

Why Visual Literacy is an Important Skill

By [Susan Coles](#)

Find out why Visual Literacy is such an important skill to teach children as part of the Art Curriculum in our [Pedagogy in 250 Words](#) series. Become a [member](#) to watch the video below.

WHY VISUAL LITERACY IS AN IMPORTANT SKILL



VISUAL LITERACY IMPROVES:

- CREATIVE SKILLS
- CRITICAL THINKING
- CURIOSITY

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**How Do We Use Artists
in Schools?**

Drawing Source Material: Orchestras and Instruments

A collection of imagery and sources which you can use to prompt drawing in schools and community groups.

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teaching practice that teachers watch all videos and visit all websites before sharing with a class. On occasion there may be elements of a video you would prefer not to show to your class and it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure content is appropriate. Many thanks.

Orchestras and Instruments

Use the film below to enable children to explore orchestras and instruments. Try to create a sense of momentum – for example you might pause the video 4 times and ask the pupils to make a 1 minute, 2 minute, 3 minute and 4 minute drawing at each pause.

Encourage close and slow looking by talking as they draw – use your voice to attract their attention to different qualities.

Try the same exercise using different materials, ie handwriting pen, ink and

nib, pastel, watercolour...

How might you invent your own instrument? What instruments might you combine? Is it self playing?

This Source Material Is Used In...

Pathway: Music and art



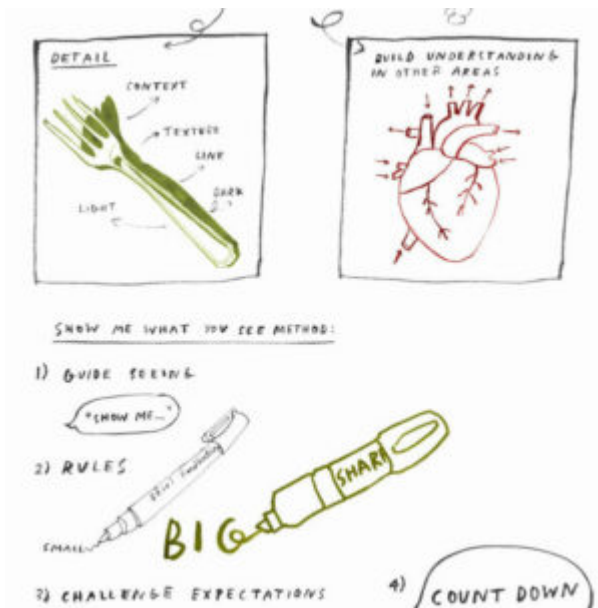
[This is featured in the 'Music and Art' pathway](#)

using sketchbooks to make visual

notes



Show me what you see



Show Me What You See

Which Artists Should We Look At in Primary School?

Talking Points: The Ancient Art of Drawing Kolam

**A collection of sources and
imagery to explore the ancient
tradition of drawing Kolam.**

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with your IT department.*

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AGES 5-8

AGES 9-11

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‘Every morning at sunrise all across Southern India women practice the ancient art of drawing kolam on the thresholds of their properties. A physical form of prayer and symbol of protection, a daily exercise, and a moment of intense concentration and meditation, drawing kolam is an important household ritual that has a lot more to it than may first meet the eye.

Two very different women living in Chennai explain their shared passion for

kolam, and their involvement in the local kolam competition.’ – [BBC](#)

Questions to Ask Children

What do you like/dislike about kolam drawings?

Do they remind you of anything?

What are some of the rituals do you take part in every morning?

This Talking Points Is Used In...

