

ART AND THE LOCALITY

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Figure 1: Three year 5 groups' 'sacred places': (a) Little Switzerland, (b) The Den Building Area and (c) The Waste (acrylics and oil pastel on board).

Here, Jon describes the benefits of using the outdoors both as a stimulus for art and to help pupils develop their sense of place.

The current National Curriculum for art and design gives a very broad canvas on which to construct a curriculum (DfE, 2013). Using the environment for art – both the area within your county and that within walking distance of your school – is a useful way for pupils to learn about the human and physical landscapes of the local area. Integrating art into a holistic experience and using it as a way of seeing or understanding is at the heart of a cross-curricular creative approach, where geography is a natural partner. Mackintosh notes that there are strong links between geography and art and that 'creative teaching, and creative activities that encourage creative responses, foster an enthusiasm for landscapes, a fascination for places, spaces and environments and a love of maps' (Mackintosh, 2013; see also Mackintosh and Kent, 2015). Likewise, Horler *et al.* (2014) explore how studying the work of particular artists can aid pupils' recognition and perception of landscapes.

Our school has always been a specialist in the Arts and has been an Artsmark Gold school for many years. However, over the last four years we abandoned the repetitive rolling programme altogether and we now operate a truly free, creative curriculum. Like many other schools, the geography of the local area and community and the location of the school are at the forefront of our teaching and the curriculum. The artistic and geographical outcomes of just some of our lessons are outlined below.

Geography, art and landscape

As part of a whole-school topic on 'The Sandstone Trail' (a local long-distance walk), one year 5 class decided to look at the ancient remains and locations of hill forts that dot the length of the Trail. This led naturally to a study of the Iron Age. The class read *Wolf Brother* (Paver, 2005), which introduces the idea of ancient people having special sacred places. Pupils made several visits to the local woods, where they took photos and sketched places along the Trail, identifying their location and specific features around them on a map. They then developed group paintings of their own 'sacred places' (Figure 1).

The pupils also extended their mapwork skills by studying 1km squares on large-scale OS maps showing hill forts on the Trail.



Figure 2: Year 5 hill fort models made from 1km OS map squares.

Then, from examination of the maps' features and contour lines, and following visits to local sites (and with a little artistic license), the pupils produced 3D models or sculptures. The finished work was displayed alongside mathematical work on ratio and poetry and narrative writing from the pupils (Figure 2).

Art and geography in the school grounds

There is much to inspire artwork and hone pupils' artistic skills within the school grounds. Transient, environmental art inspired by the work of Andy Goldsworthy, Richard Shilling and Chris Drury (see web panel), for example, is great to use with pupils of all ages and abilities. As well as geography and creative writing, this kind of work can be linked to other subject areas (e.g. maths with pattern and



Figure 3: Environmental art created, photographed and edited (using iPads) by year 3 pupils.

sequence activities, or to identification in science). Environmental art gets pupils outdoors and provides them with a familiarity with place. It also encourages them to work together to consider line, colour and shape, and the importance of photographic composition (Figure 3).



Figure 4: Cubist style work: (a) year 1 section of Kelsall School grounds in the style of Hundertwasser (mixed media on cartridge paper), (b) year 4: Our school (inks and oil pastel on card), and (c) year 6 sections of Beeston Castle (mixed media on canvas).

After studying the work of Paul Klee and Friederich Hundertwasser (see web panel) as an introduction into abstraction of landscape, and learning about aspects of cubism as a technique of painting a subject from different viewpoints at the same time, pupils used the same methods to produce wonderful abstract paintings of locations. Pupils first went outdoors to produce simple line drawings from different viewpoints, which they then combined to create sections. Pupils painted the sections in acrylics or inks (or both) then finished them with oil pastels. As small details of the original sketches can get lost in the abstraction of their cubist paintings, pupils needed to look at their sketches to recall vividly where they were and what they were thinking about. In this way the different parts of their painting had a real sense of place.

When we visited Beeston Castle, just a short coach ride away from the school, we were dropped off about 4.5km away. Pupils used maps to follow footpaths to the castle, stopping to sketch the castle from a distance and then close-up in more detail. Later the pupils combined sketches using the 'cubist' technique (Figure 4).

