

NSEAD Conference workshop: 19 June 2025



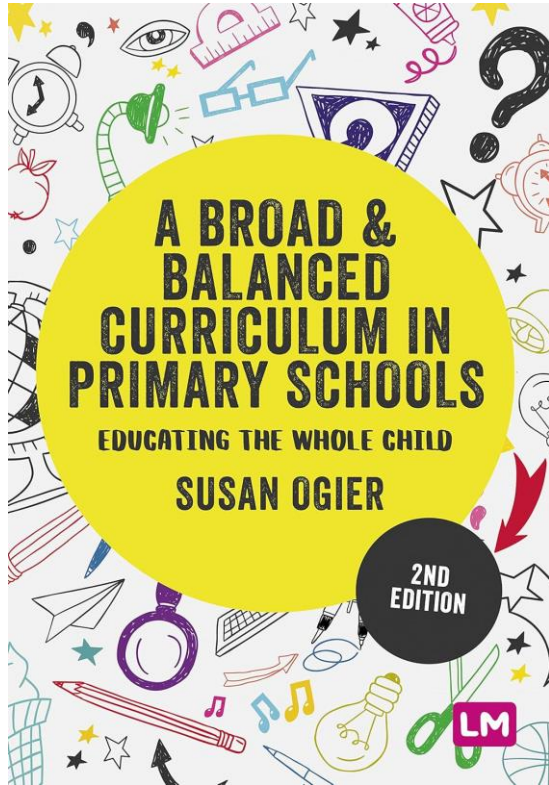
Embedding visual literacy across the curriculum through The Superpower of Looking

Tina Corri, Head of Learning, Art UK

Susan Ogier, Senior Lecturer, Roehampton University



Introductions



Susan Ogier
Senior Lecturer,
Education
Roehampton University
S.Ogier@roehampton.ac.uk



Introductions



ABOUT

Art UK gives everyone free digital access to the UK's national collection of art. It is a charity.

Discover how we make art available for enjoyment, learning and research.



EXAM SUPPORT

Art and Design A-level, AS and A2-level exam support: 2025 themes

KS5 (ENG)

KS5 (NI)

Tina Corri
Head of Learning
Art UK
tina.corri@artuk.org

ART^{UK}
Connecting you to art

Workshop agenda

1. Context
2. Superpower Lesson example
3. Drawing activities

We will explore:

- What is Visual Literacy and why is it a key competency for learners?
- How can looking at art help children to develop language and oracy?
- How The Superpower of Looking is helping to transform the literacy skills of children.

Takeaways:

- How to access and use The Superpower of Looking practically in the classroom.
- Ideas for using artworks to initiate a discursive environment in the art classroom.
- Inspiration for practical activities based on critical thinking and observation.

What is Art UK?

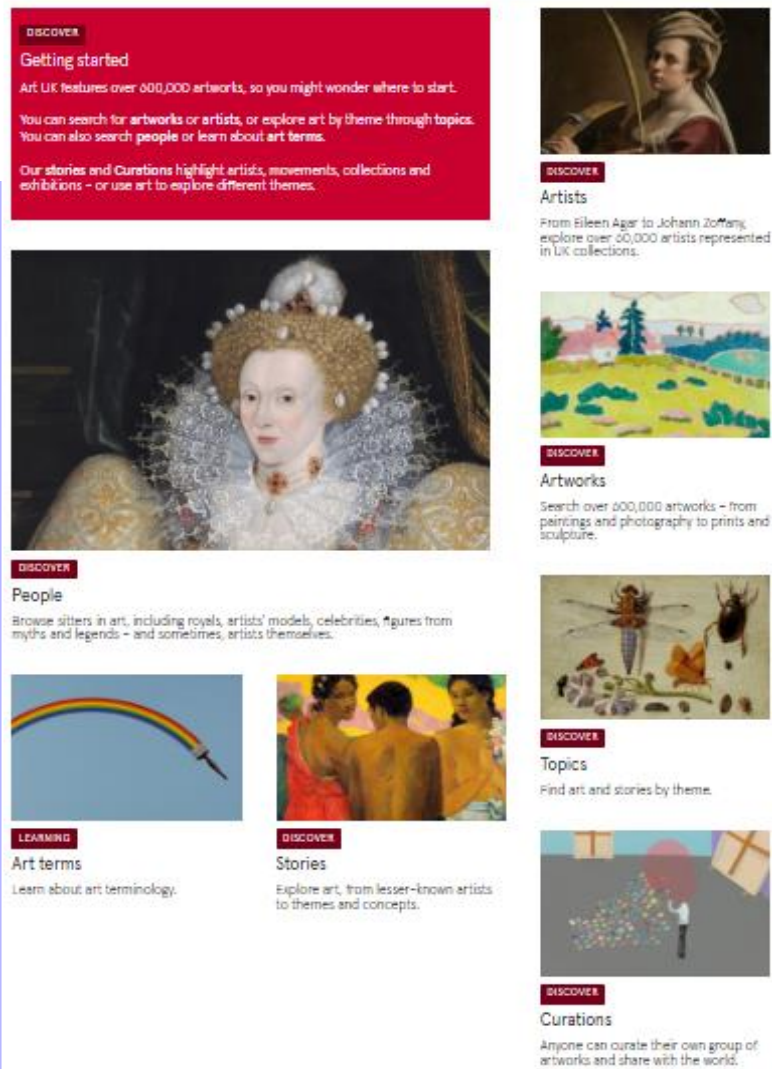
Art UK gives everyone free digital access to the UK's national collection of art. We are the online home for public art collections across the UK.

