition, with growing disappointment about the writing ability of high school graduates, educators in all areas are realizing that writing instruction can no longer be confined to the English classroom (Kelly 2008).
Fortunately, as teachers in various disciplines have added writing to their courses, they have discovered that writing assignments bring great benefits. Not only do they enhance students' general writing ability, but they also increase both the understanding of content while learning the specific vocabulary of the disciplines (p. 1).

An essential component in learning is after all communication. Throughout our lives we use many types of languages to interact with our environment and communicate with those around us. Those languages according to Haust (1989) include movement, speech and imagery.

The spoken word competes with other forms of communication throughout childhood and, as the word is more universal and a more socially interactive language, speech becomes the language of choice as a child learns and grows. The written word becomes the externalization of speech and becomes an essential means of communication as a child develops an understanding of the structure and organization of writing. The visual image, often in the form of random marks, was the child’s first documentary language and is often pushed aside in favor of more acceptable and universal languages of communication, speech and writing, which provide the child more encouragement and support from parents and teachers (p. 23).

According to Haust, a student entering a studio art class “with a lifetime of experience and skill in verbal and written communication” is often as uncomfortable as a traveler in
a foreign country.

It is an experience that initially places a block in the eventual success of a student who desires to communicate through a visual medium. The problem lies with an unfamiliarity of the language of the visual arts and not with the lack of ability or lack of potential to achieve success….The solution to the problem is a gradual and transitional withdrawal from the dependency on the written word as the only means of communication toward a comfortable familiarity with the language of the visual arts (p. 23-24).

Through writing, art students can learn that the written word evolves into a medium of communication that will support and complement their visual response as well as foster deeper thought about their work (Haust 1998). Writing is also a tool that helps students learn to think on their own and enhance their critical thinking skills (Zehr 1998).

The artistic process itself involves more than just the creation of art. As Paul Klee wrote, “Art does not reproduce the visible: it makes things visible.”

“It also means observation, reacting, reading, critiquing, writing and, in many ways, learning to see all over again (Haust 1998, p. 31)” In addition, writing reflective responses to works of art can lead to the growth and progress of the student’s work, as well as their thinking about and understanding of art in general.
According to Ernst (1997), compiling written entries within the context of a sketch journal enables students to make connections in their learning across the curriculum through drawing and writing. Journals, she explains, supply students with an instrument that assists them in their observations and provides them with a convenient place to not only practice both their drawing and writing but, take notes, express themselves, solve problems and think in both a pictorial and written manner.

Thinking (McGinley 1989) is an underlying element of all literacy learning and when combined with writing and reading instruction, learners are engaged in a greater society of experiences that lead to both better reasoning and higher-level thinking.

Tierney and Shanahan, (1991) and Cooper (1997) state that in view of this fact, thinking is a critical part of meaning construction and classrooms that aggressively promote meaning construction through writing and reading will produce better thinkers.

The authors contend that writing should be an integral part of all content areas in order for students to demonstrate their response to knowledge taught, concepts achieved and the understanding they gain through writing.

Writing in art provides students with an opportunity to critically analyze and evaluate artwork. Not dry factual analysis but personal analysis and in doing so will not only find out something about the art, but about themselves both as individuals and in their social context (Anderson and Milbrandt p. 173-174).
“As each form of expression complements and enriches the other, students develop a richer and more extensive vocabulary to learn, know and express themselves as artists and scholars (Haust 1998 p. 35).”

**Sketchbook or Visual Journal History**

“Though the instructional advantages of journal writing in art classrooms are only beginning to be understood and accepted, the journal in the artist's studio is certainly nothing new. Artists have long recognized the need for a place, alternative to the canvas, for their rehearsal of ideas (Stout 1993, p. 39).”

The sketchbook or visual journal has existed throughout the history of art. It has and continues an integral tool of artist serving as a place where images can be recorded and reflective thoughts jotted down (McTighe 2007). Great thinkers and inventors like Leonardo da Vinci and Thomas Edison sketched and noted their thoughts about everything from flying machines to light bulbs. Da Vinci had a visual journal with him everywhere he went to record his ideas, impressions, and observations. Some seven thousand pages of his journals still exist. They contain not only his own personal ideas, but thoughts and observations of individuals and scholars he admired, his personal finance records, letters, insights on personal problems, anatomical, botanical and geographical studies, and reflections on flight, water, drawings and paintings.
McTighe (2007) outlined a random but enlightening list of artists throughout history who utilized the sketchbook journal. That list and a brief description of the artist’s use of the journal follows:

**Leonardo da Vinci** (1452-1519: Italian), had filled numerous sketchbooks with several thousand pages of drawings, diagrams and written notes of things he observed and studied, and many other musings about the world.

**Mary Cassatt** (1844-1926: American) was inspired by family and children. She created numerous sketches that give insight into her interests, thinking, and influences on her art.

**Edvard Munch** (1863-1944: Norwegian) recorded ideas and sketches for paintings, and used his journal to further develop and refine old ideas.

**Pablo Picasso** (1881-1973: Spanish) produced 178 sketchbooks, often using his sketchbooks to explore themes and make compositional studies until he found the right idea and subject for a larger painting on canvas.

**Reginald Marsh** (1898-1954: American) kept over two hundred sketchbooks. Most contain variations on his favorite themes - street scenes in New York City, bather’s at Coney Island, and burlesque houses.
**Henry Moore** (1898-1986: British), a sculptor, filled one of his sketchbooks with drawings of sheep that often wandered by the window outside his studio.

**Isabel Bishop** (1902-1988: American), whose papers include eight spiral-bound sketchbooks small enough to be held in the hand, found inspiration and an endless source of subject matter in everyday urban life.

**Frida Kahlo** (1907-1954: Mexican) recorded personal thoughts and feelings in diaries and sketchbooks that were the basis for many of her self-portraits and paintings.

**Fairfield Porter** (1907-1975: American) said: “I draw but they’re (his drawings) to be for my own use for painting....I think some day I might make a painting of this, or I already have the painting in mind when I make drawings. Usually what I’m thinking of is a painting eventually.”

**Romare Bearden** (1911-1988: African American) used his sketchbooks to draw, explore and develop his unique style of working in collage.

**Eric Fischl** (1948- present: American) described visual journaling as an adventurous, shrewd, alert and relentless process where there are no rules.
Dan Eldon (1970-1993: British/American), a photographer who was stoned to death at the age of 22 while documenting what was happening in Somalia, left a record of his deepest thoughts and feelings in a series of journals (p. 2).

“Scientists, artists, mathematicians, lawyers, engineers—all 'think' with pen to paper, chalk to blackboard, hands on terminal keys. For most of us, developed thinking is seldom possible any other way (Fulwiler, 1983, p. 5).”

Artists throughout the world continue to explore visual journaling as a way to record evidence of the creative process, and to incorporate practice and theory (Bell 2008).

Defining the Sketchbook or Visual Journal

The sketchbook is typically considered a place designed solely for drawing (Sanders-Bustle (2008). “If you drew well you, you participated with a certain level of confidence. If you did not, the experience was somewhat frustrating and for some, a place to which they never returned (p. 9).”

Educators understand “the magic of the sketchbook as a space for ideas to take shape, imaginations to wander, and drawing skills to be practiced. Blecher and Jaffee (1998) suggest that sketchbooks can become liberatory tools for “widening the learning circle: to include marginalized learners (p. 9).”
Combined with the concept of the written journal, various terms, including sketchbook journal, visual journal, visual/verbal journal have been coined and all refer to the concept of doing art and writing reflections in the same book.

Samders-Bustle (2008) put forth the concept that while the use of sketchbooks, journals and reflective writing in art education is nothing new

a contemporary shift from a modernist to a postmodern paradigm challenges educators to revise and revisit practices to include experiences that are not solely about formal content and the development of art skills but those which cross disciplinary boundaries, encourage conceptual development, and foster creative and critical inquiry, all within the context of an ever-changing contemporary world (p. 9).

The visual journal is “a place to reflect, write personal thoughts and visually record ideas, plans and experiments (McTighe 2007).”

She explains that the visual journal may be considered as “an on-going, process-oriented work (of art) that combines visual imagery with verbal notions (p3).” The journal itself develops into a work of art as its creator starts to embellish written entries by considering the design and layout of the page and enhancing it with collage, illustrations, and color “finding inventive ways to visually elaborate the book (p. 3).”
A Grauer & Naths (1998) contend that through visual journaling one can discover the thought process that is crucial in a world that is in unbroken change.

Bell (2008) agrees stating, “visual journals serve as a record of how we think, which moves us out of the world of reflex and allows us to look beyond the immediate situation and pay closer attention to the process.”

**Role of the Sketchbook Journal within the Classroom**

The use of sketchbook journals in the teaching of writing has had compelling and far-reaching effects. Besides the improvement of writing skills, “journals also work to change that student's enduring attitudes, values and sense of personal identity. Ideas, feelings and insights, kept in journals offer us not only a clue to the richness of our imagination, but insight into our very being (Blake 2008).”

According to Blake, her personal experience with students who have a “dread of words” has proven that when journals are adapted, and direction and activities including visual images are provided the “flow of words increases”.

McTighe (2007) feels the purpose of a sketchbook journal is “to introduce students to an integral part of the artistic/creative process and engage them in practicing these processes by providing a place for recording information and ideas (p. 3);” a place for experimenting with media, taking risks with new ideas, reflecting on their process, and responding to assignments or events experienced within their lives.
“Visual journaling is a process that encourages students to get to know themselves on a deeper, intrinsic level. This is an effective way to break down walls of communication by using the visual journaling process as a form of self-exploration and visual communication (Bell 2008).”

“During this process, the experiences gained are not only valuable in helping students establish connections to the art-making process, but also towards literacy (Bell 2008).”

The justification for the use of the sketchbook/journal within the art classroom is evident if one recalls…. (Stouts 1993)

the intermingling of words and images in the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci; the intimate, self-interpretive notes of Frida Kahlo; the expressive sketches and extensive dialogues in Charles Burchfield's journals; and the reflective writings of a multitude of individual artists like Audrey Flack, Kathe Kollwitz, Paul Klee, and Frank Lloyd Wright. Given its established heuristic role in critical thinking and writing across the disciplines and the time-honored tradition of the journal in the artist's studio, it seems most appropriate that this forum for individual, expressive thinking should be a natural fit for the contemporary art curriculum (p. 40)

“Succinctly, writing is fundamental to thinking in all fields. What is unique about learning in the visual arts is that students have at their disposal two viable realms for generating, developing and clarifying thought: the visual and the verbal (Stout, p 42).
The incorporation of the sketchbook/journal into daily art activities, “students can capitalize on a uniquely efficient mode of learning. Through participating in a dialectical interplay between visual and verbal thinking, art students engage in one of the most powerful forums for developing critical consideration and constructing a personal knowledge of art (Stouts, p 42)”.

**Summary**

In order to determine if the use of art criticism as a part of students daily sketchbook procedures would not only engage them in critical thinking about their art but also impact their ability to articulate those ideas in a more meaningful way, improve their journaling performance and develop their ability to think critically about their art, I had to first weigh the information found through my research against my own concerns and situation. As I went through this process certain questions emerged in my mind that were necessary to address.

The first issue was the term art criticism. There are many different types of art criticism however I felt for the purpose of this study it was necessary to explore the differences between the studio art critique, teaching art criticism, and professional art criticism. The next issues that emerged were to question why we do art criticism in the first place and subsequently why art educators should teach art criticism? In addition, the connection between art criticism and the sketchbook journal was established through researching not
only writing about art, but also the history of the sketchbook and the role of the sketchbook within the classroom.

In this chapter, I summarized existing research that fell into the categories discussed to support the premise that the use of reflective journals will improve student thinking about art.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Purpose and Research Question

This mixed methods inquiry took place within the confines of my high school art classroom to determine if the application of art criticism practices in their sketchbook will improve students writing and thinking about their art.

Students enrolled in my advanced art classes have demonstrated the artistic skills necessary to produce the required art for the course; however, they lack the ability to think and write critically about their work when it came to critique.

Research Design and Theoretical Stance

This study is a triangulation design of mixed methods inquiry utilizing case study. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006), “In a triangulation design, the researcher simultaneously collects both quantitative and qualitative data, compares the results, and then uses those findings to see whether they validate each other (p.443)”. Case study research, as outlined by Stokrocki (1993), depicts the personal and social complexity of a problem. It is a quest for an understanding of an idiosyncratic, complex case (p. 33-55). Because qualitative inquiry is made up of a “systematic process of describing, analyzing and interpreting insights discovered in everyday life (p. 34),” and quantitative inquiry relies on the measurement of the variable being studied along a scale that indicates how much of the variable is present (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006, p.190), I feel a mixed methods inquiry it is well suited for my purposes.
I have taken a constructivist paradigm as my philosophical stance. “Constructivists believe in pluralistic, interpretive, open-ended, and contextualized (e.g., sensitive to place and situation) perspectives toward reality (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 125-126).” It is based on the meaning generated through researcher and participant interactions. The constructivist model suggests a variety of ways in which reality can be experienced. Realities in themselves are created by the subjects involved, as well as by the circumstances in which they are studied. As a constructivist researcher I used naturalistic qualitative methods to acquire knowledge including Pre- and Post-study questionnaires, detailed observation, direct participation, informal interviewing, and reflective journal.

