

Art

A conversation with Sophie Merrill

Sophie Merrill is an assistant head and class teacher. She has been art lead at her school for many years and has spent time teaching art across the school. She has also worked with schools on developing the use of sketchbooks to support progression in art.

When you get to the end of Year 6 and have taught a rich, challenging, ambitious primary art curriculum, what do you think Year 6 children should be able to know, understand and do in art?

In primary schools, there hasn't been an emphasis on art within the curriculum historically, and the primary national curriculum is so brief and vague. Not all schools will necessarily have a subject specialist. Consequently, schools have had to think hard about what they want from an art curriculum. So, I would like our children to have experienced a wealth of art materials and processes throughout their time at primary and have formed, through the practical experience, a foundational understanding of what those materials and processes are. I want them to leave Year 6 with a solid knowledge and understanding of the formal elements of art and design – line, tone, shape, space, value, colour, all those things. They need to be grounded in those elements. I want them to have encountered a breadth of art and design, multiculturally and

historically, so that they have a wealth of art knowledge to draw upon for themselves to create their own artwork. They need to be proficient in drawing as a way of representing ideas or designs or other things that they might want to work on. One of the important things that we've worked on as a school is pupils' confidence in art. It's easy for children to be disheartened with art and say, 'I can't draw!' One of the fundamentals is getting children to be brave and emphasising that making mistakes is okay and that to try and experiment and have a go is a basic aspect of the artistic learning process. They need to feel they are in a safe space where they can express their ideas through different media, without being wounded by adverse criticism.

While we want them feeling safe, we also want them to feel challenged. We have to avoid too much copying. Too often expression turns out to be replication: 'We're all going to draw this exact piece in this exact way using this exact media and we're all going to produce exactly the same picture.' It becomes art by numbers. Sometimes I feel we need to ban the sunflowers, because it seems that every primary school has 30 versions of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* on the wall. It makes me uncomfortable physically to see that that's the limit of the children's experience of art.

Five myths surrounding primary art...

Myth 1: You need expensive materials. Art does not have to be expensive. Of course, once you've used the materials, they're gone, but there are ways that we can resource art cheaply and sustainably. We begin by teaching the children to use materials sustainably. Part of that training is to train them to think about how much they're using and why they're using it.

Myth 2: Teachers need the skills of Da Vinci to teach art. Many teachers fear art because they have their own anxieties around their own level of proficiency within the subject, so we avoid aspects of art that we don't feel confident in.

Myth 3: We only do art at the end of term. Too many times art is blocked at the end of term as a nice thing for the pupils to do.

Myth 4: Art is a reward for children behaving well. Too many times art is scheduled at short notice on a Friday afternoon, in the guise of a reward: 'Everybody's been really good this week, so let's get the paint out.' It's always art or PE as a treat. It devalues art. It's not just

an extension of playtime. Taught well, art is rich and interesting and intellectually stimulating. It's not just something to do because you've all behaved well in assembly. At our school, we value art and privilege its position in the curriculum. It's about giving it a purpose. Getting the paint out on a Friday afternoon is craft, it's not teaching the children the principles of art.

Myth 5: Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* series is the pinnacle of artistic achievement. It does feel like Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* are on the wall in every school I visit. It is unhelpful to reinforce subliminally in the children's minds that *Sunflowers* is what we're aiming for.

Art needs to be given time and it needs to be valued, and by valued, I mean it needs to be celebrated. It needs to be up on the walls. It needs to be given gallery space in celebration time. It needs to be sequenced so that the pupils progress in their learning and within that sequencing things need to be repeated in terms of key concepts, so that the children can build on their prior knowledge and understanding of those concepts, such as colour. They need to revisit things the same way they would revisit other areas of mathematics, areas of English, with the expectation to produce artwork to a higher level of proficiency each time they make art or encounter new aspects of the discipline.

We begin in EYFS which prepares the children for the national curriculum. When we planned our art curriculum, we also looked at the KS3 curriculum for art, which implicitly presumes that the level of art teaching in primary schools isn't going to be very good. It repeats many elements of KS2 art which suggests the expectation that children will not receive much in the way of an art curriculum in primary. There's next to nothing at KS2 in the national curriculum and at KS3, the only difference is that the pupils are expected to evaluate – which they should be doing in primary anyway – and there is an increase in the amount of art history they're expected to know. They're also supposed to be 'proficient'. Beyond that, the KS3 curriculum is essentially the same as KS2.

