Elements of Art

The building blocks of visual art

Line: is the path left by the moving point. Words to use when talking about line are - organic, fluid, geometric, angular, harsh, vigorous, soft, regular, rhythmic, continuous, broken, interrupted, jagged, thick, thin, long, short, contour, outline, linear, horizontal, vertical, diagonal, oblique, technical, controlled, sweeping, swirling, curved, gestural, calligraphic, implied, sgraffito.

Colour: is a sensation seen by the eye and created from light reflection and absorption. It has three dimensions: HUE (indicated by its name such as red or yellow), VALUE (its lightness or darkness), INTENSITY (its purity or saturation). Words to use when talking about colour are – colour wheel, primary, secondary, complementary, analogous, monochromatic, polychromatic, hue, warm, advancing, cool, receding, shade, dark, tint, light, flat, solid, bold, bright, strong, intense, vivid, clear, enhanced, diluted, subdued, soft, muted, brooding, harmonious, realistic, natural, crisp, blended, subjective, objective, pigment.

Tone: is the degree of lightness or darkness of an object. Words to use when talking about tone are - shade, dark, deep, low key, shadow, medium, tint, light, high key, gradual, blending, shading, contrast, subtle, rich, dramatic, illumination, value, render, chiaroscuro.

Texture: is the surface quality of an artwork. It is how things feel, or look as if they might feel if touched. In an artwork, texture can be real and actual, or implied (or simulated). Words to use when talking about texture are – surface, rough, smooth, tactile, furry, wrinkled, sharp, soft, natural, woven, bumpy, slippery, hard.

Shape: refers to a two dimensional (2D) area that is defined by a boundary. It has only height and width and is flat. Words to use when talking about shape are – outline, two dimensional, solid, flat, geometric, free-form, organic, silhouette, elongated, overlapped, decorative, positive, negative.

Form: refers to an element of art that is three dimensional (it has height, width and depth) and encloses volume. Words to use when talking about form are – three dimensional, volume, solidity, roundness, mass, monumental, free standing, geometric, organic, realistic, abstract.
Space: is the illusion that creates a sense of depth and is the distance or area between, around, above or within things. Words to use – flat, busy, cluttered, positive, negative, empty, bare, open, deep, shallow, distance, perspective (linear perspective, aerial perspective), foreshortening, overlap, isolated, void, solitary, ambiguous
Principles of Art

The use or arrangement of the building blocks of visual art

**Composition:** is the way that the various parts of an artwork are organized. Words to use - focal point, centre of interest, structured, unplanned, simple, complex, symmetrical, asymmetrical, bird's eye view, high angle view, aerial view, worm's eye view, low angle view, open composition, closed composition, framed, narrative, rule of thirds

**Focal Point:** is the area of interest towards which the eye is drawn. Words to use – emphasis, centre of interest, dominate, obvious, focus, centred, subject, captivating, appealing, stands out

**Balance:** is a sense of stability in the artwork and can be created by repeating shapes and by creating a feeling of equal weight. Words to use – symmetrical, asymmetrical, radial, radiating, centred, informal, irregular, random, parallel, stable, dignified, compensate

**Harmony:** is the visually satisfying effect of combining similar, related elements. Words to use – unity, even, regular, consistent, repetitive, calm, rhythmic, peaceful, subtle, serene, equality, tranquility, uniformity, monochromatic, analogous

**Contrast:** refers to the use of opposing elements and is the quality of difference, in tone, colour, line or any of the other art elements. Words to use when talking about contrast – different, obvious, variety, sharp, stark, opposing, extremes, dramatic, theatrical, strong, bold, clash, discord, harsh, juxtaposed, emphasis, dominant

**Rhythm:** repeating elements creates visual rhythm and helps the viewer's eye to move around the artwork. Words to use when talking about rhythm – movement, motion, action, flowing, energetic, vigorous, swift, steady, uniform, calm, static, graceful, dramatic, distorted, chaotic, repetition, recurring

**Movement:** is the suggestion or illusion of motion. It shows action and directs the viewer's eye around the artwork. Words to use – shifting, flowing, kinetic, rush, energetic, motion, action, vigorous, static, chaotic, whirlwind.

**Pattern:** is the use of the art elements in planned or random repetition. It is often used for decorative effect or to create visual rhythm. Words to use when talking about pattern – repetition, repetitive, decorative, motif, abstract, geometric, arrangement, detailed, freehand

**Proportion:** or scale refers to the relationship between the size, height and width of one part of a composition to another part. Words to use when talking about proportion – scale, realistic, balanced, dominate, inferior, manipulated, huge, perfect