



OF THE STANDARD OF TASTE

PREPARATION:

- ✓ You will need up to eight portrait pictures (e.g. 2 Rubens's portraits, a Titian and a Memling for the first part and a Rubens, a Picasso, a grotesque and an abstract for the second)
- ✓ A couple of music stands to prop the pictures up.

STIMULUS PART 1

For the first activity, put up the four portraits. The task is to identify which two of the four paintings are by the same painter. As an example, I usually have two Rubens pictures, a Memling portrait and a Titian. On the board behind each picture I write a corresponding number: 1, 2, 3 and 4, for ease of reference. In a class of thirty invite them up in groups of about 5 or 6. Once this is done spend a few minutes allowing the children to say which two paintings are by the same painter and insist on their saying why they think what they think. Make a tally of choices on the board for later. Once this is done reveal who painted which painting by explaining their dates etc.

STIMULUS PART 2

Now change the paintings. I keep one Rubens up and add a Picasso, a grotesque and an abstract by way of contrast. This time the task is to identify the most beautiful painting. Repeat the procedure as above if necessary. Remember to insist that they say why they have chosen the picture they have. One way to get the philosophical conversation going is to say: 'Shall I tell you the answer?' This should be enough to get some hands of protest up in the air! Alternatively, you could ask them the following task question:

Task Question:

- ✓ How can we decide which is the most beautiful picture?

Philosophically, there are two levels to this discussion. First of all you might expect a distinction between 'fact' and 'opinion' to be outlined, either explicitly or by intimation. You may want to facilitate the explicit drawing of this distinction. The second level comes from attempts to establish a standard of taste. This will come when the children try to establish criteria for such a standard. This could be anything from a voting criteria to features of the painting such as the presence of colour or a higher level of craftsmanship. If this kind of discussion emerges then introduce...

DAVID'S BEAUTY DETECTOR

This is a machine that has been designed to detect the most beautiful object. David is a scientist who has made a machine that detects beautiful things. He points it at things and it tells him how beautiful any object is. The question is...

Task Question 2:

- ✓ What sort of thing would David's 'beauty detector' detect in the objects you point it at?

Could it use, as its data...

- ✓ The opinions of experts? (TQ: Could an expert decide? If so, then how?)
- ✓ The opinions of the many? (TQ: Could you decide with a vote?)
- ✓ The presence of colour?
- ✓ Balance between different parts?
- ✓ How much effort has been put in?
- ✓ Or some other fact...?
- ✓ Does it capture an essence?