You never walk into an EYFS setting and find a child who tells you that they're rubbish at art. They're absolutely convinced that they are the greatest artist ever. But by the time you get to Year 6 there are children in primary who believe that they can't draw, that somehow you're either in the 'good at art' camp or the 'not good at art' camp. As the curriculum progresses their confidence decreases. So how do we mitigate that? A

lot of that is to do with the quality of teaching of art, and not just doing art on a regular basis, but being shown how to do it, teachers modelling the messy process of creating art – the stop-start process, the trial and error, the inevitability of getting it wrong before you get it right. In my school every teacher has a sketchbook, and in their lessons they go round to each table and join in, modelling the different skills and techniques that the children might try, but within that modelling they model getting it wrong. ‘This doesn’t quite work. I’m just going to start again over here, but that’s okay. I haven’t quite got that line right,’ or ‘The value of that colour isn’t quite right, I’m going to change that... I haven’t quite got the space between these two shapes quite right, so I’m going to try that again.’ It’s allowing that freedom but also getting rid of the rubbers. If you make a mistake, draw over it. We aren’t looking for perfection.

The sketchbook is everything in art, especially in primary art; if there’s a splash on the page, it doesn’t matter, draw over it. We have sketchbooks from Year 1 to Year 6; our Year 1 children get them in spring/summer term depending on the readiness of the cohort, and then they take the sketchbooks with them all the way through to Year 6.

Art needs a purpose within the curriculum. Art should reinforce what is being taught in other areas of the wider curriculum to give it that purpose. Children need to see art in relation to something, so that art can appear in history lessons, art can appear in RE lessons. It’s not just about bringing art out to do the skill itself. For example, if you’re studying World War I, you’d look at the paintings of the brothers John Nash and Paul Nash, who were commissioned as war artists as well, or John Singer Sargent to see those responses to war, the same way that you would look at the poetry of Wilfred Owen and Rupert Brooke. If we’re learning about the Victorians, we should be looking at Victorian artwork. We might look at the arts and craft movement. We might even be looking at the Pre-Raphaelites as well within that context. You need to think about where pupils are going to re-encounter art and how art can provide a wider context for other curriculum disciplines.

When we focus upon developing the pupils’ artistic competencies, we emphasise the importance of drawing, which underpins the art curriculum. Hockney would say that being able to draw is at the absolute centre of the whole thing and even if you become Tracey Emin and you’re making tents and beds and installation art, she still needs to have been

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able to draw. She spent years learning how to draw and she developed her own style, which is idiosyncratic and unique. It's interesting how we might view that. Our Year 6 had a conversation about which is the more interesting piece of art, which is the most valuable piece of art. There was a painting by Picasso, a painting by Van Gogh and they had another painting. They all said the Picasso was worthless because it didn't look like what it was supposed to. Challenging that fidelity-to-reality concept of art is important. We sent home discussion points for our families to engage in conversation about different topics and one of them was art. I sent home a picture of Cornelia Parker's *Exploding Shed [Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View]*. Parker had the army blow up a shed. She then collected all the pieces up and then hung all the fragments back together and there's a light shining in the middle of the wreckage. I asked the children whether they saw this as art and they said they didn't because to them art is a painting that hangs in a gallery. If the painting merely replicates its subject precisely, you might as well take a photograph or order a canvas version of a photograph. There is a common-sense view that the greater the fidelity to the subject, the better the art. But look at Picasso's *Guernica* for instance. It's extraordinary. When you analyse *Guernica*, it's just phenomenal, but initially it wouldn't satisfy my pupils because it doesn't look like the real thing. It is interesting what they perceive art to be. Children in Early Years have an idea of art that is so much broader than an older child. They will create things with sticks or stones and natural materials outside; they created that artwork. It's almost like the younger the child, the broader the nature of their understanding of art. But that awe and wonder seems to disappear as children get older. That is why teaching art and introducing pupils to a range of artists and media is so important.

Sketchbooks are everything in primary art. In Year 3 we do work on the Stone Age. We look at the artwork of John Piper and Henry Moore and we look at their images of Stonehenge and we use that as a stimulus for drawing and for sculpture work as well.



We also look at Richard Long in terms of environmental art, and we connect that to the thinking about art inspired by Stonehenge and make artistic and thematic connections between the artists. In Year 4 we study the work of Joseph Cornell as part of our work on rainforests. They develop their work by experimenting with drawing rainforest flora and fauna. Thematically, they encounter rainforests in geography and in science and then they encounter them again in art, which makes meaningful cross-curricular links.

