Look and Learn
A Close-Looking Tour for Families
This *Look and Learn* tour can help you guide children of any age through the Museum galleries in a meaningful way.

The map below shows you where each of the tour stops are located in the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum. The tour will take you to five works of art and provides you with close-looking prompts and information for each work. We encourage you to spend a minute just looking at each work of art before asking questions – this allows all members of your family to take in the details of the object. After each question you ask your children, remember to validate their responses and ask this very important follow-up question: **What do you see that makes you say that?**

The questions are designed to help engage viewers with the work of art and form their own interpretations – not to guess at right or wrong answers. Once you and your children have had a chance to look closely at the work of art and talk about your ideas, the information provided below each object will help answer some of the questions you may have.
Coriolanus Taking Leave of his Wife to Join the Volscians in their Attack upon Rome
Etienne Aubry (French, 1745-1781)

Questions for Close-Looking:
• What do you think is going on in this painting?
• What do you think the people in the painting are feeling?
• How do you think these people know each other?
• Who do you think the story is about/who is the main character?
• Where do you think they are?
• When do you think the story takes place?
• Which figure do you like the most?

Remember to ask, **What do you see that makes you say that?**

Filling in the Details:

This 18th-century painting depicts the legendary Roman general Coriolanus leaving his family to go to war. Coriolanus is said to have lived in the 5th-century BCE, and was banished from Rome for his poor treatment of the plebeians (lower class Romans) during a grain shortage. Coriolanus was so angry at Rome for exiling him that he joined the army of their enemy, the Volscians, and prepared an attack against his home city. Out of desperation, his wife Volumnia and his mother travelled to his military camp and pleaded with him to abandon the attack. Eventually he relented and chose his family over war. Throughout the ages this remained a popular story about war, politics, and the importance of family. This painting shows the moment when Coriolanus bids farewell to his family at home (before he changes his mind about fighting Rome). Notice the sad faces of the woman and children in the lower right. The pale Volumnia, dressed in white, sits in a chair looking up desperately at Coriolanus, while his mother turns away dramatically and covers her face. They are not just scared for his safety, but also upset that he is going to attack their home city. The artist, Etienne Aubrey, has included Roman sculptures in the background of this scene, as well as classical architecture in the distance; these details help us understand that the scene takes place in ancient Rome.
**Questions for Close-Looking:**
- What's going on in this picture?
- Where do you think these men are?
- How do they know each other? Are they friends or enemies?
- What do you think they are talking about?
- Where is the light coming from?
- What do you notice about their clothing?

Remember to ask, **What do you see that makes you say that?**

**Filling in the Details:**

The man who painted this work was a Dutch artist who lived in the 17th century, about 400 years ago. The painting depicts a story from the Bible about three men who used to work for the Pharaoh (the ruler of Ancient Egypt) but were accused of crimes and sent to prison. This painting shows all three men in a jail cell. The man on the left with the red cloak is the main character, Joseph. The story from the Bible tells us that he was innocent of the crime that sent him to prison. Because of his good behavior, Joseph was made an overseer of the other prisoners. One day, two fellow prisoners – a Baker and a Butler – tell Joseph about the mysterious dreams they each had the night before, and Joseph interprets their dreams, accurately predicting the fate of the two men. Joseph says that the Butler (leaning over the table on the right side of the painting), will be let go and return to working for the Pharaoh, but the Baker (in the middle with his wrists in chains), will be not be released from prison. Even though this is a Biblical story, the artist did not paint the men in clothing from that time period. Instead he chose to depict the men in more contemporary dress imitating an Italian style of painting that many Dutch artists admired in the early 17th century. This artist also used contrasting lighting and shadows to enhance the drama of the scene. Notice how the hidden candle on the table illuminates the faces and hands of the men, making them glow, while keeping the background in darkness.
Questions for Close-Looking:
• What is the first thing you notice about this object?
• What do you think it was used for?
• Do you think the face belongs to a man or a woman?
• How would you describe the face? Happy? Sad? Playful?
• Why do you think it’s sticking its tongue out?
• Why might the artist have put a face on the inside of the cup?

