

Art

A conversation with Jo Baker

Jo Baker has been a secondary teacher for 20 years. She has been Head of Art for 6 years, and has recently been appointed Assistant Principal with responsibility for Teaching and Learning and CPD. Jo has written articles for NSEAD and the TES NQT supplement and authored a chapter in the book *Don't change the Lightbulbs*.

Blog: www.9picsaday.blogspot.com

Twitter: @Jobaker9

What does success look like in terms of what students know, understand and can do if you have taught a rich, challenging key stage 3 art curriculum?

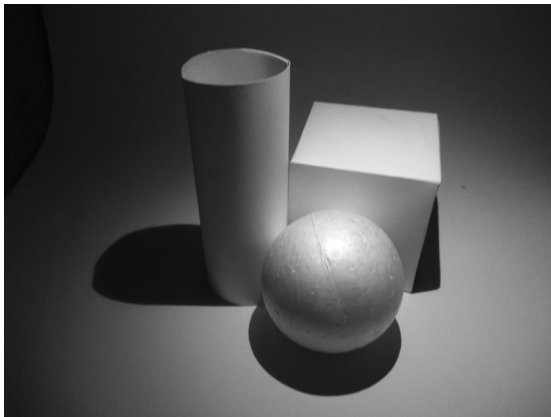
Primarily, students will be confident that they can 'do' art. Every single art department will design the curriculum in a different way. The national curriculum for art is so short and general that art departments can choose to teach any medium. Each art department has their own approach, because art teachers have diverse specialisms. Your art curriculum is shaped by your teachers' specialisms. The combination of teachers' specialisms within an art department means that each art key stage 3 curriculum will be unique. Art is essentially skills-based in key stage 3, but you have to encourage creative exploration; without the confidence and the willingness to have a go and to get things wrong in a

safe space, students find it hard to explore anything. It is your job as an art teacher to build students' confidence and resilience in parallel with their skills, knowledge and understanding.

If a student is asked to do a drawing, they suddenly feel incredibly vulnerable. People can see the result of their artistic efforts and make a judgement about it instantly. That is why students feel quite vulnerable. If a student were writing a paragraph in English, it is quite a private matter and it takes some scrutiny before anyone can judge the quality of the writing; but the instant a student begins to draw, it is open for anyone to judge. As an art teacher, you have to make each student feel comfortable enough for people to see their work and offer criticism. Your students need to be able to accept that criticism in good faith, knowing that everyone is there to help each other improve.

How do you build your art curriculum from Year 7 at Branston Community Academy?

We have students coming in from numerous different feeder schools. We look at mainly drawing, painting, printing, ceramics, 3D and graphic media and some photography. Each year we build on each of those media. Take the drawing and painting curriculum in Year 7: we will teach the fundamentals and then revisit those skills in Year 8 and build on their techniques and skills, and similarly in Year 9. We take them right back to the beginning and start by looking at the relationship between light and objects.

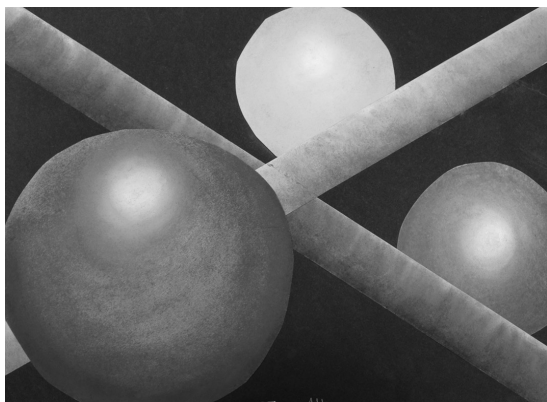


So in Year 7, for instance, we use this image of a tube, a sphere and a cube to teach the importance of light source direction. The tube's shadow is going to the left, but it is a relatively short shadow and so the light must be coming from above and to the right. Quite quickly, students become experts in seeing. Some students say, 'Well, I can't draw' and I say, 'You can't draw – yet!' I show them how light touches objects; and if they can master the light and the dark, they can master the drawing of objects.