Then finally, because we're a Manchester school, it makes sense for us to look at the Industrial Revolution. As part of that, they look at the industrial landscape and how the landscape around Manchester has changed geographically, but they also represent those changes through art by looking at the city's architecture.



When it comes to industrial landscapes, we obviously look at Lowry, but if you're a Manchester school you have to roll out Lowry. It's a bit of a Van Gogh thing. It's, 'Oh you come from Manchester, let's roll out Lowry.' Do you know what I think one of the biggest shames for Lowry is? Lowry's portraits are phenomenal. Some of his portraits are harrowingly beautiful, and yet they are rarely studied in schools. We're rolling out his *Matchstick Men and Matchstick Cats and Dogs* along with the song, which is fine, but we're ignoring some of his most beautiful and thought-provoking pieces of work as well.

At our school, the artist comes first. But it's not about the children experiencing one artist at a time. Many schools focus upon one artist per year: 'In Year 4 we do Van Gogh, so we look at all of Van Gogh's artwork; in Year 5, we look at Frida Kahlo; in Year 6, we look at Banksy.' Then they just look at all their artwork and just reproduce, whereas our approach is quite different. When we encounter our Stone Age art within the Stone Age context, there's not a lot you can get from drawing cave paintings.

It doesn't really develop the children's skills. When you're doing that period in history, it makes sense to look at rocks and soils in science as well. Then we also look at artists who have used the land as inspiration, such as John Piper and Richard Long the environmental artist. So, they encounter these different artists who have all been inspired by this one idea. The same with rainforests. Yes, they look at Joseph Cornell, but they also look at Henri Rousseau. They get this breadth of artistic styles. They see how different artists can inform their work and they try different things and find what works for them for their desired outcome. I want to emphasise the importance of that joined-up thinking within the primary curriculum. Art can't really be a stand-alone subject in primary because it needs to be informed by so many other aspects of the curriculum, from the history, from the geography, from RE. All these things feed into the understanding of art. We study early Islamic civilisation in Year 4, so we look at geometric design and geometric patterns with a link into mathematics. Then, we look at a variety of artists who have used that to inform them both historically, but also how contemporary artists have used those pieces of artwork as well to inform their own artwork now, work by artists such as Joyce Kozloff. This gives art within the primary curriculum genuine purpose and importance.

And sketchbooks are so important, because they give the children something they're proud of and you can track their progress. A sketchbook is no different to an English or a mathematics book. It's where the children try out their ideas. It's where they experiment like they do in a mathematics book. They practise their formal methods. They're practising their skills and their knowledge of those art skills and applying them. So, in your English book you practise your grammar and your sentence construction and your punctuation. It's exactly the same. If you're doing that on to scrappy bits of paper, it's not going to work.

Is there a toolkit you use to teach the children how to draw?

We re-encounter drawing within every art unit; you can see below an example of how art is structured across our school:

Re-encountering media & materials

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Drawing is taught in every unit					
Painting - seasonal landscapes	Painting - portraits	Painting - rocks	Painting - water	Painting - industrial landscapes	Painting - watercolour flowers
3D clay - slabs	3D card structures	3D clay - relief slabs	3D card structures	3D junk modelling	3D clay - pots
Printmaking - press printing	Mixed media - animals	Mixed media - mosaics	Printmaking - press printing tiles	Printmaking - collagraph printing	Mixed media - shoes

As you can see, drawing is taught within every unit. Pupils have an opportunity to look at the principles and the elements of art and design within different contexts. In Year 1, the children will have the opportunity to draw their ideas, to develop ideas around painting. They'll have opportunities to develop their ideas and design around 3D work, printmaking as well. So, that repeats those opportunities to repeat and practise how to create different lines, how to create different marks, the thickness/thinness of marks, and different shapes. One of the things that I say to children is, 'Right, talk to your partner. How many different types of line can you think of? So how many types of lines can you think of John?' A squiggly line, a straight line, a curved line, a bendy line, parallel lines, perpendicular, thick, thin, zigzag, broken, dotted, continuous... This vocabulary development is important and then they have an attempt at creating these lines and using these lines to communicate what they see in front of them and their ideas.