**Context of the Study**

This study took place within an art classroom setting. Through the use of Action Research, I worked with the students enrolled in a high school located in a small rural community in Southeastern Ohio. All of the students resided in an economically depressed county designated by the Federal Government as being a part of a 200,000-square-mile region called Appalachia.

**Participants**

The five participants were all members of one of the school’s advanced art classes. Although they were all on the same grade level, they were from a variety of academic levels. The study originally consisted of six students however, upon the recommendation of my thesis committee one individual was removed.
The population and ethnic summary of the school district follows: county, 28,241; community, 6,704; white, 97.5%; black, 1.1%; American Indian and Alaska Native, .2%; Asian, .2%; Hispanic or Latino origin, .6%; and persons reporting two or more races, 1.0%.

The median household income within the district was $36,440; per capita money income, $16,095; persons below poverty, 13.3%; less than $10,000, 1,359; $10,000 to $19,999, 1,583; $20,000 to $29,999, 1,748; $30,000 to $39,999, 1,529; 100% to 149% of poverty level, 2,592; 150% to 199% of poverty level, 2,765; 200% of poverty level or more, 18,379.

**Data Collection Methods**

My data collection began on December 10, 2007 and involved the students enrolled in one of my 2007-2008 advanced art classes. Between the start date and the culmination of my data collection on March 20, 2008, the students were involved in a variety of classroom and sketchbook exercises designed to assess the impact that reflective journals have on the students’ thinking about art. My data analysis was done in March and April 2008.

Data for this study was gathered using a variety of data collection methods as a form of triangulation. These methods included: pre and Post-study questionnaires, detailed
observation, direct participation, informal interviews, reflective journal, and the student
sketchbook journals.

Data Analysis

Each student filled out a pre-project questionnaire (Appendix A) at the beginning of the
study and a post-project questionnaire (Appendix B) at the conclusion of the project.
Responses to both questionnaires were recorded at the conclusion of the study.

Data acquired from the students’ sketchbook journal entries was gathered on an ongoing
basis at the close of each assignment. At the culmination of each assignment I scanned
the artwork and each student’s written response to the work. After scanning the work and
retyping the critique, I assessed the writing using the Sketchbook Journal Rubric
(Appendix C). Then I recorded the scores on charts designed for each category I planned
to monitor (description, analysis, interpretation, judgment, elements of art, and elements
of design). The results of the completed charts were transformed into graphs that
illustrate each student’s growth during the project.

Throughout the project, I observed the students as they reacted to the project and
interacted with each other, and recorded these observations in a reflective journal. This
document also housed notes on my participation and informal interviews I conducted
with the participants. At the close of the project I went through the journal and recorded
details and patterns I saw emerging.
Standards of Quality

Validity and trustworthiness was addressed within this research in the following manner. Trustworthiness was created utilizing the structure outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The authors point out that in qualitative research, the goal of trustworthiness is to support the argument of the researcher by proving that they are “worth-paying attention to” (p.290) and outlined the four trustworthiness criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability that I used in my study.

I utilized techniques of Pre- and Post-study questionnaires, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, informal interviews, reflective journaling, triangulation, and the student sketchbook journal and recorded the data generated using rich, thick description to produce an audit trail and project credibility. Outlined below is a description of how each technique was implemented.

- Pre- and Post-study questionnaires were given to each participant at the beginning and end of the project. The student responses were recorded in detail and compared to other data gathered.
- Prolonged engagement was established through the researcher’s ongoing involvement as a participant observer throughout the entire project.
- Persistent observation was demonstrated through the diligent recording of the data produced through the pre- and post-project questionnaires, observations, interviews, and in the student sketchbook journals.
• Informal interviews and discussions were conducted with the participants and information recorded in my reflective journal.

• A reflective journal was maintained throughout the study. The journal began as a repository for notes, dates, and thoughts, but became a project diary. It was there that I jotted down literature references, frustrations and successes, and a chronological historical account of not only the study, but also advisor correspondences and thesis production.

• Triangulation was likewise exhibited throughout the data collection and data analysis phases of the study. During the data collection, different types of data, including pre and post project questionnaire responses; researcher observations, interviews, sketchbook journal entries and other writing documents were collected.

• Information recorded by the participants in their student sketchbook journal was recorded throughout the project and the writings assessed using a rubric.

• Rich, thick description was utilized to report in detail and precision the data collected during the project allowing judgments about transferability to be made by readers of this thesis.

Project materials, handouts and copies of PowerPoint presentations prepared and presented during the project are included in this paper’s appendix.
Data Documentation and Management

This study was made up of a series of seven writing assignments accompanied by six lectures. Following each writing assignment, I collected the student’s sketchbook journals, scanned both the artwork and writings and then analyze the student writings using Sketchbook Journal Rubric (Appendix C).

The recorded information was then placed in a thesis project folder I created to hold my project documentation. The folder, organized by student, contained plastic sleeves into which I filed the items scanned from the sketchbook journals, my assignments, handouts, notes and completed Sketchbook Journal Rubrics.

The information gleaned from the rubrics for each writing assignment was mapped through a series of spreadsheets I created. At the end of each assignment, I would enter the information into the spreadsheet and that information would later be converted into charts for the purpose of analysis. Those charts examined all four actions of art criticism: description, analysis, interpretation and judgment, separately as well as the student’s use of the Elements of Design and the Principles of Art. This information permitted me to look at the participants as a group or individually (example Table 1).
Table 1

*Art Criticism Description*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Student 1</th>
<th>Student 2</th>
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The results of the completed spreadsheets were transformed into graphs that illustrate each student’s growth during the project.

Throughout the project, I observed the students as they reacted to the project and interacted with each other, and recorded these observations in a reflective journal. This document also housed notes on my participation and informal interviews I conducted with the participants. At the close of the project, I went through the journal and recorded details and patterns I saw emerging.

**Summary**

This mixed methods study was conducted in one of my advanced art classes to determine if the application of art criticism practices in their sketchbooks will improve students writing and thinking about their art.
The study was a direct result of a trend I observed over nine years of teaching advanced art. Students in the classes consistently demonstrated the artistic skills necessary to produce the required work for the course, however lacked the ability to think and write critically about their art.

During the study, I involved my targeted class in a variety of classroom and sketchbook exercises designed to assess the impact that reflective journals have on the students’ thinking about art.

Data for the study was gathered using a variety of data collection methods as a form of triangulation. These methods included: Pre- and Post-study questionnaires, detailed observations, direct participation, informal interviews, reflective journal writings, and the student sketchbook journals.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Study

Through the use of art criticism as a part of their regular sketchbook procedures, I attempted to show how writing about art will not only engage students in critical thinking about their art, but also impact their ability to articulate those ideas in a more meaningful way, improve their journaling performance and develop their ability to think critically about their art.

Since the students enrolled in my study class were also in the process of completing their regular studio course work, the sketchbook journal assignments were not addressed on a daily basis in the class. The seven sketchbook journal writing assignments, six art criticism lectures and numerous discussions took place as both time and class schedules permitted. Because the study was conducted during the months of December through March, one element I had not anticipated heavily impacted my project, the weather. Classes were either shortened or canceled several times do to inclement weather. We had two-hour delays that shortened class periods, early dismissals and full days lost due to adverse weather.

The sketchbook journal writing assignments, art criticism lectures and discussions were planned to increase the participant’s aesthetic valuing, critical and higher order thinking skill and knowledge of art criticism, as well as their ability to write and think about art.
Assignment #1

Sketchbook

To establish the entry level writing ability of each of my study participants I started the study on Monday, December 10, 2007 with a simple sketchbook assignment. The students were to draw a portrait using light and shadow (Appendix D).

The students were asked to limit their media to either graphite pencil, charcoal or colored pencil and to draw a self-portrait or a portrait of a friend or a family member. They were also to use strong gradation and a sense of form in their piece. The drawing project was due at the beginning of the class on December 12. No other instruction was given at that time.

Writing

At the beginning of the class on Wednesday, December 12 students were asked to get out their sketchbooks. They were instructed to critique the work they had created for the December 10th assignment using a written format. The writing was to go directly into their sketchbook, but no other information or expectations were related to them.

When the students had completed the written critique, I did not collect their work, but instead gave each of them an image of a contemporary work of art. Each student received a different image to discourage them from sharing ideas. Once again, I wanted to be able
to examine their entry level writing skills. After receiving their image, they were instructed to affix the image permanently in their sketchbook. No other instruction was given on that day.

Assignment #2

Writing

As frequently happens during the winter months, the next day was one laced with inclement weather. Although most teachers and staff were ready for class, many students living on the county’s side roads were on what is known as the school bus “Plan A” and thus were not in attendance. As a result, my already small class was even smaller. Undaunted by that setback, I made the second writing assignment anyway.

In that assignment the students were asked to once again write about art. This time, instead of a drawing they had created, they were to critique the artwork that had been given to them the day before. Once again they were not given any detailed instruction or assignment guidelines.

At the conclusion of the assignment, the sketchbooks, with both writing assignments (Assignment #1 and Assignment #2) completed, were to be turned in to me at the end of the class.
Following class, I scanned the artwork and written critiques for each student and assessed their writing performance (for both assignments) using the Sketchbook Journal Rubric (Appendix C). The recorded information was then placed in the thesis project folder. Students who were absent the day of the assignment were given the same instructions on the day they returned, their sketchbooks were then collected and written critiques assessed in the same manner.

I decided not to give the students any form of feedback for not only the two first assignments but to withhold my input through their fourth writing assignment as well. My decision to withhold feedback was now two-fold:

First, I wanted the students not to feel like they were being graded on the quality of work they produced. I wanted them to feel comfortable about writing in their sketchbooks and not hesitant about writing the wrong word or misspelling something.

Second, I wanted a clear view of where the students were in their individual writing ability so I could better gauge any progress they might make.

Information garnered from the rubric analysis of the first two writing assignments is compared (Figure 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) below.
The assessment of student understanding of description from the Sketchbook Journal Rubrics for the first two assignments revealed scores ranging between seven and 13 out of 20 possible points and averaging 10.1. These mid-range scores reveal that the students had some basic knowledge of how to describe a work of art (Figure 1).

![Diagram of Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Description in Assignments #1 and #2.]

*Figure 1:* Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Description in Assignments #1 and #2.

Likewise, the Sketchbook Journal Rubric scores in relation to the student’s understanding of the use of analysis in an art critique showed about the same amount of general knowledge of the process with scores ranging from seven to twelve and averaging slightly lower at 9.3 (Figure 2).
The Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis also revealed a slightly wider range of scores in the area of interpretation. Responses between six and fourteen were recorded indicating that while several students showed some knowledge of interpretation as it applied to a critique of art others had a lower understanding. Interestingly enough, Student #3 had the highest score (14) on Assignment #1, and one of the lowest scores (6) on Assignment #2 (Figure 3),
In the area of judgment, the numbers dropped consistently across the board with an average score of just eight. This drop in scores indicates a definite lack of knowledge in the area of judgment in art criticism. While students had some comfort level in the first three actions of art criticism, their comfort level with making a judgment, stating their opinion about a piece, assigning value to it, and stating if they feel the artwork is a success dropped measurably (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Interpretation in Assignments #1 and #2.
Figure 4: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Judgment in Assignments #1 and #2.

Likewise, the scores related to the students ability to utilize the Elements of Design and Principles of Art were also down. The rubric indicated that student knowledge of the Elements of Design was low with scores ranging between five and eleven and averaging only 7.1 (Figure 5).
Rubric scores indicating the student understanding and use of the Principles of Art averaged 8.9 with a spread of only three points on their critique ratings (Figure 6).
Lecture #1

What Is Art Criticism & Why Do We Do It?

On the first day of formal lecture I posed a two-part question to my students: What is art criticism and why do we do it? Their initial response was a more or less blank stare. Despite their previous studio critiques and experience they appeared not to have a clue how to answer.

I followed the question with a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix E) loaded with rich visual images that first outline what art criticism is and then delved in the vast realm of why we actually do art criticism.

The lesson was designed to mirror the five-component model of authentic instruction outlined by Newmann & Wehlage (1993). This lecture, along with the remaining writing assignments and lectures, was designed to stimulate higher-order thinking, depth of knowledge, connectedness to the world beyond the classroom, substantive conversation and social support for student achievement.

In this lesson the students learned that “the simplest answer is that art criticism is talking or writing about art, and we do it because we want to know the meaning and significance of artworks. Because art reflects human values and understanding, at a deeper level we engage in criticism to understand our own existence. (Anderson & Milbrandt 2005, p. 99).”
In addition, they learned that art is a window into the artist’s soul. “Even in indigenous cultures where originality is not valued, differences in skill, craft, and approach can be detected from one handmade artifact to the next. Clearly, artists put something of themselves into their work, so that the work suggests what they think, feel and believe (p. 100).”

In the past, my students would frequently state: “This painting doesn’t represent anything, I just did it.” What they didn’t realize then but are aware of now is because they are who they are - American teens-agers living in Appalachia Ohio in the year 2008 - their work, no matter how they try to deny it, reflects their thoughts, place and time.