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

Our website brings together over 600,000 artworks by over 60,000 artists from 3,400 collections.

We provide hundreds of learning resources which connect to all 4 nations' curricula. They are all FREE.

[Visit Art UK's website](#)



The screenshot displays the Art UK website's navigation and content sections. At the top, a red banner titled "DISCOVER" contains the text "Getting started" and "Art UK features over 600,000 artworks, so you might wonder where to start. You can search for artworks or artists, or explore art by theme through topics. You can also search people or learn about art terms. Our stories and Curations highlight artists, movements, collections and exhibitions - or use art to explore different themes." Below this, a large portrait of Queen Elizabeth I is featured. To the right, a vertical sidebar lists categories: "Artists" (with a small landscape painting), "Artworks" (with a small insect illustration), and "Topics" (with a small abstract painting). The main content area below the portrait includes a "People" section with a rainbow illustration, an "Art terms" section with a painting of three figures, a "Stories" section with a painting of three figures, and a "Curations" section with a painting of a person holding a large red umbrella. Each section has a "DISCOVER" button and a brief description of the resource.

DISCOVER
Getting started
Art UK features over 600,000 artworks, so you might wonder where to start. You can search for artworks or artists, or explore art by theme through topics. You can also search people or learn about art terms. Our stories and Curations highlight artists, movements, collections and exhibitions - or use art to explore different themes.

DISCOVER
Artists
From Eileen Agar to Johann Zoffany, explore over 20,000 artists represented in UK collections.

DISCOVER
Artworks
Search over 600,000 artworks - from paintings and photography to prints and sculpture.

DISCOVER
People
Browse sitters in art, including royals, artists' models, celebrities, figures from myths and legends - and sometimes, artists themselves.

LEARNING
Art terms
Learn about art terminology.

DISCOVER
Stories
Explore art, from lesser-known artists to themes and concepts.

DISCOVER
Curations
Anyone can curate their own group of artworks and share with the world.

Art UK's Learning offer

- The Superpower of Looking
- Resources for EYFS to post-16
 - ✓ Lesson plans
 - ✓ Exam resources
 - ✓ Video and audio
 - ✓ Making activities
 - ✓ Thematic round ups
- Programmes for 14-19-year-olds

[Explore Art UK learning resources](#)

[Visit our exam support resources](#)



The Superpower of Looking:
David Hockney paints his
parents

KS2 (ENG)

KS2 (NI)

CfE L2 (SCO)

PS3 (WAL)



LESSON PLAN

Maud Sulter and the subversive
portrait

KS4 (ENG)

KS4 (NI)

CfE L4 (SCO)

KS4 (WAL)

KS5 (ENG)

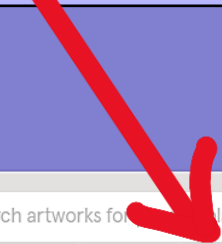
KS5 (NI)

CfE Sen. (SCO)

KS5 (WAL)

Search function

Topic, artist, artwork, type, style, art terms and location.



DISCOVER

Artworks

Search artworks for places, things...

Has image ☐ Outdoor artwork ☐

Location ▾ Type ▾ Topic ▴ Style ▾ Licence ▾ Year from Year to Tagger Filters ▾

▼ Animals and plants	▼ Arts and entertainment	▼ Fashion and costume	▼ Home and family
▼ Ideas and emotions	▼ Literature and fantasy	▼ Natural world	▼ People
▼ Power and politics	▼ Religion and belief	▼ Science and knowledge	▼ Sport and leisure
▼ Towns and buildings	▼ Transport and industry	▼ War and conflict	▼ Work and business

[Discover Art Terms](#)



[Search for artworks near you](#)

Zoom function



Portrait of Melissa Thompson by Kehinde Wiley (b.1977)
© Kehinde Wiley. Courtesy of Stephen Friedman Gallery
Photo credit: Victoria and Albert Museum, London



What is the Superpower of Looking?



