

THE

SUPERPOWER

OF

LOOKING



University of
Roehampton
London



|



Freelands
Foundation

*How looking at Art
can support Oracy
and Visual Literacy
in your curriculum
development.*

Chartered College of
Teachers

Rethinking Curriculum
6th May 2025

Introduction to Art UK and The Superpower of Looking

Tina Corri, Head of Learning, Art UK



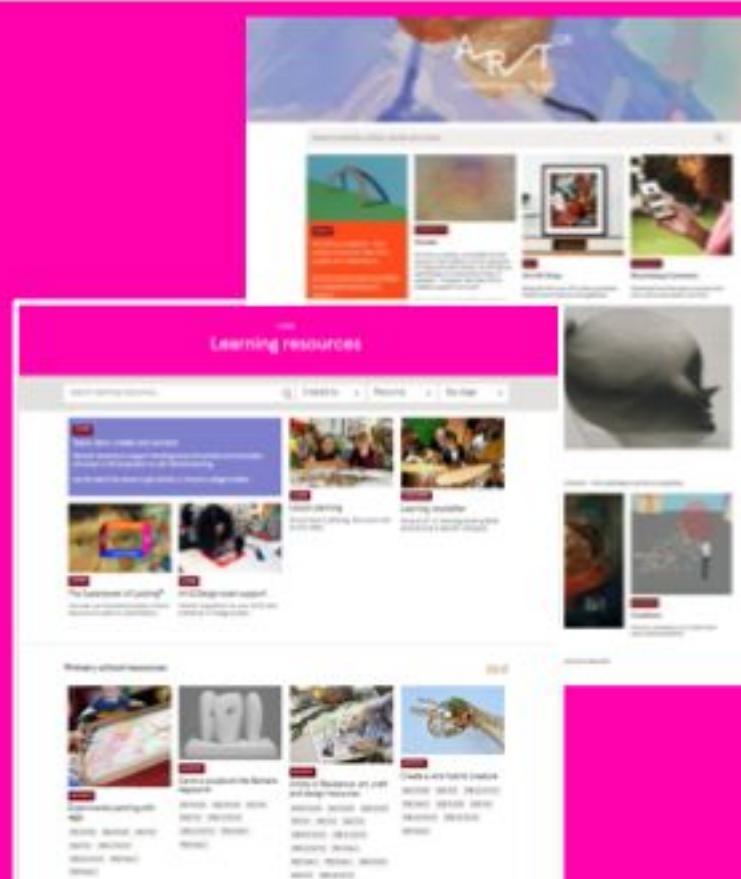
What is Art UK?

Art UK is the online home for every public collection of art. Our website brings together art from over 3,400 collections, showing over 600,000 artworks by over 60,000 artists

We are an education charity which democratises access to art for enjoyment, learning and research

Our learning resources are free and connect to all 4 nations curricula

Searchable by subjects, topics, artist, media, key stage and location.



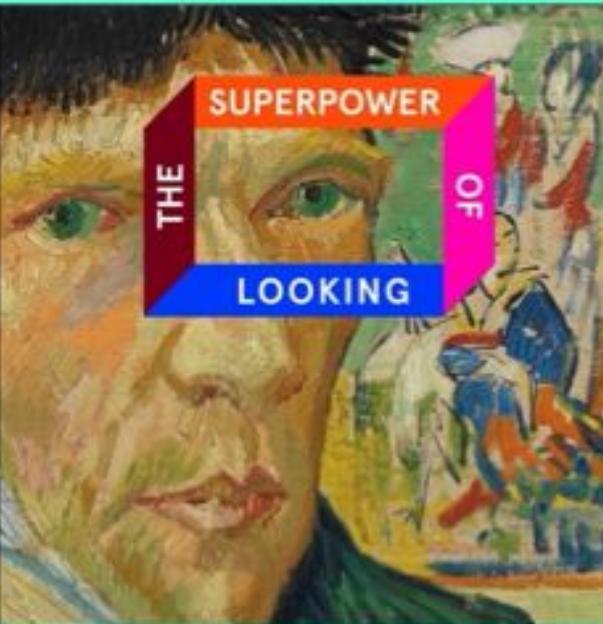
What is the Superpower of Looking?

The Superpower of Looking ® is the new vision for learning that seeks to transform the visual literacy skills of every child.

Explore

Browse lessons

ART ^{UK} |  Freelands Foundation



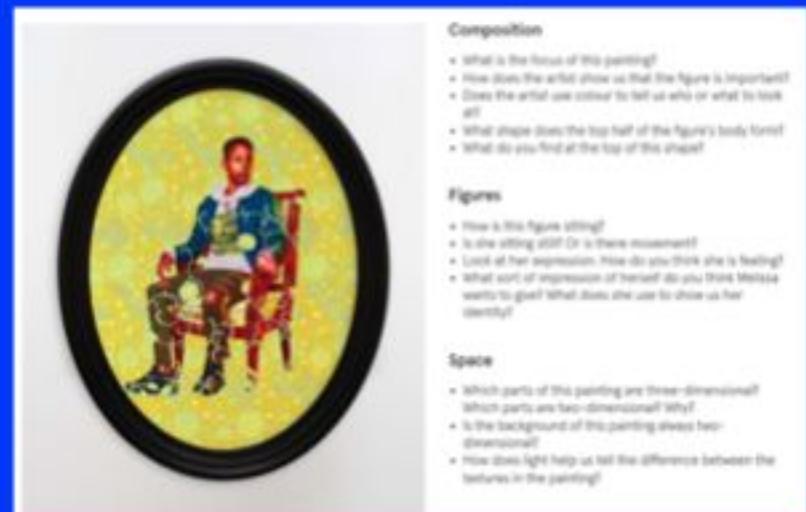
- Developing children's visual literacy skills using artworks
- Essential need for young people to be able to analyse, interpret and question visual culture
- Classroom discussion around an artwork
- For none art specialists
- Free resources and CPD
- Research and evaluation

Teaching approach

- Curriculum-based – Art & Design
- Opportunities for cross-curricular learning
- Discussion-based, films,
- Student-led enquiry
- Supporting children to critically observe, analyse, question, interpret, empathise
- Develops visual literacy and oracy skills
- Increases confidence to use subject specific language
- Increases interest in art and visiting galleries



The image shows a screenshot of a video player. At the top, there is a thumbnail for a video titled "The Superpower of Looking with Bob a... SUPERPOWER LOOKING". Below the thumbnail is a red play button. To the right of the play button is a video player for a video titled "Looking at Henri Rousseau". The video player has a red background and a play button icon. At the bottom of the video player, there is a "Watch on YouTube" button.



The image shows a worksheet for "Composition". At the top, there is a heading "Composition" followed by a list of questions. Below the heading is a painting of a seated figure in an oval frame. To the right of the painting, there is a section titled "Figures" with a list of questions. At the bottom, there is a section titled "Space" with a list of questions.

Composition

- What is the focus of this painting?
- How does the artist show us that the figure is important?
- Does the artist use colour to tell us who or what to look at?
- What shape does the top half of the figure's body form?
- What do you find at the top of this shape?

Figures

- How is this figure sitting?
- Is she sitting stiff? Or is there movement?
- Look at her expression. How do you think she is feeling?
- What sort of expression of herself do you think Melisa wants to give? What does she use to show us her identity?

Space

- Which parts of this painting are three-dimensional? Which parts are two-dimensional? Why?
- Is the background of this painting three-dimensional?
- How does light help us tell the difference between the textures in the painting?

Learning resources

27 lesson plans

- Identity
- Portrait
- Landscape
- History
- Still life
- Everyday



The Superpower of Looking:
David Hockney paints his
parents

KS2 (ENG)

KS2 (NI)

CfE L2 (SCO)

PS3 (WAL)

Identity



Portrait



Landscape



History



Susan Ogier,
Senior Lecturer Primary Art
Education,
University of Roehampton;
Art UK Academic Partner

The Superpower of Looking Teacher Champions Action Research



Why teach Visual Literacy?

'the group of vision competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences'

(Debes, 1969:27)

'an interconnected set of practices, habits, and values for participating in visual culture that can be developed through critical, ethical, reflective, and creative engagement with visual media'

(International Visual Literacy Association, 2023).