They learned that art is never just its surface qualities. In the quality, the artist’s style always reveals something about the artist. “What they think and how they feel, and their thoughts and feelings arise in part from their particular place and time (p. 100).” Artworks are cultural artifacts that express “shared assumptions, premises, forms and ways of doing things (p. 100),” and are also personal artifacts shedding light on the human condition. For that reason, I explained, the purpose of criticism is “to understand and appreciate art as visual culture in order to understand and appreciate people - ourselves and others (p. 100).”
Assignment #3

Writing

Following the preceding lecture, I projected a single work of art onto the screen and asked the students to critique the piece. I did not give them any kind of in depth instruction on the four actions of critique, nor explain in any detail what my expectations were. We did not discuss the artwork before or during the writing portion of the assignment, however when the students had completed their writings we took time to discuss the piece and compare thoughts. I also gave them a printed copy of the work to glue into their sketchbook for future reference.

At the end of the class time I collected their sketchbook journals, scanned their writings and returned the books to them. After reading their critiques I once again assessed them using the Sketchbook Journal Rubric (Appendix C). All of this information was filed in the thesis project folder.

Information gained from the rubric analysis of student ability to write and think critically about art from the third writing assignment compared to that of the first two writing assignments showed a definite increase in the average score from a 10.1 on the first two assignments to 12.2 on the third writing assignment in the area of description (Figure 7). Patterns of inconsistency in student performance also began to emerge at this point of the study, noted specifically in the scores of student #3. This individuals rating was
significantly lower in assignment #3 than it had been for assignments #1 and #2, while scores for the balance of the students increased markedly.

Figure 7: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Description in Assignments #1 through #3.

Student knowledge of the use of analysis in art criticism also increased over three points from an average of 9.3 on the first two writing assignments to an average of 12.4 on the third assignment (Figure 8). Once again the performance of student #3 was noticeably lower than that of their peers on the assignment in question. That individual also scored lower on this assignment then they had on their first two critiques.
Figure 8: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Analysis in Assignments #1 through #3.

However, the trend of overall higher average scores in the area of description and analysis did not carry over into the actions of interpretation and judgment. The rubric revealed that student ability to interpret and judge dropped one or more points in their average scores. Interpretation dropped from an average of 10 to 9, while judgment dropped from an already low average of 8.1 to 7.8 (Figures 9 and 10).
Figure 9: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Interpretation in Assignments #1 through #3.

Figure 10: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Judgment in Assignments #1 through #3.
Student #3 remained consistent in their ability to interpret, but again fell below the balance of the class in their ability to judge.

The participant’s use of the Elements of Design and Principles of Art in their writing showed an increase according to the information gained from the rubric. Elements of Design scores gained 1.9-points from a 7.1 average for the first two assignments to an average of nine for the third assignment (Figure 11), while the increase in the use of the Principles of Art in the students writing also increased. That increase was from 8.9 to 9.2, an increase of only .3 (Figure 12).

Interestingly enough, student #3’s scores rallied significantly in this area registering the highest score in their demonstration of understanding of the Elements of Design, and tying for the highest score in their understanding of the Principles of Art.

![Figure 11: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Elements of Design in Assignments #1 through #3.](image-url)
Figure 12: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Principles of Art in Assignments #1 through #3.

Lecture #2

Some Assumptions of Art Criticism

The following day, after reviewing the concepts discussed from the previous lecture, we briefly looked at some of the assumptions of art criticism with the aid of another PowerPoint (Appendix F).

I pointed out that art critics look at works of art in an effort to study them in context to determine what they reveal about the human condition. “Critics examine aesthetic, formal qualities and symbolic, meaningful qualities and approach art as both personal expression and cultural artifacts (p. 100).”
I explained to the students that because professional critics adhere to a specific process when writing a critique it results in what Anderson & Milbrandt (2005) refer to as a “more or less informed opinion, based on evidence and arrived at within a cultural context (p. 100).” This led to a discussion of the four primary questions of art criticism.

What is this?

What does it mean?

What is it worth?

What is it for?

I told the participants that the basic criticism process then evolves naturally from answering the four questions and will be broken down for the purposes of this study, in future discussions, into the four areas outlined by art educators as: description, analysis, interpretation and judgment (theory), resulting in informed decision making.

**Assignment #4-1**

**Writing**

For the next assignment, I asked the students to go through an issue of *Art In America* and select an image that was of interest to them. They were instructed to cut the image out of the magazine and affix it into their sketchbook as they had with previous assignments.
They were later asked to write a critique of the piece using information they had gained through their previous writing assignments, discussions, lectures and instruction. As with past assignments, the sketchbook journals were collected, the images and writings scanned and later analyzed using the Sketchbook Journal Rubric (Appendix C). All documentation was placed in the thesis project folder.

Information gained from the rubric analysis of the writing assignment #4.1 compared to that of the first three writing assignments shows a definite increase in scores in the area of description from a 10.8-point average on the first three assignments to an 11.6-point average on the third writing assignment. While the combined average of the first three assignments was lower than the average for assignment #4.1, it was actually slightly lower (.6) than the average for assignment #3 (Figure 13). As an individual, student #3’s scores rallied significantly.

![Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Description in Assignments #1 through #4.1](image)

*Figure 13*: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Description in Assignments #1 through #4.1
Student knowledge of the use of analysis in art criticism remained the same as the previous assignment but showed an increase over the average of the first three assignments. The cumulative average for assignments #1 through #3 was 10.33-points while the average score for writing assignment #4.1 was 12.4-points (Figure 14). Once again, student #3’s scores had climbed to reflect a standing closer to that seen in assignments #1 and #2.

![Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Analysis in Assignments #1 through #4.1](image)

*Figure 14: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Analysis in Assignments #1 through #4.1*

Student writing for this assignment showed a .2-point increase in their use of interpretation in their writing over the previous exercise, but still fell .8-point short of the average (10 points) for the first two assignments (Figure 15). Student #3’s scores increased notably in this area, while student #5’s scores plummeted to their lowest level in this point of the study.
Figure 15: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Interpretation in Assignments #1 through #4.1

Student knowledge of the use of judgment in writing an art critique rose slightly from an average of eight points for the first three assignments to 8.4-points for assignment #4.1 (Figure 16). Once again student #3’s scores climbed radically to actually lead the class, while student #5 reflected an appreciable down turn.
The students’ use of the Elements of Design and Principles of Art in their writing showed another increase. Scores for the Elements of Design category gained 2.07 points from a 7.3-points average for the first three assignments. That figure increased to an average of 9.4-points for assignment #4.1 (Figure 17). In addition the use of the Principles of Art in the students writing increased a full point from 9.2-points in assignment #3 to 10.2-points in assignment #4.1 (Figure 18).
Figure 17: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Elements of Design in Assignments #1 through #4.1

Figure 18: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Principles of Art in Assignments #1 through #4.1
Lecture #3

Elements of Critique – Sketchbook Journaling

On the third lecture day, the two primary objectives of this study were set forth for the students through the use of a PowerPoint (Appendix G). They learned that they would be able to identify the basic elements in a piece of art through their writing and that in doing so they would enhance both their writing skills and their skills of observation as well as their ability to make decisions and think critically.

The class was provided with a handout that outlined not only the assignment objectives but also, materials needed and the procedure they would need to follow (Appendix H).

After showing the PowerPoint, which defined the four actions of art criticism (description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment), the students were instructed to search for an image of an artwork that they would like to use in a future critique. That piece could include reproductions, images from magazines and the Internet, their own work or the work of their classmates. If the artwork was not already a part of their sketchbook journal, a copy of the artwork should then be affixed it in their sketchbook.

I advised the class that we would begin the formal process of critique by looking at art criticism one step at a time. We would continue by addressing each of the four actions of art criticism individually and build their writing by adding a new action each time until they could write a full critique containing description, analysis, interpretation and
judgment. This writing process would start with the first action of art criticism, description.

Assignment #4-2

Writing: Description

As a part of this first action they were instructed to write again about the artwork they selected from Art in America. However, this time they were to limit their discussion to only the description of the piece. They were told to use the information provided in the Elements of Critique handout (Appendix H) to guide them in their re-write of this critique.

When the assignments were completed, the sketchbook journals were collected, and the writings scanned, assessed and filed as in previous assignments. This time, however, the sketchbooks were returned to the students with suggested changes to improve their writing.

The analysis of the rubric at the culmination of this assignment showed that student understanding of the use of description had increased dramatically from 11.6-points on the first writing of the assignment (assignment #4.1) to 16.2-points on the rewrite (assignment #4.2). This was a 5.2-point increase over the average of the first four assignments (Figure 19).
Scores recorded for student #3 reflected another down turn, while those of student #5 regained their pre-assignment #4.1 standings.

![Figure 19: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Description in Assignments #1 through #4.2](image)

Going into this assignment I wondered how limiting the students to writing only a description might impact the scores reflected by my rubric, but soon discovered that most of my students still could not resist the urge to throw in a little analysis as they wrote. As a result, the average score for assignment #4.2 in the area of analysis rose to 15.8-points over 12.4-points from the previous assignment (Figure 20).
**ANALYSIS**

Analysis relies on the critic’s knowledge and use of the Elements of Design and Principles of Art, as a result the increase in student use and understanding of analysis is reflected in their increase elements and principles scores. The rubric reflected a growth of 2.8-points from assignment #4.1 to assignment #4.2 in their ability to utilize the Elements of Design (Figure 21).
Figure 21: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Elements of Design in Assignments #1 through #4.2

Likewise students demonstrated a better understanding of the principles of art in assignment #4.2 generating an increase of 2.6-points from the previous writing assignment (Figure 22).

While all of the participants performed well in both of these areas, student #3’s scores advanced dramatically ahead of the others in both instances.
Figure 22: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Principles of Art in Assignments #1 through #4.2

On an average, students also demonstrated an increase in the use of their interpretive skills. Their average had swelled from 9.2-points on assignment #4.1 to 11-points on assignment #4.2 an increase of 1.8-points (Figure 23).
Student understanding and use of judgment had grown from an 8.4-point average for assignment #4.1 to an 11-point average for assignment #4.2 (Figure 24).

Figure 23: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Interpretation in Assignments #1 through #4.2

Figure 24: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Judgment in Assignments #1 through #4.2
Assignment #5-1

Writing

The first day of this assignment, the students were given a set of Art Games playing cards and instructed to play several games of “Go Fish.” This particular version of Art Games was “Van Gogh and Friend” featured artwork by several Post-Impressionist artists including the work of Monet, Renoir, Degas, Pissarro, Manet, and Caillebotte, as well as two women artists: Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot (O’Reilly 2002).

At the end of each hand, the students were to review the cards that they had, and make note of the artists and individual works of art featured on the cards and select their favorite. At the end of the entire game, the students were instructed to appraise all of the favorites they had selected and choose one piece to write about. At the conclusion of class the students turned in a sheet of paper with the name of the artwork they wanted to critique and the artist who created it.

The next day I gave each participant a copy of the artwork they had selected during the Art Game. They were instructed to glue it into their notebook and then write a critique of the piece. This time the critique was to focus on not only a description, but also an analysis of the work. The assignment was due at the end of the period. Once again the sketchbooks were collected, their writings scanned and analyzed using the Sketchbook Rubric (Appendix C) and filed in the folder. As in the previous assignment, the
sketchbooks were returned with written suggestions for writing improvements.

Analysis of the rubric scores for this assignment showed only a .2-point average increase in student understanding of the use of description in art criticism (Figure 25) and a decrease of 1.8 average points in their knowledge of analysis (Figure 26).

Figure 25: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Description in Assignments #1 through #5.1
Figure 26: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Analysis in Assignments #1 through #5.1

Scores for interpretation (Figure 27) went down 14-points, while those for judgment (Figure 28) decreased by 9-points.

Figure 27: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Interpretation in Assignments #1 through #5.
Figure 28: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Judgment in Assignments #1 through #5.1

Figure in the categories dealing with the Elements of Design and Principles of Art. Also dropped by a 1.2-point (Figure 29) and 1.8-points (Figure 30) average respectively.

Figure 29: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Elements of Design in Assignments #1 through #5.1
Lecture #4

Art Criticism Analysis

The fourth lecture and PowerPoint (Appendix I) touched on the topic of analysis in art criticism. In this lecture the students learned that analysis is looking more closely at the characteristics of the works that were identified during the description in terms of the elements of art and principals of design.

When analyzing a work of art, the students were told they should concentrate on how it is organized and how the elements and principles of art are used to communicate the ideas expressed in the artwork. In addition, they should look at how history or culture affect the artwork or how the artwork affected history or culture.
**Assignment #5-2**

*Writing: Analysis*

For this assignment, I asked the students to refer to the Post-Impressionist image they selected for the previous writing assignment. Once again they were to write a description of the piece followed by its analysis (Appendix J).

In addition to the assignment details, students were provided with a copy of pages from the Art Game’s accompanying book that dealt with the artist, his or her life, history, and the artwork they selected to critique, along with a handout containing descriptive words we had discussed in class to use in their analysis (Appendix K), as well as a copy of a handout containing terms and definitions we had studied during lessons conducted earlier in the school year on the element and principles of art (Appendix L).

As students completed the writing, the sketchbooks were collected, their writings scanned and analyzed using the Sketchbook Rubric (Appendix C) and filed in the folder. After filling out the rubric I returned the sketchbooks to the students with written suggestions for improving their writing.

Analysis of the rubric from the rewrite of assignment #5.1 revealed an increase of an average of 1.4-points over the previous assignment (Figure 31).
Likewise, the rubric indicated that student understanding of the use of analysis in art criticism had increased by the 2.8-point average over assignment #5.1 and by 4.6-points over the average of the first six writing assignments (Figure 32).

