Visual Thinking Strategies
from www.vue.org

What is VTS?

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), is an elementary school curriculum that:

- Uses a **learner-centered method** to examine and find meaning in visual art.
- Uses art to teach **thinking, communication** skills and visual literacy.
- Measurably **increases observation** skills, evidential **reasoning,** and speculative abilities, and the ability to find multiple **solutions to complex problems.**
- Uses **facilitated discussion** to practice respectful democratic collaborative problem solving among students that transfers to other **classroom** interactions, **and beyond.**
- Uses eager, thoughtful participation to nurture verbal **language skills,** and **writing assignments** to assist transfer from oral to written ability.
- Uses the web to develop **independence** and **computer skills** as well as to assist teacher preparation.
- **Produces growth,** including **visual literacy** and greatly enhanced verbal and thinking skills, in all students, from challenged and non-English language learners to high achievers.
- Encourages art museum visits to underscore **connections to art** and to integrate a community resource into students' lives
- Meets state standards in art, language, and social studies; **improves test scores** in reading and writing.

Overview of VTS

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is a visual arts program for elementary school students and teachers that uses art to teach thinking, communication skills, and visual literacy. Growth is stimulated by three things: looking at art of increasing complexity, responding to developmentally-based questions, and participating in group discussions that are carefully facilitated by teachers.

VTS encourages...

- a personal connection to art from diverse cultures, times and

places
- confidence in one’s ability to construct meaning from art
- active class discussions and group problem solving
- development of thinking and communication skills
- development of writing skills
- transfer of these skills to other subject areas

Background

VTS is based on the work of cognitive psychologist Abigail Housen and veteran museum educator Philip Yenawine. Housen has been investigating the nature of aesthetic development and its role in education for over twenty years. As part of her doctoral work at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in the late 1970's, she developed a measure and method for assessing aesthetic development. In 1983, she published her doctoral thesis "The Eye of the Beholder: Measuring Aesthetic Development," which includes her well-documented stage theory. Yenawine has directed education programs at many museums, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art in New York City, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago.

Beginning their work together in 1988, Housen and Yenawine focused on studying the effects of specific treatments (such as VTS) on aesthetic development, and the relation of aesthetic thinking to cognition in general, using Housen’s method and theory as the basis of further experimentation. Also influential in the development of VTS is the work of psychologists and educational theorists Rudolf Arnheim (in whose honor the curriculum is named), Jerome Bruner and Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky’s research concerning the relationship of language to thought, and his findings concerning growth that occurs from interaction with others are particularly influential.

Field-tested since 1991 in the United States, Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, VTS is specifically designed to address the concerns and abilities of beginning viewers. It is easy for teachers to learn, inexpensive, and efficiently fits into school schedules. VTS creates partnerships between local schools and art museums, integrating museum visits into classroom studies.

How VTS Works:

• Students and teachers examine **carefully selected art** images

- Teachers ask **open-ended questions** beginning with
  - What's going on in this picture?
  - What do you see that makes you say that?
  - What more can we find?
- Teachers **paraphrase** student **responses**, actively listening, validating individual views, demonstrating language use, reinforcing a range of ideas
- Teachers **facilitate** student **discussions**, encouraging scaffolding of observations and interpretations
- Students **support opinions** with evidence, listen and share information and ideas, to **construct meanings** together

- **Artworks** become more **complex** as student facility grows
- **Web** materials and **writing** assignments **enhance** learning
- **Museum visits** expand the students' experience

Overview of Teaching

VTS consists of ten lessons taught by classroom teachers (Kindergarten - Grade 5) spread over the school year. Each lesson lasts about an hour. Most lessons are conducted in classrooms. For Grades 3-5 an art museum visit is recommended in the final lesson.

Each lesson involves a discussion of carefully sequenced images chosen from many different cultures and times, and in various mediums. In Grades K-2, two poster-sized reproductions are used during each lesson, and in Grades 3-5, three slides.

Students are first asked to look at an image without talking. Then the teacher/facilitator asks certain non-directive questions. **("What's going on in this picture?" "What more can we find?")** These questions encourage students to examine what they see. Later more specific, probing and directed questions are added. From the beginning, students are also asked to back up interpretations with evidence; whenever they state an opinion, teachers ask them, "**What do you see that makes you say that?**"

The teacher ensures that every response is heard and acknowledged, by pointing to what is mentioned as students talk, and then paraphrasing what is said. As the discussion evolves, teachers link various related answers, helping to make students aware of their converging and diverging views, and of their developing skills at constructing shared, yet varied meanings.

