

Engagement Strategies

ArtWorks Mural Tours encourage participation and offer a combination of interesting information and entertaining interaction. Below is an introduction to a few basic engagement techniques as well as sample questions to use to engage the audience.

In general guides should:

- *Ask open ended questions

- *Ask for evidence or ask "why do you think that?" after a response

- *Repeat or rephrase comments loudly for the group to hear

If you are struggling to think of a question, you can always ask "what do you see?"

Additional engagement strategies include:

Looking not Interpreting

A good way to begin a conversation about an artwork is to have the viewer stop and actually look and list what they see in the artwork before they interpret it. By asking "What do you see?" "What do you notice?" you encourage viewers to slow down and list details that they see or notice that might give them insight into the artwork's meaning. Once they state what they see, you can ask the follow up question "What do you think this means?," "Why do you think that detail was included?," to make sure you and the rest of the audience understands why the viewer is interpreting the artwork in a particular way. *No Place Like Home*, is a good mural to try out this strategy.

Compare/Contrast

A good way to have the audience consider what they are looking at is to compare it to something they have just seen. Ask "how is this mural similar to the last mural?" "how is it different?" A good follow up question might be "why do you think the artist made this in this way?" *Homecoming (Bluebirds)* and *Martha, the Last Passenger Pigeon* might be a good place to try out this strategy.

Awaken the Senses

Have the audience imagine what it might be like to actually be inside of the painting. Ask them questions like "What might you hear if you were in this painting?" "What do you think this mural would smell like?" "What would it feel like to touch an object in this mural?" "What time of year do you think it might be? How would the weather feel like in this painting?" *Riverside Vineyard* and *Fresh Harvest* are good murals to try out this strategy.

New Title

Ask the audience to give a particular mural a new title (or do not tell them the title of the mural and at the end have them brainstorm what the title might be). This strategy is best used after the audience has a lot of information about the work. This could be a good question to use before transitioning to the next mural.

What caught your eye?

Ask the audience "when we first walked over to this artwork, what grabbed your attention first?"

Have them consider what they looked at first (and why) and how their eye worked their way around the mural. This is strategy can be especially helpful when looking at a particularly busy mural such as *Ice Cream Daydream*.

Cartoon it

A good engagement strategy, especially for artworks with people in them, is to imagine what the person (object/animal) in the artwork is thinking. Have the audience imagine a thought or speech bubble next to a character and ask "what might he/she/it be thinking?" Any mural with figures in it is a good choice for this strategy such as *What's Happening Downtown?* or *Mr. Tarbell Tips His Hat*.

Addition/Subtraction

Have the audience look and analyze the details within the mural. Ask "how does the mural change if you take away _____?" The opposite question works as well "If you could add one more detail to this mural, what would it be?" This is a good strategy for a mural where the details are very important or where the meaning of the work would change if you added a new detail. A good mural to use this strategy with is *Cincinnati's Table* or *What's Happening Downtown*.

One Word

This strategy can be tweaked to work at the beginning or toward the end of a tour. At the beginning of a tour you might ask "If you could only use one word to describe this artwork, what would it be?" Using one word captures the audiences' initial reaction to the work. This question could also be asked at the end of the tour stop as well as to see how the audience might capture the essence of the work using only one word. This is a good strategy to use for a mural with a lot of detail like *The Vision of Samuel Hannaford*, *Fresh Harvest* or *Ice Cream Daydream*.

Sketches and Drafts

For some of the murals, we have alternate sketches and drafts of the mural. These can be used to have the audience consider the intention of the artist or the organization commissioning the work. "Why do you think _____ was eliminated from this work?" "Why do you think it was important to include _____?" This is a good strategy for *No Place like Home*.