




SPEAKING AND LISTENING  
ACTIVITIES AT HOME

# OBSERVING AND QUESTIONING

With artworks, we observe, we look carefully to see every little thing about it. We ask questions to help us understand the artwork and one another better. Here are some simple, fun activities to practice observing and questioning.

POKE A HOLE    QUESTIONS ONLY    INVISIBLE ART



# POKE A HOLE

This is an activity to practice observing. You'll need a few pieces of paper and a pencil.

Sometimes it can be difficult to observe an artwork. Switch your screen to the next slide. It is an image of an artwork called "Drawing for the film History of the Main Complaint," (1995-96) by William Kentridge. A good first step when you're observing is to take it all in. Just get try to get a good look at the whole picture.

1

**What do you notice about this artwork  
when you try to look at the whole thing?**



William Kentridge, South African, b. 1955  
Drawing for the film *History of the Main Complaint*, 1995-96  
Charcoal and pastel on paper  
31 ½ x 47 ½ in. (80 x 120.6 cm)  
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art  
Chicago, Gift of Susan and Lewis Manilow,  
2001.28  
Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago



Grab a piece of paper. Use your pencil to poke a hole in it somewhere. It doesn't have to be right in the center. Make the hole about the size of a quarter. Switch to the next slide and lean your paper with the hole gently against the screen.

Once the paper is in place, you should only be able to see a small part of the art. Small parts of art are just as important as the big picture. Take a few minutes and make some small sketches of what you see through the hole. When you finish one sketch, move the paper a little bit to see something different, and draw that.

2

**Did you notice anything new about the artwork once you used the paper to help you look closely at the details?**



William Kentridge, South African, b. 1955  
Drawing for the film *History of the Main Complaint*, 1995-96  
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# QUESTIONS ONLY



1

We're going to practice asking questions. Just like observing, asking questions is a great way to learn more about an artwork. Simple questions are helpful. You can ask questions about who made it or about what it is made of. Those questions search for facts.

Sometimes with art though, we're not just looking for facts and answers. You can also ask questions that are more open questions that ask about the artists intent—why they made it—or opinions—what personal thoughts or opinions are shown in the art. Either way, really good questions are specific. They ask about something particular in the art, like a detail.

# QUESTIONS ONLY



2

We're going to write four questions about an artwork on the next slide. Imagine that you're asking these questions to a friend or a classmate, not to the artist or another expert on this artwork.

Switch to the next slide and write questions that finish the following:

What...