Complexity of the images builds as students' interests and abilities grow. In the later grades, students are asked to perform writing assignments, preferably using computers and the Internet.

When questions are asked, students are first asked if they can figure out the answer by looking. If unable to do this, they then are asked where they might look to find the answer. Only as a last resort does the teacher give the answer.

Discussions of any given image generally last roughly twenty minutes–long enough for students to look carefully, develop opinions, express them, consider multiple viewpoints, speculate together, argue, debate and/or build on each other's ideas, and possibly revise their conclusions. All along, teachers are facilitators of the students' process, never the expert.

In Grades 3-5, writing assignments are used as a way for students to begin to apply as individuals the skills learned while discussing images as part of a group.

VTS Questions:

1. **What's going on in this photograph?**
2. **What in the photograph makes you say that?**
3. **What more can you find?**

Writing Assignments

- Help students to connect verbal and written experience.
- Are a useful and meaningful way to use computers and the internet.
- Are useful tools for teachers to assess student development.
- Allow students a choice of images.

Overview of Student Assessment Process

VTS is designed to promote growth in thinking and communication skills, as well as aesthetic development. Standard measures of achievement have limited use in assessing these different but related streams of growth. VTS assessment measures are built into the technique itself: listening to students, paraphrasing, and linking what is said. Paraphrasing is the main tool for keeping track of individuals in terms of oral language abilities, kinds of thoughts and concerns, information retained, and methods of processing information and ideas. Linking connected thoughts helps teachers understand how thinking progresses during any given discussion, how individuals relate to the group, and how a given student changes over time. Written assignments collected throughout VTS lessons concretely augment what teachers hear and recall.

During training, teachers are frequently asked to step back and consider what learning behaviors are encouraged by VTS, how these are manifested, and how to track them. Teachers are asked to keep an ongoing record of what they observe during VTS classes. Each lesson includes suggestions for different sorts of reflections on student behaviors.

Overview of Outcomes

Over time, students grow from casual, random, idiosyncratic viewers to thorough, probing, reflective interpreters. They go from finding only personal connections — appropriate when they begin — to searching out the intentions of artists and dealing with elements of styles. They are first encouraged to find meaning based on past experiences (legitimizing what they know), and to become grounded storytellers.

After a certain amount of experience — when they begin to become dissatisfied with their own limitations — they are asked to develop their own voices through writing about art, either using images provided with the curriculum or via the Internet. The process first depends on group interaction and works toward individual problem solving motivated by personal interests. As students develop their connection to art, they exercise a wide variety of cognitive skills that are useful in many contexts. Indeed, in all locations where VTS has been tested, both classroom and test performance has been seen to improve, and the effect in all cases has been attributable to VTS.

Why VTS Works:

- It uses art to **engage, puzzle, intrigue** and build a sense of competence about **decoding** complex and diverse material
- It is **student-centered**, inclusive, and fully respectful of all
- It is **easily mastered** because the strategy taught uses and hones existing strengths, interests and experience, providing challenges when appropriate to stimulate growth
- Students **work together** in group discussion, and then individually, to complete **writing assignments** — in each case applying what they know to learn more about what they do not
- It is **easy** for both teachers and students **to transfer** strategy and verbal reasoning abilities to other areas
- It sparks **motivation** and **curiosity**

What Makes VTS Different?

- VTS was **developed**, field tested and refined for **over 10 years** by museum educator Philip Yenawine and developmental psychologist Abigail Housen; **research studies** provide evidence of growth

- VTS **produces measurable growth** in all learners across cultures, language/background experience, and learning abilities; success helps students and teachers see all as capable and creative

- VTS has proven to show **transfer of skills** from art experience to thinking and communicating about other images, objects and topics

- VTS is both **rigorous AND fun**: both teachers and students value what they learn

- VTS includes an effective, efficient **professional development program** for teachers, providing instruction in student-centered teaching and peer coaching, as well as methods of assessing student growth

- VTS integrates an **internet** component for **expanded learning** for both students and teachers

Photography Resources

Outside the Lens:

- OTL Website: www.outsidethelens.org
- OTL Blospot: www.outsidethelens.blogspot.com
- OTL-Ning Network (for teachers): http://outsidethelens.ning.com
- OTL Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/pages/Outside-The-Lens/18264357271

Other Resources:

