These touring ideas are put together by docents who are part of the Object Stories: From the Middle group who worked with middle school teachers and their students to improve storytelling and literacy skills through museum visits. The techniques presented here are ones currently used by Museum Docents on all kinds of tours, and have been modified slightly over time. These are meant as guides to aid in your tours and to engage the visitors. Each technique is submitted by an individual docent of the committee in hopes that you will try one, or all, at various times. We find them fun and engaging for our visitors.

Strategy List

Page 2  Descriptive Word
Page 3  Two-Minute “Life” Story
Page 4  Two-Minute Life Story with Variation
Page 5  Six-Word Story/Title
Page 6  Contour Drawing with Descriptive Words
Page 7  Progressive Story
Page 8  Tableau
Page 10  Vote with Your Feet & Free Write
Page 11  Story Arc in Silver Collection
Page 12  Story Arc in General
Page 13  Blank Story Arc Template
**Strategy:** Descriptive Word (with or without six-word story)

**Age Level** 3rd/4th grades and older if writing, younger if no written component

**Big Idea** Objects of all kinds carry personal and cultural stories across time and space

**Outcomes** Expanding vocabulary and putting into words (adjectives) what you see/feel when looking at a piece of art

**Materials (if writing)**
- paper or cards with an adjective and synonyms (word sheet)
- pencils
- clipboards or writing surface

**Process**
- Select a gallery (explain the gallery--type of art, etc.)
- Have students “scan” the gallery (a very quick view to see what is there)
- Create a word sheet (list of relevant descriptive words, art terms, for your gallery)
- Pick a work and model the activity
  - Announce your word, give definition and synonym*
  - Give brief explanation of why you identify this word with your art choice
  - List 5/6 more words that describe your art choice
  - Combine these or other words and write a 6-word story about the piece
  - Explain something interesting about the piece
- Hand out word sheets and pencils to the students (if writing)
- Have them choose a work that their word describes
- Students add their own additional adjectives
- Students write a 6-word story
- Students can share their work with the group
- Students can keep word sheets, docents collect pencils.

* Words on word sheets are common and simple.
  Synonyms are not, they’re intended to expand vocabulary.

**Variations**
- Activity can be done without writing 6-word story (younger/less time)
- Activity can be done as a group verbally without writing
- Activity can be done in pairs

**Example**  
*Night Truck* by Mark Di Suvero (American, b. 1933) CMCA

Word: heavy

Synonym: cumbersome, elephantine. Additional words: big, black, hard, slow, wide, balanced, powerful, rocking

6-Word Story: Big, wide and rocking nowhere slowly.
**Strategy:** Two-Minute “Life” Story

**Age Level** All ages

**Big Idea** Objects of all kinds carry personal and cultural stories across time and place.

**Outcome** The student feels a sense of ownership of an object at the museum.

**Process**
- Select work of art.
- Conduct slow looking for a minute.
- Ask students to search for descriptive words.
- Lead students through a thought process to speculate what the artwork is about. Ask who, what, where, and when. Ask if they can feel, touch, smell, or hear anything.
- Tell them your 2-Minute Story about the work.
- Have students either pair up or individually select a work of art and create a 2-Minute Story.
- Share stories and reflect on the variety.

**Example**

Dora Erikson (*American, 1905-?*)

*Dakota Hotel*, 1933-1934

Northwest Gallery, 3rd floor

*It was a warm summer evening and after having fed my guests a good dinner, we decided to cool off outdoors. Two cattle drivers were chewing the fat and smoking a pipe. Eleanor and I couldn’t help but notice that Mr. Johnson was ignoring us. He lived a mile or two away and would come by for dinner once a week. He hardly ever said a word except to say I made the best pie he had ever had.*

*Suddenly, one of the cattle drivers pulled out a harmonica and started playing a tune. The other guy grabbed Eleanor and they started dancing. Shyly, Mr. Johnson came over and asked me to dance.*

*Well, to make a long story short, Mr. Johnson told me he wanted to make my pies famous, then he knelt down on his knee and asked me, “Miss Marie Callender, it would be an honor if you were to marry me.” The rest is history.*