Figure 31: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Description in Assignments #1 through #5.2

Figure 32: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Analysis in Assignments #1 through #5.2
Analysis of the rubric data as it related to student use of the Elements of Design and Principles of Art coincided with the increases illustrated in their understanding of the use of analysis in the art criticism process. The Elements of Design score for assignment #5.2 was 14-points, up 3 points from the previous assignment and 4.7 points over the average scores for the previous six writing assignments (Figure 33). Similarly, the average rubric scores for student use and understanding of the Principles of Design had increased to an average score of 14.2 points over the previous assignments average of 11.8 points (Figure 34).

Figure 33: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Elements of Design in Assignments #1 through #5.2
As far as student use and understanding of interpretation in art criticism is concerned, that action revealed an increase from 8.2-points in the previous assignment to a 10.2-points average for assignment #5.2. This score represents a .64-point increase over the 9.56-point average for assignments #1 through #5.1 (Figure 35).
Figure 35: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Interpretation in Assignments #1 through #5.2

Student use and understanding of judgment in art criticism also illustrated an increase from 9.2-points in assignment #5.1 to an average of 11.8-points in assignment #5.2. This number was an increase of 3.04-points over the average score for assignments #1 through #5.1 (Figure 36).
Lecture #5

Art Criticism Interpretation

After reviewing and discussing the first two steps of art criticism, description and analysis, students were given in depth instruction on the third step, interpretation. The lecture was accompanied with a PowerPoint (Appendix M) on the process of interpretation.

The students were reminded that interpretation is the third step of art criticism that should follow in sequential order behind description and analysis. During this stage in the
critique, the critic identifies the expressive qualities, meaning or mood of the work, or the idea it communicates to the viewer.

They were reminded that an interpretation is an explanation of the meaning of the piece. This elucidation is based on what they have learned through the description and analysis process, as well as what they think the artist is saying. Or, if they are writing about their own work, what they are trying to say through the artwork they have selected.

They learned that works of art can be complex and, because of this, can be interpreted in different ways depending on the individual writing the critique. In addition, the interpretation of a work is a very personal observation that answers two primary questions: 1. What is happening? 2. What is the artist trying to say?

Assignment #6

Writing: Interpretation

For this assignment the students were to select a work of art from their sketchbook or portfolio and write a critique utilizing the first three actions of critique: description, analysis and interpretation.

In addition to the lecture that preceded this assignment, they were provided with a set of guidelines (Appendix N) to assist them in the writing process.
This assignment was made on a Friday as a homework assignment that was due the following Monday.

At the beginning of the class on Monday, I collected the sketchbooks, scanned the artwork and writings, analyzed the writings using the Sketchbook Rubric (Appendix C) and filed in the folder. After filling out the rubric I returned the sketchbooks to the students with written suggestions for improving their writing.

Analysis of the rubric revealed the following findings:

Description (Figure 37):

- Student understanding of the use of description in art criticism increased from an average of 17.8-points for the previous assignment to 19.4-points for assignment #6.

- That increase represented a 5.92-point increase over the average of 13.48-points for assignments #1 through #5.2.
Figure 37: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Description in Assignments #1 through #6

Analysis (Figure 38);

- Student understanding of the use of analysis in art criticism increased from an average of 16.8-points for the previous assignment to 19.6-points for assignment #6.
- The increase represented a 6.75-point increase over the average of 12.85-points for assignments #1 through #5.2.
Figure 38: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Analysis in Assignments #1 through #6

Elements of Design (Figure 39) and Principles of Art (Figure 40):

- Student understanding of the use of the Elements of Design in art criticism increased from an average of 14-points on the previous assignment to 19.2-points on assignment #6.
  - The increase represented a 9.23-point increase over the average of 9.97-points for assignments #1 through #5.2.

- Likewise, student understanding of the use of the Principles of Design in art criticism increased from an average of 14.2-points on the previous assignment to 19-points on assignment #6.
  - The increase represents an 8.15-point increase over the average of 10.85-points for assignments #1 through #5.2.
Figure 39: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Elements of Designs in Assignments #1 through #6

Figure 40: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Principles of Art in Assignments #1 through #6
Interpretation (Figure 41) and Judgment (Figure 42):

- Student understanding of the use of the Interpretation in art criticism increased from an average of 10.2-points on the previous assignment to 19-points on assignment #6.
  - The increase represented a 9.35-point increase over the average of 9.6-points for assignments #1 through #5.2.

- Likewise, student understanding of the use of the Judgment in art criticism increased from an average of 11.82-points on the previous assignment to 18-points on assignment #6.
  - This increase represented an 8.8-point increase over the average of 9.2-points for assignments #1 through #5.2.

*Figure 41*: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Interpretation in Assignments #1 through #6
Art Criticism Judgment

After reviewing the first three steps of art criticism: description, analysis, and interpretation, students were given in depth instruction on the fourth action in the process, judgment. The lecture was accompanied with a PowerPoint (Appendix O) on the process of artistic judgment.
The students were reminded that judgment is the fourth step of art criticism that should follow in sequential order behind description, analysis and interpretation. During this, the final action in the critique process, the students were instructed that judgment requires them to determine if they feel the work is or is not successful.

In addition, they were told that judgment is also defined as the process of deciding the value of the work of art they are critiquing. A judgment should reflect on the social, cultural, psychological and environmental conditions that impact the artwork and address the following standards: formalism, emotionalism and functionalism. However, regardless of the standard, the basic question answered in this step is: Is the work successful?

Assignment #7

Writing: Judgment

In Assignment #7, the students were instructed to select one of several reprints of art by the Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo. I selected Kahlo for several reasons. We had studied her and Diego Rivera earlier in the project and my students had expressed a keen interest in her work. In addition, her art contains layers of intricate symbolism and meaning that actually connect between her paintings and her life. Plus, she was profoundly influenced by the indigenous Mexican culture, which is apparent in her use of vivid colors. All of these things combined would give my students a wealth of visual stimuli from which to
write their critique. Each student received their own packet of Kahlo prints, and each packet of prints was different from the next.

After selecting the image they planned to critique they were instructed to write a critical analysis of the piece as their final writing project (Appendix P). This critical analysis was to include all four actions of art criticism: a description, an analysis, an interpretation and a judgment.

This assignment was also made on a Friday as an in-class and homework assignment that was due the following Monday. At the beginning of the class on Monday, I collected the sketchbooks, scanned the artwork and writings, analyzed the writings using the Sketchbook Rubric (Appendix C) and filed in the folder. After filling out the rubric I returned the sketchbooks to the students with written suggestions for improving their writing.

The rubric analysis of student understanding and use of description in an art critique leveled out on this final writing assignment to mirror the 19.4-point score of the previous assignment. However, this score represented a 5.17-point increase over the average score for all of the previous writing assignments (Figure 43).
Interestingly enough, while individual student scores fluctuated, the average score for student understanding and use of analysis in art criticism also remained steady, replicating the 19.6-point score from assignment #7. This score did, however, represent a 5.9-point increase over the average score of 13.7-points for assignments #1 through #6 (Figure 44).

*Figure 43:* Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Description in Assignments #1 through #7
Figure 44: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Analysis in Assignments #1 through #7

Analysis of the rubric as it related to student understanding of interpretation in art criticism revealed a slight increase from assignment #6 (19 points) to assignment #7 (19.2 points). This final interpretation score did reveal a hefty 8.4-point score over the average of assignments #1 through #6 (Figure 45).
Of all of the four actions associated with art criticism, student understanding and usage of judgment increased the most with all students rating a perfect 20 on their final journal entry. This 20-point average increased two points over assignment #6 and 9.7-points over the average of assignments #1 through #6 (Figure 46).
Analysis of the scores for the Elements of Design showed a 20-point average for assignment #7, up .8-points from the previous assignment and 8.88-points from the average of assignments #1 through #6 (Figure 47).
Figure 47: Sketchbook Journal Rubric analysis of student use of Elements of Design in Assignments #1 through #7

The rubric also reflected increases in student understanding and usage of terms associated with the Principles of Art. Scoring on the final assignment reflected an increase of .6 points over the previous assignment and a 7.73-point increase over the 11.87-point average of the previous project scores (Figure 48).
Pre- and Post-Study Sketchbook Journal Questionnaires

Prior to beginning this study, I administered a Pre-Study Sketchbook Journal Questionnaire (Appendix A). The documents were collected and filed until the culmination of the project.

At the conclusion the study, the participants were asked to fill out a Post-Study Sketchbook Journal Questionnaire (Appendix B). The feedback forms were then collected and analyzed, by question, along with the Pre-study documents.
Summary

Since I already require my advanced students to keep a sketchbook and routinely conduct oral critiques with my students I wondered if combining art criticism techniques within the context of their sketchbook would help them to better talk and write about their art. This concept led me to ask the research question: What impact do reflective journals have on student thinking about art?

To determine this I instituted a series of seven writing assignments accompanied by six lectures. At the culmination of each writing assignment, I collect the student’s sketchbooks, scanned both the artwork and writings and then analyzed using a Sketchbook Journal Rubric (Appendix C).

In addition to the sketchbook journal assignments I administered a Pre- and Post Study Questionnaire (Appendix A and B), maintained detailed observation, participated directly with the students, conducted informal interviews, and kept a reflective journal. At the culmination of the project the information gleaned from all of the data sources was analyzed.

Through the use of art criticism as a part of their daily sketchbook this study shows how writing about art not only engaged students in critical thinking about their art, but also impacted their ability to articulate those ideas in a more meaningful way, improved their journaling performance and developed their ability to think critically about their art.
CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Questions

This mixed methods inquiry took place in one of my advanced art classes to determine if the use of art criticism practices in student sketchbook would improve their ability to write and think about their art.

My students frequently exhibit discomfort and embarrassment when participating in oral classroom critiques of their art. When asked to write critically about their art or the art of others they were at a loss. They have not been conditioned in the general classroom to do the kind of independent and personal thinking necessary to write critically about their work.

Realizing this, I decided to combine the regular use of the students’ sketchbooks with written art criticism practices to determine the impact reflective journals have on student thinking about art.

What impact do Reflective Journals have on Student Thinking about Art?

The writing assignments, lectures and discussions that made up this study were planned to discover what, if any, impact reflective journals have on student thinking about art. They were carefully designed to increase student knowledge about art, art vocabulary, and the four procedures of art criticism, with the goal of empowering the participants with the confidence and skills they needed to talk critically about art in their journals.
The analysis of student written knowledge and understanding of the four actions of art criticism (description, analysis, interpretation and judgment) was done through the use of the Sketchbook Journal Rubric (Appendix C). This document was completed for each writing exercise during the project and student performance recorded on charts for each action being studied. Information from the charts was used to create a series of charts that disclosed the following results.

**Sketchbook Journal Rubric Analysis I and Pre- and Post-Study Sketchbook Journal Questionnaire**

**The four Actions of Art Criticism**

Sketchbook Journal Rubric Analysis I (Figure 49) revealed that the participants entry-level knowledge of the four actions of art criticism were very closely matched across the board for assignment #1. While, this and the three assignments that followed were not accompanied by any specific instructions on how to write an art critique, the student scores reflecting their basic knowledge of the subject fluctuated greatly.

As pointed out in Chapter 4, the participant’s use of the Elements of Design and Principles of Art in their writing showed an increase: scores for Elements of Design gained 1.9-points, however those for use of the Principles of Art in the rose only .3-point.

This data was also mirrored in the analysis of the Pre-Study Sketchbook Journal Questionnaire (Figure A). In this document students responded in the following way to
the question: Do you think art criticism is an important exercise in your creative process? Explain why or why not?

Student #1: “Yes, it helps us to better understand and maybe use what we learn in our own art.”

Student #2: “Yes, I do think it is an important exercise. Having your art criticized opens doors for new ideas.”

Student #3: “Yes, criticism is very important, because it shows and tells us what we do right and need improvement on.”

Student #4: “Yes, because it will help you to develop a better idea of what you should and should not do in your own pieces.”

Student #5: “Yes, because it allows you to improve on areas of your work.”

In the Pre-study responses, all of the students basically agreed that art criticism was an important exercise in their creative process. They all also cited the improvement of their own work as the end result, but offered no indication as to how it would do this.
As the project progressed, student ability to describe a work of art increased steadily over the course of the first four assignments, while their ability to analyze peaked at assignment #3 and then leveled off (Figure 49).

Student understanding and use of the actions of interpretation and judgment illustrated a state of flux. Interpretation scores fell below their original entry level and stayed there, while accumulative totals for judgment rose and fell from one assignment to the next (Figure 49).

I had decided early on to not give students any form of feedback through the culmination of the fourth writing assignment. The decision to withhold feedback was two-fold:

First, I wanted the students not to feel like they were being graded on the quality of work they produced. I wanted them to feel comfortable about writing in their sketchbooks and not hesitant about writing the wrong word or misspelling something. Second, I wanted a clear view of where the students were in their individual writing ability so I could better gauge any progress they might make.