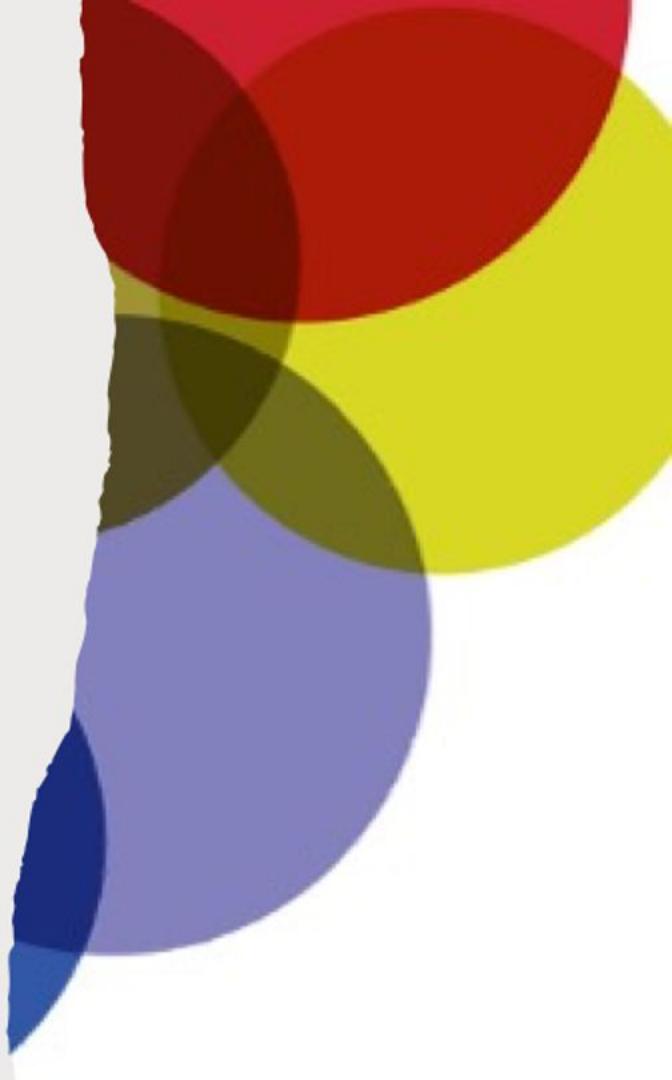


How can we teach critical thinking through art?

Curiosity helps lay the foundation for critical thinking.

- Critical thinking requires us to take in information, analyse it and make judgements about it
- Requires **imagination and inquisitiveness**.
- Children have to think about how new information fits in with what they already know, or if it changes any information that they already hold to be true.

Ellen Galinsky : Mind in the making (2010)

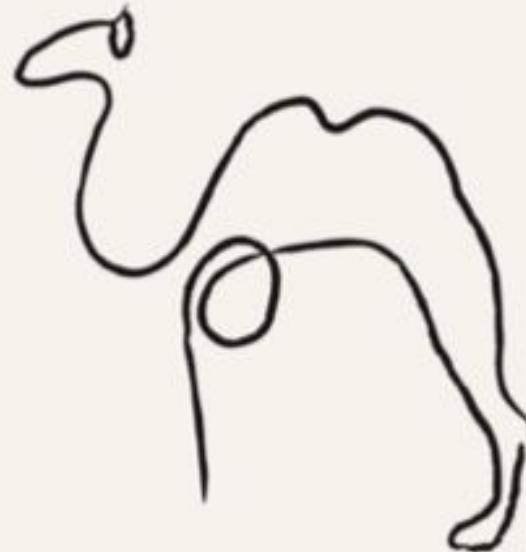




"Critical thinking is a desire to think, patience to doubt, fondness to meditate, slowness to assert, readiness to consider, carefulness to dispose and set in order, and hatred for every king of impostor."

Francis Bacon

**Tapping into
the power of
pictures**



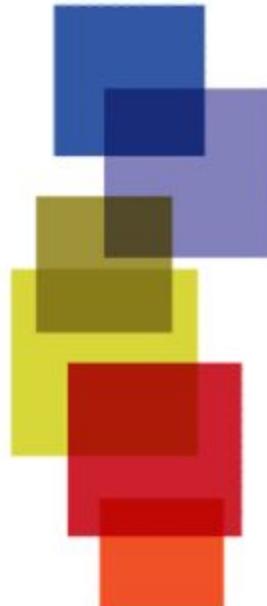
What is Action Research?

Action research allows us to investigate an area of our practice that we want to develop or change in an informed way.

It is non-hierarchical : everyone and anyone can do it.

'It is not a case that only professional researchers can do action research: students and plumbers also can and should do action research'

(McNiff, 2016)



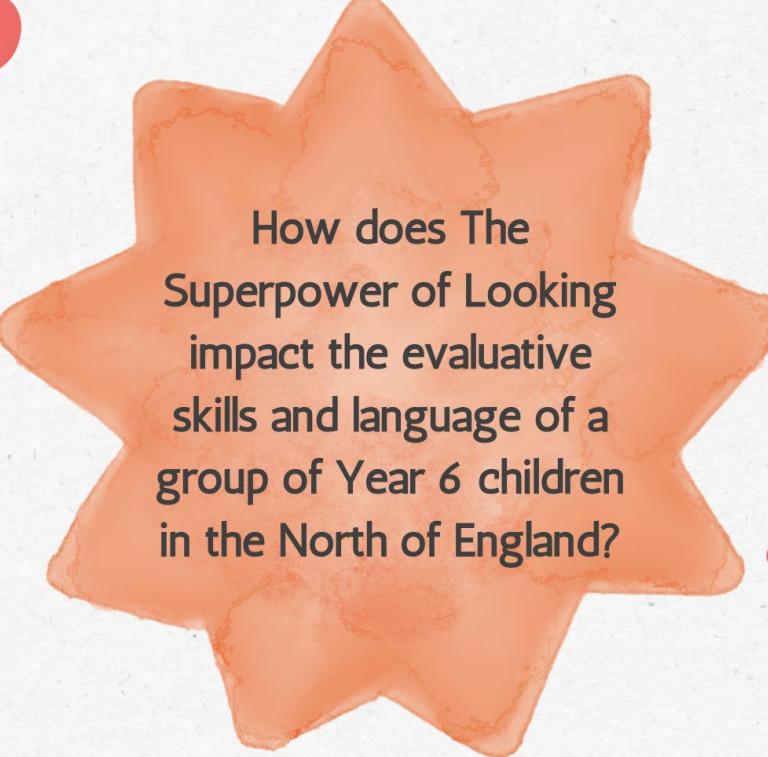


What is the project?

5 primary teachers from across UK; 5 action research projects

- Two-year period
- Kick off event: March 2024
- Individualised project design
- Projects in school – September – December 2024
- Evidence informed practice - Chartered College of Teachers: *Education Research and Enquiry Certificate*
- Creative methods of data collection and documentation.
- Dissemination – March 2025

THE QUESTION



How does The
Superpower of Looking
impact the evaluative
skills and language of a
group of Year 6 children
in the North of England?

Gemma Hankinson - UKS2 Lead / Art Lead / Y6 Teacher
Offley Primary Academy, Sandbach Cheshire

WHERE DID WE BEGIN?

- School Curriculum not improving outcomes.
- Pupil Voice.
- Low levels of artistic language when evaluating their own work and that of other artists.
- Not knowing 'how to look' - superficial observations.
- Unsure how to make their own choices for audience/purpose/ impact.
- Low confidence in creative decision making.
- Low teacher confidence/knowledge.
- Limited range of artists - rare gallery visits.
- Vocabulary not explicitly taught or revisited.

WHY IS LOOKING AT ART IMPORTANT?

High-quality art curriculums should plan for pupils to develop sufficient knowledge to make sense of artists, artwork and art traditions.

In high-quality art curriculums, pupils build an accurate impression of the range of art, craft and design work that humans have produced.

It is important for leaders and curriculum designers to carefully plan the theoretical knowledge pupils should learn in the art curriculum. It helps pupils understand that art is a product of human culture, and is affected by human culture.

