

Using a Local Landmark as a Focus for an Art and Design Project

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Case study: **#28**

A selective Girl's Grammar School, 11–18, situated in a small town in the North West of England.

What was the school trying to achieve?

This was a Year 9 project. The aim was for the students to present a personal perspective on a public space. The project used the local canal as the focus for recording and observation skills, researching into its history and significance for the city: the objective was to develop painting skills and techniques. Students needed to learn to use acrylic paints - techniques such as modeling, blending, scumbling and impasto, and with watercolour, glazing, washes, transparent layers, and how to capitalise on spontaneous marks. Their ideas were then extended through workshops with a local artist, and through a screen print workshop with an artist. They designed and produced T-shirts, with the aim of developing a harmonious final piece which combined the various elements together using a variety painting, printing and mixed media techniques.

How was learning organised to achieve these aims?

The project began with visits by Year 9 to the local canal, which runs through the heart of the city. The canal provided the opportunity of observing and recording information in a variety of ways; drawing, painting and photography were involved.

The project was initially collaborative with groups selecting and combining a variety of different viewpoints making a large drawing of the canal. The students enjoyed learning how to paint and were excited about using acrylic paints. They were encouraged to critically analyse other artist's work who painted the environment; Canaletto, Raoul Dufy and Viera Da Silva. The context and techniques of these artist's were explored in relation to their own work and ongoing painting explorations.

The students were then taken 'off timetable' for half a day and this allowed all of the year group to become involved in working with the artist for an extended period. This artist workshop was recorded through a short film. The artist explored a number of screen print and hand stencil techniques, spatter stencils, and silk-screening with acrylic and medium. Students then began to apply all their painting and print techniques to their T-shirts.

How well did the school achieve its aims?

The students did not have a sketchbook in Year 8 so the initial recording and exploration was sketchbook based. The students enjoyed using A3 sketchbooks and took pride in their outcomes which were personalised and individual, and presented in an exciting and innovative way. They enjoyed developing their ideas about their environment and themselves; though the canal was the initial stimulus the process of exploration and development encouraged a diversity of responses.

The involvement of the artists within the project and the allocation of an extended period of time to work with students was one of the most positive aspects. Working alongside an artist developed their confidence to experiment and explore a variety of outcomes as well as teaching them to value the unexpected and taking creative risks.

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