At the conclusion of the Assignment #4.1, however, it became obvious that the students had a desire to perform well, but did not have the problem solving and critical thinking skills necessary to execute a critique in a rewarding manner. They had all put forth the effort and tried their best, but had been conditioned to educational practices that were not
designed to encourage the problem-solving strategies they needed. At this point in the study, I realized that the structure of journaling presented a unique educational prospect. I realized I could guide my students toward the cultivation of both critical and higher order thinking and attain my goal of improving student journaling performance, ultimately developing the participant’s critical thinking about their art.

Studying the rubric analysis of this assignment, as compared to that of the first three writing assignments, I discovered that there was an .8-point increase in scores in the area of description. I also noted while that the combined average of the first three assignments was lower than the average for assignment #4.1, it was actually slightly lower (.6) than the average for assignment #3.

In addition the participants knowledge of the use of analysis in art criticism remained the same as the previous assignment. While their writing for this assignment showed a slight increase in their use of interpretation they still fell .8-point short of the average for the first two assignments, and their knowledge of the use of judgment only rose .4-point.

As a result of these discoveries, assignment #4.1 was followed by a discussion and lecture on the Elements of Critique (Appendix G). After the lesson, students were asked to re-write their critique focusing primarily on the first action of art criticism: description (Assignment #4.2). Students also received, for the first time, teacher feedback on the assignment they were to re-address. This feedback both assessed their previous work, and
reinforced their effective techniques. As a result, the average score for description climbed dramatically. There was, to my surprise, an added bonus: the tallies for analysis, interpretation, and judgment increased as well. I should note, however, that at this point in the study, student understanding of description and analysis still exceeded their scores for interpretation and judgment significantly (Figure 49).

For assignment #5.1, students were to write both a description and analysis of art by a Post-Impressionist artist. Interestingly enough, the rubric disclosed only a slight increase in student understanding and use of description in their written critiques, and a nearly ten-point drop in their performance in the area of analysis. Scores for interpretation and judgment were also markedly lower than those of the previous assignment (Figure 49).

Concerned by the disappointing scores, I turned to my reflective journal. I noticed that the date for this assignment coincided with a bout of inclement weather that caused at least a week’s worth of interruptions and cancellations that may have impacted student learning.

Assignment #5.1 was followed by a discussion and lecture on Art Criticism Analysis (Appendix I). Subsequently, the participants were asked to rewrite their critique focusing once again on the actions of description and analysis. As in assignment #4.1, they were provided with written teacher feedback that both assessed their performance and reinforced their use of effective techniques.
Rubric analysis of assignment #5.1 scores showed a strong increase in student understanding and usage of description and analysis, as well as approximately ten-point increases in their interpretation and judgment performance (Figure 49). This led me to theorize that the re-write, coupled with instruction, teacher feedback that assessed their performance and reinforced their work, along with the absence of class disruptions, had combined to augment student functioning in all of the elements of critique.

Prior to Assignment #6, the class took part in a discussion and lecture on Interpretation in art criticism (Appendix M). The participants were asked to, once again, write using the first two actions of art criticism: description and analysis. This time, however, they were to add a detailed interpretation of the piece.

Rubric analysis of this assignment showed substantial increases in student thinking about art in the areas of description and analysis, as well as a forty-plus increase in interpretation scores, and a thirty-point increase in judgment usage (Figure 49).

Assignment #6 was followed by a lecture and discussion of Art Criticism Judgment (Appendix O) in preparation for their final writing assignment. They were also provided with written teacher feedback assessing their performance and reinforcing their effective techniques, however, this time they did not have to re-write their critique.
For assignment #7 students were finally asked to write a critique utilizing all four actions of art criticism: description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment.

Rubric analysis of assignment #7 showed a leveling off of student usage and knowledge of their description and analysis, a slight increase in their interpretation skills and a ten-point jump in their understanding of judgment in art criticism (Figure 49).

*Figure 49*: Sketchbook Journal Rubric Analysis I; Four Actions of Art Criticism
Data substantiating the impact the study had on student thinking about art is also validated in the analysis of the Post-Study Sketchbook Journal Questionnaire (Figure B). In the post-study document, students were once again asked the pre-study question: Do you think art criticism is an important exercise in your creative process? Explain why or why not?

Student post-study responses are outlined below:

Student #1: “Yes, because an artist should want to know how people feel about their artwork, in order to help themselves improve. The four steps of art criticism has made taking part in any type of critique much easier for me.”

Student #2: “Yes, the step by step writing assignments made learning and understanding the steps involved in art criticism much easier. Looking for and writing about all of the detail and imagery in art has improved my art vocabulary a lot.”

Student #3: “Yes, because it helps you see if an idea or vision will be perceived as you view it or as you would like to view it. Learning the four areas of an art critique really helped make things clearer for me.”
Student #4: “Yes, it shows what you can improve on, gives examples from other artists, gives you ideas, and helps you communicate more clearly with others about art and its elements.”

Student #5: “Yes, I do think it’s important because it can help you better your work and the work of others. I now see how each step and the recommended sequence they are in help to build a vision of the art, the artist, and the artist’s intension.”

The participant’s Post-study responses revealed a more thorough consideration of the question. The fact that they reached beyond their original thought that critique was important because it helped improve their art, and moved into considerations about art criticism and the utilization of the four actions of critique, illustrated an overall improvement in their thinking about art.

I found it interesting however, that while students’ journaling and critical thinking skills increased over the course of the project, their actual use of the sketchbook itself had not.

Student responses to the question inquiring about the number of hours spent per week sketching in their sketchbook revealed the following in the Pre-study inquiry: one student worked one hour or less hours; two students one or more; one student two to three hours; and one student three or more hours a week (Figure 50).
Comparison of the Pre-study question related to student weekly use of a writing journal indicated that prior to the study: three students did not spend any; one student spent one or less hours per week writing; and one three or more.

Post-study responses to a question that combined sketchbook and journaling indicate the following: two students worked one or less hours; two students worked one or two hours; and one student two or three hours (Figure 51).

Comparison of the Pre-and Post Survey charts indicate that the number of hours student #1 sketched each week remained the same, while student’s #3 and #4 reduced the number of hours they worked, and student #2 and #5 increased the number of hours they worked.
Figure 51: Post-study hours a week spent sketching sketchbook journal

According to the Pre-study survey, none of the students involved in the study kept a writing journal. Analysis of the Pre-study question seeking the number of hours the students spent writing each week (Figure 52), revealed the following: three students did not write at all; one for one or less hours; and one for three or more. A comparison of these findings with the Post-study data showed an increase in hours spent writing each week for all but one student.
Two students indicated in the Pre-study questionnaire that they had used their sketchbook occasionally to jot down thoughts about their art, life or their feelings and found it useful. When asked in the Post-study if they felt combining the sketchbook with a written journal the students responded as follows:

Student #1: “Yes, it has prepared me for writing about my art portfolio.”

Student #2: “Yes, it has helped to expand my views and knowledge about art. My powers of observation and my ability to put my thoughts down on paper have both improved.”
Student #3: “Yes, because I can draw a sketch and explain my thought process.”

Student #4: “Yes, it has taught me to look at my work and helped me to see what needs to be improved.”

Student #5: “Yes, because writing in a journal and drawing in a sketchbook has expanded my creativity.”

All of the students specified in the Pre-study survey that they had participated in either oral or written critiques. Two said they had only participated in oral critiques, while three noted they had been involved in both.

When asked (pre-study) if they enjoyed the critique process they responded in the following manner:

Student #1: “No, it makes me nervous.”

Student #2: “No, at the time I did not understand the process of a critique so it was hard for me to enjoy it.”

Student #3: “Yes, it’s interesting to hear what people think and how other people see it.”
Student #4: “Yes, it helped to develop a deeper understanding of the piece and opened your mind up to new possibilities about the piece’s meaning.

Student #5: “I enjoy the constructive criticism, but would rather it been private than out spoken to many.”

When students were asked (post-study) if the exercises in the study had helped make art criticism, oral or written, easier for them, the students responded as follows:

Student #1: Yes, it has taught me how to make a good critique and thoroughly analyze a piece of art. It has improved my ability to see and describe what I am seeing immensely.

Student #2: Yes. Before this year I was not familiar with the four steps of art criticism. Learning to describe, really see what is in a piece without fear of being wrong, was extremely helpful. Learning to apply the Elements of Design and Principles of Art within the analysis not only improved my writing, but made me look long and hard at the art I am making. While interpretation and judgment were more difficult for me I found them valuable in the overall process. Now I know how to critique art.

Student #3: Yes, it has made the written part easier, because now I know how to go into detail with my criticism.
Student #4: Yes, once again I see a clear improvement of my vocabulary and the extra practice has helped me to see what is expected from an art critique. It has definitely made art criticism and a more comfortable process for me.

Student #5: Yes it has it feels more natural now and not as forced. The reason why is because I had to write about a lot of my own work and others and understand there are steps to follow in the process.

In the both the Pre- and Post- study questionnaire students were asked to describe an art critique. Each participant’s Pre- and Post-study response is compared by student below:

Student #1:

Pre-study response: “Writing about a piece of art and describing how it makes you feel, whether you like it or not.

Post-study response: “An art critique is a procedure through which you describe a work of art in detail, analyze its various elements, interpret its meaning (this doesn’t have to be the artist’s meaning, it could be your own), and judge the works value to you (if you like it and why).”

Student #2:

Pre-study response: “An art critique is criticism of the artwork’s media, composition, and the overall idea of the work.”
Post-study response: “Art criticism is a four step process in which the critic thoroughly describes the artwork and then analyzes it using artist terms, like the elements of design and principles of art, then interprets what they think the piece is about, and final places a judgment on it expressing if they feel it has worth – social, cultural etc.”

Student #3:
Pre-study response: “An art critique is taking a look at a piece of art and tearing it a part by looking at media and style and discussing why the artist decided the things they did.
Post-study response: “A critique is basically pulling a part every element or detail of a piece of art work to describe it and examining color, batter, line and form to analyze it and find out more about the piece and the choices of the artist.”

Student #4:
Pre-study response: “An art critique is an analysis of a work of art looking at the meaning of the piece and the use of the elements of art and principles of design it is how the piece makes you feel and of things that the artist could have done to make the piece better.”
Post-study response: “Art criticism is a four step action. First step: Description; second step: Analysis; third step: Interpretation; and fourth step: Judgment.”

Student #5:
Pre-study response: “When people or a person write or tell you what you should work on the piece being displayed.”
Post-study response: “A critique is something that explains the detail of an artwork, its meaning, colors used, details and things included and the overall process for your work. It is a four step way of writing or talking about art to give it personal meaning through a process that includes description, analysis, interpretation and judgment.”

**Sketchbook Journal Rubric Analysis II**

*Elements of Design and Principles of Art*

In this study, student growth in understanding and use of the Elements of Design and Principles of Art almost always mirrored their performance in the area of analysis for assignments #1 through #6. When student analysis skills showed a down turn, as they did in assignment # 5.1, it was reflected in the rubric analysis of the Elements of Design and Principles of Art (Figure 54). This, of course, is because analysis is permanently linked to the Elements of Design and the Principles of Art. Therefore, students must become proficient in the use of the art vocabulary associated with both the elements and principles in order to analyze and/or create a work of art effectively.
Interestingly enough all five participants, despite their entry-level rubric scores, finished the project with Elements of Design and Principles of Art rubric scores within a three-to-five point range of each other.

**Evaluation of Findings in Relation to Previous Research from Literature Review**

*Art Criticism*

“Feldman (1973) defines art criticism broadly as talk about art, talk which is informed and organized for the sharing of discoveries about art and the human condition (Barrett 1988. p. 22).” This informed and organized talk about art teaches students the value of not only looking longer at art, but also more carefully and more intelligently.
Across the board, students involved in this study showed improvement in their critiquing and writing ability over the course of the project. Because the study group had a wide variety of academic skills and backgrounds, the rate of their growth was extremely interesting to chart.

The concept of teaching for higher order thinking entails assisting students with learning in an active, constructive manner so that what they learn in one circumstance is transferable to a new situation (Kowalchuk, 1996; p.1). To that end, the art journal served as the unifying element for accumulating ideas for higher order thinking. Students were able to actively learn the concepts necessary for the project and transfer them successfully into the new concept of sketchbook journaling, ultimately reinforcing the concepts learned.

By instituting art criticism in conjunction with the concept of mentoring outlined by Barrett (2000), I was able to resolve the adverse characteristics my student’s had previously voiced about critique. Barrett believed that mentoring alone would not “solve all troublesome aspects of critiques”, but ideas about mentoring could “provide instructors motivation to reflect on their critiques and change ineffective and counterproductive practices (p. 34).” These ideas were adopted and adapted for my particular teaching setting.
When my students realized that I was working to mentor them in the process, as apposed to criticizing them, they responded “more positively to and engaged more readily in critical discussion of their work” and were “less likely to assume defensive postures when their work was being discussed (Barrett, p. 35).” In fact, the grouped worked readily and appeared to enjoy each challenge I presented to them.

As I guided my students toward finding the words to talk comfortably about their art, they became more prepared to write cohesive art critiques, as well as make reference to issues that arise in and impact art. “In the classroom, verbal cues can help students explore and secure meanings in art. At the same time, these cues also can regulate what students look for and think about in their encounters with art (Cotner 2001, p. 15).”

Using Barrett’s (1989) suggestion to ask four basic questions: 1) What is here?, 2) What is it about?, 3) How good is it?, 4) Is it art?, I armed my study participants with a heuristic matrix. This matrix was used by the students to read criticism in a way that helped them to discover for themselves how critics go about criticizing art (p. 32).