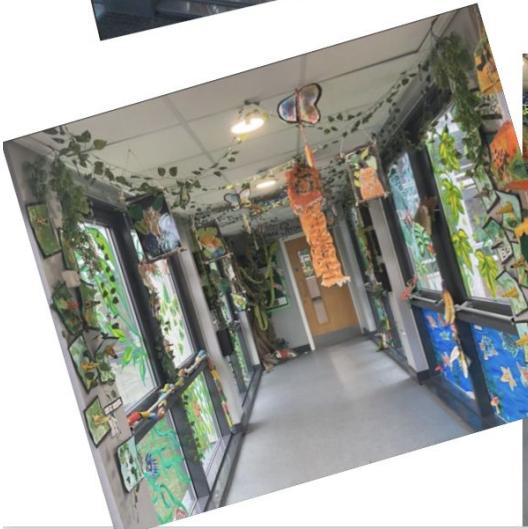
Ofsted Research Review - Art and Design - February 2023

WHY IS LOOKING AT ART IMPORTANT?

Visual literacy can enhance students' critical thinking skills and help students understand the viewpoints of others. Developing visual literacy skills enables students to understand and communicate ideas and information effectively and more rapidly than text alone. It allows them to analyse and interpret visual messages, which are increasingly prevalent in the modern world and through digital culture.

Visual Literacy - NSEAD

Whole School Superpower Launch



Research Phase



Exploring Identity



CONCLUSIONS

01

Superpower of Looking is having a direct impact on children's knowledge and understanding of a range of artists. It is teaching them how to "look" at art, ask questions, have more purposeful discussions and deepen thinking.

02

Evaluation skills are beginning to improve, this appears to be linked to an improvement in creative decision making. Children are thinking more about their creative choices when creating art which enables them to have more focussed reflections

03

Knowledge and understanding of vocabulary is beginning to improve when discussing work by other artists. This is emerging in their evaluations but needs to be more embedded and revisited at regular opportunities.

NEXT STEPS....

- Re-visit training with staff.
- Art curriculum has been developed to include SPOL sessions throughout school.
- Focus on a specific area to help manage time constraints.
- Language part of lessons (Star vocabulary and knowledge organisers).
- SPOL display.
- SPOL assemblies.
- Language on display.
- Encourage creative decision making conversations.
- Develop school wide evaluation techniques.

What is the impact of using Superpower of looking on children aged 6-8 years attending an after-school club in a southeast London primary school in applying learned techniques and ideas in their own artwork, over the duration of two terms?

Helen Jones - Assistant Head, Art Lead, Phonics lead and Year 2 Teacher
Pilgrims' Way School, London

Data for after school club

Languages spoken at home (English, Albanian, Kurdish, Bengali, Somali, Spanish, Turkish, Arabic, Krio)	73% are EAL
Pupil Premium	73%
SEND	18% (1 child has autism)

composition is cropped
want to know how tiger
looking at.

lots of green

silver leaves

the clutching
claws like leaves
above & behind
tiger like tiger claws

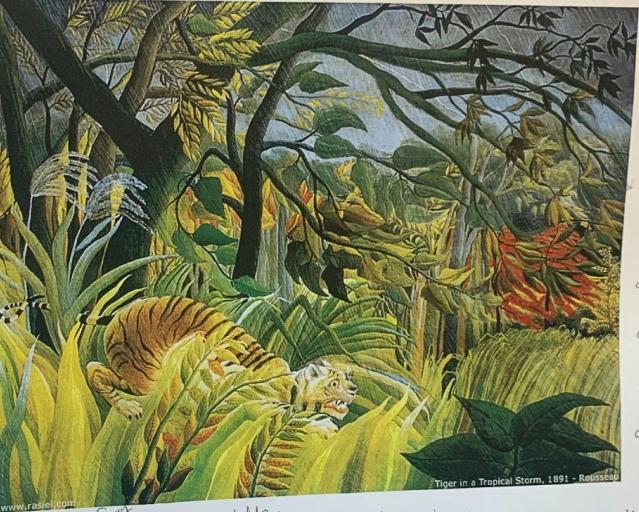
leaves moving

left & right

looks like tiger
will pounce

hungry

imaginative dream look at tiger first
like - tiger can't follow gaze
balance on tail
black - children orange/red in mouth & leaves



lime leaves
white lightning
& tiger's teeth

thunderstorm stormy sky

rain - everywhere
wind
whiskers in opposite
directions
tiger, rain & stripes
in leaves

diagonal lines

movement -
rain, leaves, branches
tiger's tail, whiskers
ears back
but tiger still

orange/red
leaves

Colours - pop
orange/red & green
leaves
opposite on color wheel

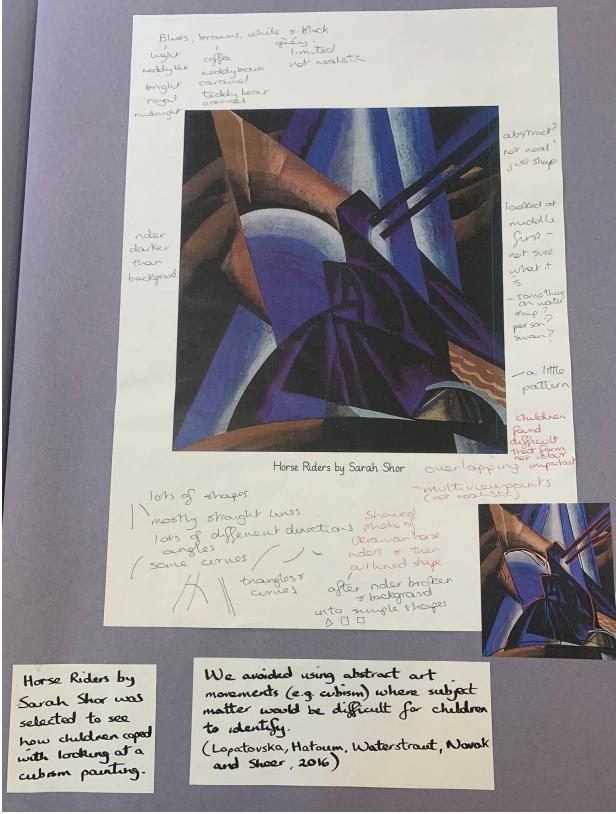
dark green plants
lots of green colors

who looking at

orange tiger
scary tiger or scared
tiger ?? tail like
snake.
tiger looks like balanced
~strangely balanced
2D (flat) not 3D







The Superpower of Looking Toolkit was used for the analysis to help direct questions and discussion for the visual literacy aspect of this artwork.

Man Drinking Coffee by Joy Labinjo
was selected because we were very lucky to have the artwork at Pigeons, Way School for the day.

1st thing

man's face or man or tap - different colors & pattern

2nd

light(lamp)
or plant

Colors

warm red - warm
yellow/orange

green - plant
man's houses

bold
green & red complement
man's shirt
patterns - random note
cool colors

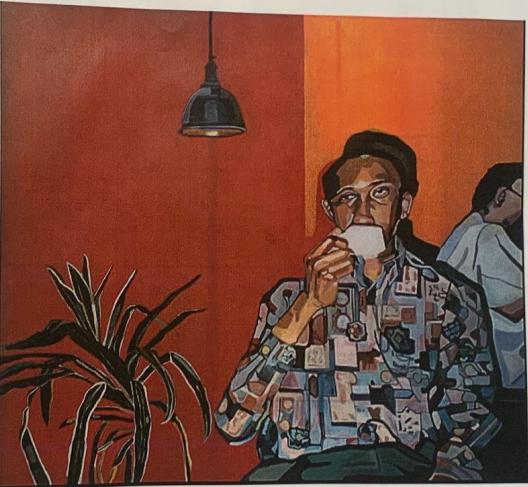
colorful
2 weird shapes
pink / brown / light blue
grey / blue / purple
bright colors

light
composition
plant man

person in background

split into 2
by colors
man in both parts

flattened - shadows



Man Drinking Coffee by Joy Labinjo

Children knew title because this artwork actually came to school. Man her dad.

face

squashed round, curved
We made from clay
different colors - tones
shades
like a sculpture

angular
serious, thoughtful
maybe thinking hard
about
or dreaming
where looking?
cup funny shape