**About the Dakota Hotel**

During the Great Depression, the federal government created a unique experiment to patronize the arts. The Works Projects Administration, or WPA, affected many lives across the country building roads, bridges, dams, etc., and putting people to work. The Public Works of Art Project came under the WPA. The administrators wanted to promote an American style and focus on scenes from daily life of America’s rural and working class. Thousands of artists were put to work. Dora Erikson’s work can also be seen at the Timberline Lodge.
**Strategy:** Two-Minute “Life” Story with Variations

Same Age level, big idea, outcome and materials as Two-Minute Life Story

**Process**
- Select work of art.
- Conduct slow looking for a minute or two.
- Ask students to search for descriptive words.
- Lead students through a thought process to speculate what the artwork is about. Ask who, what, where and when.
- Tell them your two-minute story.
- Have students make up their own two-minute story on an object of their choosing. They can do this individually or in pairs.

**Variations**

**Adding to your story**
The students can make up a two-minute story for the object you used for your two minute story, either with a new story altogether or another “chapter” to the story you already told. Lead a discussion with the group on how the artwork applies to both stories (the one you modeled and the one they made up). If time permits and the students are open to it, you could add to a story as a group.

**Story written as a group**
Have the students work together to write a story. Focus on a beginning, middle and end of a story along with characters, setting and events that take place in the story. Have each student participate. If there are students who don’t volunteer, tell the students you will call on each one to share something to add to the story. They can add to but not repeat.

**Alternative events/ending**
Have students share the stories they created for their chosen artwork, either in pairs or individually. Allow the other students to share their own ideas for the different pieces and discuss how each student saw something different in the piece. This would reinforce the idea that art is interpreted personally and everyone has a different perspective.

**Combining several variations**
If the students are engaged and time allows, you can use several of these variations together. If students write a story as a group, then have them work in pairs or individually on variations to the group story and vice versa if you have them start out in pairs or individuals.
**Strategy:** Six-Word Story/Title

**Big Idea** Objects of all kinds carry personal and cultural stories across time and place.

**Outcome** Students will think of descriptive words for composing a story. Students will explore the concept of beginning, middle and end in storytelling.

**Age Level** 3rd grade and up (Could be used for lower level if group shares Six-Word Story/Title orally).

**Materials** 3x5 cards (or larger)
- pencil
- felt pen for Docent
- variety of descriptive words (one each on 3x5 cards), chosen to fit works on view in the gallery where this activity takes place

**Process** Select an artwork.
- Students look silently at that object for about 1 minute. Discuss words that describe the art piece.
- Each student shares a descriptive word and explains why they chose it.
- Docent writes each shared word on a separate card (3x5 or larger). Put on floor for group to see.
- Students and Docent make a 6 word story/title with the words. (Add noun(s) and verb(s) as needed). Discuss.
- Docent has each student pick a descriptive word from a pack of descriptive words (1 on each 3x5 card).
- Student finds an art piece in the specified gallery or area that fits the word. Student writes 6 more words on the back of the card to describe the art piece and makes a 6 word story/title on back of card.
- Share and discuss.
- Add grains of information about the art piece when the opportunities arise.

**Example**
*Street Corner*, Gregorio Prestopino, 1935, American Gallery

(Words) Empty, quiet, peaceful, calm, colorful, warm

(6-Word Title/Story) Quiet, calm warmth; peaceful, colorful emptiness.
**Strategy:** Contour Drawing with Descriptive Words

**Age Level** Middle school and up

**Big Idea** Objects of all kind carry personal and cultural stories across time and place.

**Outcome** Observe an object and add words for a clearer understanding.

**Materials**
- drawing paper
- pencils

**Process**
- Find an object.
- Have visitors look quietly at object and have them pair share what they see.
- Lead a discussion on what is seen. Incorporate information about artist and time period into discussion.
- Explain that they are going to make a contour drawing of the object. Demo this, using most of the sheet of paper (so it is big) and show the results.
- Hand out paper and pencils and ask them to do a contour drawing of the object.
- Using your example, tell them to find parts of the contour drawing to add descriptive words. Add a couple of descriptive words to your drawing as an example.
- Give them time to add at least five words.
- Ask them to create a sentence about the object using their descriptive words.
- Share.