Pathway: Spirals

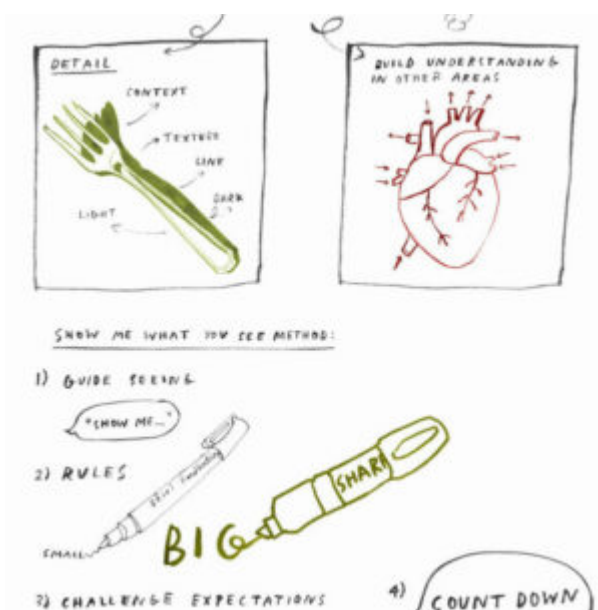


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using sketchbooks to make visual notes



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Talking Points: What is Composition?

A collection of sources and imagery to explore the question 'what is composition?'

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AGES 5-8

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AGES 14-16

Composition is the arrangement of different elements in a piece of artwork.

As well as positioning, elements like shapes, lines and colours can have an impact on composition.

Composition addresses the relationship between these different elements. Some artists aim to create a balanced composition in their artwork whilst others may choose to bring things to the viewers attention by creating imbalance.

Why is Composition Important?

Whether it is a painting, drawing, photograph, print or even a piece of sculpture, the way the elements are arranged impact upon how we respond to the piece of art. The artist might be trying to convey an emotion, or communicate a message, and artists use

tools they have through composition to help sell those “messages”.

Throughout history, composition can be seen as an indication of the period or artistic movements that a piece of art has been created in.

Focal Point

The focal point is the area of the artwork which your eye is drawn to. The artist might use placement to draw your eye to an object (i.e. where the object is on the page), or they might use colour or value to draw your eye in.

How goes the artist draw your eye to a focal point in the illustration below?

