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## Topics and Themes

When a topic has been identified, the teacher must assume that all students' prior exposure to the topic will not be equal. Some students' experience will be extremely limited; others' will be very extensive. It is important that all have the broadest knowledge and understanding of the topic as possible, even allowing for the limitations of classrooms time. The general idea of allowing time for the exploration of a topic is to permit the student to turn the subject inside out, to explore every angle, and to discover previously unknown facets of the topic and its personal relevance to the student. The broadening of the student's concept of the topic gives the student more flexibility in approaching and creating art.

One does not have to follow a set formula in exploring topics. Listed below are a number of possible approaches.

- ! **Observation.** Whenever possible, observe the object(s) or event(s) directly. It is important to allow sufficient time for this. Look for major visual components: line, shape, colour, texture, and value. These are the elements of design. Look for the organization of the visual components: areas of emphasis, contrast, repetition, rhythm, movement. These are the principles of design. Look for relation of size, length, thickness, angle, etc. Look for mood and atmosphere. Look for environments. What's happening around the main object(s) or event(s)? What is the relation between object and environment?
- ! **Discussion.** As a group discuss the object or event. This reinforces the seeing and activates students to see things they might have missed. Discuss ideas. Share information. Share points of view.
- ! **Comparison.** Discuss how objects are similar or different. Compare visual components. Compare materials. Compare functions. Compare student reactions.
- ! **Looking for New Points of View.** Use two L-shaped pieces of cardboard to make an adjustable viewing frame. Zoom in on small areas of large objects. Find interesting compositions. Instead of concentrating on small portions of whole objects, look at whole large shapes. Record both kinds of looking. Look at objects from new angles. What does a bicycle look like from the back? From above? Look inside objects. What makes them tick?
- ! **Learning by Doing.** Participate in events. Dramatize events. Manipulate objects. Find out how they work, how they feel. Go on field trips. Explore, experiment, ask questions, and discover new things.
- ! **Collecting and Displaying.** Collect objects of visual and tactile interest. Collect and display objects for a theme. Display student art work in the classroom, around the school, in public

buildings. Over the years, slowly build a collection of interesting objects which may be used in still lifes or for studies. Such objects may include bottles, old or broken implements, ropes, bowls, shells, feathers, bones, driftwood, fabrics, gourds, fishing gear, and so on. Eventually there will be a wide variety of shapes, sizes, textures, and colours for students to study, observe, and incorporate into works.

- ! **Recording.** Students must keep a sketchbook. They can record things they see, ideas they have, glue in things that interest them. Teachers are encouraged to do the same thing.
- ! **Using Resources.** Look at a variety of visual resources - slides, films, videotapes, filmstrips, magazine photographs, books. Use the library. Research books for information.
- ! **Playing Games.** Check the group's visual memory. Study an object/art work for a minute or so. Hide the object/art work and describe it in detail. Draw the object. Look at the object again briefly. Complete the drawing.

Describe the design elements of an object/art work which is hidden from the group. Do not name the item or part of it. See if students can guess the object. Specific rules of what may or may not be included in descriptions may be decided upon beforehand by the group.

- ! **Image. Ask "What If"?** What if the scale were changed? What if we have x-ray vision? What if we painted with something other than a paintbrush? What if the light came from below? What if objects had a new surface (e.g., a teacup made of fur)? What if....?

The following themes provide a number of possible topics as subject matter.

## People

At rest - sitting, lying down, leaning ...

In motion - running, jumping, throwing, marching, dancing, swaying, waving, clapping ...

In costume - ethnic costume, work clothes, dress-up clothes, assorted clothing and accessories (e.g., goggles, floppy hat, rubber boots, bangles, umbrellas ...

Particular people - family members, friends, community workers, children, elderly people, rock/movie stars, heroes, favourite people ...

At school - in the cafeteria, at the school dance, on the school grounds, in science class, at an assembly, in the gym, waiting for the bus ...

Emotions - anger, fear, happiness, hate, intolerance, friendliness, hypocrisy, loneliness, justice ...

Other \_\_\_\_\_

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## The Build Environment

Building exteriors - public building (e.g., church, school, fire station, town hall, library, store), industrial buildings, historical buildings, buildings in decay, private houses ...

Building interiors - personal spaces (e.g., student's room at home, study space, hiding space), shared spaces (e.g., classroom, art room, clubhouse), public spaces (grocery store, library, art gallery, local hangout, theatre, restaurant, airport) ...

Portions of buildings - doors, windows, roofs, chimneys, mailboxes, street numbers ...

Contents viewed through open doors - art cupboard, kitchen cupboard, closet, battered van ...

Community layout - the community as seen from above, area maps, street scenes, personal walking routes ...

Fantasy - a familiar building relocated to an unusual site, a new building on an old site, a space colony, exotic architecture ...

Signs and symbols - trademarks, business signs, traffic signs ...

Other \_\_\_\_\_

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## The Natural Environment

Scapes - landscapes, seascapes, fantasy scapes, sky scapes ...

Atmosphere - windy, stormy, hot, cold, foggy, calm, morning, noon, night, seasons ...

Sounds - wind, rain, hail, running water, thunder ...

Water - the ocean, rivers, ponds, waterfalls, puddles ...

Trees - shapes, sizes, in seasons ...

Wild and domestic plant life - flowers, lichen, seeds, pods, cones ...

Objects from the natural environment - shells, rocks, sea urchins, plants, devil's purse, driftwood, nests, hives, cocoons, kelp ...

Skeletal objects - bones, skulls ...

Fruits and vegetables - whole and cut

Other \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Activities

Working - jobs at home, helping out in the community, holding a part-time job, baby-sitting ...

Playing - roller skating, ice-skating, sliding, skiing, skidooing, hockey, football, broomball, basketball, running, skateboarding.

Relaxing - fishing, berry-picking, picnicking, travelling, shopping, after school, hanging out ...

Events - parade, circus, fair, garden party, rock concert, festival, school dance ...

Making music - playing an instrument, the orchestra, performers, choirs ...

Other \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Animals

In the natural environment - moose, rabbits, animals in camouflage ...

In captivity - birdcages, zoo, circus ...

Underwater creatures

Exotic creatures

Fantasy creatures - monsters, amalgams ...

Work animals

Creatures with strong design elements - butterflies, insects, birds, fish

Other \_\_\_\_\_

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## Designed Objects

Transportation on wheels - cycles (bicycles, tricycles, motorcycles), automobiles (vans, cars, trucks, jeeps, battered vehicles, shiny new vehicles, cement mixers, plows), trains, baby carriages, roller skates ...

Transportation on water - ferries, trawlers, dories, sailboats, wind surfboards ...

Transportation in air - jets, seaplanes, helicopters, parachutes, hot air balloons ...

Machines - typewriters, telephones, stereos, computers ...

Furniture - chairs, (stools, office chairs, stackable chairs, lounging chairs, lawn furniture ...

Musical instruments - clarinets, flutes, guitars, violins, accordions, trumpets, trombones ...

Carpentry tools - hammers, saws, wrenches ...

Collection of objects - the contents of locker, purse, treasure box ...

Toys and games

Kites

Inside mechanisms of clocks, watches, radios ...

Inventions

Letter and number forms

Masks

Clothing

Transformation/metamorphosis can also be an excellent starting point. Any subject can be explored through its change over time.

Other \_\_\_\_\_  
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