Looking at how our art curriculum is structured, paint is repeated because that tends to be the most obvious area of art. Three-dimensional art is then repeated every year. Pupils encounter clay three times but in different forms and it gets progressively more difficult each time they encounter it. The same with these card structures. The children are expected to make sculptures from card or junk models, with increasing difficulty each time. Then, other elements of art such as printmaking are repeated too. In Year 4 and Year 5, we structure the art curriculum that way because it fits better

with the humanities. We could have very easily in Year 3 put printmaking, then mixed media in Year 4, but actually it was better to put it the other way round, because it suited humanities better. Pupils are still getting to encounter that work, they still have opportunity to re-encounter and look back through their sketchbook to build upon what they have done previously, but the work has more purpose because it is connected to other areas of the curriculum. Textiles comes in through D&T. We do sewing, puppet making, making textile bags and things like that.

Are there any other principles underpinning sequencing?

Re-encountering principles

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Drawing is taught in every unit					
Painting - seasonal landscapes	Painting - portraits	Painting - rocks	Painting - water	Painting - industrial landscapes	Painting - watercolour flowers
Line Shape Space Colour Texture	Line Shape Space Colour	Line Shape Texture Tone Form	Texture Pattern Tone Colour Space Shape	Shape Space Tone Line Value	Shape Space Line Form Tone Colour Value

Obviously, the further up the school, the more progress they make, and the more you expect of them. In painting, we would want the children to encounter colour repeatedly and to mix colours to varying degrees of accuracy; not just obviously mixing primary and secondary colours but being very specific about the tertiary colours that they mix. We want them to be mixing colours for a desired outcome: 'If I add this amount of white, what kind of tint am I going to get? If I add this amount of black, what shade am I going to get and how will it get darker?' It's hard. Being able to mix 12 different shades of green is difficult. You only need five colours in any primary school: black, white, red, yellow, blue.

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That's all you need. In Years 4 and 5 we give the children a picture as a stimulus, perhaps a picture of a landscape, and they must match the colours in the landscape using colour mixing, which is very precise. They must be incredibly exact with how much colour they add in terms of replicating the colours accurately. That's how the children develop their understanding of the capabilities of materials.

When we draw, we give our children biros, graphite sticks, charcoals, Indian Ink, as well as pencils. We use sticks or old pencils dipped in Indian Ink, and we train Year 1 and 2 children to use Indian Ink in small groups with an adult. One of the things that I want the children to understand when they leave Year 6 is, 'If I'm going to do a small, detailed drawing, I need to know the right art materials to achieve what I want to achieve.' We see children with chunky graphite sticks trying to draw something detailed and they must understand that that material won't do that and that's part of the knowledge and understanding we want to develop.

So, as well as key media and materials and key principles, we have artists.

Re-encountering artists

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Drawing is taught in every unit					
Painting - seasonal landscapes	Painting - portraits	Painting - rocks	Painting - water	Painting - industrial landscapes	Painting - flowers
Monet Georgia O'Keeffe Van Gogh	Kehinde Wiley Frida Kahlo	Georgia O'Keeffe John Piper	Hokusai Monet David Hockney	Lowry Ford Madox Brown Turner	Judith Leyster Georgia O'Keeffe Van Gogh

You'll notice that Georgia O'Keeffe is repeated, because I want the children to re-encounter some artists, to see that they did different things, that they didn't just paint in one style. You might look at Picasso. If you chose to have Picasso in your curriculum, he would be interesting to repeat because he didn't just do one thing.

There are landscape artists to illustrate different ways of representing landscapes. You might have more contemporary artists; Hundertwasser would be interesting to include for his abstract landscapes in Year 1. It's important that we've got diversity within the artwork that we choose. So, we've got artists like Frida Kahlo repeated. She comes up again in Year 6 at a later point, but for a different reason. She's not shown here, but we encounter Frida Kahlo more than once in our school. She was a Mexican painter. In Year 2, they look at different portrait artists and how Frida Kahlo had things around her portraits that were important to her. She's interesting because she had a horrific life. When she was much younger she was in a bus crash, and it left her with very severe injuries which she portrays within her paintings. So, those ideas are explored in Year 6. Frida Kahlo is important as a feminist icon who challenged stereotypes. There's so much richness around the meaning behind her art and what she stood for. She's a fabulous artist to study. So, our Year 6 children look at democracy and, as part of that, they look at the suffragette movement. As part of our curriculum work on the roles of women, we include Frida Kahlo, not from an art point of view, but for discussions in philosophy sessions. Art is used to reinforce the discussions that are taking place within the broader curriculum.

