

# Understanding an Exhibition

## Leaving Certificate Resource Pack

[nationalgallery.ie/schools](http://nationalgallery.ie/schools)



NATIONAL  
GALLERY of  
IRELAND



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NÁISIÚNTA<sup>na</sup>  
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# Introduction

This resource pack has been designed to supplement a self guided visit to exhibitions at the National Gallery of Ireland. It contains suggested activities for students to complete before, during and after their visit. It is intended to assist students preparing for the gallery question of the Leaving Certificate Art History and Appreciation Exam and does not replace a visit to the exhibition.

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### Sample Question from the 2018 Leaving Certificate Art Appreciation Paper

The primary objective in the design of an art gallery, museum or interpretive centre is to create a space for the interaction of people with artworks/artefacts. Discuss this statement with reference to a named art gallery, museum or interpretive centre that you have visited. In your answer describe and discuss two named works and refer to the ways in which the use of the space affected your interaction with these works. Briefly outline your visual concepts for the layout of a school-based exhibition of student art work. Give reasons for your design decisions. Illustrate your answer.

Marking scheme		Marks	Notes
A	Name of gallery, museum or interpretive centre and discussion of statement.	10	5 for name 5 for discussion
B	Describe and discuss two named works and refer to the ways in which the use of space affected your interaction with these works.	15	5 for named works (3/2) 5 for description and discussion of works (3/2) 5 for space and how it affected the interaction
C	Briefly describe and discuss your own ideas for designing a school based exhibition of student art work. Give reasons for your design decisions.	15	
D	Sketches.	10	
<b>Total</b>		<b>50</b>	

**History & Appreciation of Art Paper is worth 150 marks i.e. 37.5% of the total marks for Art**

# Before your visit

Visit the Gallery's website. What information can you find out about the exhibition or Gallery? Is it easy to find? How is it presented? Does it make you want to visit the exhibition? Is there enough/too much/not enough information?

Do some background research on the artist or artists featured in the exhibition. What do you anticipate the exhibition will cover? There are often articles and reviews written about exhibitions at the Gallery. Do you think it is useful to read these before you visit? Do you think reading a review will have an impact on how you view the exhibition?

Consider the exhibition's title. How do you think the title sets your expectations for the visit?

# During your visit

This resource includes prompts and activities to help you explore an exhibition at the Gallery. Remember to:

**Observe & record** – use a sketchbook or notebook to record your observations of your visit. Photography is not permitted in some exhibitions, so it is important that you create an accurate record of your visit. You will be required to include sketches in your LC exam, so make lots of annotated sketches alongside your notes.

**Form your own opinion & give examples** - every visitor to the exhibition will have a different experience. We bring our own backgrounds, histories, opinions, and perceptions to viewing works of art. Age, gender, education, nationality, and many other factors will impact how we perceive an exhibition. Everyone's opinion is equally valid; there is no right or wrong. When answering the Gallery Question it is important to give your own interpretation of the exhibition, but it is equally important to back up your opinions with examples to support your argument.

# First impressions

Your experience will be influenced by a number of factors that may consciously or subconsciously affect how you engage with the exhibition. Some of these will have been deliberately created by the Gallery to create a comfortable environment for viewing art (eg the lighting, the way the paintings are hung), whilst others will be unique to you (eg your mood, previous positive or negative experiences at the Gallery). How other visitors are interacting with the space will also have an impact.

## Before you enter the building, note down:

- \ External factors: time of day; weather
- \ Internal factors: your mood; energy levels; how your body feels
- \ Is this your first visit to the Gallery? Do you have any preconceptions about what your experience will be?
- \ What does the building look like?
- \ What is your first impression?

## When you enter the building, note down:

- \ What can you hear? smell? see?
- \ What facilities are there? (eg information desk, cloakroom, toilets) Is there signage, maps, information about exhibitions? How can you move around the building? Are there stairs, lifts, escalators? Are there places to sit? What else can you observe?

**Make an annotated sketch of the foyer showing these elements.**

- \ Who else is in the Gallery? (eg staff, other visitors, members of your group) What are they doing? How are they interacting with the building?
- \ How does the Gallery make you feel?