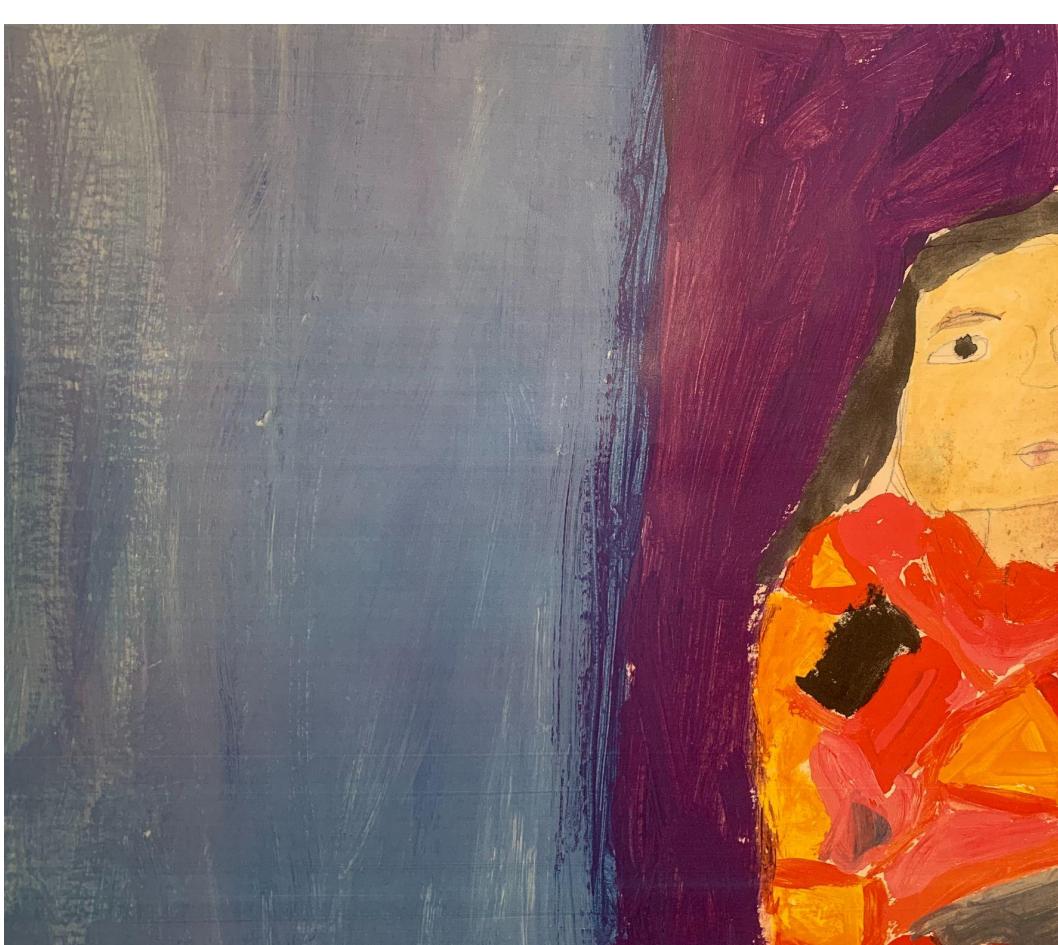
plant

green - white
yellow
leaves bent
rectangle shape
like big hair
long leaves

who in background
in shop/cafe

- linked to parents
are (Hackney)





Conclusion

Using Superpower of Looking techniques has improved the children's art ability by giving them the knowledge and vocabulary to critically analyse artwork. It has meant they better understand elements of art, which in turn has improved their own artwork. Learning related art knowledge and skills has helped children to be more able to express themselves in their own work and to become more conscious about what they were doing. They have become more thoughtful and reflective artists.

Next Steps

- Embedded Superpower of Looking in the art curriculum throughout the school.
- Include Nursery and Reception.
- Have a Superpower of Looking display.
- Extend Superpower of Looking into History looking at art linked to the various topics or when looking at historical documents.
- Focus on children using the language from Superpower of Looking sessions in art lessons and about their own artwork.
- Continue to offer a Superpower of Looking after school club.