When it comes to 3D, we look at different artists and some of those feature in historical work. In Year 5 the children study Viking craft. They look at, from a historical point of view, how the Vikings made brooches and jewellery and use that as a starting point for their artwork. In Year 6, they do a unit of work around the Holocaust and World War II and study different artists to inform their work in creating three-dimensional objects to create shoes. So, there are artists that interconnect the curriculum and then other artists exemplify different art forms. In Year 3 the children look at Roman mosaics, but then they also look at still life. They look at different still life artists throughout history, and the idea of creating a fresco, and how other people have been inspired by that art form, to show the children how they can take their artwork in different directions. It's that breadth of experience, that diet of seeing that people experiment with different forms... It's like reading. It shouldn't just be a diet of Michael Morpurgo or Roald Dahl. It shouldn't be just a diet of dead white men. For art, it needs to be broader than that. Year 5 look at migration in one of their units for geography and they look at Yinka

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Shonibare's *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*. It needs to have that richness. The art curriculum needs to be rich, full, vibrant, and exciting, the same way a reading curriculum should be.

You cannot expect children to be confident, interesting artists, to be fluent in art and proficient in art in all its forms, if they only have a limited diet to inspire them.

The EYFS lead at our school is phenomenal, and the EYFS art curriculum is founded in their creative areas where they set up the media and materials that pupils will encounter again later in the school. The children can experiment with drawings and mark making on different surfaces with different material in assorted sizes. They can have chalk to draw on the playground. They can draw on small pieces of paper, huge pieces of paper. They can scribble. They can have artworks as a talking point as well, giving the children a picture, asking, 'What can you see here? What do you notice?' as a perfect starting point for developing vocabulary with children. We use picture books in EYFS by Anthony Browne, and just his pictures without the text are used as a starting point for discussion. We might use artwork by Roberto Innocenti who did *Rose Blanche*. He's produced a version of *Pinocchio* that is a beautiful talking point for younger children, and *The Nutcracker* as well. It's about the art, not about the text.

Having high expectations of the children is key, encouraging them to try modelling, giving them clay or Play-Doh, giving them sand and water to build sculptures. Also giving them paint and substances to mix with the paint, like sawdust, and to see what happens. How does the texture change? The vocabulary is so important, because there is vocabulary that you experience with art materials that's just so difficult to replicate in terms of understanding from anywhere else in the curriculum. Experiencing the tactile nature of the materials and all the sensory words associated with that is a great opportunity to extend the children's vocabulary. Art is such an underused medium through which you can develop sensory vocabulary as well as visual vocabulary. It feeds into other subjects. In science, children sometimes find it hard to understand the difference between soft and smooth in terms of when they were looking at properties of materials. Well, if you've got a great art curriculum, you're going to experience materials that are either soft or smooth. Encourage year groups to go out and make rubbings. Take

bits of sturdy sugar paper and some graphite sticks and go out and find different textures and then talk about the textures. What does it look like? How did it feel when you touched it? It is that experiential side to art that our children need, and I suppose in some ways, all year groups need to be a little more EYFS. That feeds into their writing then. How can they write with beautiful adjectives if they don't understand what they are or beautiful metaphors or beautiful similes if they haven't had the first-hand experience of those natural materials, the range of mark-making materials?

How the creative areas in school change is key. It is important to not always have the same materials available. Keep things rotating. If you're using paint, put some materials out to make the paint different and see what happens. Does that change the way that I have to paint? It might be that you've got paint out, but you don't give them a paintbrush. You give them a spoon. You give them a plastic knife. You give them a fork. You give them a roller. You might give them things to print with. These are all mark-making experiences that are principles of art. How many artists don't paint with a paintbrush but paint with a palette knife? How often do we shoehorn children into painting solely with a paintbrush?

We train the children to use the tools. 'This is a paintbrush. It's not a scrubbing brush. We're not scrubbing the floor. We're painting with it. Look at the bristles. If we're not gentle with it what will happen? It will end up like this.' It's showing them how to use the tools carefully. It's modelling. It's your guided instruction.

