

Close Study: Close Viewing Maria Sibylla Merian

Artist: [Maria Sibylla Merian](#) (1647, Frankfurt, Germany–1717, Amsterdam)

Work: Maria Sibylla Merian, Plate 11 (from *Dissertation in Insect Generations and Metamorphosis in Surinam*, second edition), 1719; Hand-colored engraving on paper, 20 1/2 x 14 1/2 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay

Target grade range: 3-5

DPCS Curricular Unit: Make a Wish

DPCS Curricular Arc: Identity/Becoming

DPCS Curricular Theme: Growth in nature and personal growth

Note: Annotation is a key feature of Close Study, ensuring that students are engaged in the process of evidence gathering. Annotation can take a range of forms across grade levels and disciplines. Annotation can provide assessment information as to each student's depth of comprehension. Additionally, it can be a useful tool for launching critical discussions. Encourage students to annotate this work physically or virtually.

Round 1

Type of Question: General Understanding/Responses

Sample Question: **What do you notice about this artwork?**

Guidance: The goal of this conversation is to generate a range of student responses to the work. There is no wrong answer, but rather the idea is to open the conversation and create an environment in which students see the value of both their own opinion and the possible range of opinions.

Round 2

Type of Question: Key Details

Sample Question: **How would you describe the relationship among the creatures arranged on and around the plant?**

Guidance: The conversation should focus on gathering evidence from the image; formal and technical evidence, as well as evidence based on the imagery. Student responses should include discussion of specific visual aspects of the work. You may ask guiding questions such as, **“What colors so you see? Why do you think Maria Sibylla Merian chose to use them?”** OR **“What makes this work look real to you? Unreal?”** OR **“Why might Maria Sibylla Merian portray these creatures with this particular plant?”** pushing students to focus on the visual aspects of the work and how they might begin to support the responses discussed in Round 1.

Round 3

Type of Question: Structure

Sample Question: **How has Maria Sibylla Merian represented the passage of time in this artwork?**

Guidance: This discussion should focus more specifically on how the structure of the work is supporting the students' interpretations of the work. This conversation might be around compositional strategies, the use of evocative visual designs, or the inclusion of distinct features.

Round 4

Type of Question: Intent/Inferences

Sample Question: **In making this artwork, what materials and tools do you think Maria Sibylla Merian used? Why do you think she chose this medium, and how might the finished image have been different if she had used another medium?**

Guidance: Unlike the intentional omission of information in other rounds, prior to asking students to respond to this question, the teacher should provide some context for the work. This context should come in the form of another visual work. The nature of the context should promote the goals of the overall lesson or unit. This work might be:

- Another work by the same artist
- A work that serves a similar purpose in a more familiar context
- Another work from the same school, movement, or genre

Possible Contextual Works:

- Rachel Ruysch, *Roses, Convolvulus, Poppies and Other Flowers in an Urn on a Stone Ledge*, ca. late 1680s; Oil on canvas, 42 1/2 x 33 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; Photo by Lee Stalsworth

- Amy Lamb, *Anemone*, 1997; Iris print, 20 x 13 3/8 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Steven Scott, Baltimore, in honor of the artist; © 1997 Amy Lamb, all rights reserved
- Maggie Foskett, *Shedding Eden*, 1994; Cliché-verre, 20 x 16 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of the artist; © Maggie Foskett

Round 5

Type of Question: Opinion/Application

Sample question: **If you were to create an artwork illustrating the growth and development of a plant or animal, a) what subject would you choose, b) what stages of life would you portray, and c) what medium(s) would you use?**