SUPERPOWER OF

LOOKING

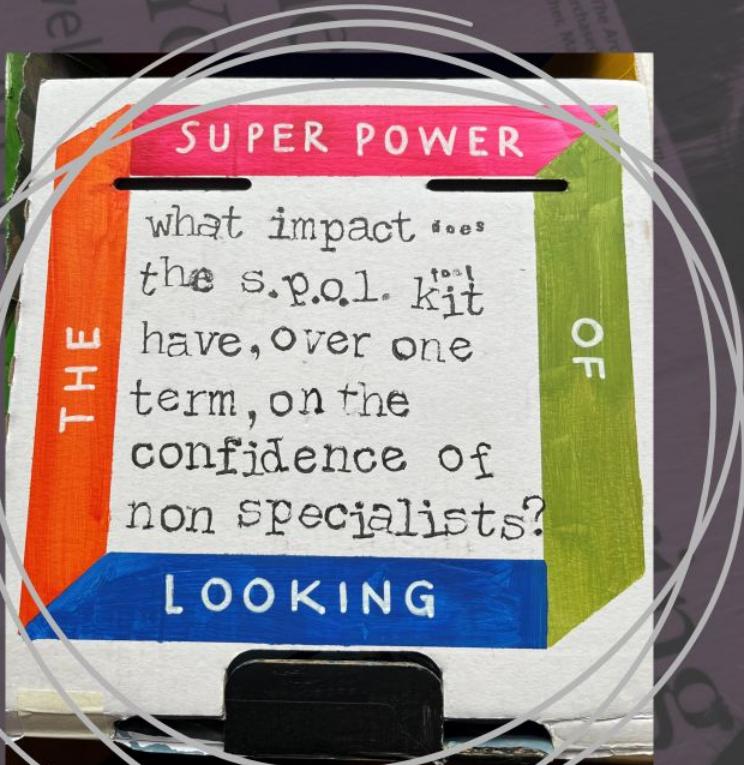
Teacher Research
Project



GILL SEKATAWA

Y4 teacher and ART LEAD

Nelson Academy, Norfolk



BACKGROUND & RESEARCH

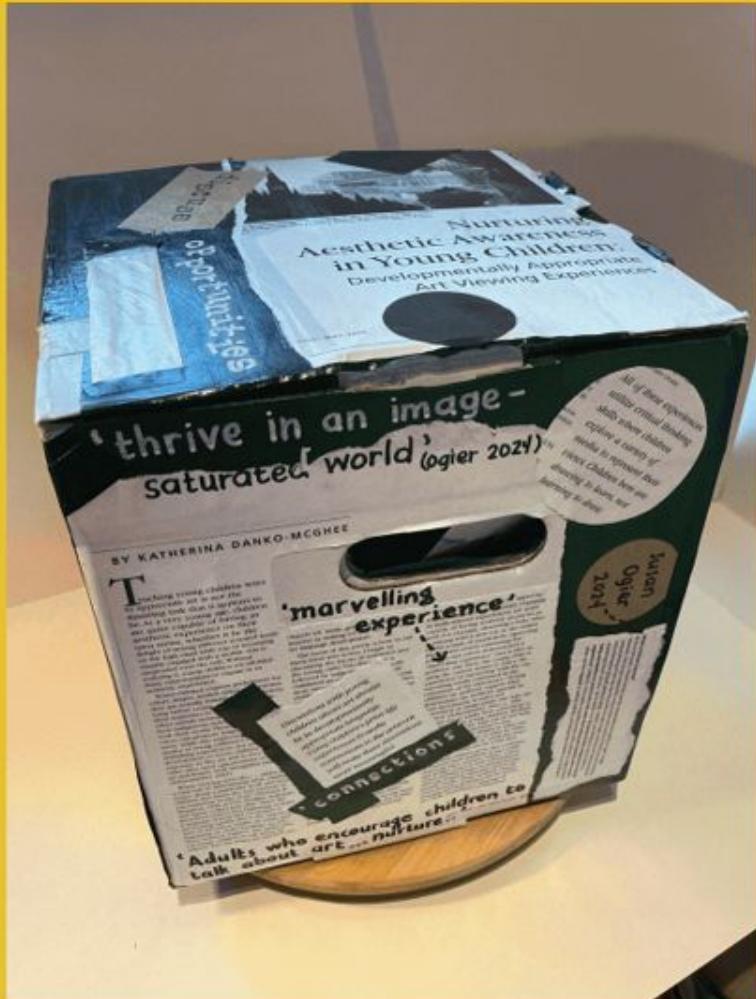
Focus on Teachers

Sharing art with children

Art Curriculum

Teaching Visual Literacy Skills



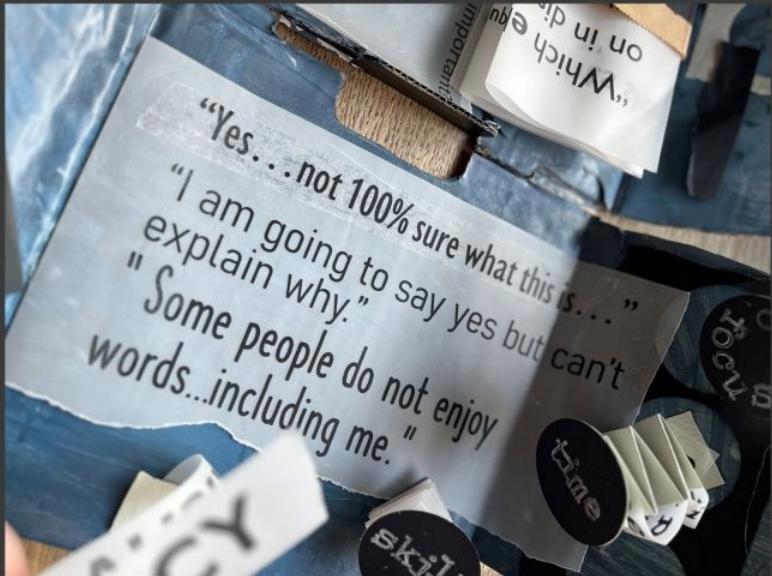


ACTIVE RESEARCH - THE BOX

Pre-trial QUESTIONNAIRE

Lack of training

Core Subjects focus



Finding Artwork



Which Questions?





TRIAL PHASE

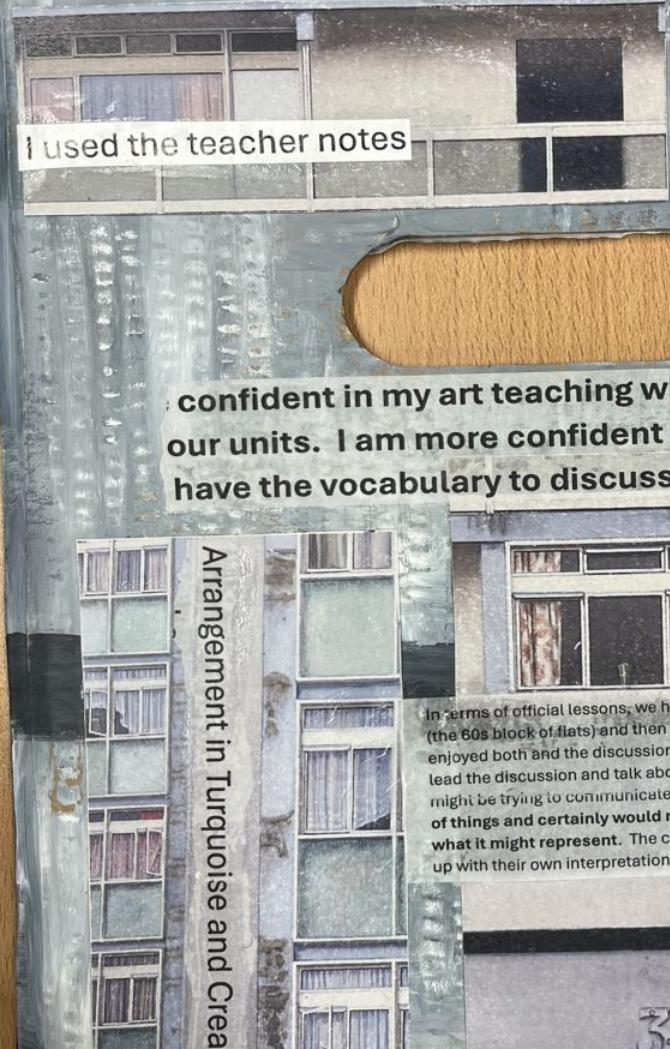
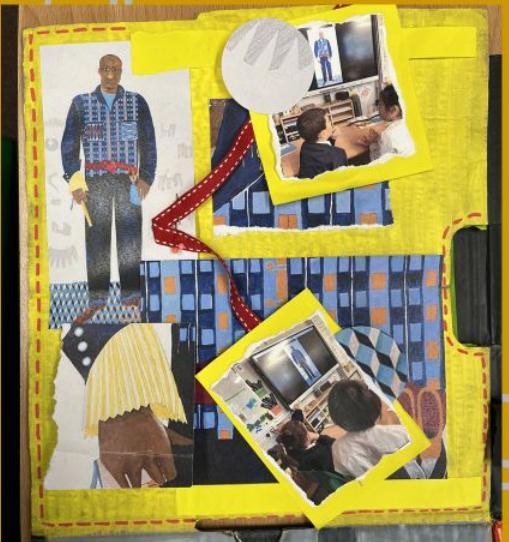
High res zoomable
images and videos

Toolkit vocabulary

Nudge Questions

Activity ideas

Multi sensory ideas



AND THERE IS MORE....



"this was some of the children's first and only experience with a gallery, it has sparked a genuine interest in art, and we're excited to continue nurturing that curiosity."



IMPACT

Greater Confidence
Developed risk takers
and Innovators
Cross Curricular usage
SEND access





Miss Elizabeth Harper

How can embedding a new art and design curriculum, which incorporates the Super Power of Looking programme, impact on children's learning and enjoyment in art and design lessons in a Stoke-on-Trent Primary School?

What does OFSTED say?

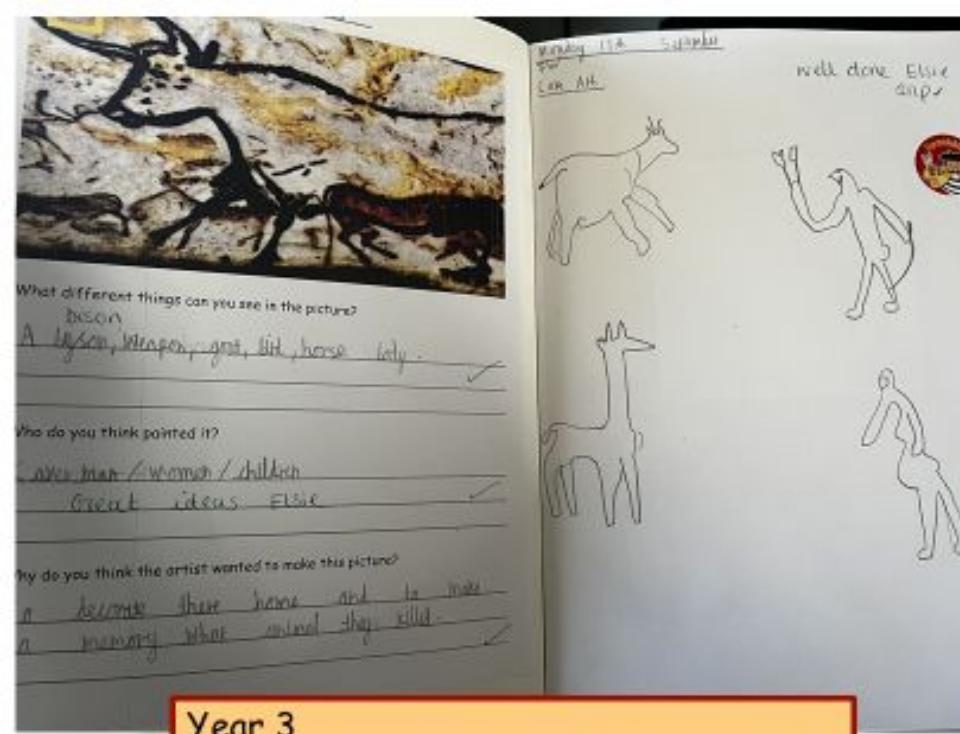
"The study of art enables pupils to understand, appreciate and contribute to a dimension of life that taps into and expresses human innovation, imagination and thought.

