



EduTrend Contents

W4C · VISUAL ARTS · HIGH SCHOOL

Composition and Critique

Analyse artworks and design a strong composition

Ages 15–18

Level: Advanced

75 minutes

Individual and small
groups

Activity 05

Inside: activity at a glance · step-by-step session plan · facilitator notes · 3 student worksheets · assessment checklist

ACTIVITY 05 · AT A GLANCE

Composition and Critique

Students use a four-stage critique model (describe, analyse, interpret, judge) to discuss artworks from different periods and cultures. They analyse composition devices such as the rule of thirds, leading lines and balance, then plan three thumbnail compositions and hold a group critique.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session students can:

- apply a structured critique model to artworks;
- analyse composition using elements and principles of design;
- plan and compare alternative compositions;
- give and use constructive critique.

KEY WORDS

composition · elements · principles
· balance · emphasis · rule of thirds
· leading lines · critique ·
interpretation

CURRICULUM LINKS

Art and design: critical and
contextual studies, composition.
National Core Arts Standards:
responding and creating.

1**EXPLORE**

Look and play

2**IMAGINE**

Generate ideas

3**PLAN**

Sketch and choose

4**MAKE**

Create the work

5**REFLECT**

Talk about it

6**REFINE**

Improve and share

Materials (per student)

- Printed reproductions of 6 artworks from different periods and cultures (museum open-access images)
- Tracing paper and viewfinders
- Sketchbooks, pencils, markers
- Critique prompt cards
- Worksheets 1, 2 and 3

Before the session

- Select artworks with varied composition strategies; many museums offer free open-access images.
- Prepare critique prompt cards for each stage.
- Cut card viewfinders.
- Plan groups for the critique.

SAFETY

Critique focuses on the work, not the person.
Agree respectful language before the group critique.

ACTIVITY 05 · SESSION PLAN

Step by step

Insist on description before judgement: students jump to “I like it” too quickly.

Time	What happens	Say or ask
0–10 min Hook	Show two versions of the same scene with different cropping.	<i>“Which is stronger, and why?”</i>
10–30 min Critique	Groups critique two artworks using describe, analyse, interpret, judge.	<i>“What evidence in the work supports your interpretation?”</i>
30–40 min Analyse	Trace composition structures on reproductions: thirds, lines, balance.	<i>“Where does your eye go first?”</i>
40–60 min Thumbnails	Students plan three thumbnail compositions for one subject.	<i>“What changes when you move the focal point?”</i>
60–75 min Group critique	Groups critique each other’s thumbnails and choose the strongest.	<i>“What one change would improve this?”</i>

CHALLENGE CARD (print or copy onto the board)

Critique an artwork using a four-stage model, then design three alternative compositions and justify which is strongest using principles of design.

ACTIVITY 05 · FACILITATOR NOTES

The art in brief

Composition is the arrangement of elements in an artwork. Artists use elements (line, shape, form, colour, value, texture, space) and principles (balance, contrast, emphasis, movement, rhythm, unity, proportion) to guide the viewer's eye and create meaning. The rule of thirds places key points on imaginary lines dividing the picture into thirds.

Edmund Feldman's critique model asks viewers to describe what they see, analyse how it is organised, interpret its meaning and then judge its success. Separating these stages helps critique become evidence-based. Composition rules are tools rather than laws; many great works deliberately break them.

Common ideas to listen for

- "The subject is centred in all good compositions." Off-centre subjects often create more interest.
- "Critique means criticism." It means careful, evidence-based discussion, including strengths.
- "Interpretation is just opinion." Good interpretation is supported by evidence in the work and its context.

Adapting the activity

Support

Provide sentence starters for each stage of the critique model.

Stretch

Research the context of one artwork and explain how it changes your interpretation.

WORKSHEET 1

Four-stage critique

Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

Critique one artwork.

Critique

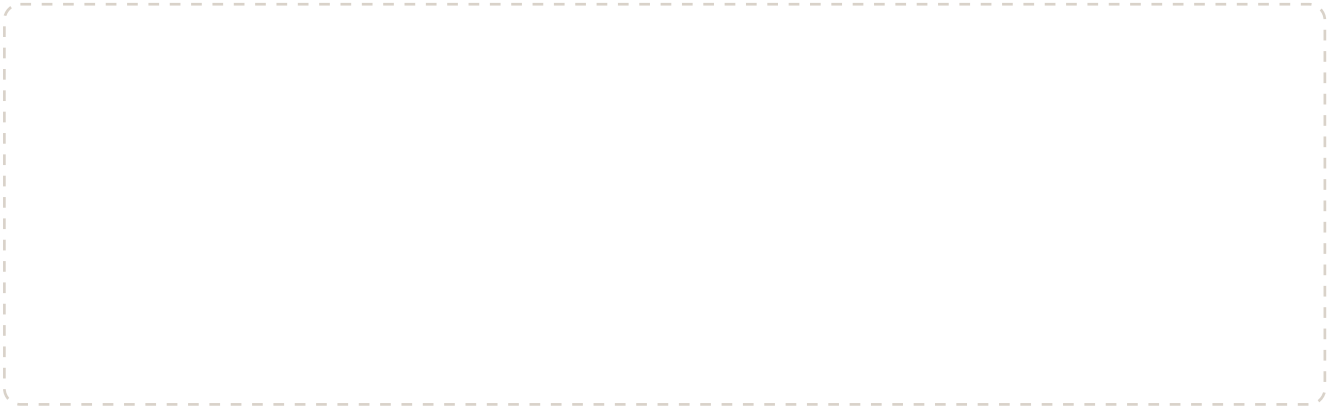
Stage	My response
Describe	
Analyse	
Interpret	
Judge	

WORKSHEET 2

Thumbnails

Plan three compositions for one subject.

Thumbnails



Draw three small rectangles and plan a different composition in each. Mark the focal point.

Principles used in each

WORKSHEET 3

Critique and decision

Record feedback and your choice.

Feedback received

My chosen composition and why

FOR THE TEACHER

Assessment checklist

Use during the session. One sheet covers up to eight students; copy as needed.

Student	Applies critique model with evidence	Analyses composition	Justifies design choices

Suggested codes: W = working towards · E = expected · G = greater depth

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Composition and Critique is a sample activity from the EduTrend Contents W4C Visual Arts programme (high school, level: advanced). Every activity in the programme follows the same format: a practical challenge, a clear session plan, facilitator notes and ready-to-print worksheets, so that teachers, club leaders and parents can run it without extra preparation.

Full 15-, 20- and 32-week programmes are available from EduStore at edutrend.org.

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