The combination of art criticism, as recommended in art education literature, within the context of the a reflective journal, enabled the students to became actively engaged in descriptive, analyzing, and interpretive arguments, which facilitated their arrival at what Barrett (1988) termed a “more carefully reasoned and more fully argued judgments.”
This, he contends will give both the teacher and students “more to consider and more to talk about (p. 27).”

**Implications for the Findings**

Implications for the findings of this study are multifaceted. First, for art educators, combining the use of art criticism as a part of students daily sketchbook procedures successfully engages students in critical thinking about their art, and impacts their ability to articulate their ideas in a more meaningful way, improve their journaling performance and develop their ability to think and write critically about their art.

As an art educator, the satisfaction of seeing my student’s critical thinking and writing skills develop and grow was almost overwhelming. Their understanding and use of the four steps of art criticism expanded visually each time I added new data to my study charts. From Assignment #1 to Assignment #7 the study group’s growth advance in each of the six areas measured advanced between 9.2- and 12.9-points as follows. Knowledge of: Description – 9.3-points; Analysis – 10.4-points; Interpretation – 9.2-points; Judgment – 12-points; Elements of Design – 12.9-points; and Principles of Art – 10.7-points.

Throughout the course of a day, everything an art teacher does, art appreciation, studio instruction, etc., is essentially art criticism. Because art teachers are continually describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating works of art during the process of
instruction, implementation of the four actions of art criticism into their curriculum should be a natural step. In fact, the hub of every creative process is the critical assessment that enables students to describe a work of art, analyze the process used, interpret its meaning, and judge or evaluate its success. By cultivating an atmosphere that encourages artistic risk taking, art teachers can empower their students with the skills to advance to higher cognitive levels. Whether written or oral, I have come to value the educational opportunities art criticism practices have brought to my classroom.

Students respond well to the mentoring approach I took in this study. They did not appear to be intimidated by the assignments, and enjoyed the freedom they were give to write without the burden of being graded, even though they were asked to include specific elements with each successive assignment.

As an art educator I was aware that art making, in and of itself, provides students with an unmatched opportunity to digest the abundance of media and information they come in contact with throughout the day. However, I discovered that by combining art making with the journaling process (even without art criticism), I could cultivate yet another avenue through which I could strengthen my student’s educational experience.

Finally, I realize the application of the techniques practiced in sketchbook journals could be used, not only by art educators, but also could be custom fit into practically any classroom situation by general educators. For example, English teachers could institute
sketching requirement to enrich their writing journal assignments, and science teachers might incorporate sketch journals to replicate microscopic organisms studied under the microscope.

There are, after all, many different kinds of sketchbook journals. For instance, themed sketchbook journals research a specific subject. Themed sketchbooks may well serve as an extension to the classroom for students of botany or horticulture. Students could draw, make rubbings and paste leaves of various specimens into the sketchbook while they are in the field or lab to research and write about later. Discovery sketchbook journals provide a place for students to document their discoveries, to observe and research in order to better understand the world. Lewis and Clark carried a discovery journal into the wilderness of their time, and so to could today’s students.

Another version of the sketchbook journal could be an illustrated reference journal for individuals to store specific details about topics of interest to them, from seashells to architecture. Other applications could be as illustrated travel journals, sketchbooks of the imagination, life stories sketchbook journals or in-depth study sketchbooks. Sketchbook journal concepts and applications are as endless as the students who file through every teacher’s classroom door.

I have struggled for years looking for a successful way to teach art criticism. I have lamented many times over my students’ apparent inability to write both knowledgeably
and creatively about their art. The development of this study was to fulfill my personal quest for these answers, however it has turned out to be so much more.

This study has opened my eyes to a whole new realm of creative possibilities for me as an educator. I want to share my findings, ideas, and enthusiasm for sketchbook journaling with teachers of every discipline. I want to go back, revisit the study, analyze my successes and failures, and try it again and again.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

To that end, after initiating this project in my study class, I liked the results so well, I instituted the project in some of the general art classes I teach. These non-study students have now been working nearly twenty weeks on their sketchbook journals. The extended amount of time has proven beneficial in order for me to judge how the project might be applied throughout the school’s Fine Arts curriculum.

One of the primary limitations of the study was time. It was conducted during a relatively short time span, about twelve weeks, including time missed due to inclement weather. A project of this type would have far greater implications if it were to be applied for a full school year. More time was needed during the study for the development, application and practice of the concepts being taught. I see now, as I observe the continued progress of my other classes, my primary recommendation for future research would be to extend the
time frame considerably and include many more opportunities through which the students could practice their writing skills.

I had initially thought that class size might be a limiting factor in my study since I only had five students. I was concerned that the techniques I employed may not be applicable or practical for larger classes. However, the other standard-sized classes in which I have introduced sketchbook journaling appear to be taking well to the project. The primary difference I have seen is in my ability to assess the journals and return them to the students as quickly as they would like.

Interestingly enough, in the general classes I have a very broad base of students who range academically from Advanced Placement and honor students, all the way through to students with special needs. This difference in academic skills has not altered the student’s overall zeal for, or their success in, improving their ability to write about their art.

Observing as my students learn to look at art, and thus the world, in context; as they figure out how to determine what is being said about the human condition; as they examine the aesthetic, formal, meaningful and symbolic qualities of a work of art, I see them successfully using the tools I have given them. Through these tools I have empowered them to approach art as not only a form of (visual and verbal) personal expression, but also as a cultural artifact. Since art reflects our human values and
understanding at a deeper level, I have feel that I have likewise given them the tools they need to better understand and deal with their own existence.

**Summary**

This mixed methods inquiry took place an advanced high school art class to determine if the application of art criticism practices in their sketchbooks would improve students writing and thinking about their art.

During the study, the targeted class was involved in a variety of classroom and sketchbook exercises designed to assess the impact that reflective journals have on the students’ thinking about art and develop their skills in the use of art criticism.

Data for the study was gathered using a variety of data collection methods as a form of triangulation. These methods included: Pre- and Post-study questionnaires, detailed observations, direct participation, informal interviews, reflective journal writings, and the student sketchbook journals.

Combining the use of art criticism as a part of students daily sketchbook procedures successfully engaged students in critical thinking about their art, and impacted their ability to articulate their ideas in a more meaningful way, improved their journaling performance and developed their ability to think and write critically about their art.
Because art teachers are continually describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating works of art during the process of instruction, implementation of the four actions of art criticism into my curriculum proved to be a natural step for not only my students, but for me as an art educator.

Art making alone provides students with an unmatched opportunity to digest the abundance of media and information they come in contact with throughout the day. By combining art making with the journaling process (even without art criticism), educators can cultivate yet another avenue through which they can strengthen their student’s educational experience.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Pre-study Sketchbook Journal Questionnaire  Jones/2007

1. How many hours a week do you spend sketching in your sketchbook?
   a. 0
   b. 1 or less
   c. 1 or 2
   d. 2 or 3
   e. 3 or more

2. What is the hardest part of keeping a sketchbook?

3. What do you like the most about keeping a sketchbook?

4. What do you least like about keeping a sketchbook?

5. Do you use a writing journal? ____________________________

6. If so, how many hours a week do you spend writing?
   a. 0
   b. 1 or less
   c. 1 or 2
   d. 2 or 3
   e. 3 or more

7. Have you ever used your sketchbook as a place to write about your art, your life, or your feelings?
   a. If yes, Do you find this combination useful? How?
b. If no. Do you think this would be a useful combination? How?

8. In the space below add any thoughts or suggestions you have about combining a sketchbook and a verbal journal into a Sketchbook Journal.

9. Have you ever participated in a critique of an artwork?
   a. If yes, was the critique written or oral?
   b. If you have participated in a critique, did you enjoy the process? Explain why or why not.
   c. If you have not participated in a critique, do you think that you would enjoy the process? Explain why or why not.

10. Do you think art criticism is important exercise in your creative process? Explain in detail why or why not.

11. In the space below, describe what an art critique is.

12. Do you feel art criticism is important?
APPENDIX B

Post-study Sketchbook Journal Questionnaire  Jones/2008

1. How do you feel about critiquing artwork in your sketchbook?

2. Do you prefer a written critique to an oral critique? Why or why not?

3. Has using art criticism in your sketchbook helped you write better about your own artwork? Explain why or why not?

4. Have these exercises helped to make art criticism easier for you? Explain why or why not.

5. Do you think art criticism is an important exercise in the creative process? Explain in detail why or why not.

6. In the space provided, describe a critique.

7. How many hours a week do you spend working in your sketchbook journal?
   a. 0
   b. 1 or less
   c. 1 or 2
d. 2 or 3
   e. 3 or more

8. Have you found combination of sketchbook and written journals useful?
   a. If yes. How?

   b. If no. Why?

9. In the space below add any thoughts or suggestions you have about combining a sketchbook with a verbal journal.


10. Has using art criticism in your sketchbook helped you write better about your own artwork? Explain why or why not.


11. Have these exercises helped to make art criticism oral or written easier for you? Explain why or why not.


12. Do you think art criticism is an important exercise in the creative process? Explain in detail why or why not.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRINCIPALS OF ART</th>
<th>APPENDIX C</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELEMENTS OF DESIGN</td>
<td>Describes the kind of objects in the picture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUDGEMENT</td>
<td>Discusses the mood, emotions and meaning of the work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERPRETATION</td>
<td>Discusses the kind of lines used and discusses their location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANALYSIS</td>
<td>Examines how the work is organized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>Describes what is seen or what is going on.</td>
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<th>JUDGEMENT</th>
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<td>USES PROPER PUNCTUATION</td>
<td>Shows evidence of higher order thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USES CREATIVE THOUGHT</td>
<td>Shows creativity in writing style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USES SPACING</td>
<td>Uses proper spacing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>USES GRAMMAR</td>
<td>Shows evidence of higher order thinking.</td>
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Advanced Art

SKETCHBOOK ASSIGNMENT #1

Draw a portrait using light and shadow.

✓ In order to achieve strong gradations and a sense of form, place a light from different angles than normal.

✓ These can be under the chin, behind the head or from the top.

✓ This can be in graphite pencil, charcoal or colored pencil.

✓ You can draw yourself, a friend, or a family member.
  
  o One suggestion is to use the classroom flood lights to set up a model.
  
  o Take reference photographs on which to base your drawing.

This assignment must be done in your new sketchbook journal and is due at the beginning of class on Wednesday, December 5.

Assignment adapted from:
http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/index.html
What is Art Criticism & Why Do We Do It?
Advanced Placement Studio Art

What is Art Criticism & Why Do We Do It?

- The simplest answer is that art criticism is talking or writing about art, and we do it because we want to know the meaning and significance of artworks.
- Because art reflects human values and understanding, at a deeper level we engage in criticism to understand our own existence.

Sending messages about who we are...

- In their form and content, art and expressive visual artifacts are a primary way we send messages to ourselves about...
- Who we are...
- What we believe...
- And what we feel.
What’s It Mean?

- The meaning of works of art and other visual expression is not as self-evident as the meaning of written communication.
- Art - unlike written or spoken language - is normally not discursive, or explanatory.
  - Discursive - lengthy and including extra material that is not essential to what is being written or spoken about.
  - Explanatory - giving reasons or details that explain something.

Art is Presentational

- It presents us with a feeling...
- A visual worldview....
- Suggesting or implying what is...
- Or what may be...
- But not giving an explanation.

Meaning of a work of art

- The meaning of a work of art is carried by aesthetic components that modify and shape the literal content.
- As a result, the meaning of art is frequently obscure.
- It’s literal meaning is difficult to ferret out...
- or is even nonexistent.
An Abstract Formula

- Reduced to an abstract formula...
- Art can be described as content...
  - (for example an image of a horse)
- Carried by aesthetic form...
  - (the horse may be executed expressively, using exaggerated form and arbitrary colors)
- That together make up the expressive presentational meaning and quality of the work...
  - (such as elegance, power, and speed)

Repeated Practical Art Criticism

- But how this works is understood best not in the abstract....
- But through repeated practical art criticism.

Looking at the Work: The Question of Style

- In an artwork, presentation, or style, has both intellectual and emotional qualities.
- Through artistic style, artists tell us something about what they both think and feel.
Art Reflects  
The Artist’s View of Life

- Art reflects the artist’s view of life, whether or not the artist intended it to do so.
- Thus similarities and differences between artworks are not a matter of style alone, or of style for style’s sake.
- Rather, style carries meaning.

Artistic Expression is  
Communication from  
Artist to Viewer

- Artistic expression, and the style that transmit it, is communication, intentional or unintentional, from the artist to other people about some aspect of his or her being, seeing, and valuing.

Looking beyond the Work:  
Determining Meaning in Context

- The worldview presented by an artist is in many ways unique.
Kahlo and Rivera

- As individuals, they had different things to say, and so their artwork took different forms.

Art is a Window into the Artist’s Soul

- Even in indigenous cultures where originality is not valued, differences in skill, craft, and approach can be detected from one handmade artifact to the next.
- Clearly, artists put something of themselves into their work, so that the work suggests what they think, feel and believe.
- Art is in this sense a window into the artist’s soul.