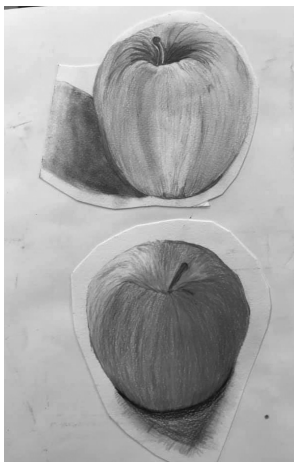
In the next two images, they are learning how to draw spheres in charcoal and then coloured chalk. They are demonstrating an understanding of the light and how it touches 3D objects:



The final piece in this introductory 3D objects unit is rods in space:



This builds their confidence. They are amazed at and enthused by what they have drawn. Then we build upon those basics. If they can draw a sphere and understand the relationship between the sphere and the light source, then they can draw and paint an apple.



We are applying the same techniques, but the students' work is becoming more and more refined each time. The more they do, the more they are confident to have a go at doing the next step and the next step. Once they have drawn a cylinder and a sphere, they are able to draw a can. Then once they can draw a cube and they can understand how light touches all of these objects, they can draw and paint basically any organic object. We build from Year 7 to Year 8 with a more detailed still life, but they are using the same toolkit techniques. In Year 9, we study landscapes, but the students are still using the same techniques. So it builds up, bit by bit by bit.

We take them through the process of learning how to draw step by step. We wait some time before we ask the students to be 'creative'. There are parallels with other artistic forms. Take a musical instrument. If you give someone a brand new musical instrument and say, 'Hey, create a song!', they would need to learn how to play that musical instrument before they could compose a song on it. There are certain technical hoops to jump through. It comes back to building confidence. If students

are successful at stage one of the drawing process, they have a go at stage two. I emphasise early on that being good at art is not a God-given talent. Certainly some individual students have more talent than others – it is like some people can play football better than others, some people can bake better than others. But you can certainly get better and better and better at anything. But you cannot get better unless you *do* it. I try to instil in them that if they want to get better at art, they need to do art. You have to point out to them where their successes are. If they are not confident in their own ability, when you say, 'Do you think that's a bit wonky? It looks a bit woolly; it doesn't quite look like that,' you can lose students very easily. Teaching art is all about relationship-building in the first instance; it is about mutual trust. You can say something about their work and they know that you are not being mean, that you are supporting them to the next stage of artistic competence. They need to trust that you know your stuff.

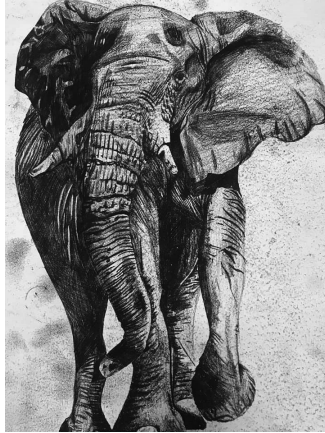
How do you build your art curriculum from Year 7?

Across Year 7, we will do a project in drawing, painting, printing and ceramics, to introduce the basic skills. Over key stage 3, we will research an artist or an art movement per scheme. However, in the Year 9 painting practice, sometimes I will give them a choice of three artists and they have to choose the one that really speaks to them. So they increasingly have their own say in where they are taking the work. Generally in Year 7, we look at a single artist and suggest students begin to use the artist's techniques in the design of their own work. In Years 10 and 11, students have to show how they have been inspired by artists and create their own work around them. That is our GCSE assessment objective 1: how you look at the world, how you respond and then how you create work in response to that. Year builds upon year as, step by step, I mould these students into self-directed, increasingly confident and increasingly skilful practitioners.