- 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 sessions

The Superpower of Looking

Teaching approach

Curriculum-based – Art & Design

- Opportunities for cross-curricular learning
- Discussion based learning
- Student led enquiry

Supporting children to:

- Critically observe, analyse, question, interpret, and empathise
- Develop visual literacy and oracy skills
- Increase confidence in subject specific language
- Develop interest in art and visiting galleries



Resources

30 lesson plans

- 16th – 21st century artworks
- Themes: Identity, Portrait, Landscape, History, Still life, Everyday
- Hi-res artworks with zoom feature
- Audio descriptions
- Teacher support notes
- The Superpower of Looking Kit
- Presenter-led films
- Everyone learning activities

Identity



The Superpower of Looking: a powerful portrait by Kehinde Wiley.
KS2 ENG KS2 PE
C19 L2 0000 PS3 NALU



The Superpower of Looking: a Scottish clan visits a special gathering.
KS2 ENG KS2 PE
C19 L2 0000 PS3 NALU



The Superpower of Looking: a Pop Art self-portrait by Chitra Kumar Singh Berman.
KS2 ENG KS2 PE
C19 L2 0000 PS3 NALU



The Superpower of Looking: Munch paints two visitors to the Tabor court.
KS2 ENG KS2 PE
C19 L2 0000 PS3 NALU

Portrait



The Superpower of Looking: Joan Randley paints the children of Glasgow.
KS2 ENG KS2 PE
C19 L2 0000 PS3 NALU



The Superpower of Looking: Lorenzo Minola's portrait of a tailor.
KS2 ENG KS2 PE
C19 L2 0000 PS3 NALU



The Superpower of Looking: Howard van Sagh's a wife and a bandaged war.
KS2 ENG KS2 PE
C19 L2 0000 PS3 NALU



The Superpower of Looking: David Mackney paints his parents.
KS2 ENG KS2 PE
C19 L2 0000 PS3 NALU

Landscape



The Superpower of Looking: a forest by a light.
KS2 ENG KS2 PE
C19 L2 0000 PS3 NALU



The Superpower of Looking: J.M.W. Turner's steam train.
KS2 ENG KS2 PE
C19 L2 0000 PS3 NALU



The Superpower of Looking: a window of the imagination in collage.
KS2 ENG KS2 PE
C19 L2 0000 PS3 NALU



The Superpower of Looking: a stock of fish as art.
KS2 ENG KS2 PE
C19 L2 0000 PS3 NALU

Teacher Champions

Engage, Share and Connect

- Sign up via newsletter
- Bespoke support from Schools Officers
- Limited edition print
- Art in Superpower Schools

[Teacher Champion webpage](#)
[newsletter sign-up form](#)

Photo credit: Dave Madden Photography



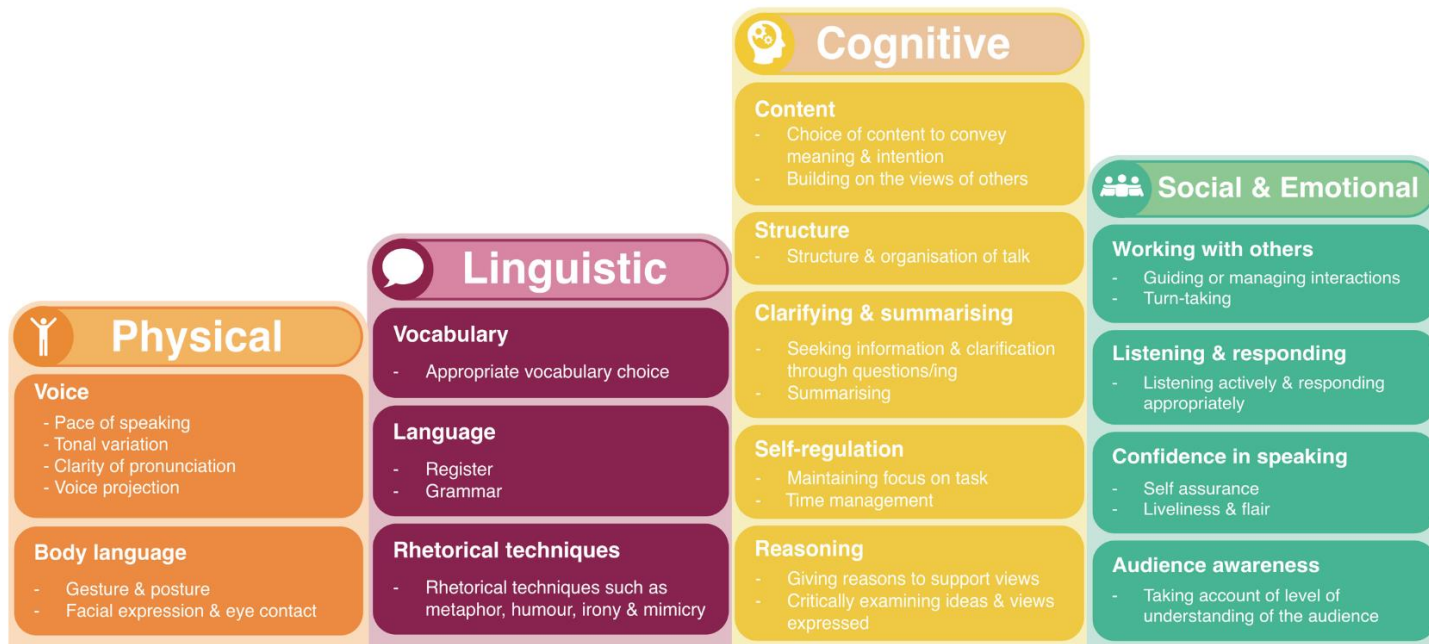
Key role of oracy and visual literacy in the art classroom