The enacted art curriculum

Every art unit is structured in this way. You begin with research and experimentation. Your research informs your experimentation. You find out about an artist and you look at the way that they have used colour and you experiment with that. You look at the way that they've applied paint. You mimic their processes. That's all in the children's sketchbooks. We evaluate after every lesson. Now, in KS1, that's a conversation. 'Let's have a chat. Talk to your partner. Tell your partner how well you think you used those materials. What would you change? What did you find tricky about using the materials?' As the children move further up the school, they can start to put annotations in their sketchbooks that then inform their next piece of work. The research and experimentation comprise

the core part of any art unit because that's where the pupils develop the knowledge and the skills to produce the final piece.

Planning an art unit is like planning a big write. Their final piece is their 'big write'. Track back. If you want to paint a landscape or a city scape, what do we need to teach the children for them to be able to do it? Well, they need to know how to draw the buildings. They need to know the textures of the buildings. They need to look at perspective. They need to look at the space between the buildings. They need to look at composition; it's where you would use all your research experimentation. They would then design their final piece. They'd then make it and then evaluate it.

We have looked at Joseph Cornell. They did some drawing of rainforest plants.



We've got collage experiments to look at capabilities of materials. We've got designs before they then create, and we take photographs of their final piece and stick them in their sketchbooks with their final evaluation as well; it can inform their later work.

Each lesson has that specific structure as well. So, you retrieve, you recap what you did last time. 'What is our prior knowledge? How does it

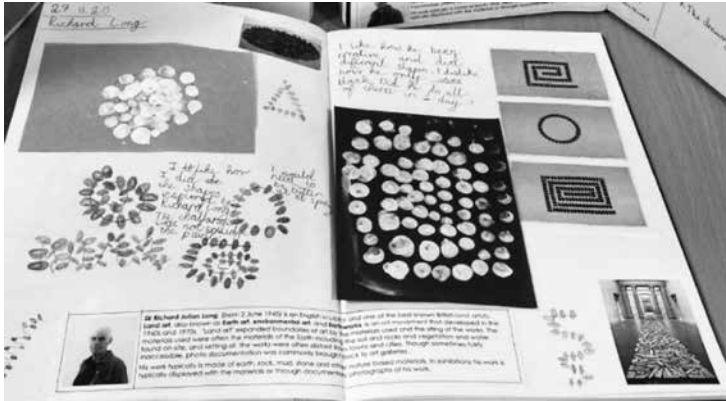
connect with what we're doing now?' Introduce a new hook; it might be a new artist or a new piece of artwork. It might be an object. It might be a series of objects if you're doing observational drawing and a picture. You introduce the knowledge, the vocabulary. It might be art history. It might be knowledge of media and materials, the process. Pupils have a go. They evaluate how effective their independent application is. That's how every single lesson is structured.

When you get towards your make phase, obviously you are recapping everything that they've done before that. So, what tools do we need to use to help us with that final piece? Sketchbooks are out every lesson. Even though they're making their final piece, the sketchbook is out in front of them, because that tells them how they've got to do it. The sketchbook is the plan. Then finally we come back to the evaluation. A lot of that is just the children expressing their opinions. Quite often people think they need to be Brian Sewell to be able to talk about art. You don't. You can say whether you like something or not. Aidan Chambers' structure for book talk in terms of likes, dislikes, questions, puzzles is great for talking about art. He uses it for picture books. It's great for talking about art as well.

Sketchbooks

Sketchbooks are the king and queen of all primary art! They must show a range of materials and processes.

I would expect to pick up any child's sketchbook and see that they have used drawing, painting, collage, to see experiments with mixed media such as twisting paper, plaiting paper, coiling string, all these things stuck in the sketchbook, different painting experiments, splashes all over the place. Maybe some pages are ripped because they've taken a bashing. It all needs to be in there. You'll see just in this one lesson, inspired by Richard Long, we've got painting, we've got drawing, we've got knowledge of the artist.



We've got vocabulary. It's all there. That was just one lesson. It has to show purpose where it connects to everything else... So, we theme our sketchbook pages, so we have pictures that the children stick in the corners so when you pick up the children's sketchbook you know which work goes together.