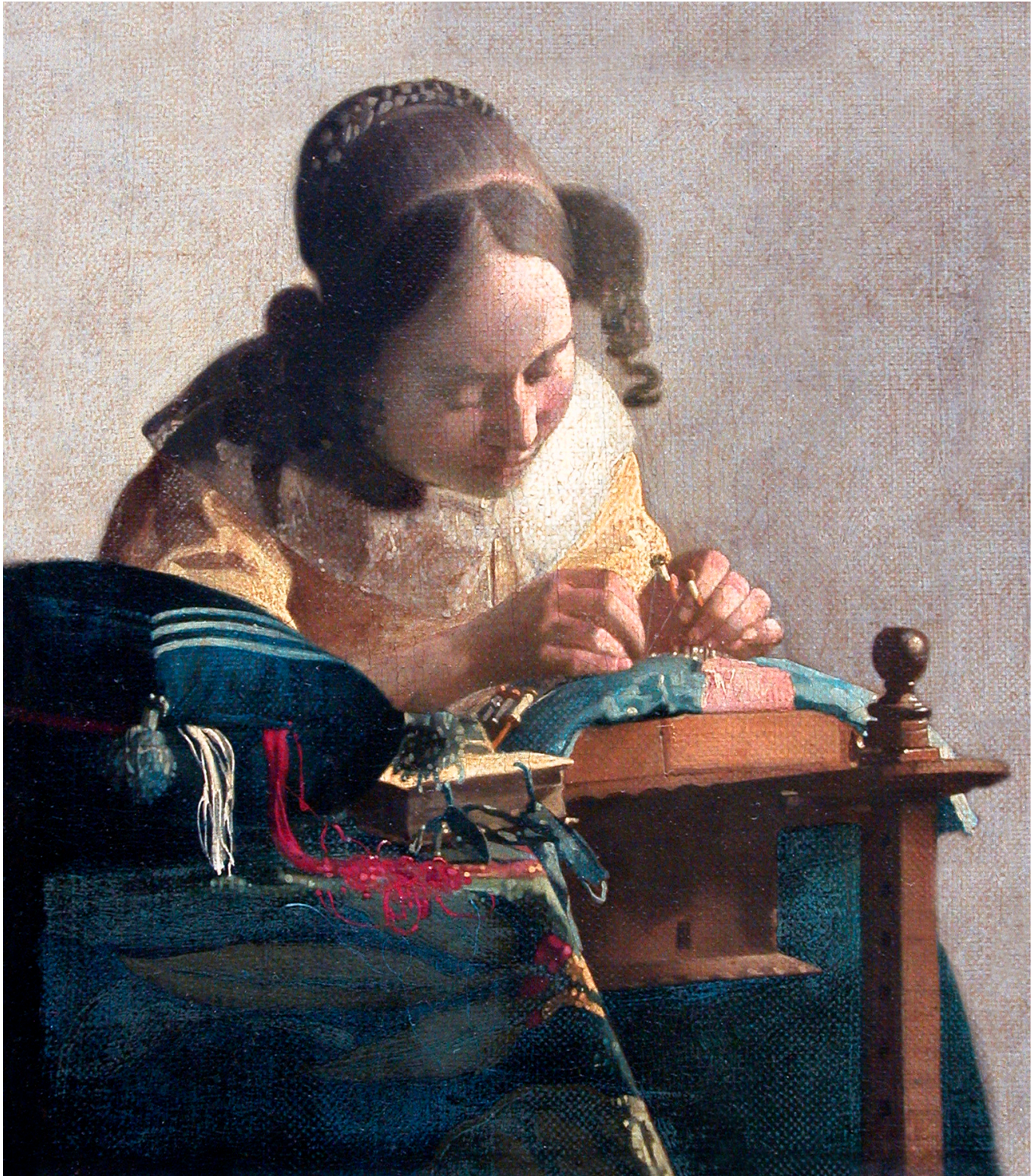


**Interior of the Temple of Abou Simbel
Nubia illustration by David Roberts
(1796–1864)**

**What is the focal point for you in the
paintings below? You might have a
different focal point to your friends,
or you might even have more than one?
Where are your eyes drawn?**



Little Girl in a Blue Armchair (1878)
by [Mary Cassatt](#).



**Johannes Vermeer's The Lacemaker
(ca.1669–1671)**

Balance / Imbalance

Sometimes the elements of an artwork lend to a sense of calm. This is usually because the artist has intentionally balanced colours, shapes and values.



In other artwork the artist deliberately makes us feel uneasy by throwing us off balance, by creating a sense of chaos...



Improvisation 35 (1914) Wassily Kandinsky

Rule of Thirds

Sometimes artists divide rectangles into a grid of 9 – 3 rows and 3 columns.

When working with landscape for example,

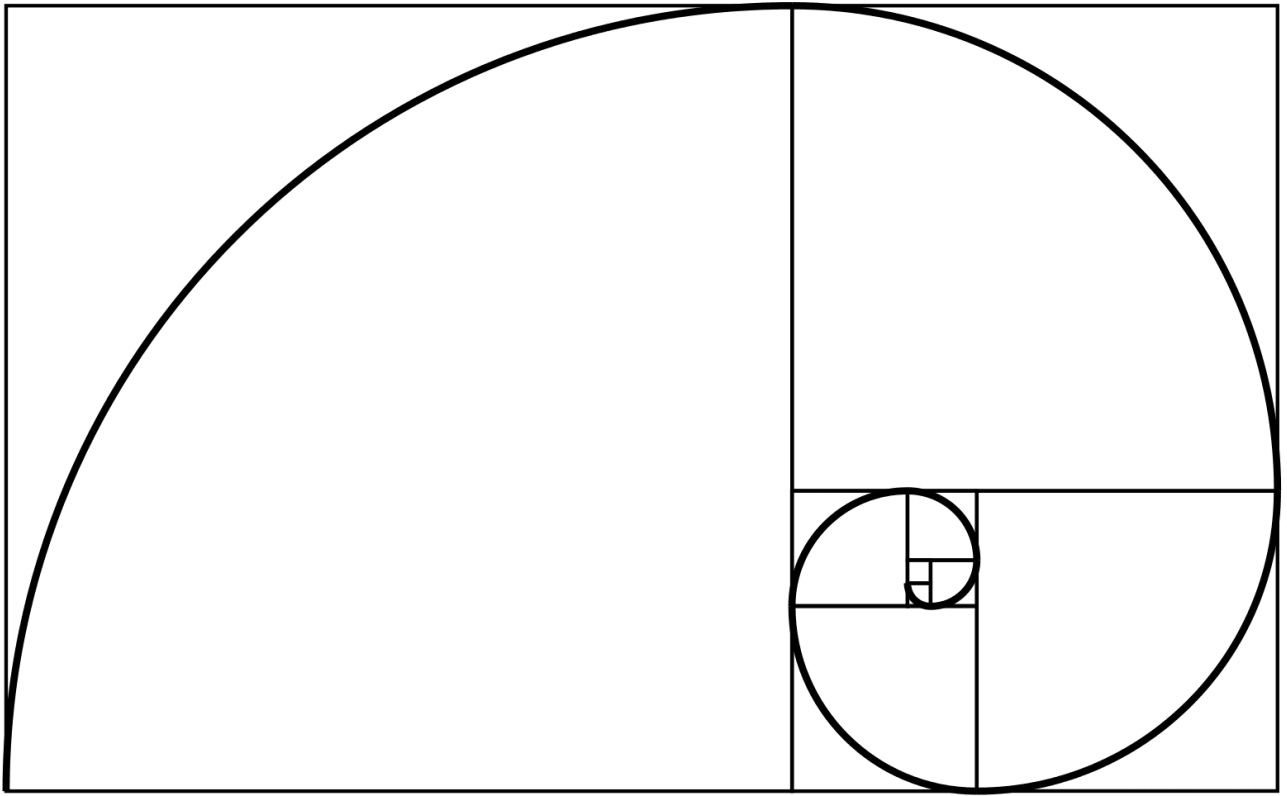
artists might choose to place the horizon along one of the grid lines.