In our curriculum, the technical skills of portraiture are taught in Years 8 and 9. This is where students want to do art about themselves and say something about themselves. So we look at proportions of the face and we explicitly teach how to draw faces. We teach how to draw a nose and how to draw eyes. You have to give them the tools and then they decide whether they are going to use the tools in the future. They need that tool

Huh

in their box, and it is my job to help put that tool in their box. This work is the foundational knowledge, understanding and skills which underpin a monoprint in Year 12 like the one below:



They arrive in Year 12 with the confidence to create art as self-expression – ‘This is me and this is what I want to communicate in art.’



Ben, above, had done nothing for weeks and I kept saying, ‘Stop going out with your girlfriend, just do your homework, do something.’ I was ringing his mum often. That was an old notice board that I took off the wall outside my classroom because I was at the end of my tether with him. I said, ‘There is a can of black paint. There is some white paint. Do

Art

me a painting. You have an hour.' That was his response. I gave him a big brush, and that was the start of his expressive self-portraiture project that he continued in Year 13.

As another example, Ellie was looking at medicine. She was interested in art as a learning tool and wrote her A level extended essay based on that.



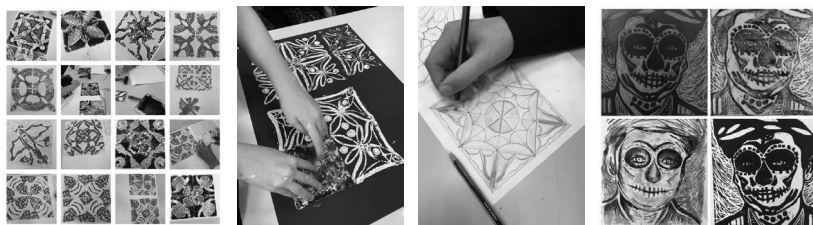
This piece below was completed during lockdown. Abby was exploring issues around the COVID-19 pandemic. We made a piece of paper two metres by two metres to show that everyone is isolated; it is the essence of the human condition. But two metres is a massive space, and she tried to show how separate people are by working on a piece of paper that is exactly two metres square. It required 15 pieces of A1 paper.



This preparatory exploration work all stems from individual discussions with our GCSE and A level students. It is not our work – it is theirs. We need to be skilful in manoeuvring discussions and ideas to facilitate their progress.

All this creative output is a result of the way they have been taught, coupled with their imagination, underpinned by deep confidence. The key thing is, they cannot produce this quality of work if they have not been taught. They have to be able to take criticism in good faith. In every subject, but particularly in the ones where students are thriving and producing something which is an expression of themselves, the culture in which this is able to take place is both robust and kind, characterised by high challenge and low threat. The building blocks are refined over time; you have got to know some stuff before you can then play with it. You will find this in all the great endeavours of human creativity; there are some fundamentals in which we need to be secure before we can then make our own mark – literally, in the case of art.

In the printing unit, we build from Year 7, to 8, to 9 as you can see from left to right below:



Working from Year 7 on the left; Year 8 gets a bit more detailed; Year 9's Day of the Dead lino printing. Skills build on each other.

Our key stage 3 ceramics course begins in Year 7 with the basic skills of manipulating clay into a thumb pot and a lid. They fire it. We glaze it. They take it home for Mother's Day. Everyone is happy. In Year 8, we make clay animals, which involves a double thumb pot, so they revisit that thumb pot, they make another one, they join them together and they turn that into an animal. We keep building upon their skill base, and in Year 9 we introduce them to slab building and coil pots.

In Year 9, we study Kate Malone; she makes big pots based on natural forms. She will be inspired by a garlic clove and make a huge pot in

response. We watch videos of her making her work. I get the students excited about designing their own pot; in Year 9, they've got much more choice about what they are doing. And that is the same for the drawing projects, painting projects – we build on their skills from Year 7, extend them into Year 8 and then on into Year 9. But in Year 9 we begin to introduce more space to develop their creativity. By Year 10, I want them to be able to tell me why they are doing what they are doing – to tell me the artistic influences which are shaping their work, which is theirs but (to varying degrees) derivative.