At an individual level, a high-quality art education can build pupils' ability to 'appreciate and interpret what they observe, communicate what they think and feel, or make what they imagine and invent'.

At its best, the subject is both intellectually challenging and creatively demanding."

To reflect this, I realised our art curriculum needed to evolve.

"Art itself is not static, and its purposes, materials and methods are always evolving."



Year 3

No questions about techniques or skills

One artwork

No impact on the project

'The challenge for us all is the strength and depth of our belief that this is what we must invest our energy in, for the sake of the pupils we seek to educate.'

Gregory, P. (2019) 'Valuing the arts in Education' Available at: https://my.chartered.college/impact_article/valuing-the-arts-in-education/ (Accessed: 13 May 2024)

It was evident from the sketchbooks across the school that artist research was either seen as a tick box exercise or that teacher's had little confidence in utilising this crucial art process. There was no value. Perhaps this is due to the lack of hours spent on art during teacher training.

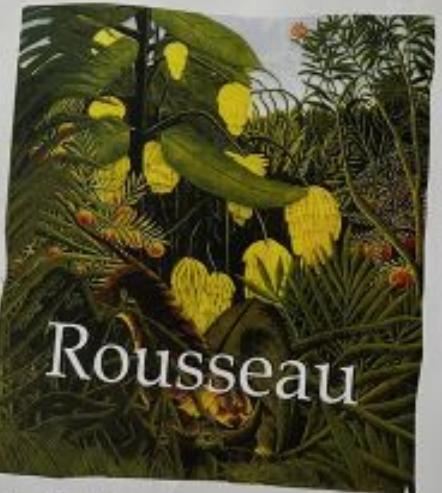
I was currently at the early stages of my own journey as art leader, I knew art needed to change and adapt but I felt lost and unsure how. The scale of this was daunting.

The puzzle pieces were about to fall into place.

Artist Research Before

Friday 17th January

Artist Research



Rousseau

I chose this picture because it is a jungle.

- One artist for each topic

- Comments / Sentences focussed on the artists life, not artwork.

- Children did not acquire knowledge of skills, techniques, colour choices, terminology.

- Each book looked the same.

Each sketchbook was a carbon copy because they appeared to hit an objective. A crucial point is made by Jump (Jump 2019) 'Classroom teachers though can become focussed on the end product... this may be due to time constraints, pressure from above or lack of confidence.' Since becoming a teacher in 2018, I soon realised that time constraints were a main factor as to why teacher's would grasp any resource which would reduce their ever growing workload.

This is just another factor which adds to the growing reasons as to why the arts is a subject that is feared. Time. Time, required to understand the why and the how.

The Superpower of Looking supports teachers' who lack the confidence or the time it takes to fully understand a piece of artwork. Jumps' research supports the ambition of the Superpower of Looking as it encourages 'careful observation of one part of a painting or choosing one of the eight elements... is a good starting point.' (Jump 2019) You can carefully select the questions which suit the artwork. It is helpful to have answered these yourself as you can steer the discussion. However, I found the most exciting element is the children's responses as we all view artwork through a fresh lens.



After taking a step back and giving the children more freedom the lesson took a positive turn. By using the questions from the Superpower of Looking Toolkit, I noticed that children who usually find learning difficult, were beginning to flourish. These children were usually reluctant during art lessons and now they were looking closely at the shapes, brushstrokes and colours.

A case study by Hall (Hall 2024) highlights that assessment could be having a negative effect, '...but the term 'development' can be misleading as you might be seen to assume an unfolding of something that is bound to occur, and over which the individual has little control.' Hall (Hall 2024) continues to highlight that 'nurture is as important as nature and I argue that this point is equally relevant in formal and informal learning contexts.'

Through encouragement, positive reinforcement and allowing the children freedom to explore, the progress from the lesson spoke for itself.

We need to create an environment where children feel safe and confident to explore and experiment. We need to allow children the freedom to develop artistically.

On reflection of my own practice, I was denying the children the journey they would go on, which took away their enjoyment because they were too focussed on what they thought I wanted them to produce.

After lots of discussions about how the world is seen differently to each individual, the children began to enjoy the lesson. I was finding that the children cheered when they realised we were having our art lessons.

The Superpower of Looking Toolkit supported my teaching because the lesson now had a clear focus on the artwork due to carefully selecting the questions prior to the lesson. I found that by using the questions from the toolkit, the children's responses then naturally led into more questions.

They even noticed things that I didn't.

The knowledge they were gaining was now informing their decisions for the rest of their project.





Through the combination of questioning, explicit teaching and providing a safe space to explore the medium, the children were enthusiastic about the learning. The fear of making mistakes or not producing a piece of work which looked like the teacher's example had been removed.

As the lesson progressed you could see that the reluctant, apprehensive children began to relax and enjoy the process.

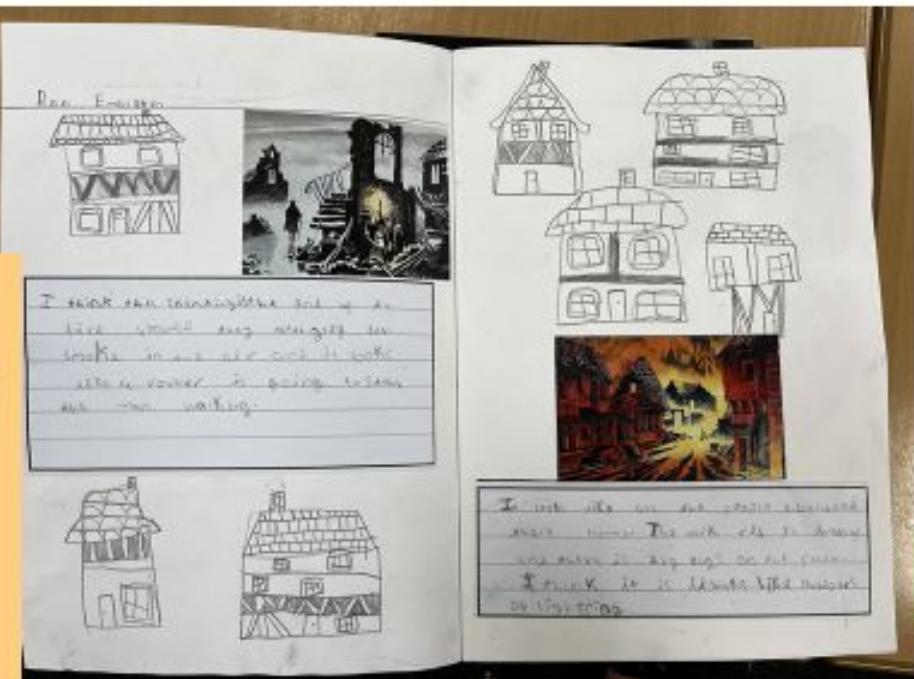
I kept the vocabulary used in the Superpower of Looking Toolkit in my mind, and through questioning we annotated key words and key techniques.



Over time, I noticed that some children were revisiting these pages of their own accord to either add more detail or to draw another house. I praised those doing this which encouraged others.

