

**Name of educator:** Kathleen Doherty

**Teaching plan title:** US History through Art

**Subject area for educator's teaching plan:** US History

**Educator's state:** Massachusetts

**Description of teaching plan:** A class discussion, using the Visual Thinking Strategies protocol, of a given piece of art related to a particular unit of study in order to promote inquiry, critical thinking and curiosity about the upcoming unit.

**Lesson plan format:**

**1. Introduction, overview, and unit rationale:** Andy Warhol is said to have remarked that in America, most people think that Art is [just] a man's name. While that may be an overstatement, it is easy to overlook the arts and this assignment is one way to incorporate the arts on a regular basis. There are many ways to learn about history. Looking at art may engage students who would otherwise be less interested in history. Conversely, it and may also be a way to have students who love history appreciate art more fully. This assignment uses VTS (Visual Thinking Strategies) and is meant to be repeated several times throughout the year. Ideally, a field trip to a museum in the second half of the school year would be possible, with a VTS examination of an artwork (or two) led by a museum educator.

**2. Unit goals:** Through this ongoing class exercise students will gain exposure to American art, an understanding of how the study of art provides insight into a given historical time period, as well as practice with close examination and analysis of visual works of art.

**3. Connections to state standards:** Selected excerpts from the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Science (pp. 117 -118, 180, 182-183)

“They [teachers] may choose to design courses that also integrate language arts, the arts, and history and social science, selecting examples of literature, music, dance, and visual art that correspond to periods in United States History.”

[USI.T6] United States History I Topics, Topic 6. Rebuilding the United States: immigration and industry

*Supporting Question: Industrialists have been called “Captains of Industry” and “Robber Barons.” Which title is more appropriate for them and why?*

- 1. Explain the various causes of the Industrial Revolution** (e.g., the economic impetus provided by the Civil War; **important technological and scientific advances, such as the expansion of the railroad system**; the role of business leaders, entrepreneurs, and inventors such as Alexander Graham Bell, Andrew Carnegie, Thomas Edison, J.P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, and Cornelius Vanderbilt).

2. **Make connections among the important consequences of the Industrial Revolution** (e.g., **economic growth and the rise of big business; environmental impact of industries; the expansion of cities**; the emergence of labor unions such as the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor under Samuel Gompers; workers' distrust of monopolies; the rise of the Populist Party under the leadership of William Jennings Bryan or the rise of the Socialist Party under Eugene Debs).

Grades 9–10 Reading Standards for Literacy in the Content Areas: History and Social Science [RCA-H]

#### Key Ideas and Details

1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

#### Craft and Structure

4. Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.
5. Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

Grades 9–10 Speaking and Listening Standards for Literacy in the Content Areas [SCLA]

#### Comprehension and Collaboration

1. **Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions** (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *discipline-specific topics, texts, and issues*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

1. Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas. (See grades 9–10 Reading Standard 1 for more on the use of textual evidence.)
- c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.
- d. Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

## Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

4. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, vocabulary, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

### 4. Detailed description of what will happen each day

- At the start of the year, we will have discussed art and music as two of the many ways in which we can examine a given time period. For each unit, we will examine at least one piece of music or one piece of art, following established protocols.
- By the time of this lesson, I will have already done at least one round of examining visual art with students, using the *Visual Thinking Strategies protocol* (see guidelines below). (For example, we will already have examined John Gast's *American Progress*. Another example - during the unit on WWI, we will look at Christopher Nevinson's *La Mitrailleuse*.)
- For this unit on industrialization, I will start the unit with a look at *Pittsburgh Industrial Scene* using the VTS protocol. (see attached image below). Depending on the dynamics of the particular class (I have five different sections) this will take anywhere from 10 to 30 minutes. At the end of the unit, I will either have a class follow-up discussion or put that image on the test for students to respond to.

### 5. Formal and informal assessment -

- Informal assessment – via VTS class discussion
- Formal assessment – (optional) – the artwork could be included on an end-of-the-unit assessment. Students could be asked to analyze in writing the work we had already discussed in class – commenting on how that art was a reflection of its time, making sure to bring in specific information from the unit that was just completed. Alternatively – or in addition – students could be asked to analyze a different, but related, piece of art, which had not been discussed in class.