Artworks Reflect a Collective Soul

- Artworks also reflect a collective soul, sensibility, and culture, because an artist is part of his or her place and time.
- Thus the works of Rivera and Kahlo, despite their differences, also share many qualities:
- In fact, they are very similar to each other in the larger scheme of world art.
Artworks Reflect a Collective Soul

- For the same reason, the works of Hiroshige and Hokusai, artists who lived a hundred years earlier in Japan, are similar to each other and different from those of Rivera and Kahlo.
- In spite of their individuality, the Mexicans cannot help being Mexican and the Japanese cannot help being Japanese.

Artist's culture, place, and time are a huge factor in their work.

Through their work, artists speak about their culture. You might even say the culture speaks through the artist.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More Than One Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Some contemporary artists present more than one culture in their artwork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Contemporary artist Roger Shimomura’s paintings, prints and theatre pieces address the sociopolitical issues of Asian America.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Never Only Its Surface Qualities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Art work is never only its surface qualities; its qualities and its style always refer intellectually and emotionally to something beyond themselves.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Artifacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Artists always tell us something about what they think and how they feel, and their thoughts and feelings arise in part from their particular place and time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Therefore, artworks and other expressive visual works must be seen as cultural artifacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They are cultural statements expressing shared assumptions, premises, forms, and ways of doing things.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Understand and Appreciate Ourselves and Others

- Artworks also illuminate the artist's individual values and sensibilities...
- They are also personal artifacts.
- They shed light on the human condition.
- Accordingly, the purpose of criticism in art for life is to understand and appreciate art as visual culture in order to understand and appreciate people -
- Ourselves and others.

Source of Information
Art for Life: Authentic Instruction in Art
T. Anderson & M. Milbrandt
APPENDIX F

Some Premises
of
Art Criticism
Advanced Placement Studio Art

Personal Expression
& Cultural Artifacts
- The art critic looks at works of art in context to see what they tell us about the human condition.
- Critics examine aesthetic, formal qualities and symbolic, meaningful qualities and approach art as both personal expression and cultural artifacts.

Four Questions of Criticism
- Over time critics (professional and other) have asked four basic questions:
  - What is this?
  - What does it mean?
  - What is it worth?
  - What is it for?
Basic Criticism Process

- Answering the four questions results in the basic critical process.
- Description - which tells us what an object is and what it is for.
- Interpretation - which tells us what the object means.
- Interpretation is the main outcome of criticism, since it answers the question.
- What is this work all about?

Basic Criticism Process

- As a result, the most important of the four questions is, what does it mean?
- Since this is also the most difficult question critics first ask, what is this?
- And What is it for - and try to find answers through description.
APPENDIX G

Elements of Critique

Sketchbook Journaling

Objectives

• During the course of this project you will learn to identify basic elements in a piece of art through your writing.
• In doing so you will enhance both your writing skills and your skills of observation.

Materials

• Artwork including reproductions, magazine and internet articles and your own work.
Procedure

- Examine artwork including reproductions, magazine and internet articles and your own work.
- Write about these works in your sketchbook journal.

Art Criticism

- Art criticism involves a specific way of looking at a work of art.
- You can make discernment about art without being a professional artist, all you need to do is learn to look (see) and think about what you are seeing.
- Learning how to criticize artwork properly will allow you to better understand works of art and why they have become important.

The Process of Art Criticism

- The process of art criticism involves four actions.
  - They are:
    - Describe
    - Analyze
    - Interpret
    - Decide
One Step at a Time....

- We’re going to begin this process one step at a time looking at each of the four actions of art criticism one at a time.

Describe

- First Impression - record your first spontaneous reaction to the artwork.
- By the end of the process you may understand your first impression better or you may even change your mind.
- There are no wrong answers.
- Unfortunately, this step is where many people stop when they are looking at artworks.

Describe

- What is your immediate reaction to the work?
- List any words that come to mind.
Describe

- This stage is like taking inventory.
- What things are in the work of art?
- You want to come up with a list of everything you see in the work.
- The key here is to stick to the facts.

Describe

- Imagine that you are describing the artwork to someone over the telephone.
- This is a long and detailed section.

Describe

- Think of things like clothing, environment, shapes etc.
- Look carefully at the work of art in front of you. What colors do you see in it? List the specific colors that you see.
- What objects do you see in the work of art in front of you? List the objects that you see.
Describe

- What is going on in this work of art? Mention whatever you see happening, no matter how small.
- Does anything you have noticed in this work of art so far (colors, objects, or events) remind you of something in your own life?

Describe

- Is this work of art true-to-life? How real has the artist made things look?
- What ideas and emotions do you think this work of art expresses?
- Do you have a sense of how the artist might have felt when he or she made this work of art? Does it make you feel one way or another?

Source of Information
http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/lessons/elem/criticism2.htm
Elements of Critique

Sketchbook Journaling

Objectives
- During the course of this project you will learn to identify basic elements in a piece of art through your writing.
- In doing so you will enhance both your writing skills and your skills of observation.

Materials
- Artwork including reproductions, magazine and Internet articles your own work and the work of your classmates.

Procedure
- Examine various types of artwork as described above.
- Write about these works in your sketchbook journal.

Art Criticism
Art criticism involves a specific way of looking at a work of art. You can make discernment about art without being a professional artist, all you need to do is learn to look (see) and think about what you are seeing.
Learning how to criticize artwork properly will allow you to better understand works of art and why they have become important.

The Process of Art Criticism
The process of art criticism involves four actions.
They are:
- Describe
- Analyze
- Interpret
- Judge
One Step at a Time….

Due end of the period January 9, 2008

We’re going to begin this process one step at a time looking at each of the four actions of art criticism one at a time.

For your midterm exam you will be describing (in your sketchbook journal), for a second time the artwork you selected from Art in America. This time, you will follow the procedure we discussed in the Elements of Critique PowerPoint, That procedure is outlined below.

**Describe**

First Impression - record your first spontaneous reaction to the artwork.  
- By the end of the process you may understand your first impression better or you may even change you mind.

There are no wrong answers.

Unfortunately, this step is where many people stop when they are looking at artworks. This is a long and detailed section.

**What do you see?**

DESCRIPTION is a process of reporting the things that are in the artwork. Asking yourself these questions will help you.

1. What is your immediate reaction to the work?
2. List any words that come to mind.
3. What things are in the work of art?
4. This stage is like taking inventory.
5. You want to come up with a list of everything you see in the work.
6. The key here is to stick to the facts.
7. What art form or type of art is this? Is it a painting, a print, sculpture, ceramics, a photograph or something else?
8. What is the subject matter? Name the things in the artwork. Look closely.
9. What lines dominate the artwork? Are they straight, curvy? Can you find other words to describe them?
10. What shapes dominate the artwork? Are they geometric (straight, mathematical-like shapes) or organic (curvy, naturalistic shapes), or perhaps both?

11. What are the major colors? Name them.

12. Name the major patterns (e.g., stripes, circles, etc.) and textures (bumpy, smooth, other) that you find.

### Helpful hints:

- Imagine that you are describing the artwork to someone over the telephone.
- Think of things like clothing, environment, shapes etc.
- Look carefully at the work of art in front of you. What colors do you see in it?
- List the specific colors that you see.
- What objects do you see in the work of art in front of you?
- List the objects that you see.
- What is going on in this work of art?
- Mention whatever you see happening, no matter how small.
- Does anything you have noticed in this work of art so far (colors, objects, or events) remind you of something in your own life?
- Is this work of art true-to-life? How real has the artist made things look?
- What ideas and emotions do you think this work of art expresses?
- Do you have a sense of how the artist might have felt when he or she made this work of art?
- Does it make you feel one way or another?

Please affix this document in your sketchbook.

*Source of Information: Incredible Art Department*

http://www.princetonol.com/groups/idad/lessons/elem/criticism2.htm
APPENDIX I

Art Criticism

Analysis

Analyzing

- Look at how you organized various characteristics of a work during the descriptive process.
  - Are they symmetrical or asymmetrical?
  - Are there clearly dominant colors, shapes or textures?
  - Are they dominant because of their relative size or repeated use?

- Is there implied or actual movement?
- What kind of curves, gradation or transitions can you see?
- Are contrasts conflicting, subtle, obvious or harmonious?
It is important to analyze how visual qualities are arranged

- Ask yourself these questions...

  - What elements do you think dominate the work? How is the work arranged?
  - Which objects seems closer to you? Further away?
  - What can you tell me about the colors in this painting?

- What color is used the most in this painting?
- What makes this painting look crowded?
- What can you tell me about the person or objects in this painting?
- What can you tell me about how this person lived? How did you arrive at that idea?
- What do you think is the most important part of this picture?
- How do you think the artist made this work?

Look for the elements and principles that seem to dominate the work.

Use specific examples to support your statements.
Ask yourself:

- How has the picture (art elements) been arranged? (Artists repeat lines, shapes, colors, and patterns in exciting ways to make an artwork more interesting.)
- How are the shapes arranged? (symmetrical, triangle, vertical, circular, grid) To help you answer this place tracing paper over the image and outline the major directional flow.
- How are the colors arranged? Are the colors predominantly light or dark? Are they bright or dull?
- How is the space arranged? (flat, overlapping, or deep dimensional)

In your critiques:

Try to address a minimum of three of the elements of art:

- Lines – are they real or implied, curved, straight, directional?
- Space – positive or negative?
- Shape or Form – Geometric or freeform? Is the art 2-D or 3-D?
- Colors – Warm, cool, bright, dull (shading and tinting), soft, bold?
- Texture – Real or implied? Rough, smooth, shiny, dull? What is the texture of the medium and the objects portrayed?
- Value – Light or dark? Does it reflect or absorb light?
Try to address a minimum of three of the principles of design:

- Contrast – Variety and visual differences within the work?
- Balance – Formal (symmetrical) or informal (asymmetrical) balance?
- Unity – Does the work hold together visually?
- Movement – How does your eye move around the work? Is there the illusion of action?
- Proportion – What are the size relationships?
- Emphasis – What part is dominant? Subordinate? How is this achieved?
- Rhythm – Are there repeats of elements and images?

How is the work organized?

(Analyze how are the elements and principles of art are used to communicate the ideas expressed in the artwork)
How did history or culture affect this artwork?

How did this artwork affect history or culture?

More helpful hints –
• Mentally separate the parts or elements, thinking in terms of textures, shapes/forms, light/dark or bright/dull colors, types of lines, and sensory qualities.
More helpful hints –

- In this step consider the most significant art principles that were used in the artwork.
- Describe how the artist used them to organize the elements.

Here are some suggested questions to help with analysis:

1. How has the artist used colors in the work(s)?
2. What sort of effect do the colors have on the artwork?
3. How has the artist used shapes within the work of art?
4. How have lines been used in the work(s)? Has the artist used them as an important or dominant part of the work, or do they play a different roll?
5. What role does texture play in the work(s)? Has the artist used the illusion of texture or has the artist used actual texture? How has texture been used within the work(s).
6. How has the artist used light in the work(s)? Is there the illusion of a scene with lights and shadows, or does the artist use light and dark values in a more abstracted way?

7. How has the overall visual effect or mood of the work(s) been achieved by the use of elements of art and principles of design?

8. How were the artists design tools used to achieve a particular look or focus?

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Source of information for this lecture

http://www.erictone.com/groups/uid/Files/crit.htm
http://artework.suo.edu/art/teachers/standards/visual.htm
APPENDIX J

Post-Impressionist Analysis

January 24, 2008

For this assignment I want you to write (in essay form) a DESCRIPTION followed by an ANALYSIS of the image you selected. Please be sure to identify the artist and name of the artwork as a part of your description.

Now is your chance to do all of the analyzing you all wanted to do in your description.

Please try not to move into the final two areas of critique: INTERPRETATION and JUDGEMENT.
APPENDIX K

Descriptive Words to Use in an Analysis of Art

ELEMENTS OF ART
Line: blurred, broken, controlled, curved, diagonal, freehand, horizontal, interrupted, geometric, meandering, ruled, short, straight, thick, thin, vertical, wide
Texture: actual, bumpy, corrugated, flat, furry, gooey, leathery, prickly, rough, sandy, shiny, simulated, smooth, soft, sticky, tacky, velvet, wet
Value: dark, light, medium

ART ELEMENTS
Shape/Form: amorphous, biomorphic, closed, distorted, flat, free-form, full of spaces, geometric, heavy, light, linear, massive, nebulous, open, organic
Colors: brash, bright, calm, clear, cool, dull, exciting, garish, grayed, multicolored, muted, pale, polychromed, primary, saccharine, secondary, subdued, sweet, warm
Space: ambiguous, deep, flat, negative/positive, open, shallow

ART PRINCIPLES
Balance, contrast, emphasis, harmony, pattern, repetition, rhythm, unity, variety

THEMES IN ART
Adoration, children, circus, cityscape, earth, air, fire, water, farming, festivals, gardens, grief, history, hunting, landscape, love, music, mythology of historic occasions, portraiture, processions, religion, seascape, storytelling, theater, war

MEDIA (MATERIALS)
Two-Dimensional: chalk, colored pencil, conte, egg tempera, found materials, gouache, ink, oil, pastel, pencil, photograph, print, tempera, vine charcoal, watercolor
Three-Dimensional: bronze, clay, fibers, found materials, marble, metal, mixed media, papier-mâché, plaster, stone, wood

TECHNIQUE/FORM
Architecture, batik, carving, ceramics, collage, crafts, glassblowing, jewelry making, metalwork, modeling, mosaics, painting, photography, printmaking, repousse, sculpture, weaving

STYLE OR PERIOD
Abstract, classical, genre, historical, literary, naive, narrative, nonobjective, primitive, realistic, romantic, Renaissance.