Think critically about the elements that have been created by the Gallery. Why do you think they are there? How do they affect your experience? Do you feel any differently to before you walked through the door? Do you feel prepared and ready to view art?

## Further activity

There are two entrances to the Gallery. How may your first impressions differ depending on which entrance you use?



Merrion Square Entrance



Clare Street Entrance

You can find out more about the history and architecture of the Gallery here: <https://www.nationalgallery.ie/history>

# The hang

A **hang** is how the paintings in an exhibition are arranged on the walls of the gallery. This refers to both the way they are physically displayed, and the order the curator has decided to put them in. For example, an exhibition may be hung **chronologically**, where the paintings are displayed in order of when they were created, or **thematically** where they are grouped by similar subject matter. Shows may also be hung **aesthetically**, where paintings complement each other. Curators also have to take into account **practical** considerations – some paintings may be too big for certain walls or galleries.

## Observe & record:

For each element consider how it affects your viewing and interpretation of the paintings.

- \ What are your **first impressions** of the exhibition? What is the atmosphere like? What is the temperature of the room? What can you hear? What can you smell? What can you see?
- \ What is the **architecture** of the gallery? What materials, texture and colours are the walls? Ceilings? Floors? Are there doors between the rooms?
- \ The **hang** of the paintings. What height are they hung at? Are they close together or far apart? Are they grouped? Is your eye drawn to certain paintings? How are the paintings fixed to the walls? What frames are they in? Are they glazed?
- \ The **interpretation**. Are there text panels? Signage? Labels? Where is the interpretation? What size is it? Colour? Design?
- \ The **lighting**. Is it natural? Artificial?
- \ The **fixtures and fittings**. Is there any furniture? Security devices? Light switches, fire extinguishers, etc? Do they enhance or detract from the paintings?
- \ How are **visitors** moving through the space? Are they following a set route? How are they interacting with each other?

## Sketch:

Create a floorplan and sketch the layout of the exhibition. Is it hung chronologically or thematically?