**Variations** Have them create a poem with their descriptive words.

**Example**
Chaim Soutine
*Le Petit Patissier*
Inventory Number 40.30
**Strategy:** Progressive Story

**Age Level** This approach can be used with all ages.

**Big Idea** Objects of all kinds carry personal and cultural stories across time and place.

**Outcome**
1. Tell stories around museum art objects.
2. Identify connections, significance, and personal meaning associated with objects.

**Materials** Story Arc Template

**Process**

- Select work of art and conduct visual analysis: slow looking for a silent minute.
  - Discuss what can be seen in the work, and relate to any of the five senses if applicable.
  - Include relevant information about the selected work of art.
- Considerations to discuss with students:
  - Stories are appealing physically, emotionally, and intellectually.
  - Stories help us remember, and we gain insights from the stories of others.
- Divide students into three groups (each group works independently).
  - Review: 1) Story Elements and 2) Story Arc (use template)
  - Group 1: Plan together; each student determines one descriptive word/phrase corresponding to the STORY BEGINNING.
  - Group 2: Plan together; each student determines one descriptive word/phrase corresponding to the STORY MIDDLE.
  - Group 3: Plan together; each student determines one descriptive word/phrase corresponding to the STORY ENDING.
  - Each group arranges the sequence of its words/phrases.
  - All students line up in order (groups and words).
  - Each student states chosen word/phrase (in order for groups 1, 2, and 3).
  - Repeat, focusing on oral expression.
  - Discuss significance of the artwork related to selected spoken vocabulary, discuss connections between the independent word selections of all three groups and discuss the complete meaning of the “progressive story” that was created.
- Conclusion
  - Discuss significance of the art, the connections, the progression, and resulting meaning.

**Variations**

- Work backwards; determine how the story progressed.
  - Consider characters and setting.
- Groups 1, 2, and 3 meet again to revise selected vocabulary based on agreements.
- Second oral presentation: incorporate additional ideas for significance and meaning.

**Example** *The Gift* by Richard Notkin, 1999
**Strategy:** Touring Activity - Tableau

**Age Level** K and up

**Big Idea** Objects of all kinds carry personal and cultural stories across time and place.

**Outcome** By engaging in a deeper sensory experience, understanding of a work of art is enriched.

**Materials** None needed

**Process**
- Select a work of art
  - Find a painting rich with characters
  - Choose an age appropriate portrait: *(Pastry Chef, George Washington)* to go even deeper. More suggestions:
    - European Galleries
      - Repentant King David
      - Coriolanus
      - Cleopatra and the Apse
      - Latona and the Peasants
      - The Drunken Cobbler
      - Christ on the Lake of Genesareth
      - A Spartan Woman Giving a Shield to Her Son
    - CMCA
      - Photography galleries
  - Conduct visual analysis
    - Instruct slow looking observation for a silent minute
    - Discuss what can be seen in the work: setting, characters, relationships, focal point, expressions, etc.
    - Discuss with students what is known about this work but can not be seen if appropriate
- Divide students into groups
  - Group 1: ask students to choose a character and for a few moments study in detail posture, facial expression, relationships to other characters, etc. and then have them collectively perform their tableau.
  - Docent will then use prompts to elicit discussion with both student observers and performers about how becoming part of a work of art changes your experience of it?
  - Group 2: repeats the same process and so on until all groups have participated or variations are introduced in each successive group depending on time constraints.
- Variations:
  - **Highlighting Characters with Dialogue:** give students time to work out dialogue in their tableau and then explain that you will tap their shoulder and they will speak as the character or object in the artwork. Have students
perform the tableau again using dialogue. Docent uses prompts to elicit discussion with both participants and student observers about whether adding dialogue changed their experience and if so how?