Human geography and art

As well as producing artworks focused on landscape, there are other aspects of geography that can inspire pupils to produce works of art. For our most recent whole-school theme – the 80th anniversary of the school itself – year 4 pupils walked around the village looking at some of the most significant buildings and learning about their past and present roles in the community. Pupils visited and photographed St Philips Church, and, after studying Van Gogh's painting *The Church at Anvers* (see web panel), produced paintings in the same style – a heavy impasto style of applying oils. To create a similar texture, the pupils used acrylics mixed with glue and sand (Figure 5).

Using the same theme, year 4 decided to branch off into a class topic on farming in Cheshire. They visited a farm in the area and Reaseheath (the local Agricultural



Figure 5: Year 4 painting of St Philips Church in the style of Van Gogh.

College) and walked in the fields, taking photos and drawing livestock. Yet again this approach offers more depth and a greater connection with the subject. The pupils then created excellent impressionistic landscapes of Cheshire farmland and some livestock studies (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Year 4 artwork inspired by farming: (a) Dairy Cow in a Landscape (acrylic on textured papers and canvas), (b) Dairy Cow (mixed media on card), and (c) Sheep Face (mixed media on card).

Year 5 went to visit Crosby beach to look at Antony Gormley's *Another Place* sculptures (see web panel). While there a local photographer, Ron Davies, showed them how to compose and frame effective photos. Back at school the pupils produced individual paintings of their work. Working as a group, they created life-sized sculptures of figures. The pupils took the figures up to the woods at Kelsall for more photos in a 'contrasting locality' (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Year 5 work inspired by Antony Gormley's sculptures at Crosby Beach: (a) painting from photograph (acrylic and oil pastel), and (b) Boris – the sculpture made and taken to Kelsall woods for photographing.



The final example involved learning about the Second World War. As part of the topic pupils dressed up as evacuees and went on a trip to Liverpool to visit museums, to the docks to have their pictures taken, and then to Abbeywood (a rambling old house and gardens just down the road from Kelsall School) to explore and take more photos in an environment that some of the evacuees from Liverpool might have experienced during the War. Pupils produced group portraits (in the style of Henry Moore's *Shelter* drawings) and canvases from photos taken at Abbeywood were used to illustrate pupils' narrative writing on the theme of evacuees (Figure 8).

Summary

This article has demonstrated how art and environmental engagement can be used to develop pupils' geographical skills as well as key concepts and core knowledge. In our school's experience, art enriches the experience, giving both teacher and pupils a focus and a greater understanding of art, geography and other curriculum areas.

References

- DfE (2013) *National Curriculum in England: Art and design programmes of study – key stages 1 and 2*. London: DfE.
- Horler, T., Mackintosh, M., Kavanagh, P. and Kent, G. (2014) 'The art of perceiving landscapes', *Primary Geographer*, 83, pp. 8–10.
- Mackintosh, M. (2013) 'Representing places in maps and art' in Scoffham, S. (ed) *Teaching Geography Creatively*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 74–84.
- Mackintosh, M. and Kent, G. (2015) *Everyday Guide to Primary Geography: Art*. Sheffield: Geographical Association.
- Paver, M. (2005) *Wolf Brother*. London: Orion.



Figure 8: Year 4 and 6 work inspired by the Second World War: (a) evacuees in the style of Henry Moore's *Shelter* drawings, and (b) *Arriving at a Country House* (acrylic on canvas).

WEB RESOURCES

- Transient land artworks – Andy Goldsworthy: www.goldsworthy.cc.gla.ac.uk/
- Richard Shilling: www.richardshilling.co.uk/
- Chris Drury: <http://chrisdrury.co.uk/>
- Abstract landscape art – Paul Klee: www.wikiart.org/en/paul-klee
- Friederich Hundertwasser: www.hundertwasser.com
- Antony Gormley's work: www.antonygormley.com
- Vincent Van Gogh's *Church at Anvers*: www.everypainterpaintshimself.com/article/van_goghs_church_in_auvers_sur_oise_1890

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