



# Socratic Questions

a 45 – 60 minute classroom activity  
Grades 9 – 12+  
By Jeanne Sheets-Sagoo, Center for Advanced Learning

**Lesson Overview:** Students will use artwork to develop different levels of questions that allow them to practice critical thinking within the framework of a Socratic discussion.

## Suggested Posters:

- *Three Kids*, William Cumming
- *Untitled*, Nottingham Studio, Macon, MO
- *Indian Summer*, Wendy Red Star
- *Shiva as Lord of the Dance*, India, 12th century or later

## Materials:

- Posters
- Paper and Pencil

## Before the Lesson:

1. Choose a shared text. Select a single poster to exhibit for the class. Give students a moment to just “observe” the mounted artwork.
2. Create a “discussion area” somewhere in the classroom. This might be four chairs facing each other or a table space.
3. *Why Socratic Discussion?* Inquiry-based discussion encourages critical thinking through questions, not definitive answers or conclusions. Introduce this idea to the class.

## Lesson Steps:

1. Define the three types of Socratic question types that you will use for this activity.
  - a. **Clarifying:** This question has a right or wrong answer. The answers can be found in the text or clarified by research.
  - b. **Interpretive:** This question has multiple, possible answers that must be backed up by the text. This question asks the reader to use evidence to make a claim.
  - c. **Evaluative:** This question allows a reader to move outside the text. This question may come in the form of an opinion or personal response that is inspired by the text. (10 min.)
2. Ask students to use the artwork to write one example of each type of question. (10)
3. Move about the room and observe student’s work. Choose 4-5 students with effective questions. Ask these students to move into the “discussion area”. (5)



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4. Allow students to conduct their Socratic discussion by asking and answering their questions.(10)
5. Rotate a new group of students into the discussion every 5-10 minutes. (10)
6. Debrief as a whole group, or journal: **How did this discussion increase your understanding of the artwork?**

Example: *Shiva as Lord of the Dance*, 12th Century or Later. Tamil Nadu, India

Clarifying Question: Who is Shiva?

Interpretive Question: Which symbols in this sculpture work to establish that Shiva is a deity?

Evaluative Question: What does this artwork mean to me now?

Go online for Poster PDFs in Spanish and English, maps, and more:

<https://portlandartmuseum.org/learn/educators/resources/posters/>