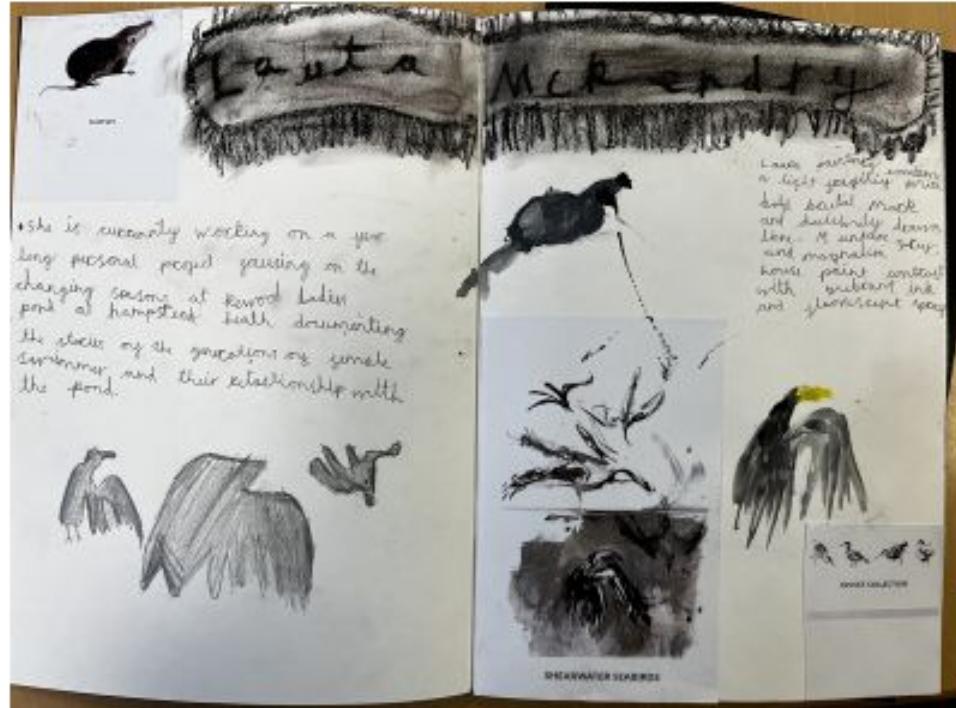
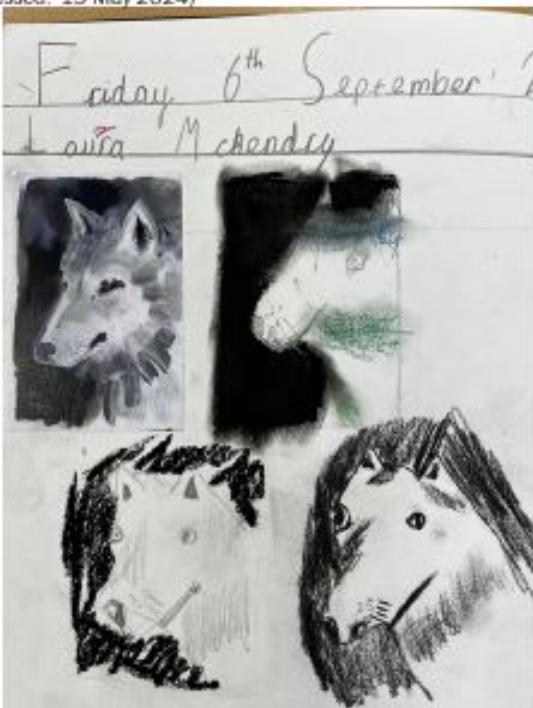
It is important to note, that because the children were naturally adding to previous drawings, shows their love for the subject and the pride they have in their work.

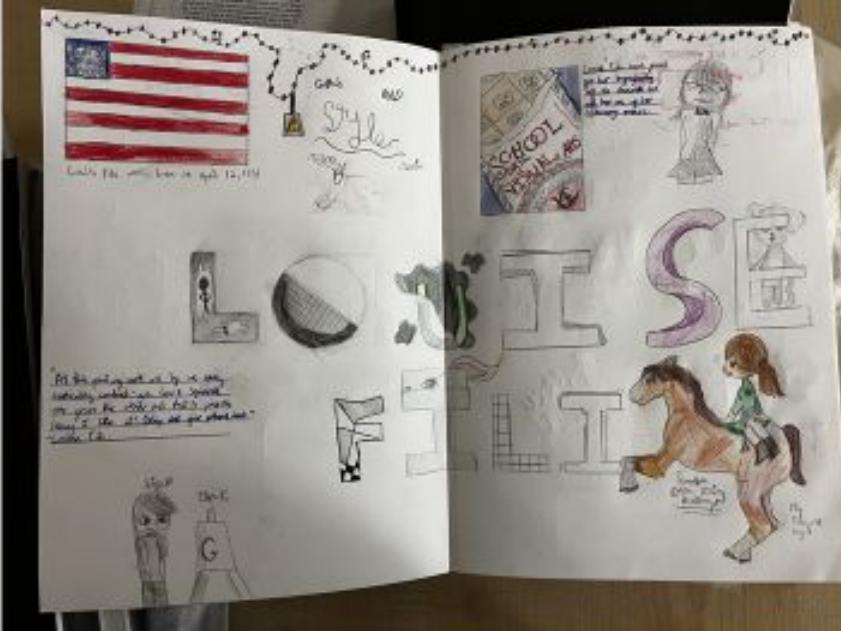
Perhaps one of the main reasons for this development in their own practise, is because the questions used from the toolkit have encouraged them to look in more detail and has developed their confidence within art that they feel able to develop their sketchbooks and develop their artistic flair.



Ky Lo (2019) indicated that 'the practice of making art and making mistakes along the way enables students to rehearse making choices and seeing the consequences. Exploring art media can help children to break through mental inhibitions.' Previously, children were not presented with opportunities to make mistakes. A picture was drawn, the objective for the lesson had been met and the child did not 'rehearse making choices.' (Ky Lo 2019) Similar to the art process, our curriculum changes are about taking the leap and 'seeing the consequences' (Ky Lo 2019).

Ky Lo, A. (2019) 'Happy Mistakes: Art based learning through failing'
Available at: https://my.chartered.college/Impact_article/happy-mistakes-art-based-learning-through-failing/ (Accessed: 13 May 2024)





'When they are not expected to think like adults, they can use their intuition to improvise with whatever resources and existing knowledge they have at hand.' (Ky Lo 2019)

Year 5 have been exploring typography and maps. The lesson took longer than usual due to the teachers' getting their heads around our new approach to art.

The sketchbooks speak for themselves. Each one individual. Each one creative. Each one shows pride.

'It's begun the discussion in detail, rather than a surface level discussion.' - Year 5 teacher. Questionnaire.

'The children are asking to continue working on their sketchbooks during lunchtimes.'

This teacher was less fearful of how the sketchbooks looked and embraced the freedom given to the children.



In conclusion, the Superpower of Looking has been a great toolkit to support the teaching and learning of artists. Even though I have not used the lessons, the questions have been a useful starting point to our discussions and also a safety net when you are either short on time or needing a little support with questions.

Through the use of the toolkit along with the curriculum change, the children's enjoyment and engagement with the subject has improved. This is evident from their positivity during the lessons and through their explorations with different mediums.

I feel that the Superpower of Looking is just one element that teachers require to assist them with the teaching of art. They could benefit from examples of what sketchbooks could look like, the structure of a series of lesson and how that looks on paper.



Superpower of Looking

Teacher Researcher

Gomersal Primary School

Mandy Barrett



- Research question:

How has implementing The Superpower of Looking throughout a range of year groups, had a positive impact on children's creativity and ability to be an individual artist?

- With consideration to our new school values
 - Curiosity
 - Creativity
 - Collaboration
 - Honesty
 - Respect
 - Achievement



1. Strategic alignment and long-term commitment:

Successful partnerships are built on a shared vision and long-term commitment.

These partnerships are aligned with the school's overall arts strategy and curriculum goals. Heads and arts leads work to ensure that partnerships are not just one-off experiences, but part of a sustained, progressive arts offer.

Maintaining successful partnerships with artists and cultural organisations requires intentional effort, clear communication, and a shared commitment to arts education. It's not just about bringing in external expertise, but about creating meaningful, sustainable relationships that enrich the school's arts provision over time. As the head of Newlyn Primary noted, "It's about building a community of practice around the arts, where everyone — students, teachers, artists, parents — has something to contribute and something to gain."

4. Integration into the curriculum:

Successful partnerships are deeply integrated into the school's curriculum, rather than being treated as standalone projects.

