

THE REED-LO SCAFFOLDING APPROACH TO ART

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REED-LO is an acronym for the steps a student must perform in order to formulate a viable interpretation of a work of art. The first step is *Reacting*, followed by *Embracing*, *Exploring*, *Deciphering*, and then *Locating* the work in its historical context, which culminates with *Opining*, or offering an opinion regarding the work's meaning. Each of these verbs is accompanied by a key question or a series of questions that prompt the student to begin an examination of the work of art and then, step by step, end with a more informed and coherent interpretation of the work. The REED-LO Matrix, a one page flowchart, aids students through this process by allowing them to record their thoughts as they formulate their interpretations. This methodology, known as scaffolding, provides the structure and the support to assist students in finding a meaningful experience as they engage a particular work.

Step 1: React

What is the emotional tone of the work?

What is your "gut" reaction?

How does the work of art make you feel?

The first step in REED-LO involves students simply developing thoughts to express their initial reaction to the work of art; they simply identify how the work makes them feel. They explore the emotions that the work evokes and then make a pre-analysis determination as to whether or not they find the work aesthetically pleasing, neutral, or deplorable.

After this initial emotional response to the work, students may then begin to investigate and answer the questions tied to this stage. They should then advance to Step 2, *Embrace*, in order to further explore the work and to reflect upon their first impression of the work(s).

Step 2: Embrace

How would you describe the composition?

Where in the work are your eyes drawn?

What is the first thing to which your eyes are drawn? Why?

The second step in this interpretive process relates to the compositional elements of the work of art. Students should try to identify the perspective the artist attempts to capture; how the artist uses color, light and shading; how the artist interacts with positive and negative space; and whether triangular, circular, oval, or other compositional shapes are discernable. As they glance at the work, they should identify what appears to stand out and where their eyes are naturally drawn. They should also explore what visual elements facilitate the movement of their eyes.

Step 3: Explore

What Objects and items do you see?

What is the medium, or what materials were used to create this work of art?

The third step involves students immersing themselves in the work of art as they create a detailed list identifying the medium used and all the objects or items visible in the work. They should not attempt to find meaning in these items at this time, but simply list the items.

Step 4: Decipher

What objects and compositional elements might serve as symbols?

What might be their meanings?

How would you describe the action taking place in the work?

How does medium affect the action and the meanings of the symbols?

In step 4, students begin to decipher the work of art by identifying possible symbols and exploring composition in more detail. They should identify the objects from Step 3 that could hold symbolic or iconic meaning and list those objects and meanings. Along with these objects students should explore any symbolism enhanced through the composition. In other words, they may want to examine if the overall composition of the work leads their eyes to specific objects that may in turn hold more significance to the work's meaning than other objects less enhanced by the composition. They should also explore their thoughts about patterns found within the work. If the work is abstract or contemporary art and lacks discernable objects, students should examine how the images and colors interact.

During this step students should also take time to describe, in a narrative format, the action that is taking place in the work. As they do this, they should relate the possible meanings of symbols and/or images to the action occurring. They should also explore how the medium may affect the action and the meaning of the symbols and images. In other words, does the medium allow certain symbols or images to exist that could not exist in another medium?

Step 5: Locate

How does this work reflect the historical events occurring at and around the time the work was created?

Students locate the work in its historical context. No work of art operates in a vacuum; thus, to successfully complete this step, they must consider the historical events surrounding the work and historic themes possibly alluded to in the work, or they must research this information.

At this point students return to the notes they recorded in Step 4, the Decipher section, and their initial reflections recorded in Step 5 to make any changes or additions that enlarge their understanding of the work. Possibly an item previously believed not to warrant much attention may now have new meaning due to the historical context in which the work is set. Other symbols may take on different meanings due to historical events alluded to or surrounding the work.

Step 6: Opine

What do you believe to be the meaning of the work?

What is your critique of this work?

Using the notes recorded from Steps 1-5 and their assessment of emotional tone, symbolism, medium, composition, and context, students should now be ready to present their interpretation of the work. After formulating their opinions, students should compare those opinions with their initial reactions to the work in Step 1. They should also record any questions about the work that have come to mind after going through all of the steps in REED-LO. In the end they should recognize that by exploring those questions, they will begin to build a relationship with the work of art that will possibly lead them to change their opinions and find different meanings in the work over time.