How much of a student's emerging distinctive style is taught and how much of that distinctive style comes from somewhere you cannot fathom?

When I look at students' work, I sense that there is something here, they have 'something' slightly indeterminate. It is an energy, a boldness, some expression in their work. They begin to develop characteristic work. Certainly at GCSE, I can see whose work is whose. The great artists each had a unique style. Someone like Constable or Van Gogh will have drawn and painted more than any of us and honed their techniques. The more artists create, the more they get comfortable in their style. You can only do things in your style. I think it is when you are comfortable in your style that you stop mimicking other artists.

There is certainly a good amount of mimicry in art. But I think you have to be totally comfortable in yourself and what you are doing in order to have your own style, because when someone else comments on that, you still need to retain your style. I think most students are very concerned with what other people think and what is acceptable. And the extraordinarily brilliant ones do not care – they just spend every minute of the day in the art studio. When they are like that, the others tend to just leave them alone, because they are untouchable. I am good at art, but I am not amazing at it; when you teach students who are so much better than you, it becomes about coaching rather than teaching. And in order to be able to get the best out of those students, you have to leave your ego at the door, else you just end up with 20 students limited to your capabilities. You need to be comfortable in accepting that you would not be able to do work like some of the very best students, but you need to be able to tell those students where you think their next steps

should be. You are more coach than teacher. I think that is essential for key stages 4 and 5; if you want students to fly, you have to be prepared to just let them go.

It is important to have a sixth form area at the back of your classroom, or, better still, a different sixth form studio. I have a sixth form area, and main school students see the senior students' more mature work. We have work in various stages of progress around the classroom. The younger ones see the graft that goes into a work of art. When students arrive in Year 7, they think they either can or cannot 'do' art; they change their minds subliminally when they see the hard graft that goes into being good at art. They say, 'Oh that's changed then; they've changed the background.'

My catchphrase in my classroom is, 'Nobody's died.' If a student says, 'I really want to change that but it's so good and I dare not do it,' I encourage them not to be so precious about their work. Quite often they say, 'I'm scared of going wrong' before they even begin. I say, 'No one's going to die...what's the worst that could happen?' I promote this attitude relentlessly in Years 7 and 8. It is simply marks on a piece of paper. If you can put the marks in the correct place once, you can do it again. I am not flippant about it, but I do not want them to be full of teenage angst about their art; it is just a process I try to encourage.

Beyond art

We have built curriculum links with RE and with mathematics. We study Islamic designs in our Year 8 printing project and we often display work in the RE classrooms; we time it to coincide with when the students are learning Islam. We look at mandalas and art as a religion. I show them some work of the Buddhist monks who created a big mandala in Lincoln, then tipped it into the River Witham so all the chalk was washed away. And the students then spend a number of lessons creating mandalas, and I play some appropriate ambient music. They create this beautiful piece, and they are so proud of the work, but at the end I say to them, 'Now put it in the bin, rip it up,' and they are aghast. I explain how it is not about the piece of art; it is about the process of making art. I do not actually make them bin their mandalas, but I do point out that if we were creating them for real, the artwork would be unimportant. We work with history too; we marked the centenary of the end of the First World War

with sculpture projects based on Antony Gormley's work. Mathematics is intrinsically linked with art: we look at rotational printing; we study Escher; we look at balance and proportion.

Art builds a number of different skills which are applicable across the entire curriculum, and these are skills that students will apply to every other single subject or job or relationship in their lives. Teaching art is about shaping people for life.

What do you want your senior leader line manager to know about your subject?