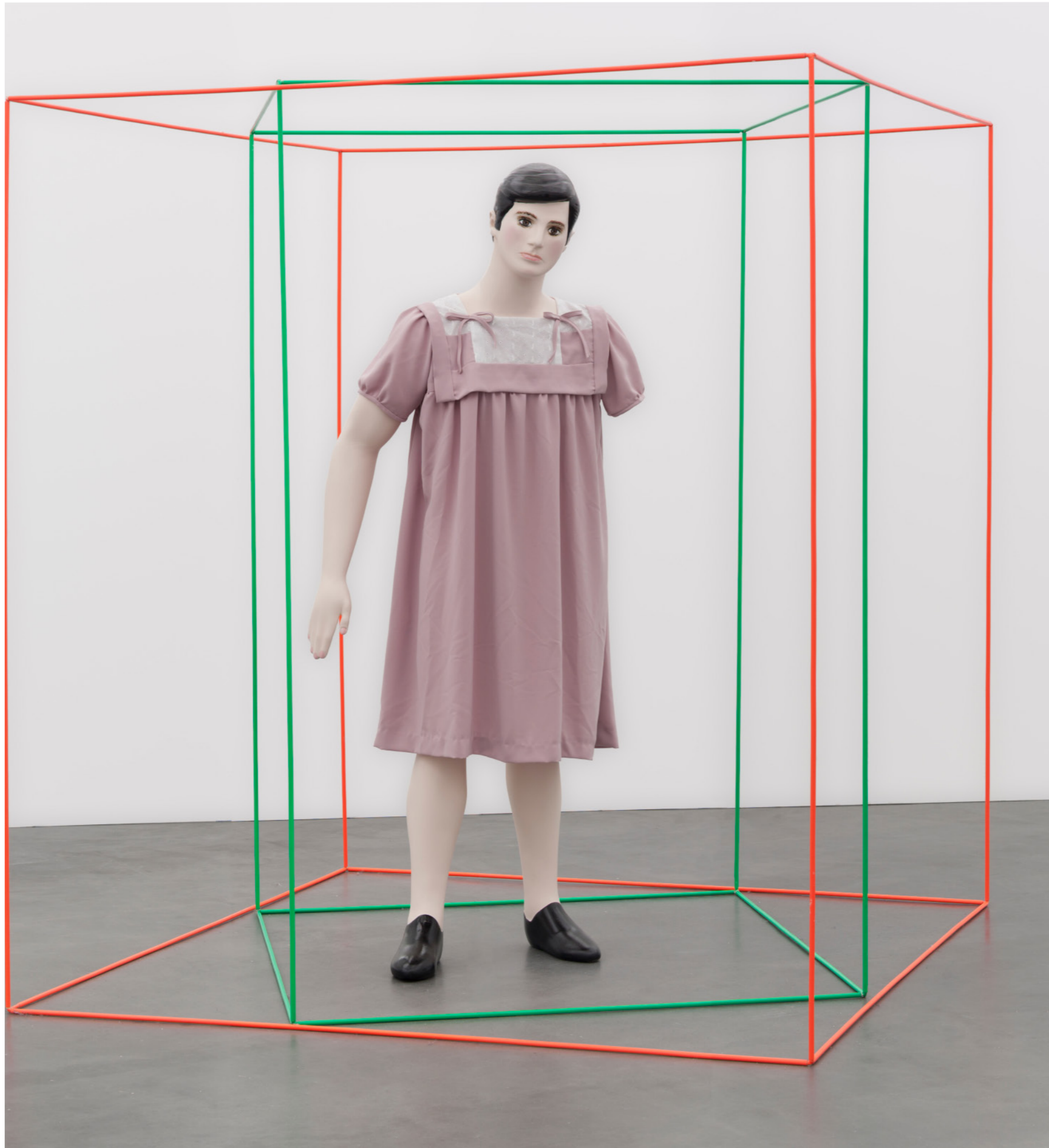
Why...

What if...

What if we...

Which were your best questions? What made them great?





Gülsün Karamustafa, Turkish, b. 1946  
Double Reality, 1987/2013  
Fabric, iron, and polyester  
75 9/16 x 66 15/16 x 67 5/16 in. (192 x 170 x  
171 cm)  
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art  
Chicago, Gift of Mary and Earle Ludgin by  
exchange, 2014.18  
Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago



For this game, we're going to attempt to draw an artwork based only on a description. It's a fun way to practice some observing skills. You'll need paper and a pencil.

When you switch to the next slide, you'll see a description of a work of art. Read those sentences and try to draw the art being described.

**Do you have any questions about the art being described? What could you ask that might help you draw it better?**

1

There are two people sitting on a big rock. The rock is on a rocky beach. There's an ocean and sky in the background. It looks like there's a pale blue ship sailing on the ocean.

The two people are half-human, half-fish. They look like upside down mermaids. Their legs are human, but their bodies and heads are fish. They are leaning against each other.



How is your drawing? Do you like it? Now switch to the next slide to see the actual work of art. Think about some of the questions you had while you were drawing. Look closely at all the details.

**How is your drawing different from this painting? How is it similar?**

2



René Magritte, *Les merveilles de la nature* (The Wonders of Nature), 1953. Oil on canvas. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, gift of Joseph and Jory Shapiro, 1982.48. © 2015 C, Herscovici/Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York  
Photo © MCA Chicago

# OBSERVING AND QUESTIONING

What was your favorite activity? Do you still have questions about any of the art you saw today?

Ask your teacher to send them to [schoolprograms@  
mcachicago.org](mailto:schoolprograms@mcachicago.org) and we will answer them for you!