6. **Technological needs** – can be done with Smartboard or other projector and/or give students handouts of the art piece or share via Google Classroom

## 7. Material needed to complete the unit –

- The artwork (to be projected and/or printed, photocopied and distributed and/or to be shared on Google Classroom or similar if students have devices to view it on) – for this lesson, the piece is [Pittsburgh Industrial Scene](https://collection.thewestmoreland.org/objects-1/info/3644)  
<https://collection.thewestmoreland.org/objects-1/info/3644>



- The discussion protocol – there are several; here is one (see below as well) [Visual Thinking Strategies](https://www.licm.org/media/filer_public/e6/2f/e62fecc5-2e9c-4043-b04f-ffd33204dad/art_programs_download_basic-vts-at-a-glance.pdf)  
[https://www.licm.org/media/filer\\_public/e6/2f/e62fecc5-2e9c-4043-b04f-ffd33204dad/art\\_programs\\_download\\_basic-vts-at-a-glance.pdf](https://www.licm.org/media/filer_public/e6/2f/e62fecc5-2e9c-4043-b04f-ffd33204dad/art_programs_download_basic-vts-at-a-glance.pdf)

## 8. Other sources to consider –

- [Introduction to ‘What’s Going on In This Picture?’](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/28/learning/introduction-to-whats-going-on-in-this-picture.html)  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/28/learning/introduction-to-whats-going-on-in-this-picture.html>
- [On-Demand Webinar: Using Photos to Promote Critical Thinking Across Subjects](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/22/learning/on-demand-webinar-using-photos-to-promote-critical-thinking-across-subjects.html)  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/22/learning/on-demand-webinar-using-photos-to-promote-critical-thinking-across-subjects.html>
- Visual Thinking Strategies [website](https://vtshome.org/about/) - <https://vtshome.org/about/>
- [Picturing US History – My Favorite Image](https://picturinghistory.gc.cuny.edu/category/my-favorite-image/) -  
<https://picturinghistory.gc.cuny.edu/category/my-favorite-image/>
- Westmoreland Museum of American Art: [Born of Fire/Valley of Work/Scenes of Industry](https://collection.thewestmoreland.org/objects-1/portfolio?records=20&query=Portfolios%20%3D%20%22407%22&sort=0) collection - <https://collection.thewestmoreland.org/objects-1/portfolio?records=20&query=Portfolios%20%3D%20%22407%22&sort=0>
- [Teaching in the Art Museum – Chapter 6 – Questioning the Use of Questions](https://www.joslyn.org/Post/sections/188/Files/Teaching%20in%20the%20Art%20Museum%20Chapter%206.pdf)  
<https://www.joslyn.org/Post/sections/188/Files/Teaching%20in%20the%20Art%20Museum%20Chapter%206.pdf>

This is an interesting chapter that takes a critical look at several techniques, including VTS. Thought provoking!

# VTS *Visual Thinking Strategies*

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## Basic VTS at a Glance

By: Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine (May 2010)

### Starting the Lesson (Getting Ready)

At the start of the first class, introduce VTS: it allows students to examine art, think, contribute observations and ideas, listen, and build understandings together.

Project the first image. Always give students a moment to look in silence before inviting them to speak.

### Asking Questions

After they have examined the image, ask the question, *What's going on in this picture?*

Whenever students make an inference (comments drawing conclusions based on observations), respond first by paraphrasing, and then ask, *What do you see that makes you say that?*

In order to keep students searching for more observations, frequently ask, *What more can you find?*

### Responding to Students' Comments

**Listen** carefully to students, making sure that you hear all of what they say and that you understand it accurately.

**Point** to what they observe in the image, pinpointing precisely, even if the observations are not new. Use encouraging body language and facial expressions to nurture participation.

**Paraphrase** each comment. Change the wording, but not the meaning of what is said. In rephrasing, demonstrate proper sentence structure and vocabulary to assist students with language development.

**Accept** each comment neutrally. Remember that this process emphasizes a useful pattern of thinking, not right answers. Students are learning to make detailed observations, sorting out and applying what they know. Articulating their thoughts leads to growth even when they make mistakes.

**Link** answers that relate, including both agreements and disagreements. Show how the students' thinking evolves, how some observations and ideas stimulate others, how opinions change and build.

### Concluding the Lesson

Thank students for their participation. Tell them what you particularly enjoyed. Encourage them to think of viewing art as an ongoing, open-ended process. Avoid summaries; linking throughout is enough to show how conversations build.



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