Thompson, P. Hall, C and Maloy, L (2025) The RAPS Project



University of
Nottingham
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

Freelands
Foundation

The RAPS Project

Researching the Arts in Primary Schools

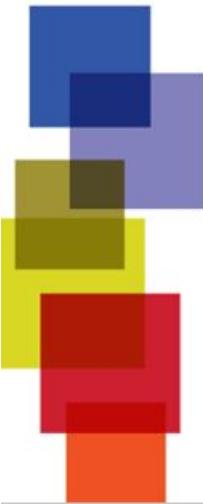


Pat Thomson, Christine Hall and Liam Maloy

School of Education
The University of Nottingham
Funded by Freelands Foundation

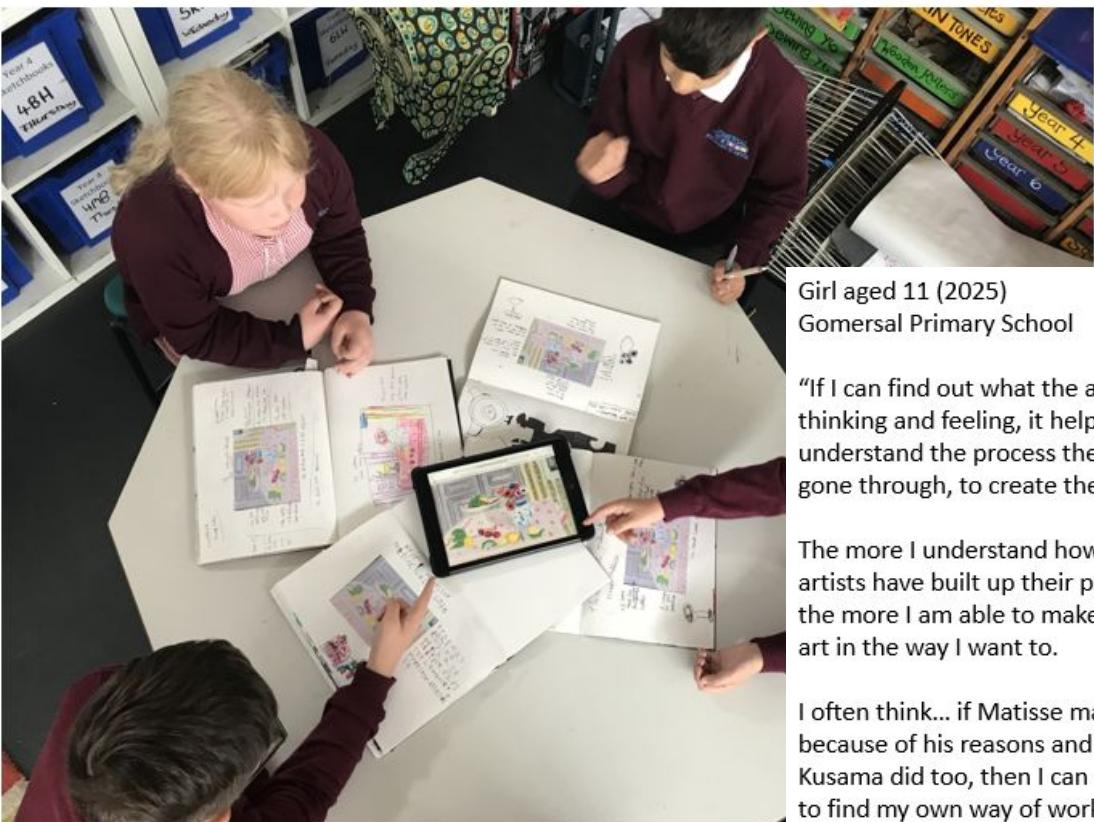
What does a Superpower of Looking lesson look like?

How is this helping to develop a sense of community and children's creativity and ability to be an individual artist?





Community



Girl aged 11 (2025)
Gomersal Primary School

"If I can find out what the artist was thinking and feeling, it helps me to understand the process they have gone through, to create their work.

The more I understand how other artists have built up their processes, the more I am able to make my own art in the way I want to.

I often think... if Matisse made this because of his reasons and Yayoi Kusama did too, then I can use this to find my own way of working, using them all as inspiration."



Two children by Joan Eardley

The Superpower of Looking's Art Adventure



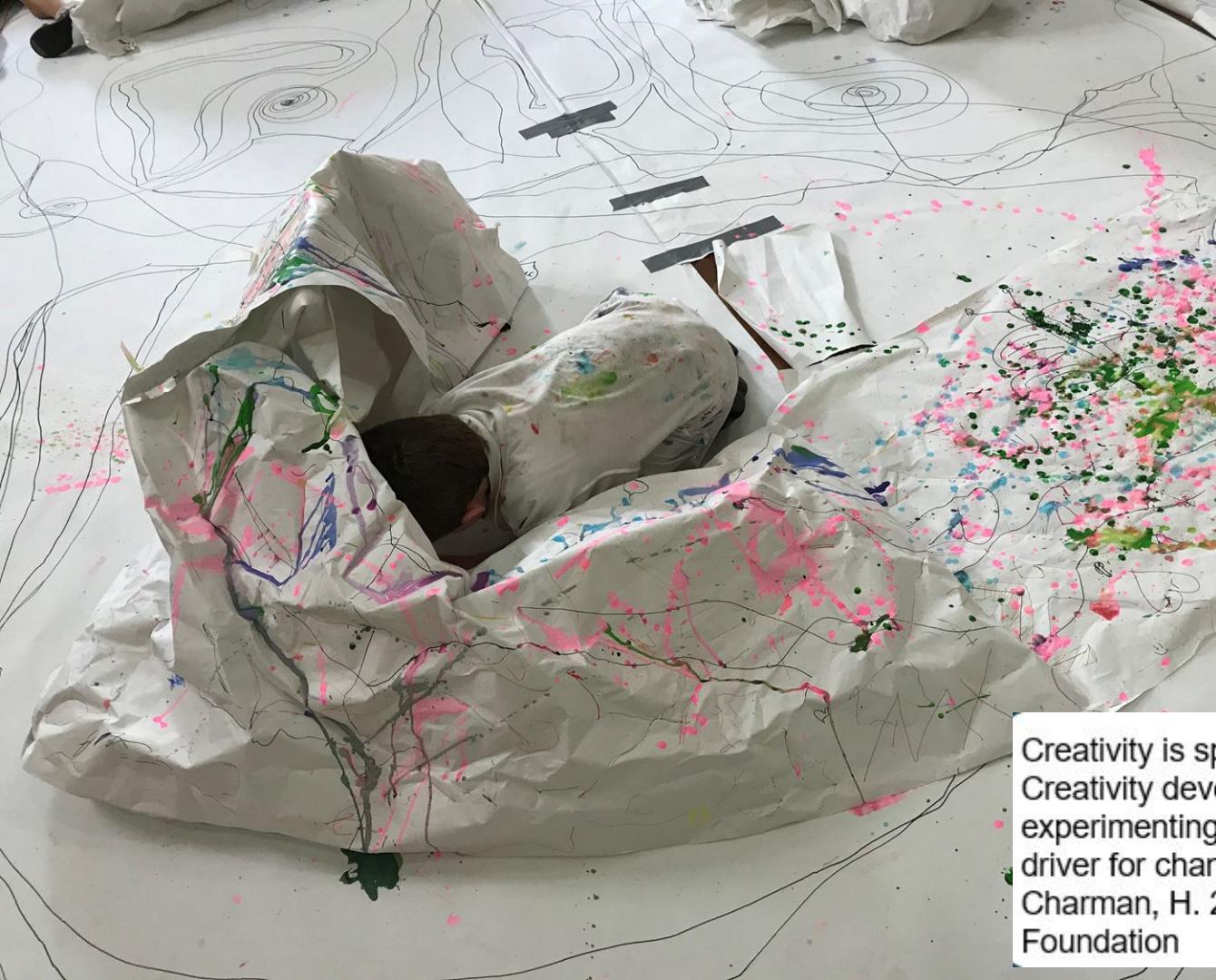
Looking carefully
and making
decisions

Developing ideas together



'Year 4 playing at school' inspired by Two children by Joan Eardley



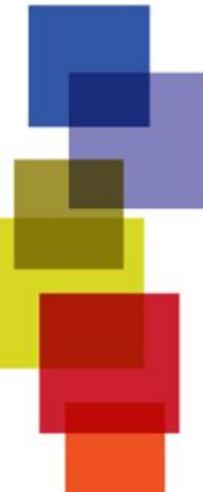


Creativity is sparked by curiosity and imagination. Creativity develops through playing and experimenting with ideas and things. Creativity is a driver for change and for adaptability.

Charman, H. 2025 Creating Creators – The Lego Foundation



The Superpower of Looking:
Rachel Ruysch's flowers and
insects



How has implementing The Superpower of Looking throughout a range of year groups, had a positive impact on children's creativity and ability to be an individual artist?

