

Meadowdale Middle School is situated in Bedlington, Northumberland with 510 pupils aged 9–13.

What did the school want to achieve?

Within Key Stage 3 a range of ingredients is provided to build an appetite for learning, inspiring the students to lust for more. This scheme of work takes the past into the future aiming to make the introduction to the History of Art particularly relevant, accessible and interesting. Both pupils and teacher use technology skills confidently and productively relating each process to its role within the creative industries.

How was learning organised to achieve these aims?

The aims of the project were firmly grounded in "The Importance Statement" for art and design in the new secondary curriculum. The scheme had two distinctive parts; pupils gathered the knowledge and information about historic art then went on to combine it with their newly acquired animation skills.

A Year 8 visit to the National Gallery provided the starting point. The Gallery education staff encouraged the pupils to familiarise themselves with paintings as they were guided through the stories they told. This sparked their enthusiasm and desire for more. Back in the art room pupils continued to use their perceptive and investigative skills working in pairs as exhibition curators, selecting from a diverse range of scaled down images of paintings and sculptures produced over the past 500 years, then justifying their value and placing within a model gallery entitled "British Art". This coincided with a whole school curriculum focus on Britain which included a visit to York City Art Gallery. Pupils had quickly built up a knowledge base and were able to recognise a variety of paintings, sculptures and artists' styles while developing the confidence to communicate and express their views in a constructive and positive way.

The animation part of the project was then introduced. Clips from a range of work by influential animation artists such as Norman McLaren, Caroline Leaf, Nick Park, Miyazaki, John Lassiter and Susie Templeton were downloaded from iTunes and Google Video and shown to pupils. They responded to each clip by considering the artists starting point and animation technique.

Experiments followed as pupils worked in groups bringing toys, food and magazine cut outs to life while learning to control the camera and develop their own style. They were shown how to download the collection of images and convert them into video using Animation Shop. At the end of each lesson pupils' clips were shown to the class (known in the industry as the 'Rushes') and feedback was encouraged.

They were then asked to take one (or a section) of the paintings or sculptures that they had studied, and turn it into an animated video putting their chosen artwork into a context of their choice. They storyboarded their ideas and annotated their thoughts and then worked in groups, combining ideas to produce animations in a range of styles. Using Windows Movie Maker, sound, titles and credits were added making Uccello's Dragon REALLY as fierce as he looks; Epstein's Rock Drill has become a futuristic chess fanatic, while Degas' ballerinas take on a whole new personality in plasticine. The best work is beginning to be published on YouTube (MeadowdaleAnim8).

How well did the school achieve its aims?

The project is nearing completion and although a formal evaluation process is yet to take place, enthusiasm has been visibly evident throughout. Pupils have been well motivated, enjoying the pace of the lessons and the immediacy of the results. They have been keen to experiment and take risks. There were particularly positive and intuitive responses to the paintings and sculptures came from pupils who would usually avoid sharing their views with the class. Having taken inspiration from real galleries, the pupils' ultimate goal has been the same as that of all artists they studied, to produce work worthy of being exhibited, shared and admired.

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