- Photovoice: http://www.photovoice.org/
- Visual Thinking Strategies: http://www.vtshome.org/
- Kids with Cameras: http://www.kids-with-cameras.org/home/
- Picnik (free online editing): http://www.picnik.com/
- Animoto (turn your photos into a mini-video): http://animoto.com/

Funding Resources

- Post on http://www.donorschoose.org for equipment.
- Post on http://www.kickstarter.com/ for funds to put towards the program.
- Post on http://www.globalgiving.org for funds to put towards the program.
- Grants specific to after school programs: http://www.afterschool.gov/
- Host a Restaurant Fundraiser in your area. These typically take place on a weekday night. Increase your sales by passing out flyers that day to local businesses asking them to purchase their lunch there. Publicize around the school to get families to attend.
- Ask friends and family to "donate" their birthday. Create a simple facebook page or add a line on your evite that asks party-goers to donate money or equipment for the program in lieu of a gift.
- Visit local businesses to ask for donations towards your project. This could include monetary donations or in-kind items that can then be used to help money (think raffle, silent auction, price largest donation, etc).
- Hold an equipment drive before or after the holidays. You might just gain a few cameras that are old news after holiday presents are opened.
- Contact Outside the Lens (info@outsidethelens.org) to grab great deals on cameras and make the most of the money you earn.

"Picture This"

You can s u want, yessir, but its' the words that sing, descend... I bow to them... I love them, I cli un them down, I bite into them, I melt them words so much... the unexpected they drop... ... they glitter like colored stones, they leap li hey are foam, th ead, metal, dew... I run after hey be uti that I want to fit them all into my p in front, as they buzz past, I trap th pe m set myself in front of the dish ave a crystal e text e to me, y, like fruit, like algae, like agat them, I shake them, I drink them , I let them my p , like slivers of polished wood, like m a shipwreck, gifts from the waves... the word... - Pablo Neruda

"Picture This"

This book is for you and about you.

There are no wrong or right answers.

Your answers are not going to be graded or looked at by anyone but you.

Be open and honest with yourself.

Everyone is different and unique in their own way.

You do not need to be the best artist or writer in the world to complete this booklet.

Have fun! Be creative! Just be you!

Draw a picture of how you see life.

"I found I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn't say any other way… things I had no words for."
–Georgia O'Keeffe

“All about me”

People say I am...

I tell myself I am...

I really am...

"Everything has its beauty but not everyone sees it." - *Confucius*

Write 10 things that...

Make me HAPPY	Make me SAD
(do not include specific names of people)	
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.

"Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.." - Mahatma Gandhi

If you could be any kind of animal, what would you be and why?

Draw a picture of yourself as this animal, including all your characteristics.

"The world of reality has its limits; the world of imagination is boundless." - Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Draw a picture of your family. What role do you play in your family?

"In every conceivable manner, the family is link to our past, bridge to our future." - Alex Haley

What is one tradition or custom that is important to you and your family?

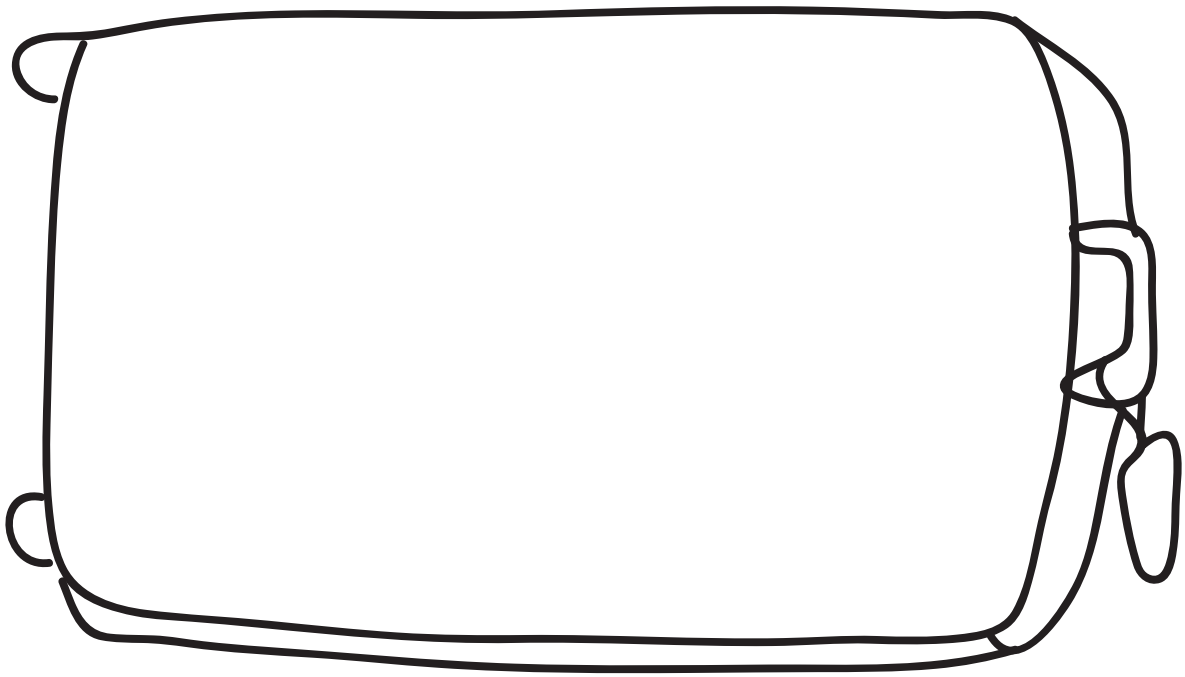
Draw a picture of that favorite family tradition or custom.