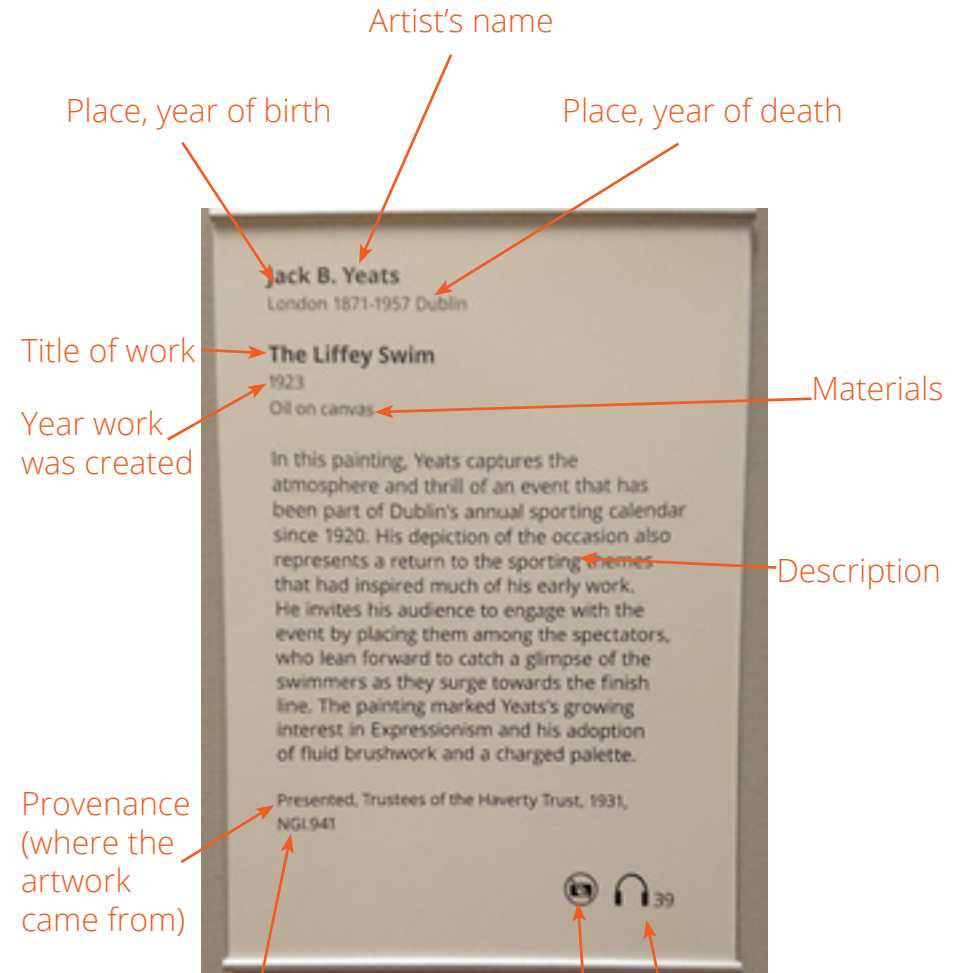


# Interpretation

Exhibition text is skilfully written to convey complex information in a clear and accessible way, within strict word counts. A curator will often do a great deal of contextual research about a work or artist that they then have to condense into a short amount of space. When someone visits an exhibition, they don't want to read a book on a wall! The curator will have to decide what they have to leave out, as much as what they will write. This process can be very difficult, but curators have lots of practice in writing in this particular style. The text will also be proofread by a number of different people who will check for accuracy, clarity and style. The final text that you see in the exhibition will have gone through lots of drafts and edits before it is printed.

There are different layers to exhibition text. This may include:

- \\ An introduction panel for the whole exhibition
- \\ Introduction panels for each room
- \\ Room titles and years
- \\ Labels for each artwork
- \\ Audioguide commentary



Is there anything more you would like to know about the painting? Is there any information you don't think should be included? What information do you think is the most important?

## Further activity

Choose one of the paintings from the exhibition and write your own label. Think about:

- \ What is the most important piece of information you want to share with the visitor? Put this first.
- \ Use active rather than passive language.
- \ Don't just describe what's in the painting – include something that the viewer can't see for themselves.
- \ Use language a 10 year old would understand – keep it clear, accessible and interesting.
- \ Prompt the visitor to look deeper at the painting – you might want to ask a question.
- \ Remember to stick to the word count – maximum of 80 words for the description.

## Two named works

In the LC exam you will be asked to discuss two named works in detail and use sketches to illustrate your answer. While you are in the exhibition space, use this time to make detailed notes and sketches of two works. Some of the works may be under copyright restrictions so you may not be able to find images of the works online after your visit, so it is important you take down as much detail as possible.

### Note:

- \ Title of work
- \ Date
- \ Materials
- \ Information included in the label

### Sketch & annotate:

- \ How the painting is hung (is it high, low, close/far away from other works; make a note of other works nearby)
- \ Lighting
- \ Wall colour
- \ Frame
- \ Interpretation (where is it positioned; what does it say; how does it affect your viewing of the work)
- \ The formal elements of the painting (shapes, colours, textures, etc)

# Education programme

The Education Team provide tailored talks, tours, workshops and special events for diverse audiences including teachers and schools, early years, families, young people, adults, lifelong learning and community groups. The programme connects with the national collection, special exhibitions and national and local festivals and programmes.

Look at the Gallery's website and find three educational events for different audiences that connect to your exhibition.

## Note:

- \ Title of event
- \ Audience
- \ Time of day
- \ Location

How do educational events enhance understanding of an exhibition?

## Further activity

Design an event for young people that could accompany the exhibition. Think about:

- \ Who is the target audience? What will appeal to them?
- \ What time of day should the event be? How long will it take?
- \ Where will the event be held?
- \ What is the event? Is it a talk, a performance, a workshop, or something else?
- \ Why this event? What will participants learn?
- \ How does the event enhance understanding of the exhibition?
- \ Do you need any materials?
- \ What other practical steps do you need to make the event happen?

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# Access

The National Gallery of Ireland is committed to providing a fully inclusive experience for all visitors. Full details can be found here: <https://www.nationalgallery.ie/visit-us/accessibility-visitors-disabilities>

Look at the Gallery's website and find four things that the Gallery provides to make a visit more accessible. Choose two things that assist people with physical disabilities, and two that assist people with intellectual/developmental disabilities.

- \ How do you think it would be to experience the exhibition as someone with a disability?
- \ Is there anything else the Gallery could/should provide?

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