

The Tempest – a contemporary approach to illustration linking with an English department

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Case study: **#33**

School profile: Benton Park Technology Collage is an inclusive 11-18 comprehensive school in Rawdon, Leeds, West Yorkshire. The school has Artsmark gold status.

What were we trying to achieve?

Responding to the new secondary curriculum's emphasis on cross-curricular links, greater focus on personalised learning and the creative use of ICT, the art and design department devised a new scheme of work that encompassed these elements.

We knew Year 9 would be reading Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'. Illustration was identified as a good linking concept. Further inspiration came from contemporary illustrations (in particular the work of Marion Deuchars). Fortnightly access to a computer room became a key to achieving our planned outcomes.

Pupils experimented, and explored materials and concepts with a relevant design purpose. After researching contemporary illustrators pupils recognised the importance of combining art and ICT techniques and working to a commercial, commissioned brief. A teacher adopted the publisher's role then pupils were required to 'bid for the job'. This gave direction and clear parameters for responses.

The English department emphasised visualising and describing characters, places and scenes. Pupils explored language and made lists of words associated with the book for use in art lessons. Discussions about imagery and feelings evoked by language provided an essential framework for the project.

How did we organise the learning to achieve our aims?

Following an introduction to the Tempest in English lessons, pupils' homework focused on gathering appropriate images linked to highlighted language and concepts in the play. They accessed a specific website

(www.pro.corbis.com) collecting only black and white images. During art lessons pupils cut into and around their images and in sketchbooks extended out of and on top of the images using a range of materials. Pen, Indian ink, oil pastels, paints, card, carbon and tracing paper were available for pupils to explore and develop their sketchbook pages. Pupils combined materials and experimented with mark making. They drew from life; producing studies of sea-themed objects. Sketchbook work was then photographed and accessed from school server.

The computer room was used to construct book jackets using Photoshop. Pupils worked in pairs opening their (two best) digital pages. Pupils were focused on a specific range of Photoshop tools (resize, eraser and move tools). Jackets were made by overlapping and moving images with the layers palette and using layer filters. Again experimentation was focused – pupils used a muted colour background and a specific font (a 'house style'), otherwise pupils arranged and created their cover however they liked.

Most pupils had no experience of Photoshop prior to these lessons but responded well to digitally designing the book jackets with the software.

How well did we achieve our aims?

The illustration project was a great success evidenced by the superb work produced and the attitude and enthusiasm of the pupils. All relished the freedom, opportunities for personal expression and learning using new technologies. Pupils gained greater awareness of how working artists combine image making methods successfully and how the perceived boundaries between artist, illustrator and designer can be blurred and work created all the better for it.

Additional valuable experience gained from this project came from pupils working with art in a vocational context – to be able to play and experiment but for a definable and commercial outcome. This gave them responsibility extending beyond producing work purely to please themselves, highlighting the idea that sometimes being creative is about stretching possibilities within a framework of limitations.

The department is now negotiating with local bookshops to display the pupils' work to the public.

Adam Davenport is a teacher of art and design at Benton Park School.