"I grew up in this town, my poetry was born between the hill and the river, it took it's voice from the rain, and like the timber, it steeped itself in the forests." –Pablo Neruda

“One medium sized suitcase”

You are leaving home forever and you can only bring one medium sized suitcase.

Draw a picture of the suitcase and what is inside of it.



Explain the objects and why you are bringing them.

We find that after years of struggle we do not take a journey, but rather a journey takes us. - John Steinbeck

“Who are you?”

I am...

I love...

I feel...

I need...

I give...

I'm afraid of...

I'd like to see..

I live...

I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear. - Joan Didion

Recall a time when you did something you thought you couldn't do. How did you feel after you accomplished what you did?

"Life is not easy for any of us. But what of that? We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something and that this thing must be attained." - Marie Curie

Draw a picture of your favorite memory.

Why is this your favorite memory?

How has this memory made you the person you are today?

Life is not what one lived, but rather what one remembers, and how it is remembered to tell the tale.
- Gabriel Garcia Marquez

How do you show someone you care about them? How do you show yourself you care about yourself?

"Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow. Just walk beside me and be my friend." - Albert Camus

If there was a book written about your life, what would the title be?

Draw the cover.

"The books that help you most are those which make you think the most. The hardest way of learning is that of easy reading; but a great book that comes from a great thinker is a ship of thought, deep freighted with truth and beauty." –Pablo Neruda

Make a list of the things that you appreciate most about yourself.

"Bravery is believing in yourself, and that thing nobody can teach you." –El Cordobés

All eyes are on you!

Write a speech that you would like to give to the world about any issue(s) or anything. Write freely and be honest. What do you think the world needs to know?

The world we have created is a product of our thinking; it cannot be changed without changing our thinking.
- Albert Einstein

Draw a picture of where you dream or hope to be in 10 years.

"Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now."
- Johann von Goethe

You can say anything you want, yessir, but its' the words that sing, they soar and descend... I bow to them... I love them, I cling to them, I run them down, I bite into them, I melt them down... I love words so much... the unexpected ones... the ones I wait for greedily or stalk until, suddenly, they drop... Vowels I love... they glitter like colored stones, they leap like silver fish, they are foam, thread, metal, dew... I run after certain words... They are so beautiful that I want to fit them all into my poem... I catch them in mid-flight, as they buzz past, I trap them, clean them, peel them, I set myself in front of the dish, they have a crystalline texture to me, vibrant, ivory, vegetable, oily, like fruit, like algae, like agates, like olives... And I stir them, I shake them, I drink them, I gulp them down, I mash them, I garnish them, I let them go... I leave them in my poem like stalactites, like slivers of polished wood, like coals, pickings from a shipwreck, gifts from the waves... Everything exists in the word... - Pablo Neruda

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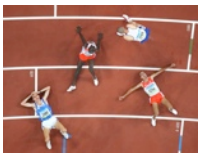
through photography and multimedia projects
www.outsidethelens.org

VANTAGE POINTS

Vantage Point: A position that provides a broad overall view or perspective.



Bird's Eye View: A very high angle onto the subject

Worm's Eye View: Very low, ground level view

Close Up: Extremely close to the subject

Long Shot: Very far from the subject.

Direct View: A front (straight on) view of the subject.

Side View: A profile of the subject.