ORACY DEFINITION

- Meriam Webster: proficiency in oral expression and comprehension
- Cambridge: the ability to speak clearly and grammatically correctly
- Oracy is about communication – **passing information**, thoughts, ideas from one person to another in **a purposeful way**.
- Oracy is **learning to talk and learning through talk**. Students use collective thinking to create and revise their understanding, to negotiate complex ideas and solve problems.

(Doherty, 2023)

The Oracy Skills Framework and Glossary



Oracy skills framework

PHYSICAL SKILLS includes an appreciation of how the voice and body language impacts on interpretation. It asks, ‘are the speakers audible?’, and ‘are they making eye contact?’

LINGUISTIC SKILLS the way in which information is presented is as important as the intended messages? It asks, ‘have the speakers used sophisticated language?’ and ‘have they used rhetorical devices?’

COGNITIVE SKILLS understanding what information is and how a response can be formulated to provide understanding. It asks, ‘does the speech convey meaning?’ and ‘are the ideas critically examined?’

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL SKILLS embedding these skills allow for a more attentive and well-rounded communicator. It asks, ‘are the speakers confident?’ and ‘is there an awareness of the audience?’

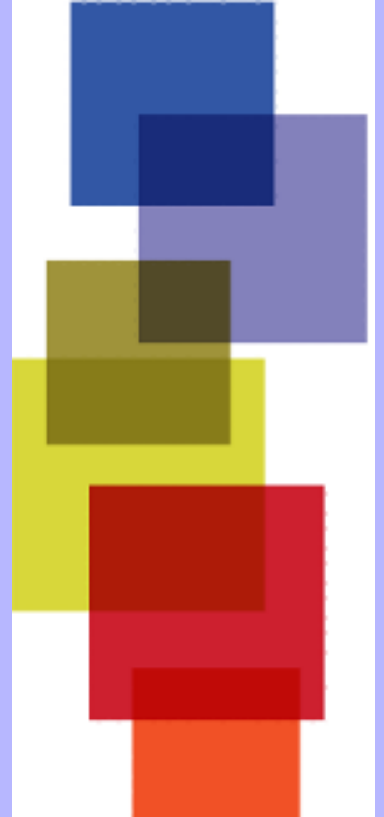
What is Visual Literacy?

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).



Why should it be taught?

Simply defined as being able to 'interpret and construct meaning from visual images' (Eckhoff, 2010), visual literacy helps children to develop powerful critical thinking skills that will enable them to actively question what they see, rather than assume the position of passive recipients of visual information

(VanderlipTaylor and Buchman, 2022).