Remember to ask, What do you see that makes you say that?

Filling in the Details:

This was made in Ancient Greece, more than 2,000 years ago. It is a type of drinking cup called a kylix, and it would have been used to drink red wine at parties called symposia. Because it would have been filled with dark liquid, the face at the bottom of the cup would not be immediately visible. Even though this figure looks like it has a beard, it is actually a woman. Specifically, it is a female mythological creature called a Gorgon. The most famous Gorgon from Greek mythology is Medusa, who was slayed by the hero Perseus during one of his adventures. Anyone who looked at Medusa’s face would be turned to stone, even after her head was cut off. Imagine drinking out of this cup, tipping the cup forward and suddenly seeing this face as you drain the liquid. Would you be surprised? Would you be scared, or would you think it was funny? In ancient Greece a face sticking out its tongue was thought to scare away evil spirits and bad luck. Because of this tradition, faces like this one often appear on personal items, and were thought to protect the object’s owner.
Tomb figurines (yong) in the shape of camels and a court official
Chinese, Tang dynasty (618-906 CE)

Questions for Close-Looking:

- What is the first thing you notice about this group?
- What colors do you see on these three objects?
- Why do you think the figures are this size?
- Which figure do you like the most and why?
- Describe the camels – do they look calm or upset?
- What do you notice about the man’s face and clothing?

Remember to ask, What do you see that makes you say that?

Filling in the Details:

These figures come from tombs and were made in China over a thousand years ago. Tomb figures were believed to serve the deceased in the afterlife, and were also a sign of their owner’s wealth and high status. Camels, which were not native to China, were important transportation animals for trade along the Silk Road – the trade route that stretched from China all the way to the Mediterranean. Called the “ships of the desert,” camels carried heavy loads and could withstand long journeys across the hot desert. The type depicted in these sculptures is the Bactrian camel, which is two-humped, and comes from Central Asia. The two camels are depicted very realistically – notice their heads are thrown back and their mouths are opened wide; this is what camels do when they know a dangerous sandstorm is approaching. The figure of a male court official wears a long, flowing robe with wide sleeves and a high collar. With large almond-shape eyes and bushy eyebrows and mustache, his face suggests that the artist was trying to depict someone of foreign (non-Chinese) origin. By depicting foreigners and exotic animals such as camels, these figurines show the international culture of the Tang dynasty, as well as the influence of its prosperous trade with other cultures across the Silk Road. The combination of amber, green, and cream glazes is called sancai, which means “three-color glaze.” The glazes were chosen by the potters because of their tendency to splash, run, and blend together to create the free-flowing designs unique to each piece.
Questions for Close-Looking:

- What is the first thing you notice in this painting?
- What do you think is going on in this scene?
- Who do you think the figures in the bottom left are?
- What do you think the figures are doing?
- How would you describe the weather?
- What season is it: winter, spring, summer, or fall?
- What do you notice about the clouds?

Remember to ask, *What do you see that makes you say that?*

Filling in the Details:

This painting, by the American painter George Inness, is of Conway Meadows in North Conway, New Hampshire. It was painted by the artist in 1876 after he spent the summer there. North Conway was a very popular subject for artists in the late 19th-century. The colors and shapes in this painting seem to be constantly changing. If you stand further back from the painting you can see and understand the whole scene, but as you move towards the canvas and look closer, shapes lose their meaning and become blurred before our eyes.

If you look under the mass of gray clouds at the top right you'll notice another group of white clouds, separated by a line of green representing the hills in the background. Take a closer look at these and you might notice that they seem to be trailing off towards the right. It has been suggested that the artist was representing smoke or steam rather than clouds, perhaps belonging to a train that is invisible to us because of the trees in the foreground. If Inness had painted a visible train in the foreground of the painting, how do you think it would change our understanding of the scene?