QUESTIONS FOR AESTHETIC DISCUSSION

These are a few examples of questions to stimulate aesthetic inquiry in the classroom:

- What is a work of art?
- What is it about a work of art that enables us to identify it as art, as distinct from an ordinary object or event?
- What characteristics must an object have for you to consider it a work of art?
- Is there one standard of aesthetics that applies to all cultures and times? Why or why not?
- If an object is on display in a museum, is it a work of art? Why or why not?
- Why do we call some works of art masterpieces?
- Must an object be original and/or innovative to be considered art? Why or why not?
- What do we mean when we say something is beautiful? ugly?
- How much knowledge of the cultural origins of a work is necessary for understanding a work of art?
- Can we understand works of art from other cultures only from our own perspective?
- How necessary is it that we understand the aesthetic perspective of other cultures?

Teacher Guidelines for Aesthetic Inquiry

"The general goal of any program of aesthetic inquiry is to develop in students the ability to deal with disagreement and uncertainty; to value ways of viewing a problem that differ from their own."

"Since inquiry cannot proceed without guidelines, get the class involved in setting down a few rules before you begin. These may range from the general ("Try to be open to a point of view that's different from yours.") to the more specific ("When possible, give some clear evidence, such as pointing to a flaw in an argument to support your statement.")"

Al Hurwitz and Michael Day, Children and Their Art, Methods for the Elementary School

The Value of Group Discussion

"In discussions in a group, wonderful things can happen between individuals when they engage each other about works of art that cannot come about when viewing art individually. The group can construct a broader range of meaning than can an individual, and groups tend to be self-correcting about interpretations that are too far removed from the work to be convincing. Groups can widen dogmatic, idiosyncratic views about art whether the work is a soft pastoral landscape or the incendiary photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe's well as about life."