Artful thinking: Project Zero

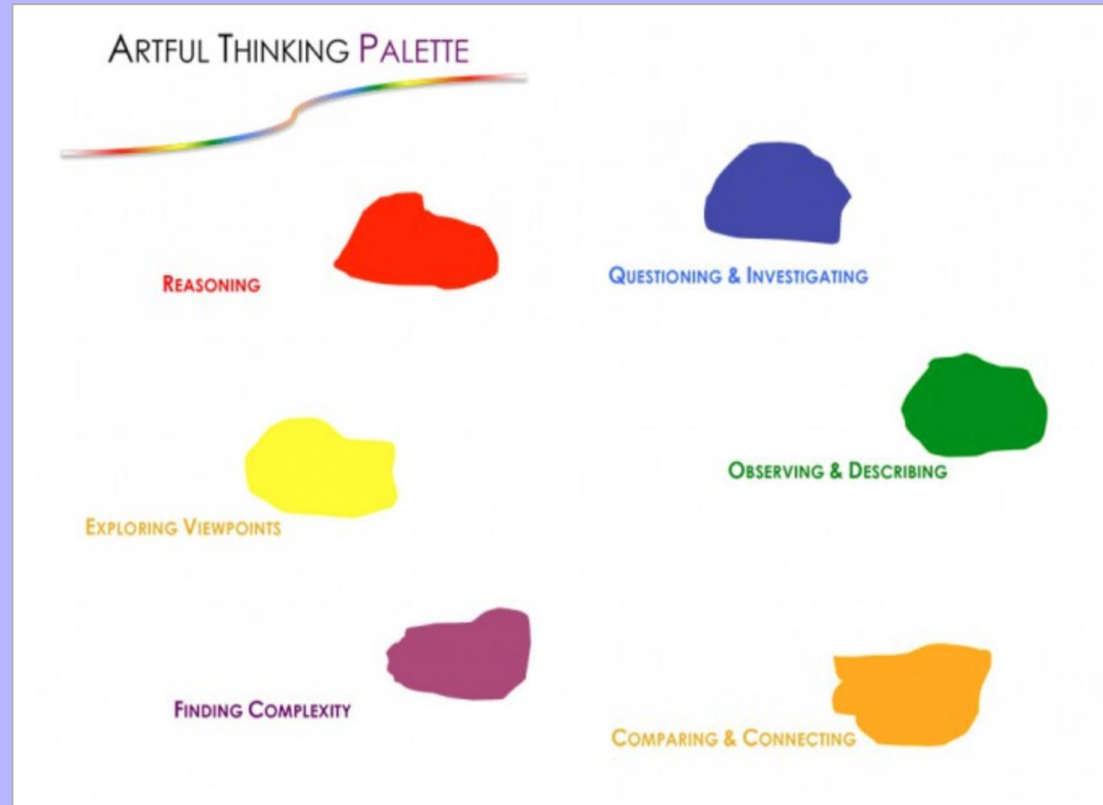
Tishman, S., (2006), Stronger thinking and learning through the power of art.

Thinking Dispositions;

Thinking Routines;

Thinking Moves;

Habits of Mind



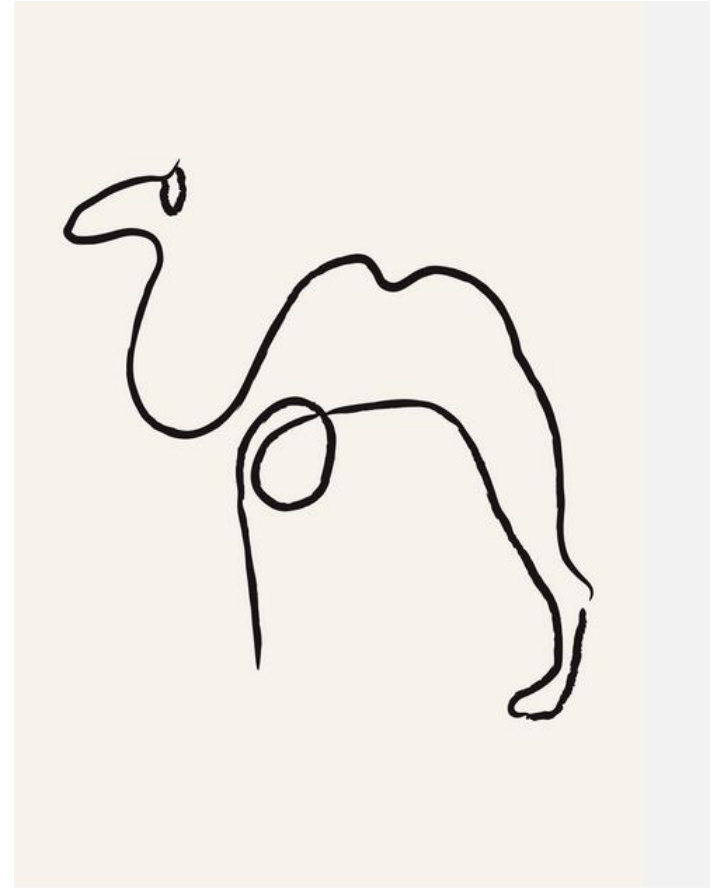
Misconceptions around the 'knowledge rich' curriculum



Why use art to teach Visual Literacy?



Tapping into the power of pictures



Amy Herman: The Four A's of visual intelligence

- 1. Assess** your situation. Ask: *What do I have in front of me? What information is here?*
- 2. Analyse** the information. Break it down and decide what's important.
- 3. Articulate** your observations. Put them into words.
- 4. Adapt** to the situation. Take the information from the first three A's, make a decision, and act on it.