Jalais Hill, Pontoise (1867) by Camille Pissarro.

Golden Ratio

The Golden Ratio is a spiral and it can be found in nature and art.



Can you spot how the Golden Ratio is used in the “Katsushika Hokusai’s The Great Wave” above?

Classical Composition

Within the classic tradition, artists would create a sense of balance by arranging elements in geometric shapes such as triangular compositions.



Foxhound (1760) painting in high resolution by George Stubbs. Original from The Yale University Art Gallery.

Questions to Ask Children

What can you see in the foreground/background of the painting?

How do the colours vary from the foreground to the background? Why do you think these choices were made by the artist?

Where is your eye drawn to in this painting? What do you see next?

Can you see any triangles in the composition?

Symmetry

Can you see how symmetry has been used in the still life below by Camille Pissarro?

How does this image make you feel?

Think about the colours AND the shapes, and where they are placed.



Still Life with Apples and Pitcher (1872) by [Camille Pissarro](#)

Abstract Art

Art movements such as cubism and abstraction redefined the rules of composition.

Artists such as Jackson Pollock opted

for 'allover composition' which considers using the whole canvas instead of top, bottom and centre.

Watch from moment 2:29 to find out how 'allover' painting differed to more classic painting styles.

Questions to Ask Children

How does this vary to the classical way of painting?

Can you see a foreground or background?

Which part of the painting is your eye drawn to first? Where does it travel to after?

Which style of composition do you prefer and why?

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Pathway: Explore and Draw



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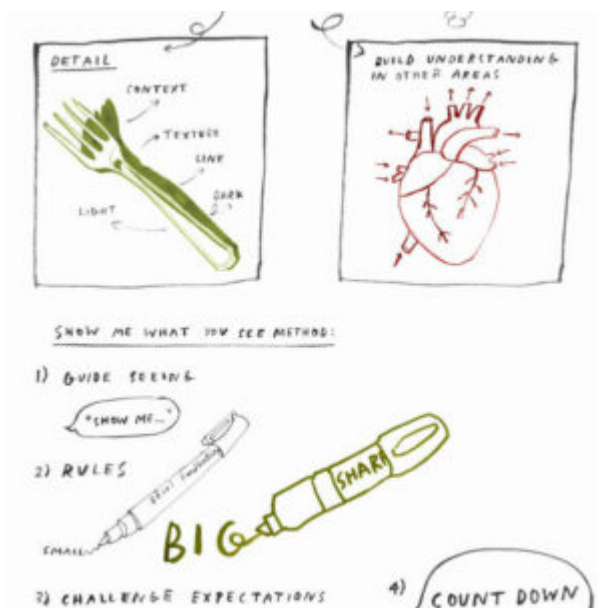


Pathway: Exploring Still Life



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