**Introduction to Making Observations**

*“I see no more than you, but I have trained myself to notice what I see.” - Sherlock Holmes*

By Madelyn Smith

\*Information in this lesson is based on personal experience, working as a Gallery Interpreter at NHMLA, and the book “The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling” written and illustrated by John Muir Laws.

**Accompanying materials:**

* “Visual Thinking Strategy” handout from NHMLA
* “Field Journal” or something for students to record their drawn and written observations on

**Introduction:**

All too often we walk through our world caught up in our thoughts and worries, glued to a screen, or focusing on a completely separate time and place. We look without seeing, when there is an infinite amount of information swirling around us at any one time. Taking even just a couple seconds to truly focus on what’s around us can lead to new discoveries, deepen understanding of something familiar, or just allow us to not getting hit by the bus as we cross the street.

“Observation, curiosity, and creativity are skills that you can develop. Learn to observe deeply and open yourself to the wonder of inquiry and investigation. Embrace what you do not know as a point of departure to explore the mystery of the world.” - John Muir Laws, *The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling*

**So...What is an observation?**

Simply put, and observation is gathering information by employing our 5 senses.

**Why do we make observations?**

* Essential to basic survival...notice the bus so you don’t get run over
* Part of the scientific method!
* Leads our inquiry...helps us to formulate questions
* On a personal level: can elicit all sorts of emotions (excitement, wonder, confusion, curiosity, calm, etc.)

**How do we make observations?**

Use all 5 senses (when appropriate of course…)

*In practice...*pause, quietly focus on what you are observing.

* Spend at least 30 seconds focusing silently on it
* If you need to move around it (it’s a big object) or manipulate it (small, not going to be affected by touching it), then do so.

**Prompts to focus our inquiry:**

I notice…

I wonder…

It reminds me of…

ONCE THE 30 SECONDS OF SILENT OBSERVATION IS OVER, ask for volunteers to share their observations with the group.

> Do not praise or refute their observations.

> Ask 3 open-ended questions: *What’s going on in this picture/ What are you noticing about [X]? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find?*

**Reflect on the process:**

Pause now to think about how much you learned about the subject of your observations in such a short amount of time.

**Types of Observations**

*Quantitative* - think “quantity”: numbers, counts, measurements, etc.

*Qualitative* - think “quality”: descriptions that don’t have to do with numbers (colors, smell, etc.)