

Worksheet 2.1. Teacher’s Version: Activity 1. Looking Closely

Student Name _____ Date _____

The suggested observations, below, are samples only. Individual students’ observations and interpretations will vary. The teacher should require students to cite evidence from the painting for their observations and interpretations per the Common Core State Standards guidelines.

Objects	Formal Element	Observations	Effects	So, what, now, is the painting about for you?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • house • chimneys • train tracks and ties • windows • window blinds • the earth/ground • the sky 	<p>Line (see Basic Elements of Art handout)</p>	<p>What kinds of lines predominate? Around what objects? Do you see any interesting patterns or contrasts in the painter’s lines</p> <p>There are contrasting verticals and horizontal lines in the house and the railroad tracks. Strong, repeating diagonals across the house, which read as shadows</p> <p>Some near-parallel lines between the lines on the house and the railroad</p> <p>Lots of uniformity in line thickness throughout</p>	<p>To what effect? How do these elements make you think more or differently about what the painter is communicating about his objects? To what conclusions are you led?</p> <p>Most of the lines appear harsh and strong; unforgiving Sharp lines define the outline of the house and close it off from its surroundings</p> <p>The upward thrust of the vertical lines lends the house majesty; while the small, curved lines of its windows and the varying closure of the blinds give it an organic,</p>	<p>The slightly ominous and isolated majesty of a perhaps abandoned house; The train tracks and foreground landscape cut off the roots of the house and separate it from the observers; isolating it from us. The low viewpoint, meanwhile, both aggrandizes the house and exposes it to our scrutiny.</p> <p>The similarities in hue between the house and the sky unite the two in the space above the viewer’s head. They seem to share limitless space</p>

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		<p>Curved lines above the windows soften the straight lines that dominate the composition.</p> <p>The thickest and most dominant lines are those of the railroad tracks and the shadow on the ground running below them.</p>	<p>living effect.</p> <p>In general, the lines are vertical and horizontal, communicating more stillness than movement; confining incipient movement to the windows with their arching brows and the sharp shadows that denote time of day.</p> <p>The horizontal slash of the railroad track grounds the house. It also draws attention to where the viewer is standing: looking sharply up at the house and sky.</p>	<p>making the house appear majestic, romantic, but also potentially ephemeral.</p> <p>This unity of hue contrasts with the solid nature of the house as a closed form, largely inorganic and fixed with only its porch open to the outside.</p> <p>The house’s windows have the only organic (and therefore human) forms in the painting. With their green blinds at different levels, they suggest movement but communicate nothing about the inhabitants.</p>
	<p>Form (see Basic Elements of Art handout)</p>	<p>What kinds of forms predominate (organic or inorganic)? Around what subjects? Do you see any interesting patterns or contrasts in the painter’s forms?</p> <p>This work is dominated by inorganic, straight-edged shapes with a plethora of repetitions,</p>	<p>To what effect? How do these elements make you think more or differently about what the painter is communicating about his subjects? To what conclusions are you led?</p> <p>The solid shapes are very rigid and consistent with very few surprises. Because of the low viewpoint, the house</p>	<p>The sharp light that both reveals and hides the forms accentuates a sense of loneliness or emptiness. Some movement in the house’s windows looks like eyes; there</p>

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		<p>or geometric patterns, in the windows and columns and overall structure of the house.</p> <p>The few organic shapes (e.g., the windows seem to both soften and humanize the central subject.</p> <p>The treatment of the sky, meanwhile, is without definition. The shapes of its clouds are indefinite and impressionistic</p>	<p>itself is noticeably large, as is the tower portion making the whole edifice appear very still and solid.</p> <p>The treatment of the sky contrasts sharply with the solid objects in the painting, giving the background a feeling of limitlessness and openness against the tight and rigid forms of the house and tracks.</p>	<p>is potential for human subjects here, either behind the windows or from the train tracks.</p> <p>So, the painting can be seen to celebrate both the majestic house at its center and the surrounding, vital sky, even while it mourns something potentially ominous in the slash of the railroad tracks that separate the above from the earth.</p>
	<p>Space (see Basic Elements of Art handout)</p>	<p>What is the relationship of negative to positive space in the painting?</p> <p>There seems to be almost perfect balance between the positive (house and foreground tracks and ground) and negative space of the sky, giving them equal visual weight.</p>	<p>To what effect? How do these elements make you think more or differently about what the painter is communicating about his subjects? To what conclusions are you led?</p> <p>The spatial balance gives the painting a sense of equilibrium and gravity. The house of the porch with its open columns performs an important function of helping to buffer the open space of the sky with the closed</p>	

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			form of the rest of the house.	
	<p>Color (see Basic Elements of Art handout)</p>	<p>What colors predominate? What hue, value, and/or intensity? Around what subjects? Do you see any interesting patterns or contrasts in the painter’s use of color?</p> <p>The colors in the house and the sky are similar, even when their intensity or values contrast strikingly. The dark shadows pick up the denser tones of the foreground earth and tracks, uniting the upper and lower parts of the painting.</p> <p>The colors are not intense or pure. There is little here in the mid-range of hue.</p> <p>Colors tend toward cool blue and greenish yellow. Red and green are also muted.</p> <p>The painter has chosen</p>	<p>To what effect? How do these elements make you think more or differently about what the painter is communicating about his subjects? To what conclusions are you led?</p> <p>The painter chose similar tones in house and sky to unite them and to distinguish them from the earth and tracks, below.</p> <p>The cold blues and yellows and the muddy tones of red distance us from this work.</p> <p>The contrasting values of shadow and light are dramatic and emphasize sharp angles; they hide details in some places and expose other areas, such as the half-shaded windows.</p> <p>The horizontal shape made by the heavy red tracks helps to ground the house in the</p>	

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		<p>muted hues but has treated these hues dramatically in regard to their values of light and dark.</p>	<p>landscape and at our eye level, which is very low.</p> <p>The impressionistic treatment of the yellow parts of the sky results in a kind of halo around the house, which seems to add to its isolation—make it, even, vaguely religious.</p> <p>The rust-red line of tracks suggests potential or perhaps failed movement as do the red chimneys, from which no smoke ascends.</p>	
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