
Is it art?

WORKSHEET A

Jack

“I can’t believe the kind of garbage that some people call art. Yesterday my girlfriend dragged me to a modern art gallery to see an exhibition she read about in the paper. It was five or six so-called installations made of pieces of plastic, wood, and paper that seemed to be just thrown on the floor. It was a mess, basically – just like the floor in my sister’s house when my two-year-old nephew leaves all his toys out, but less colorful. Come to think of it, if you’d given those pieces of plastic, wood, and paper to my nephew, he probably could have created something just as good. I guess sometimes the cleaners end up throwing art like that in the trash at the end of the day, because they must find it hard to figure out what’s an exhibit and what’s just litter!”

“I think that if a painting or an installation looks like something I could have done myself in fifteen minutes, it doesn’t deserve to be called art. But when I say that, people like my girlfriend say I’m ‘uncultured.’ I reckon a lot of the people who say they appreciate the kind of stuff we saw yesterday are just pretending – deep down they know it’s trash, but they don’t want to be the first one to admit it because, unlike me, they’re afraid of being looked down on.”

Lily

“Art, for me, is a very broad concept. I’d say any materials arranged in such a way as to stimulate a person’s emotions or thoughts can be art. Obviously this includes the traditional visual arts like painting, drawing, and sculpture, and it also includes more modern forms such as video work and three-dimensional installations.

“I don’t like it when people say one form of art is ‘better’ than another. For example, people talking about fantastic installations in museums sometimes say, ‘But it’s just a simple arrangement of everyday objects – I could have done that.’ They don’t understand that with many such installations, as with many modern paintings, the originality or beauty is in the *idea* behind them. Once the artist has the idea, it doesn’t really matter whether or not it is technically ‘difficult’ to put the elements together. What I’d say to the people dismissing such works is, ‘Sure, you could have physically put those objects together, but you’d never have had the idea of doing it that way, would you?’

“Everyone knows that a great painter like Van Gogh had fantastic technical skills, but for me that doesn’t necessarily make his work better than a painting or installation in a modern art gallery that is quite simple in technical terms – it’s just different.”

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WORKSHEET B

Exercise 1

Decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F), or if the text doesn't determine (D).

1. Jack thinks the installation he saw at the modern art museum was no better than something his two-year-old nephew probably could have done.
2. Lily thinks installations and video work should be considered art, but also that they are inferior to painting.
3. Jack believes some people are not honest about their feelings about the kind of art he saw at the modern art museum.
4. Lily thinks a work of art doesn't have to be technically difficult to create in order to be good.
5. Jack dislikes art in general.
6. Lily dislikes the work of Van Gogh.
7. The installations Jack saw at the modern art museum were made from three different materials.
8. Lily thinks the reason some people don't appreciate some installations is because they don't understand them.

Exercise 2

Answer the questions below.

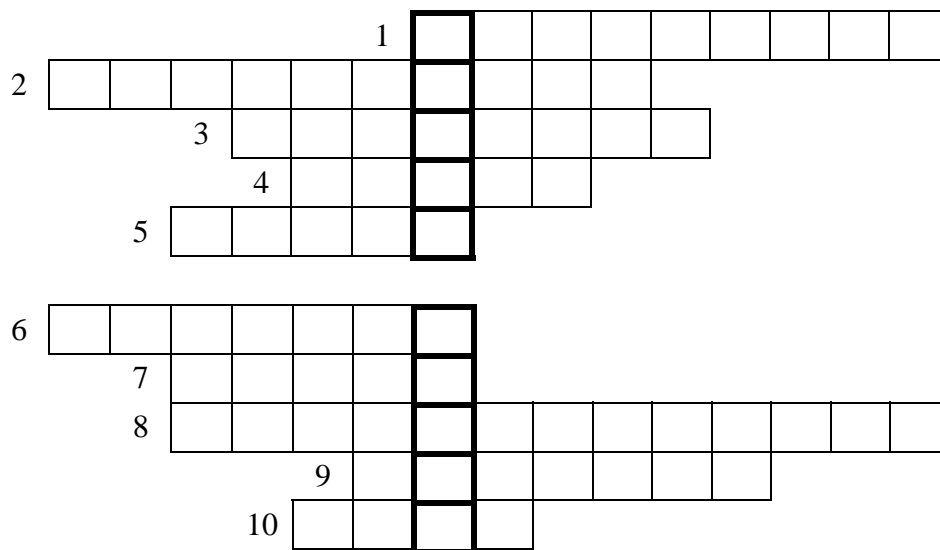
1. Lily mentions five different art forms – what are they?
2. What is Lily's definition of art?
3. What is Jack's definition of what *doesn't* constitute art?
4. In what way does Jack say the floor of the modern art museum is similar to the floor at his sister's house when his nephew leaves his toys out?
5. Where does Lily say the originality or beauty in many installations and modern paintings lies?
6. Why does Jack imagine some installations at modern art museums might be thrown away by the cleaners?
7. What does Jack say he is not afraid of?
8. How would you summarize the difference in opinion between Jack and Lily?

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WORKSHEET C

Exercise 3

Complete the crossword below. If all the words are correct, the dead animal (4.3 meters long and preserved in formaldehyde) used by British artist Damien Hirst to create one of his most famous and controversial installations, in the 1990s, will read from top to bottom.



1. Lily doesn't believe great _____ skills are necessary in order to create a great work of art.
2. It seems Jack and his _____ disagree about art.
3. Lily thinks the ideas behind simple-looking art installations can be very _____.
4. Lily thinks Van Gogh was a _____ artist.
5. The installations Jack saw were on the _____ of the gallery.
6. Lily thinks people are often wrong to _____ simple-looking installations.
7. Jack thinks the exhibition he went to was _____.
8. Jack certainly wasn't impressed by the _____ he saw.
9. _____ is an example of a traditional visual art.
10. Jack and Lily don't _____ the same kind of art.