I like to show the artwork to people to explain our subject. Pictures often say a lot more about what we do than when I try to explain it verbally. It is important that the line manager observes me teaching a key stage 4 class. What they see is me coaching individuals. Rarely do I teach from the front: 'Right Jody, what are you doing? Okay, what do you think of that? Right, what do you need? Go get some pastels.' One student is working in clay, another is drawing, someone else is making an artefact out of wire. Key stage 4 and 5 can be more workshop-based, whereas key stage 3 is a more traditional approach, with teaching from the front with a demonstration, before the students mimic what they have been taught. I think it is important for line managers to see upper school classes and for them to leave their prejudices at the door, and just notice what each individual student is doing instead. The line manager needs to go and ask the students about what they are working on, flick through their books, and ask the most important question: 'What are the skills that enable you to do that?' I think your line manager needs to be guided by the subject leader. Get used to the difference between subjects, because those micro climates in each curriculum area are what make all the different subjects really interesting.

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 fifth 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.¹

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

Once the importance statements have been revisited, it is helpful for subject leaders and coordinators 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.

1 www.bit.ly/3fSBi2p

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 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/3IUQwYj

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

The Tate – www.bit.ly/3xAWTSP

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

² www.nsead.org

³ www.twitter.com/NSEAD1

An overview of the Branston School key stage 3 art curriculum

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9
Drawing	<p>SoW 3D Shaded shapes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mark making • Tonal range • Drawing techniques • Contour shading • Objects / objects in occlusion • 1 point perspective 	<p>SoW Sweet still life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing from observation • Detailed tonal work • Proportions • Details • Accuracy of shape and tone • Composition • 2 point perspective 	<p>SoW Portraiture / Landscape</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportions of the face • Detailed drawing and shading of facial features • Self portrait • Charcoal • Accuracy of shape / tone • 1, 2 and 3 point perspective
Painting	<p>SoW Simple Still life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colour theory • Colour mixing • Basic composition • Basic shapes from observation 	<p>SoW Sweet still life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit colour theory / mixing – tertiary • Detailed observation • More objects in still life • Realism enhanced • Detailed work • Observation of packaging – highlights / reflections / shadows • Lettering 	<p>SoW Landscape painting techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1, 2, 3 point perspective • Proportion • Perspective and composition • Detailed technique exploration, variety of textures and techniques
Ceramics / 3D	<p>SoW – Thumb pot and lid</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single thumb pot technique • Understanding of clay / firing • Adding clay together • Basic carving techniques • Basic glazing techniques 	<p>SoW 3D animal design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modelling • Realism • Revisiting adding clay • Exploring building techniques • Detailed structure / characteristics • 3D work from observations / models • Achieving details / texture 	<p>SoW Kate Malone inspired vessels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using thumb pots, slab building or coiling • Creative designing and making in response to artist's work • Pressing / relief work • Experimenting with glazing / layering
Printing / Graphic media	<p>SoW Escher animal prints</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symmetry • Rotational pattern • Design • Press printing • Poster design for Escher exhibition – photoshop image / text 	<p>SoW Islamic inspired string printing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symmetry / detailed design work • Rotational pattern • Balance • Predicting outcomes • String printing methods and technique <p>SoW CD Design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photography • Design / composition of CD • Extending photoshop skills – adding text / adjustments of photo & colour 	<p>SoW lino printing Day of the Dead</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design • Working in the style of DoTD • Creative planning • Lino printing techniques and processes • Moving lino prints into film poster design / DVD cover. Photoshop skills extended to include layering and cloning techniques

Three documents for your senior leader line manager to read about art

1. NSEAD A & D Quarterly
2. Look at the department displays regularly. Ask if the department have a social media account, take an interest.
3. Gombrich's History of Art

Five questions for your senior leader line manager to ask you about art

1. What type of specialists do we have in the department?
 2. What do you consider important for our curriculum in our school? Why?
 3. How do you build up skills throughout KS3–5?
 4. What should I expect to see in a typical lesson?
 5. How do you manage all the resources/housekeeping in the dept?
- Plus, please do not ever say to staff or students, 'I cannot draw; all I can draw is stickmen.'