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 kind of impostor."

Francis Bacon



COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING



**INDISTINGUISHABLE
TEXT ON HAT & TAGS**



DISTORTED HAND

Researching Superpower: Teacher-researcher project

To assess and record the progress of children's visual literacy skills by engaging them with Superpower of Looking, and to critically evaluate the implementation of the programme.

To develop an action-research project in school/setting which investigates the following questions:

- ***How might visual literacy improve pupils' metacognition and oracy by using the Superpower of Looking?***
- ***How can the Superpower of Looking be implemented as a pedagogical approach within the curriculum?***



Exploring Identity



Man Drinking Coffee by Jay Labadie
was selected because we were
very lucky to have the artwork
of this artist! Why School for the day

1st thing 2nd
man's face or man light (lamp)
or top - different or plant
colours & pattern

Colours

man's face - warm
yellow/orange

green - plant
man's shirt

bold
green's not complementary
man's shirt

patterns - random note
cool colour

colours
man's shirt

pink / brown right the
grey blue / purple

bright colours
light

composition
man

person in background

split into 2

by colours
man in both
parts

Patterns - random



Man Drinking Coffee by Jay Labadie

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

face
squared round, oval
like made from clay
different colour - long
like a sculpture
angular
serious, thoughtful
man's thinking hard
or drawing
where looking?
cup funny shape

plant
green - white
yellow
leaves
neckline shape
like long hair
long leaves

man in background
in shadow

linked to parents
and (history)



Research questions

- *Helen:* What is the impact of using Superpower of Looking to develop visual literacy and oracy skills in children aged 6-8 years old attending an after-school art club in a South-East London primary school?
- *Gemma:* How will teaching 'Superpower of Looking' impact the evaluative skills and language development of Year 6 children in a primary school in Northwest England?
- *Liz:* How can embedding a new art and design curriculum, which incorporates Superpower of Looking programme, impact on children's learning in (and enjoyment of ??) art and design lessons in a Stoke-on-Trent primary school?.
- *Gill:* What is the impact of using the Superpower of Looking toolkit in developing non-specialist teachers' confidence in talking about artwork with KS1 children in two Norfolk primary schools?
- *Mandy:* 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?





Key impact from Teacher Researcher project

Children are thinking more about their creative choices when creating art which enables them to have more focussed reflections

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.

Evaluation skills are beginning to improve, this appears to be linked to an improvement in creative decision making.

Key impact from Teacher Researcher project

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 improve 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.

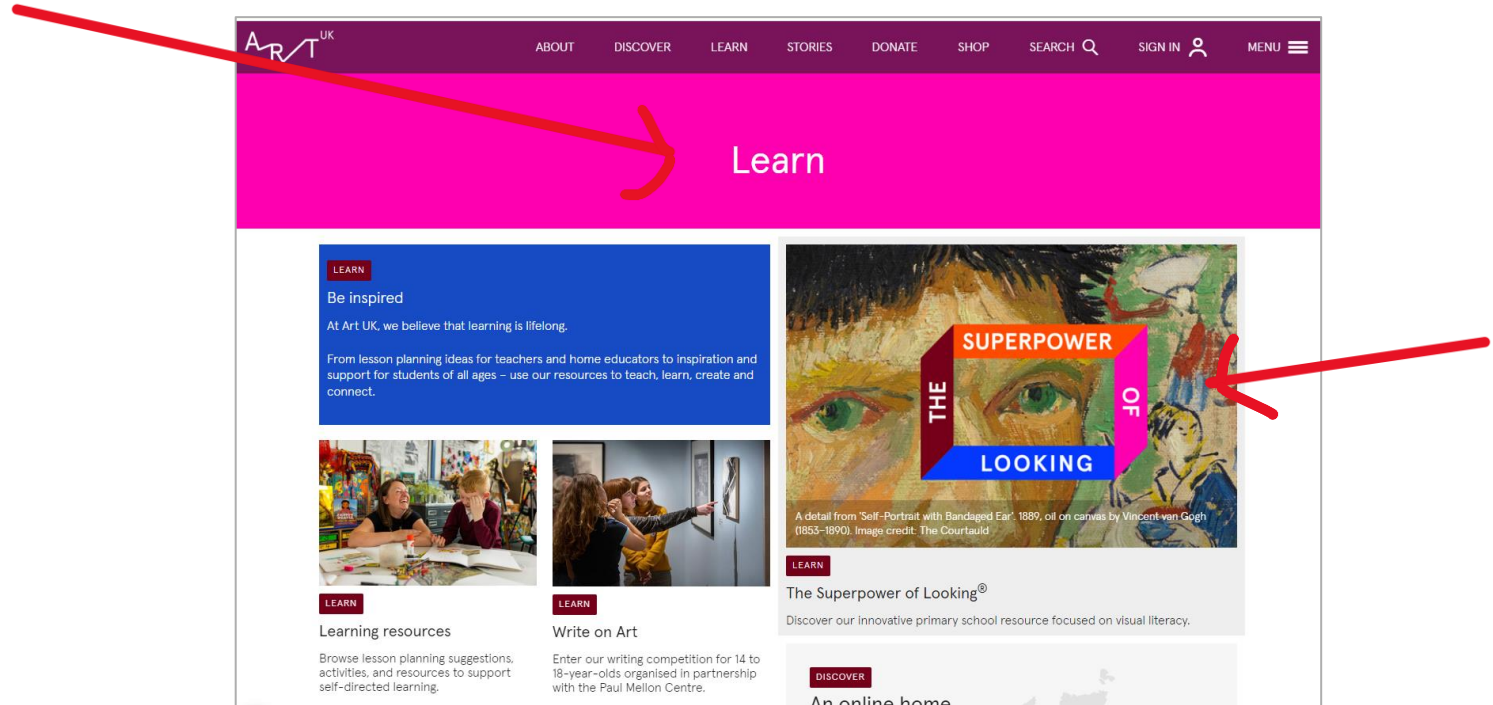
Superpower of Looking is having a direct impact on children's knowledge and understanding of a range of artists. It is teaching them how to "look" at art, ask questions, have more purposeful discussions and deepen thinking.

