The Stele of Zezen-nakht

Stele of Zezen-nakht (1947.61)
This resource will allow you to lead your students through close looking exercises to enable them to describe, analyze, and interpret what they see in *The Stele of Zezen-nakht* (2000 BCE).

This approach to looking at art is based on the Art of Seeing Art method created by the Toledo Museum of Art. It is discussion-based and will help you and your students explore a work of art from the Museum’s Classic Court.

**How to use this resource:**
- Print out the document for yourself.
- Read through the document carefully as you look at the image of the work of art.
- When you are ready to engage your class, project the image of the work of art on a screen in your classroom using an LCD projector. With the image on the screen lead your students through a discussion of the image.

This exercise is meant for use in the classroom. There is no substitute for seeing the real work of art in the exhibition at the Toledo Museum of Art.

**We are open:**
- Tuesday and Wednesday 10 AM–4 PM
- Thursday and Friday 10 AM–9 PM
- Saturday 10 AM–5 PM
- Sunday 12 PM–5 PM


**Connections to the Common Core State Standards and Ohio’s New Learning Standards:**
The Common Core State Standards were designed to help teachers provide knowledge and foster skills in students that are necessary in order for them to successfully navigate the contemporary world. The following Common Core State Standards relating to Visual Literacy are covered in this lesson:

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7** Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.1.c** Pose and respond to specific questions with elaboration and detail by making comments that contribute to the topic, text, or issue under discussion.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.4** Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

**Ohio’s Social Studies Standards: Grade 6, Content Standard 2:**
Early civilizations (India, Egypt, China and Mesopotamia) with unique governments, economic systems, social structures, religions, technologies and agricultural practices and products flourished as a result of favorable geographic characteristics. The cultural practices and products of these early civilizations can be used to help understand the Eastern Hemisphere today.
Important Vocabulary:
1. **Hieroglyphics**: a stylized picture of an object representing a concept, word, syllable, or sound, as found in ancient Egyptian and other writing systems.
2. **Stele**: an upright stone slab or column typically bearing a commemorative inscription or relief design, often serving as a funerary monument.
3. **Afterlife**: a life that some people believe exists after death.

Looking Close and Describing:
Before providing your students with any information, give them about two to three minutes to look at the art work. Have them describe what they see and provide them with broad open-ended questions. Below are a few questions that you might use to get started.

What is the first thing you notice about this image? Why?
What else do you see?
What objects or figures do you see that you can identify? Describe them.
What colors do you see? Which colors are repeated? Where?
What lines and shapes do you notice? Which are more dominant: straight lines and geometric shapes or curved lines and organic shapes?

**Elements of Art**

**Principles of Design**

Analysis:
Once the students have completed describing what they see in the image through close looking, begin to ask simple analytical questions that will help them deepen their understanding of the sculpture.

Look closely at the size of the figure in relationship to the other objects in the image. What do you notice? What can you infer about the figure based on your observation?

What do you notice about the arrangement of the objects and images on the right hand side of the stele? Does this remind you of anything you have seen before?

Pay special attention to the kinds of objects depicted along the bottom right edge of the stele. What kinds of objects are they? Can you identify any of them?
Background Information:
Share the background information provided below regarding the stele and the importance behind it. This is information that a viewer cannot get simply by looking at the object. Once you have shared the following information, your students will be ready for deeper analysis and interpretation of the work of art.

Ancient Egyptians built funerary steles to honor the deceased and assist them in the afterlife. They believed that when a person died his spirit or Ka left his body and lived on forever. Because the ancient Egyptians believed the Ka needed a place to dwell, they embalmed the body of the deceased and placed it in a tomb. They painted and carved images of the dead to provide a place for the Ka to dwell if anything should happen to the body. Images and inscriptions on the stele allow the Ka to continue the same sort of life in the tomb as one had on earth.

Zezen-nakht, the subject of this stele, was likely a nobleman during the period that spanned the end of the Old Kingdom and the beginning of the Middle Kingdom (about 2181–2055 BCE). His figure has been designed to communicate his power and nobility. Wealth and success are suggested by his curled wig, clean-shaven face, starched kilt, and golden collar and bracelets. The long staff and scepter in his hands are traditional Egyptian symbols of authority. Offerings for Zezen-nakht to consume in the afterlife can be found on the bottom of the stele. These include bread, onions, beef, birds, and jars filled with wine and beer.

Interpretation:
Interpretation brings the close looking and describing questions, analysis, and background information together to aid in better understanding the work of art.

How did the background information support your observations?
Has the background information caused you to change your interpretation of the stele? Why?
Put yourself in Zezen-nakht’s shoes. What foods and objects would you want depicted in your stele?

Optional Extension Activity:
Symbols of Wealth and Power Across Cultures

Step 1: Give each student a copy of the worksheet on the next page.
Step 2: Working in small groups ask the students to consider the following:
Zezen-nakht’s clothes, hairstyle and accessories all suggest wealth and power. How are these things used to demonstrate wealth today? What are the similarities and differences between ancient Egypt and today?

Step 3: Ask them to work as a group create a Venn diagram to record their ideas. In one circle use the visual evidence and the background information to record Egyptian symbols of wealth and power, in the other have the students list 21st-century symbol of wealth and power. In the overlapping area, record any symbols that apply both then and today.

Step 4: Bring the class back together and lead a group discussion about their findings.
Symbols of Wealth and Power

Ancient Egyptian Symbols

21st-Century Symbols

Shared Symbols