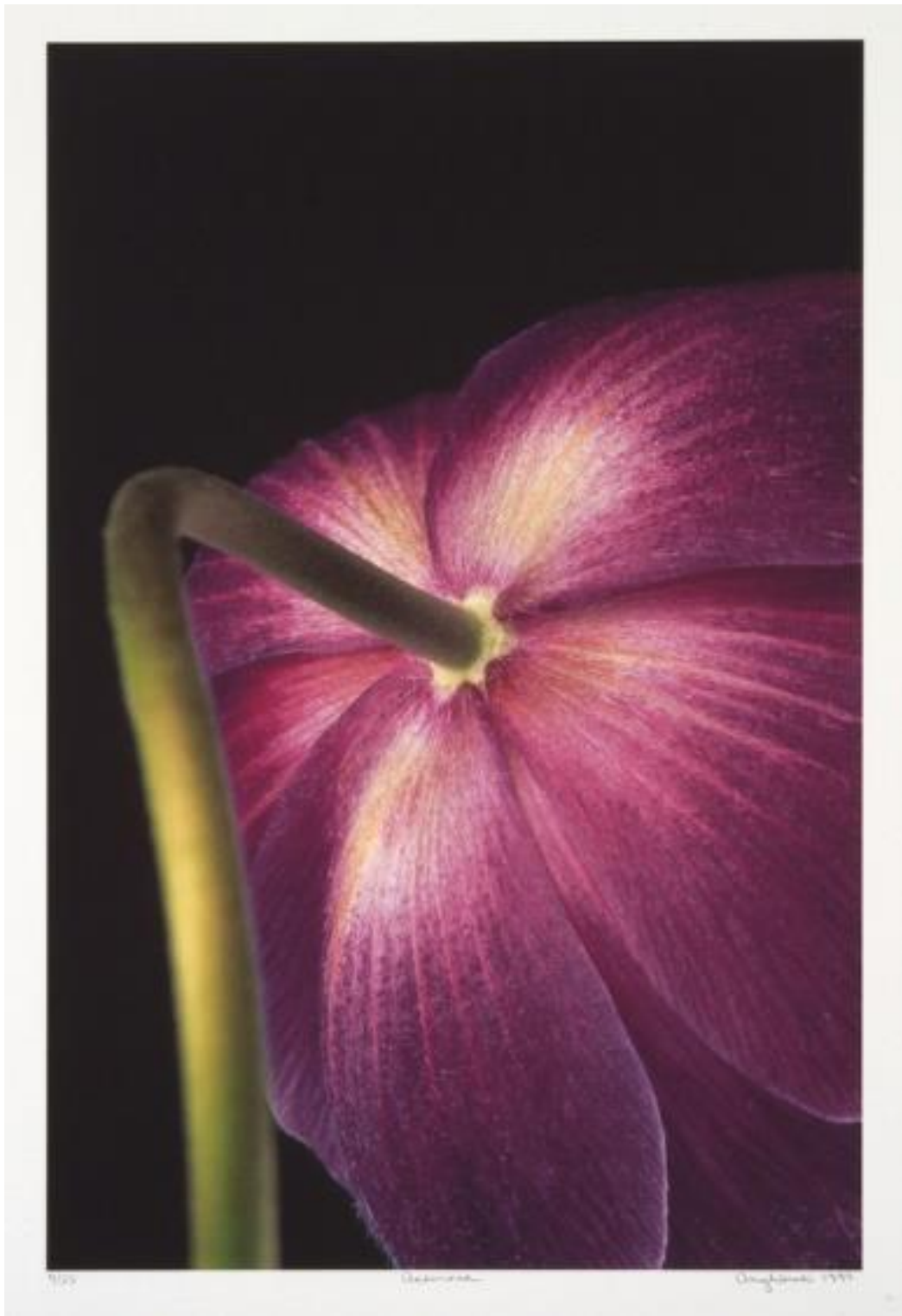
Guidance: This round is asking students to internalize the knowledge and information built in the previous rounds by using the concepts generated to visualize a work that applies to a personal goal of communication. The direction of this question is directly related to the broader thematic goal of the lesson or unit.



Maria Sibylla Merian, Plate 11 (from *Dissertation in Insect Generations and Metamorphosis in Surinam*, second edition), 1719; Hand-colored engraving on paper, 20 1/2 x 14 1/2 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay



Rachel Ruysch, *Roses, Convolvulus, Poppies and Other Flowers in an Urn on a Stone Ledge*, ca. late 1680s; Oil on canvas, 42 1/2 x 33 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; Photo by Lee Stalsworth



Amy Lamb, *Anemone*, 1997; Iris print, 20 x 13 3/8 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Steven Scott, Baltimore, in honor of the artist; © 1997 Amy Lamb, all rights reserved



Maggie Foskett, *Shedding Eden*, 1994; Cliché-verre, 20 x 16 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of the artist; © Maggie Foskett