What does a Superpower of Looking lesson look like?

- Choose a theme and an artwork
- Download the Teachers Notes
- Open the Zoom feature
- Look, Describe, Discuss
- Nudge Questions
- Watch a short video
- Questions from The Superpower of Looking Kit
- Everyone Learning activities



What does a Superpower of Looking lesson look like?



<https://artuk.org/learn/the-superpower-of-looking>

Landscape



The Superpower of Looking: surprised by a light!
K32 (ENG) K32 (NL)
CIE L2 (SCO) P53 (WAL)



The Superpower of Looking: J. M. W. Turner's steam train
K32 (ENG) K32 (NL)
CIE L2 (SCO) P53 (WAL)



The Superpower of Looking: a landscape of the imagination in collage
K32 (ENG) K32 (NL)
CIE L2 (SCO) P53 (WAL)



The Superpower of Looking: a block of flats as art
K32 (ENG) K32 (NL)
CIE L2 (SCO) P53 (WAL)

History



The Superpower of Looking: the three wise men who visited Jesus
K32 (ENG) K32 (NL)
CIE L2 (SCO) P53 (WAL)



The Superpower of Looking: a lady, a curse and tales of King Arthur
K32 (ENG) K32 (NL)
CIE L2 (SCO) P53 (WAL)



The Superpower of Looking: a battle in Renaissance Florence
K32 (ENG) K32 (NL)
CIE L2 (SCO) P53 (WAL)



The Superpower of Looking: Pop Art planes inspired by comics
K32 (ENG) K32 (NL)
CIE L2 (SCO) P53 (WAL)

Still life



The Superpower of Looking: Rachel Ruysch's flowers and insects
K32 (ENG) K32 (NL)
CIE L2 (SCO) P53 (WAL)



The Superpower of Looking: Matisse and a pink tablecloth
K32 (ENG) K32 (NL)
CIE L2 (SCO) P53 (WAL)



The Superpower of Looking: an old woman cooking eggs
K32 (ENG) K32 (NL)
CIE L2 (SCO) P53 (WAL)



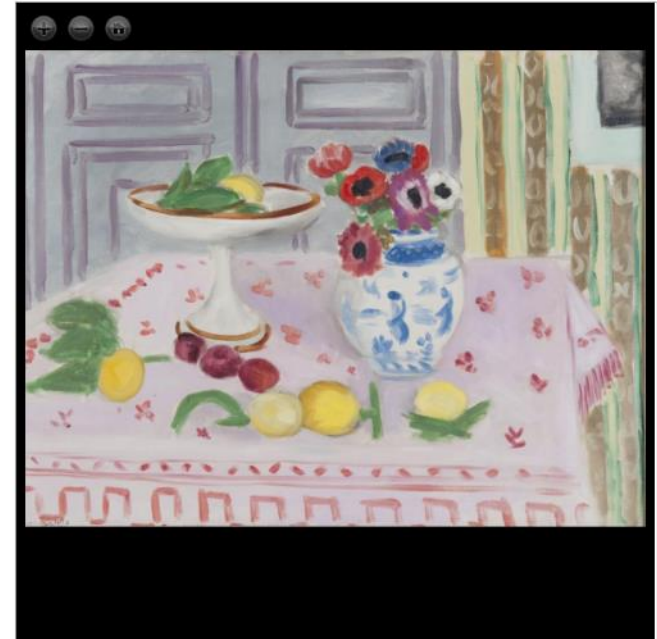
The Superpower of Looking: Yayoi Kusama's spotty pumpkin
K32 (ENG) K32 (NL)
CIE L2 (SCO) P53 (WAL)

Zoom feature

Look, describe and discuss

Open a full-screen version of the image in a new window.

