



Meaning & message

Artists use a range of ingenious methods to communicate meaning in their work. To discover some different approaches, look at a range of art works and answer these questions.

Representation

- Is the art work representational (depicting something easily recognisable) or abstract (not a realistic representation), or both?
- Can you detect a clear meaning or message, or is the artist more concerned with formal elements, such as light, space, and colour?

Symbolism

- Has the artist used any signs or symbols in the art work? If so, for each, identify whether it is personal, cultural, or universal. What might it represent?
- How would you describe the relationships between the symbols (eg, clashing, contrasting, harmonious, incongruous, sympathetic, analogous, sequential, controversial)?

Iconography

- Has the artist used religious or spiritual iconography in the art work? If so, what, where, and to what effect?

Objects

- Can you see recognisable objects in the art work? Why do you think they have been included? Do they have any symbolic associations or relationships with each other that may contribute to the meaning or message of the work?

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Narrative

- Does the art work have a narrative (story)?
If so, describe the time, place, and setting of the story (eg, future, night, fantasy, dream, memory).
What do you think is happening?
Are there figures or animals in the work?
What role could they play in the narrative?

Appropriation

- Are there elements of the work that have been appropriated (taken from other art works)? If so, describe them. Do you think this was deliberate or accidental? Why?

Subject

- What subjects or themes do you think the artist is exploring through this piece? Describe them.

Intention

- What message do you think the artist is trying to communicate? Is the work making a social or political statement? Is it controversial? How?

Title

- Does the title of the work contribute to its message or meaning? How?

Text

- Is there any text in the work? If so, discuss whether it helps to communicate the message of the work.

Emotion

- Does the work make you feel a certain way?
Describe this feeling and how it relates to the meaning or message the artist might be trying to convey.

Personal response

- What was your first impression of the art work? What do you think or feel about it now? Do you think the artist has succeeded in getting their message across? Why or why not?