



Crossing Cultures

The Art of Seeing Aboriginal Art

Teacher Resource for *Echidna*

This resource will allow you to lead students through close looking and describing questions, analysis, and interpretation relating to the painting *Echidna* by Aboriginal painter Dick Nguleingulei Murrumurru.

It is based on the Art of Seeing Art method created by the Toledo Museum of Art. This discussion-based approach will help you and your students in exploring a work of art in the Museum's exhibition of Aboriginal art, *Crossing Cultures*.

How to use this resource:

- Print out the document for yourself
- Read through the document carefully as you look at the image of the work of art
- When you are ready to engage your class, project the image of the work of art on a screen in your classroom. You can find the image at the end of this document. Use the questions provided below to lead the discussion.

This exercise is meant for use in the classroom. There is no substitute for seeing the real work of art in the exhibition at the Toledo Museum of Art. Please call our scheduler to schedule a tour today. The TMA has a wide range of original works of art and many tours to offer. We are open Tuesday to Sunday and docent-led tours are available. Visit <http://www.toledomuseum.org/learn/tours/> to schedule.

Close Looking & Describing Questions

Ask your students to look carefully at this work of art. Have them look closely and describe what they see. Start the questioning with elements of art and broad, open-ended questions.

*Describe what catches your eye in this painting.
What else do you see in this painting?*

Continue to guide your students' eyes around the work of art with more close looking and describing questions, such as:

*What colors do you see?
Where has the artist repeated the same color?
How many colors has the artist repeated?
What color is the background? How can you tell?*

*How many different lines do you see? Describe them.
How do the lines create movement in this painting?*

*What kinds of shapes do the lines create?
Where do you see the same shape more than once?*

What has the artist used to fill in the spaces between the lines and shapes?

How does the background color interact with the lines on the surface of the painting?

Are the lines all the same or different? What makes you say that?

How do the lines create movement or make your eyes move around the composition?

*Where has the artist used lines to show us texture?
Describe these textures.*

Analysis

Once the students have completed listing everything they observed in the painting by close looking, begin to ask simple analytical questions that will help to deepen their understanding of the work of art.

Does this painting remind you of anything in your life?

Where have you seen similar shapes in nature?

Where have you seen similar colors in nature?

How would this painting change if the lines were not lines but solid colors?

What tools do you think the artist used to create this work of art?

How do the colors in this painting make you feel?

Does the space in this painting seem cluttered, busy, open, white, empty, colorful? Why?

Is this a large work of art or a small work of art? How does its size affect how you feel about it?

Layering of Information

(Background Information/Research)

Share the background information provided below regarding the artist and the painting. This is information that a viewer cannot get simply by looking at the painting. Once you have shared the following information, your students will be ready for deeper analysis and interpretation of the work of art.

The animal depicted in this painting is an echidna. Echidna are very unusual animals. They are small mammals which are covered in spines like hedgehogs or porcupines. Like platypuses, they are monotremes, one of only a few mammal species that lay eggs. Echidnas have tiny mouths and no teeth. They eat by breaking open soft logs and anthills and using their long, sticky tongue to collect ants and termites.

In this painting the artist has depicted both the outside and the inside of the echidna. This style is sometimes called the x-ray style because it looks like one. Paintings like this one are used by Kunwinjku clan elders to educate young children about how to butcher the animal, as well as how the meat should be distributed by seniority throughout the community.

The artist has used traditional materials which were harvested from the local environment. Instead of canvas, the artist has used the flattened bark of a eucalyptus tree. Ochre, a clay-like substance mined from the earth, has been used as paint.

The delicate cross-hatching pattern which covers this work of art is called *rarrk*. *Rarrk* is created using a very fine brush with as little as a single hair. Aboriginal people believe that the shimmering effect created by the use of *rarrk* gives the painting Ancestral power.

Once the background information has been shared, you might consider asking the following questions:

What did you learn from the background information?

How does the background information help reinforce what you observed in the painting?

How would you have reacted to the painting differently if you had known the background information first?

Interpretation

Interpretation brings the close looking and describing questions, analysis, and background information together to aid in better understanding the work of art.

What might be some of the challenges of using bark and natural paints to create a work of art?

What natural materials might you collect where you live to use in an artwork?

What animals do you see near where you live? If you wanted to create a picture of one, what would be important to include? Why?

Try to make a drawing of an animal that lives in your neighborhood in the x-ray style. What inside elements will you include?



Dick Nguleingulei Murrumurru
Kunwinjku, about 1920–1988
Echidna, 1972
48 x 35 cm
Ochres on stringybark
Promised gift of Will Owen and
Harvey Wagner; EL.2011.60.17