

Academic Scholars: Analysis by Observation



On Saturday 8th October a group of the Academic Scholars had the opportunity to explore the imaginative world of Art. Dr Hammer led the activity on 'Analysis by Observation'; a skill which can not only aid the artists among us, but can help with tasks such as revision or even interpreting sources in an exam or lesson.

Art requires us to use both sides of our brain; the right side, dealing with visual references, and the left, handling organisation and logic. Naturally, students with a dominating right side generally tend to be more creative and respond better visually. Others, who are more inclined to the left side, are far more analytical, preferring organised thinking, solving problems step by step, and a more cogent approach. This marries both hemispheres of our brain together, effectively strengthening our capabilities for understanding and recalling creatively, as well as deepening our analytical thinking. A perfect warm up tool for exams and visual classroom exercises!

We were given one minute to look at a painting by Georges Seurat called the 'Bathers at Asnières', and then we were instructed to hide the

picture and draw all that we could recall. This was a seemingly simple task; the painting contained basic shapes, a clear distinction between foreground and background, and the detail could easily be drawn accurately. However, when faced with a blank sheet of paper, and asked to replicate what seemed like a simple structure, it suddenly seemed a far more daunting prospect. All sense of proportion became distorted, and even locating the basic outline of the trees or the sea was similarly hard to recall accurately.

Although it was a challenge, I did manage to set out the foundations, pencilling in the main aspects of the painting. It was interesting to observe what other people managed to recall in comparison to my efforts. Some focused on the bathers in the foreground (perhaps because of the vivid colours they were clad in), whilst others concentrated entirely on the yachts in the sea. A true range of visual memories and interpretations was evident.

The second task was similar: observing, noting and then trying to capture the angle of the shadows or placement of the buildings. But this time we had two minutes to focus, along with

the added challenge of remembering the colours in the original. Strangely enough, I found this second task easier. I could still recollect the structures and the vibrant colours fairly clearly and accurately. Whilst drawing, the connection with revision could not help springing to mind as the colours clearly made an impact on my memory and could therefore be used effectively in my revision notes. Not only that, but it became more apparent that using your visual memory engages all of your brain and can be a far more interactive way of learning.

So, what did I learn from this session of trying to think and learn visually? The majority of us clearly learned a lot about Art itself, in particular about complementary colours and the use of tone in a painting. But on another level, the challenges that we were set helped to teach us how to think efficiently and to engage all parts of our brains; not only thinking and learning by doing, but also by what we see. I certainly felt that the session had enriched my potential to learn, and had opened up new pathways to how we learn.

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