Adapted from The Incredible Art Department:
http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/Files/crit3.htm
APPENDIX L

Elements and Principles of Art

Elements of Art

- **Line:** The path of a moving point. It can be vertical, horizontal, diagonal, curved, angular, zigzag, bent, straight, interrupted, thick, thin.
- **Color:** What the eye sees when light is reflected from it.
  - Hue is the color in its most intense form.
  - Value refers to the differences in hue ranging from lightest to darkest.
  - Primary colors (red, blue, yellow) cannot be produced by mixing other colors together.
  - Secondary colors (orange, violet, green) are created by mixing primary colors.
- **Shape:** The area enclosed by an outline; the flat area created by lines, colors, and tones; geometric; amorphous (without clarity); and bio-morphic (living or dead). Shapes can be indicated by line or color.
- **Form:** Shapes with three dimensions – height, width, and depth. Form can be realistic, abstract, idealized naturalistic, or non-representational.
- **Value:** The gradual change of lightness or darkness, white to black, used to suggest roundness of depth.
- **Texture:** Surface treatment ranging from very smooth to quite rough. It can be real or implied.
- **Space:** Actual (open air around sculpture or architecture) or implied (can be shown by control of size, color, overlapping).

PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

- **Proportion:** The pleasing relationship of all parts to each other and to the whole of the design.
- **Variety:** Differences in scale, surface, line, value, and shape that give interest to a composition.
- **Contrast:** Differences between the elements of art: texture, color, value, line.
- **Emphasis:** The center-of-interest one feature is most important and everything else works with it.
- **Pattern and repetition:** Use of line, color, or a motif in more than one place in a composition.
• **Rhythm:** Repeated use of similar elements such as color, line, or shape. The smooth transition from one part to another.

• **Balance:** The equilibrium of various elements in the work of art. It can be symmetrical or asymmetrical.

• **Harmony:** The unity of all the visual elements in a composition.
APPENDIX M

Art Criticism
Step Three
Interpretation

What is interpretation?
• Interpretation is a stage in the work of art criticism following the describing and analyzing of an artwork, in which one identifies the work's expressive qualities, or the meaning, or the mood, or idea communicated to the viewer.

Different interpretations
• A work of art can be very complicated and may be interpreted in different ways by different people.
• In art criticism, one's interpretation of a work is personal, based upon the information one has gathered from the work.
• In art history, interpretation identifies the influences of time and place on the artist's images of the same subject, created at different times or in different locations may have little in common.
• Their differences reflect the contrasting personal and cultural traditions and values of each artist.

An interpretation seeks to explain the meaning of the work based on what you have learned so far about the artwork and what you think the artist is saying.

During step three, you have two questions to answer:

• "What is happening?" and
• "What is the artist trying to say?"
You will interpret...

- You will interpret (explain or tell the meaning of) the work.
- It is during this part of a critique that you can make guesses.
- Interpretation is the most difficult art criticism step for some people.
- But it can also be the most creative and the most rewarding.

Use your intelligence, imagination and courage

- You must use your intelligence, imagination, and courage.
- You must not be afraid to make an interpretation that is different from someone else's.
- After all, you are different from anyone else.

Your Interpretation

- How you interpret a work of art will depend on what you have done and seen in your life.
- However, your interpretation should be based upon the facts and clues you collected during the first two steps.
- Your interpretation can express your feelings, but your feelings must be backed up by observation.
INTERPRETATION is the process of understanding or making meaning.

This process involves several aspects:
- Emotions
- Symbols
- Modern and historical importance
- Reinterpretation

Ask yourself these questions....
- What could be a new title for this piece?
- What symbols do you see? (A symbol is something that stands for something else. For example, a lion is often used as a symbol of strength.)
• What do the colors symbolize? (For example, blue might mean loyalty or calmness like the sea.)
• What do the colors express? How do they make you feel? Do they create a happy or sad mood? Or some other mood?

• What theme, big idea, is this about? Is it, for instance, about nature, politics, religion, childhood, other?
• What does this work mean for people today?

You can also ask....
• What was the artist's statement in this work?
• What do you think it means?
• What does it mean to you?
• How does this relate to you and your life?
• What feelings do you have when looking at this artwork?
....OR....

• Do you think there are things in the artwork that represent other things-symbols?
• Why do you think that the artist chose to work in this manner and made these kinds of artistic decisions?
• Why did the artist create this artwork?

Source of information for this lecture:


http://artwork.asu.edu/art/classes/expressions.html

APPENDIX N

Art Criticism

*Description, Analysis and Interpretation Guidelines*

Using the materials provided write a description/analysis/interpretation of your selected artwork. Read the procedure below and follow carefully while crafting the critique. As with previous writing assignments, pre-think before you write, check your spelling and grammar, and use a Thesaurus to find synonyms to use.

*Procedures:*

**Description** – Remember this step is the process of simply describing the work. In this step you want to avoid saying what *you believe the work is about* and simply say what you see.

**Analysis** - This step is also a form of description, but, in this step, you must look at what elements have been used to create this work and how they were used. When you talk about how the elements are used, it is convenient to speak of the principles of art. For instance, you might say that the repetition of red shapes in the painting creates a regular rhythm in the work. Be as specific as you can. **Be careful not to simply create some sentences peppered with the names of elements and principles. Your sentences must make sense in relation to the artwork that you are viewing.**

**Interpretation** - **In this step you should express what you believe the artwork conveys.** This can be a communication of idea, emotion, or aesthetic experience. For this step you should be familiar with the main theories of art:

- Formalism
- Expressivism or Emotionalism
- Realism or Naturalism
- Instrumentalism
- Functionalism

Understanding that art can have any of the above purposes should make the process easier. This part of the critique can really be fun, because what the work conveys may not be exactly what the artist intended. What do you get from it? This is where you get to give your opinion.
APPENDIX O

Art Criticism
Step Four
Judgment

The Final Step
- In this step you will judge if you feel the work of art is successful or a failure
- The judgment process offers the critic a second opportunity to express their own opinion.

Why is this work important?
- Judgment is a process of deciding the value of a work of art.
Influences on the Artwork

- During the judgment the critique should reflect upon the social, cultural, psychological and environmental conditions that impact a work of art.
- Looking at these conditions will help you to explain your judgment of the piece.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What is your personal response to the work of art?
- What do you think the artist is trying to say?

Is the artwork an example of.....

- Formalism?
  - Did the artist try to experiment with art elements and principles of design, (line, shape, color, texture, patterns, form, variety, unity, etc.)?

- Emotionalism?
  - Did the artist try to emphasize mood or symbolism? The artist emphasized moods or symbols.

- Functionalism?
  - Did the artist intend the artwork to be useful, religious, educational, or propaganda.
Is the piece.....

• Imitative?
  - Did the artist try to accurately describe the subject matter: people, events, objects.

Standards of Artistic Excellence

• Knowing the intentions behind the work or the theory of art it falls into, can help you decide if the work was successful or not.
• In essence, you are judging the artistic excellence of the work.
• In order to do this you must know what the standards of artistic excellence are.

Implied Standards

• Each of the previously mentioned theories (formalism, emotionalism, functionalism) of art have their implied standards.
• Those standards have to do with the quality of the communication of the work.
• How well does the work convey what it was intended to convey, or perhaps, how much more or less it conveys than was intended.
One more standard

- Another standard to consider is how well crafted the work is.
- This standard may be considered secondary to the others, but is still very important.
- When looking at a functional work one must consider what the function of the piece is and how well it performs its intended function.

Regardless of the standard...

- They all fall under the basic question that is answered in this step of:
- Is the work successful?

Source of information for this lecture:
http://www.artex.com/ArtEx/II/Interpreter.html
http://arteswork.asu.edu/arta/students/epressions/images/fig1.1.htm
APPENDIX P

Study Guide Advanced Art Classes

Please bring your sketchbook to class on Tuesday, March 18. You will be given a sheet similar to this and a print of two reproductions from which to choose. From the two you will be required to select one of the reproductions for your critique. Using paragraph form, write a critical analysis of the piece. Do not go down the list and literally answer each question I have asked – they are general questions posed to assist you in your thought process.

For instance, a description should answer a) general questions and contain b) obvious thematic, formal and technical qualities. Likewise in your analysis you should be able to discuss the a) formal relationships of shapes and images to each other and b) their formal characterization or the intended impact of the forms, colors, theme, and their relationships to each other.

Up to this point you are not to be offering our personal opinion of the piece merely describing what you see and analyzing the elements of art and principles of design used within the work. However, when you get to the interpretation you can offer you ideas on what you think the work means.

The final step in a critique is the judgment at this point you offer your ideas on what you think the work means. This is done by addressing four areas: a) your personal experience; b) the aesthetic judgment; c) your contextual judgment; and lastly d) your final judgment.

In this critique you must address the four major issues of concern 1) Description; 2) Analysis; 3) Interpretation; and 4) Judgment.

Those steps and each subcategory you should use are outlined below for your use. Carefully read each and major issue and its subcategory information before you begin to write.

Please write clearly using correct spelling and punctuation if you need to refer to a dictionary or thesaurus I have both available for your use.

Outline for the Critical Analysis of a Work of Art

1) Description
   a) General questions
      i) What’s your first response to this work?
ii) How does this make you feel?
iii) What does it make you think of?
iv) What does it remind you of?
b) Obvious thematic, formal, and technical qualities
i) What images (illusions, pictures of recognizable things) do you see?
ii) What colors (shapes, textures, etc.) do you see?
iii) Are there any outstanding or unusual features you notice?
iv) What else do you see?
v) Are there any dark (light) areas? Rough or unusual textures? Large or small shapes? And so on.
vi) How do you think this work was made? (What was it: a painting? A sculpture? A photograph? Something else?)
vii) Why do you think so? What types of brush strokes (sculptural finish, photographic technique, etc.) do you see?
viii) What is the artist's (physical) point of view? What are your clues?

2) Analysis
a) Formal relationships of shapes and images to each other. (The key in formal analysis is to look for relationships between forms and images. Differences such as changes in rhythm or one thing's being bigger, darker, brighter than another are particularly significant clues for meaning. The focus here is on principles of design.)
i) What (colors, shapes, textures, lines) dominate the image? Why?
ii) Are there significant negative areas or spaces in the work? What makes them significant?
iii) What movement do you see? What elements (line, shape, etc.) and principles (rhythm, proportion, etc.) cause movement?
iv) Where do you see contrast? What causes it?
v) Where are the figures looking/leaning toward/pointing? (The emphasis here is on implied movement).
vi) What is the focal point in this work? What causes you to look there? (Is there a single focus? Why? Why not? What features cause us to see it that way?)
b) Formal characterization (Intended impact of the forms, colors, theme, and their relationships.)
i) What mood is presented? How are we meant to feel in the presence of this piece? Why? What's the evidence?
ii) Why are we meant to focus where we o? (Why is there no central focus, or why is there a central focus?)
iii) Is this work realistic? Formalistic? Expressionistic? Some combination?
iv) Would you characterize it as primitive, slick, aggressive, bold, intellectual, overpowering, timid, monumental, fluid, abstract, cool, static, rhythmic, hot, etc? Why? What's the evidence?
(Sometimes you need to ask opposites to get at the character of a piece.) What if the background were a different color? What if this work were realistic instead of having exaggerated forms? What if it had soft instead of hard edges? And so on.

3) **Interpretation** (This is the most difficult but ultimately the most significant stage.)
   a) General questions
      i) What do you think this work means? (Remind students of the subject matter, qualities, and character as described earlier to stimulate interpretations.)
      ii) If you were inside the work, as a particular character, abstract form, or figure, what would you be thinking and feeling?
      iii) (In the face of a nonobjective or highly abstract work.) What does it remind you of or make you think of?
      iv) What title would you give this work if you were the artist? Why?

4) **Judgment/Evaluation**
   a) Personal experience
      i) What was the quality of your experience in critiquing this work?
      ii) Have your perceptions or feelings changed since we started? How?
      iii) Would you like to own this work? Why or why not?
      iv) Do you feel a need to resolve what you found through personal critique (looking at the work) with what you found in the contextual examination? Can this be done? If so, How?
   b) Aesthetic judgment
      i) Is the work well made? (Does it indicate a high degree of technical, compositional, or conceptual skill?) Do you think its form, composition, and technique are good? Why or why not?
      ii) Does it clearly express a point of view?
      iii) Overall, is it beautiful, visually satisfying, and complete in and of itself?
   c) Contextual judgment
      i) Does the work address some significant human problem or need? If so, does it do this well? Why or why not?
   d) Final judgment
      i) Is the work clear? (Does it do what it seems to be trying to do?) Is it up to the task we have determined that it set for itself? Was it worth making?
      ii) Finally, does it move you? Does it have the aesthetic power to make you feel something strongly, or think something new, or move you to action in any way?
      iii) Ultimately, was it worth examining? Why or why not?

**Source:**
http://www.artlex.com/ArtLex/i/interpret.html
http://artswork.asu.edu/arts/students/expressionism/les1_1.htm