The sketchbook shows the children's thinking process, so the children are constantly commenting on the work that they're doing. They're explaining the work that they're doing. They're talking about the materials they're using, how well they've used them, and they show progression. Every week my children open their sketchbooks and look at what they did in Year 1 and go, 'Look at that what I did in Year 1 and look at me now!' A caveat on sketchbooks... Thin, rubbish paper or photocopier paper sketchbooks are not good enough. They need to be robust cartridge paper. They need to take a bashing. They need to be well organised so that the pupils can refer to their work, so train them to use them properly like you would anything else. Get them to think about how they're organising their work. That is their space to experiment with. You need to teach them that it's okay to make mistakes. So, again it's where the teacher has their sketchbook and models getting it wrong, because sometimes modelling getting it wrong in art is more important than getting it right. It takes time to embed that. It does take time and it doesn't come overnight. If it doesn't work, don't turn over. Don't start a new page.

We teach art half-termly, your half-term art, half-term D&T. I'd say it needs a minimum of an hour a week. It depends on what materials you're using. If you're getting the paint out, an hour is potentially not long enough. But if you're just focusing on a drawing principle, an hour is fine. If you're experimenting using paint, you need at least an hour and a half. It's about having that flexibility in your timetable. I wouldn't block art in terms and teach all the art in one day at the end of term; the children get fed up. They lose focus. Whereas that little-and-often diet once a week for a half-term works much more effectively. Give it the time it needs. And celebrate the art. Fill your staircases with artwork. Our staircases are like a gallery space. I'd like to have gallery spaces everywhere. I've talked to my head about getting cabinet spaces for 3D work displaying the children's artistic output properly. That's the goal.

Art: background

The earliest figurative art in Europe is a collection of ivory figurines from 30,000 years ago, found in Tübingen. The Venus of Willendorf is estimated to have been made around 25,000 years ago. The images of horses, bison, mammoths and other local animals painted on the walls of a cave at Lascaux are among the earliest known examples of painting found in Europe, estimated to be from 17,000 years ago. Artistic development in Europe was shaped by sculptors such as Polykleitos, Pheidias, Myron and Praxiteles in the 5th century BCE in ancient Greece. The first known analysis of art is from Pliny's *Natural History*.

It is worth quoting the purpose of art and design from the national curriculum programme of study:

'Art, craft and design embody some of the highest forms of human creativity. A high-quality art and design education should engage, inspire and challenge pupils, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to experiment, invent and create their own works of art, craft and design. As pupils progress, they should be able to think critically and develop a more rigorous understanding of art and design. They should also know how art and design both reflect and shape our history, and contribute to the culture, creativity and wealth of our nation.'

‘The national curriculum for art and design aims to ensure that all pupils: produce creative work, exploring their ideas and recording their experiences; become proficient in drawing, painting, sculpture and other art, craft and design techniques; evaluate and analyse creative works using the language of art, craft and design; know about great artists, craft makers and designers, and understand the historical and cultural development of their art forms.’¹

Once the importance statements have been revisited, it is helpful for subject leaders and co-ordinators to discuss and agree with colleagues the reason why their subject, in this case art, is important for the pupils in their school. One way of doing this is to draw on a quote, in this case from Don Miguel Ruiz: ‘Every human is an artist.’ This kind of prompt allows us to formulate our way of stating the importance of the subject.

We might agree or disagree with such a statement and in doing so come to a form of words which expresses our view of the importance of this subject, in this school. This moves us away from the territory of ‘we teach this subject because of the SATs or GCSEs’. While the external tests and exams are important, they are not the totality of the subject.

Professional communities

Subject associations are important because at the heart of their work is curriculum thinking, development and resources. The subject association for art is the National Society for Education in Art and Design,² and any member of staff with responsibility for a subject should be a member of the relevant subject association, and this should be paid for by the school.

Twitter subject communities are important for the development of subject knowledge, because it is here that there are lively debates about what to teach, how to teach and the kinds of resources that are helpful. It is worth following the NSEAD on Twitter³ and the hashtags #art, #artteacher, #artsketchbook, #artgcse. The Twitter art and design

1 Department for Education. (2013) *National curriculum in England: art and design programmes of study*. Available at: www.bit.ly/3fSBI2p (Accessed: 9 March 2022).

2 www.nsead.org

3 www.twitter.com/NSEAD1

community is a space for ongoing discussions about the subject. The hashtag is #artteachers, and here it is possible to engage with other teachers, thinkers and academics.

Links

NSEAD – www.nsead.org

V&A resources for teachers – www.bit.ly/3fTuOjN

The British Museum – www.bit.ly/3lUQwYj

The National Gallery – www.bit.ly/2VKIXKo

The Tate – www.bit.ly/3xAWTSP

The 10 Best Christmas Story Paintings – www.bit.ly/2VJJRFT