- **Beginning, Middle, End**: students are asked to create several tableaux to show sequence of events, beginning-middle-end of a story, cause and effect, etc. Discussion again follows to inquire if understanding was changed or deepened in any way?
**Strategy:** Vote with your Feet & Free Write

**Age Level** 5th grade and older

**Big Idea** Objects of all kinds carry personal and cultural stories across time and place.

**Outcome** Students will think and describe works of art in detail

**Materials** (for the optional writing activity only)
- clipboards
- lined paper
- pencils

**Process**
1. Docent selects a work of art.
2. Students observe the work in silence for one minute.
3. Docent starts analysis with “I was drawn to this object because ….” E.g. The size, it puzzled me, the materials, wondering what is the story or is there a story? No explanation of the work or the artist, just the docent’s first reaction.
4. Have students say what they SEE – word or phrase only. Go around the group, everyone gets to speak.
5. Have students say what the object REMINDS them of. With a difficult piece, such as Marie Watt’s “Almanac…”, prompt students to use their imaginations. What does it make them think of? Do they have a favorite blanket?
6. If the object has a title, such as “Almanac…” ask them what the title helps them see about the work. Use the wall label.
7. Find out what the students wonder about the work or what they would want to ask the artist.
8. Docent offers two pieces of information about the work. Really short facts or insights! E.g. the role of blankets in spreading smallpox among Native American populations.
9. Have the students stand and **Vote With Their Feet** – create an invisible line, on one side they agree, or say “yes”, the other is disagree or “no”, ask questions such as: Would you like to have the object for your home or room, do you think the object effectively communicates with people that see it. Does the artist want to tell a message?

**Writing Activity** Students could be asked to write a one-paragraph diary entry about their own connection to a blanket or their memory of a family reunion or gathering.
**Strategy:** Story Arc from the Silver Collection

**Age Level** Middle School and up

**Big Idea** Objects carry stories over time and place

**Outcome** Students will be able to identify and create the elements of a story from beginning, middle to end, using a museum object.

**Materials**
- Story Arc
- Paper
- Pencils

**Process**
- Using a silver pitcher in the silver collection, I tell the students a story about the silversmith who made the pitcher. As I tell the story, in partners, they are responsible to capture one element of the story arc: i.e. character, setting.
- After telling the story, the students report out their element in the arc.
- I select another piece of art and we collectively tell a progressive story. I highlight the characters, setting, etc. when they emerge in the progressive story.
- Having used the arc twice, I break the students out to select an object and create their own story. I have done this component in pairs as well.

**Variations** Would be interesting to tie two works of art into one story.

**Example** Any work that seems interesting from the silver collection.

This process takes 20 minutes and includes two art objects and as many other objects as there are students.
**Strategy:** Story Arc in General

**Age Level** Middle School and up.

**Big Idea** Objects of all kinds carry personal and cultural stories across time and place.

**Outcome** Students will be able to make up and organize a story using Museum Objects.

**Materials** drawing paper or Story Arc template, pencils and clipboard/hard cardboard to support paper.

**Process**

- Have students look at an object for a minute. Then tell a story based on that object.

- Have students repeat the story as you discuss the Story Arc elements: characters & setting; inciting incident; on the ascending side, one or two actions that happen or obstacles encountered along the way; at top, the most dramatic part of the story (the climax); on descending side, any additional actions in the story; and, finally, how the story ends or resolves. (This exercise will take about 10 minutes depending on length of story)

- Explain to the students that they (alone, in pairs, or as a group) will now identify an object of interest to them and develop a story using the Story Arc construct. Hand out paper or Story Arc template and pencils and ask them to develop their Story Arc.

- Have students share their stories using the Story Arc, if they have worked alone or in pairs.

**Example**

*Story Arc Example* by a middle school student:

Arthur Runquist, *Powder Monkey*, c.1940 (Oregon floor NW collection) Steel Mills Gallery; 3rd

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**Inciting incident:** carving dynamite

**Event 1 & 2:** loading dynamite in crate & bringing to cave

**Character(s) & Setting:** A Powder Monkey & his helpers in a mountainous area with many caves

**Events 2 & 3:** placing dynamite in cave & lighting fuse

**Most Dramatic moment:** Big, loud boom

**Event 4:** Finding lots of gold

**Ending:** Gold everywhere