Ask your students to describe the artwork, encouraging them to simply say what they can see.





The Pink Tablecloth c.1924-1925

Henri Matisse (1869-1954)

Glasgow Life Museums

About this resource

This is one of the lesson resources in The Superpower of Looking on still life. It focuses on Henri Matisse's 1924-1925 painting *The Pink Tablecloth*.

These lesson resources are also in the still life theme:

- [Rachel Ruysch's flowers and insects](#)
- [An old woman cooking eggs](#)
- [Yayoi Kusama's spotty pumpkin](#)

How to use this resource

To teach this lesson, download the [teachers' notes](#) on a separate device, screen or print them off. Have this webpage open on your screen or whiteboard and use the prompts in the teachers' notes to guide your students through the lesson.

Looking

Describe the artwork

Look carefully

What can you see?

I see ...

I think ...

I wonder ...



Nudge Questions

- Would you put anything breakable or valuable on this tabletop? Why or why not?
- **Is this a realistic painting? Why or why not?**
- Does a painting have to look realistic for it to be described as a good painting?
- Is how a painting makes us feel more important than how it looks?
- If you were transported into the painting, what might you be able to smell?
- **How would you describe the mood of this painting and why?**
- Do you think people thought Matisse's painting was very good when he painted it?






The Superpower of Looking with Denis...



Looking at
Henri Matisse

Watch on  YouTube

The Superpower of Looking Kit

- **Composition**

- **Space**

- **Colour**

- **Line**

- **Light**

- **Scale**

- **Materials and techniques**

- **Figures**

- Has the artist created a believable space? Do we feel that we could enter the space and walk deeper into the painting? If not, why not?
- Do the objects/figures become smaller in size as they get further from us?
- Is there an obvious arrangement of space: a **foreground**, **middle-ground** and **background**?
- Has the artist used **line**? Line can be used to create a sense of space and depth, e.g. drawing additional lines on a 2D square shape turns it into a 3D cube.
- Has the artist used colour to help create a sense of distance (**atmospheric perspective**), e.g. the colour becomes paler as it gets further away?
- Has the artist used **modelling** to create **3D**, solid-looking objects, e.g. shading on a face?
- Are there any shadows thrown by figures or objects to imply 3D space?
- Are we made to look up or down (we call this a high or low **viewpoint**) or are our eyes meeting an object at the same level? What effect does this have on our **interpretation**?

- Has the artist used **layering** and/or overlapping of objects or figures to create a sense of space?
- Is anything shown at a dramatic angle that makes the object look realistic either as it recedes or advances towards us (**foreshortening**)? e.g. If the flat palm of a figure's hand faced the viewer straight on it would appear more 2D than if they pointed directly at us, suggesting depth (3D).

Using colour to create a sense of distance



Composition

- Can you see any shapes in the picture, e.g. squares, circles, triangles, rectangles? Are any of these shapes used more than once? Do the repeated shapes create harmony?
- Has the subject matter been cropped or edited, in the same way that we can adjust an image on our camera/phones? What does this tell us about what the artist finds important?
- Is the painting symmetrical or asymmetrical? If it is not symmetrical, is it balanced?



Space

- What can you see in the foreground, middle-ground and background?
- Does this feel like a real space you could walk into? Do you think this was important to the artist? If not, what do you think was more important to them?
- Has the artist used shading or modelling to create three-dimensional, solid-looking forms?
- Are we made to look up or down at the object (we call this a high or low viewpoint) or are our eyes meeting the object at the same level?
- How does the viewpoint make you feel about the object?



Colour

- Has the artist used saturated colour (bright and vivid) or is the colour pale and washed out?
- [Take a look at the colour wheel in The Superpower of Looking Kit.](#)
- Has the artist used complementary colours (these are opposite colours such as red/green; yellow/purple; orange/blue)? These combinations provide a 'pop' effect. Why has the artist chosen to use colour in this way?
- Has the artist used warm colours (red, orange, yellow) or cool colours (blue, green turquoise), or both? How does the colour affect the way you feel about the painting?



Response activities











